

EXPLORING REPRESENTATIONS OF MASCULINITY IN DISNEY ANIMATED

FEATURE FILMS

A Thesis

by

BRITNEY LYNN HIBBELER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2009

Major Subject: Communication

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## ABSTRACT

Exploring Representations of Masculinity in Disney Animated Feature Films.

(August 2009)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Srividya Ramasubramanian

The purpose of this research project was to examine representations of male characters and masculinity in Disney animated feature films. Social learning theory, gender and hegemonic masculinity were used to theoretically frame this study. Twenty-two movies were examined; a total of ninety-one characters were included in the analysis. The movies included in the sample were produced between 1930 and 2007. This study sought to examine the dimensions of character descriptions, physical descriptions, socioeconomic status, sexuality, family structures and practices, and aggression as well as to understand how constructions of masculinity in Disney films changed over time.

The results of the present study regarding character role indicate that good characters were most often middle aged, slender and fit but not muscular, single, royalty, and had community as family. They were most often heterosexual, equally likely to be romantically involved as to be not romantically involved, were sexual in nature, and were most often the victims of physical aggression.

Evil characters were most often middle aged, slender and fit but not muscular, single, royalty, had community as family, and were well dressed. Evil characters were most likely to trap other characters and to steal.

Neutral characters were most often old/elderly, overweight and not muscular, and were most often employed as inventors, royalty, and diamond miners. They were also most often single and to have community as family.

The results regarding character centrality indicated that central characters were most often white, slender and fit but not muscular, single, middle aged, showed physical strength, and were well dressed compared to peripheral characters. Central characters were heterosexual, romantically involved, sexual in nature, engaged in hand to hand fighting, and engaged in social isolation and name calling.

Peripheral characters were most often white, slender and fit but not muscular, single, and also more likely than central characters to be old/elderly.

For the analysis of masculinity across time, it was found that the types of masculinity shown in Disney films did not match with hegemonic masculinity historically. Overall, the most common theme of masculinity that was observed throughout all decades was the fatherhood movement.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father. Thank you for your love and support.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In a world where families book vacations to Disneyland or Disneyworld theme parks, where Disney movies are collected and passed down from generation to generation, and where children dress as their favorite Disney character for Halloween, the influence of the Disney Corporation and their products cannot be denied. The Disney Corporation maintains enormous corporate and cultural influence as seen by the existence of its \$44 billion empire (Kramer, 2000). The Disney Corporation owns a major television network, cable television networks, and radio stations (Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman, & Lund, 2003). The reach of Disney does not stop here. Disney has also further proliferated into the consumer market by selling cartoons, books, computer games, backpacks, and clothing (Tanner et al., 2003). According to Wohlwend (2009), toys “associated with children’s popular animated films... encourage children to play and replay familiar scripts and character roles” (p. 59). Therefore, marketing tactics used by the Disney Corporation encourage identification with Disney products and stories. The most popular of all its products sold remains the Disney animated full length feature film (Tanner et al., 2003).

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This thesis follows the style of *Journal of Communication*.

These films are initially released in theatres. Once out of theatres, Disney secures the film's popularity by re-releasing them on a seven year rotation to attract a new generation of viewers (Henke, Umble, & Smith, 1996). Starting with *Snow White* in 1937, both Walt Disney and Team Disney (who assumed control after Walt's death under the direction of Michael Eisner) have produced over twenty-six animated feature films (Tanner et al., 2003; Do Rozario, 2004; Kramer, 2000). Ward (2002) argues that the Disney Corporation and the Disney animated feature film are so powerful that they "can shape the way children think about who they are and who they should be" (p. 5). As Malin (2005) writes, when we have "fewer companies producing our stories, the less variety of stories they are likely to tell, and the less various images... we are likely to see (p. 6).

The purpose of the current study is to examine the major emerging themes regarding representations of male characters in Disney animated feature films and to examine how representations of masculinity in Disney animated feature films compare to historical trends in representations of masculinity. A mixed methodology research approach was used in order to apply both qualitative and quantitative methods to the research problem. Because previous research has neglected to focus solely on the issue of masculinity in Disney films, it is necessary to examine the construction of male gender stereotypes and masculinity therein.

The Disney Corporation has consistently marketed itself to children and families (Hines & Ayres, 2003). Hines and Ayres (2003) argue that Disney has sold itself "in the guise of innocence, packaging itself for mass appeal and the reinforcing of the status quo

of American family values” (p. 4). From the moment that *Snow White* was first released in the Depression Era in America, Disney and the Disney Corporation have attempted to give the consumer audience a fairy tale with a happy ending; this happy ending often comes at the expense of common sense knowledge about reality regarding gender, family structure, and race (Hines & Ayres, 2003). Current Disney movies, while sometimes embracing updated attitudes towards these concepts, still embrace traditional stereotypes; these are being consumed in large quantities by children (Hines & Ayres, 2003).

Perhaps even further illustrating the need to study boys and their relationships with the Disney Corporation are Disney’s recent attempts to market their products more directly to boys. Children retain a large marketing influence, with children aged four to twelve influencing at least \$165 billion in spending in the United States (McGee, 1997). According to the *New York Times*, the Disney Corporation has recently begun efforts to target their entertainment more to boys in the six to fourteen year age range (Barnes, 2009). Disney XD has been introduced as a new web site and cable channel targeted to young boys (Barnes, 2009). The *New York Times* reports that Disney’s audience is 40% male but that the majority of their products are targeted to young girls in the form of Disney Princess paraphernalia and that young girls account for most of the spending on Disney related products (Barnes, 2009). Therefore, Disney is attempting to secure more boys as consumers of their products.

The Global Disney Audiences Project found that Disney is typically experienced for the first time at a young age and that individuals tended to underestimate their

exposure to Disney products (Wasko & Meehan, 2001). The results of their study indicated that people who had exposure to Disney products regarded them as attractive to children and a natural part of childhood for most children (Wasko & Meehan, 2001). In fact, respondents indicated that they planned to incorporate Disney products into their own children's lives (Wasko & Meehan, 2001). Results of the study, however, revealed that the individuals who consume Disney products "are constrained by the text and by their expectations of the Disney brand" and therefore cannot adequately negotiate meanings of what is viewed (Wasko & Meehan, 2001, p. 334).

Previous research on Disney animated feature films has largely undertaken feminist readings of Disney heroines (Henke et al., 1996) and representations of women in Disney films (Do Rozario, 2004). Other research has sought to examine portrayals of older characters in Disney animated films (Robinson, Callister, Magoffin, & Moore, 2007). Most of the previous research on Disney has neglected to focus specifically on masculinity and male characters are represented and how male children view and make meaning of Disney films. While some studies give brief attention to male children (Hoerrner, 1996; Tanner et al., 2003; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2003), there are few, if any, studies that focus on solely on male children and their interaction with Disney texts.

As I noted above, children and families consume Disney films the most. This study plans to give special attention to the male gender by focusing on male lead, sidekick, and neutral characters in order to understand how they are represented. According to the Children Now (1999) report, "we live in a society that often sends



confusing and conflicting messages to men and boys” (p. 4). Boys are more likely than girls to do poorly in school, to commit suicide, and to be involved in violent crime (Children Now, 1999). How children absorb and integrate media experiences into their own lives will greatly impact the current and future generations of men (Children Now, 1999). It is for these reasons that this research project will focus on representations of masculinity.

### **Organization of thesis**

The second chapter of this thesis will present the theoretical framework that will guide this research project. The theoretical framework section will include information on children’s viewing patterns, active audience engagement and social learning theory. Transportation theory, fantasy, identification, and imagination will also be incorporated. A review of the literature on gender, masculinity, media portrayals of men, and children’s entertainment will also be included in this chapter.

Chapter III will consider the methodological approaches that will be used for this research. A brief definition and justification of using a mixed methodology will be given and the procedures used to select the sample of texts will be identified. Units of analysis will be discussed and the variables of interest will be defined.

Chapter IV will report the findings of the research project as indicated by using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Statistical findings as well as interpretations of the results and examples from the films will be given for the character levels of analysis in order to determine what are common representations of male characters in Disney animated feature films. The second half of this chapter will be devoted solely to

the qualitative analysis. This section will seek to examine how representations of masculinity in Disney films do or do not reflect historical changes in masculinity.

Chapter V will provide a discussion of the research project. This chapter will offer a summary of the research findings and will address the theoretical and practical implications of the findings. Limitations of the study will be presented and directions for future research will be given.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter will explore the theoretical perspectives that will be used in the research project. First, there will be an examination of children's viewing patterns and preferences along with a discussion of social learning theory. Social learning theory will be examined in order to understand how children may model Disney characters. Following this, an examination of the literature about fantasy, imagination, and identification with media characters will be presented and transportation theory will be introduced. Then, a discussion of gender roles, hegemonic masculinity, and a historical overview of masculinity will be presented. Following this, a discussion of portrayals of men in the media and Disney as an entertainment medium will be given.

#### **Children's viewing patterns**

The consumption of movies in the cinema became a popular family activity during the 1920s and 1930s (Paik, 2001). Along with the cinema came the introduction of VCR players and later, DVDs. Currently, 99% of households with children contain television sets (Roberts & Foehr, 2008). Therefore, most children have the capacity to view Disney animated feature films. The activities of watching television and viewing a film on VHS or DVD are similar; research shows that the gratifications gained from watching television produces the same rewards as watching a VCR tape (Cohen, Levy, & Golden, 1988). Because films originally produced for the cinema soon become available for home purchase, viewing of films released in the cinema has become a common activity for the family. Disney films that were at first only released in theatres

now have become available for repeat home viewing. Younger children tend to watch more rented or owned recordings of films and also engage in more repeated viewings of those films (Mares, 1998). In fact, television use increases during the initial four to five years of children's lives (Roberts & Foehr, 2008). Compared to school aged children who are busier, this age range has more time available due to the lack of demands imposed by school and socializing (Roberts & Foehr, 2008). Therefore, children in this age range have the potential to view more television and recorded movies such as the Disney animated feature film.

Ultimately, young children are watching more films at home with more repeated viewing of each film at the crucial time when gender identity begins to develop. Children of different ages experience preferences from a young age regarding program content, and these preferences will be explored in the next section.

### **Age-based differences in media engagement among children**

Patterns in viewing and programming choice among children evolve at an early age. While viewing patterns in television may change as he or she ages, a child's content preferences can influence their adult viewing patterns (Paik, 2001). Children of different developmental levels exhibit particular preferences regarding televised content (Valkenburg, 2004).

Children start to pay attention to television programs around four to five months of age (Valkenburg, 2004). Children between ages zero to two are much more limited in their media preferences than older children. Children in this age range are able to see some color and movement, but their sight is still blurred (Valkenburg, 2004). Ultimately,

children in this age range tend to react to auditory and visual attributes such as songs or bright colors but were not able to understand the story line (Valkenburg, 2004). Because Disney films are so visual in nature and have characters singing songs, children in this age range may start to pay attention to Disney films.

Children aged two to five learn to imitate media characters (Valkenburg, 2004). Content that appeals to this age of viewers involves action that is slow paced with lots of repetition (Valkenburg, 2004). Preschool children tend to prefer programming that involves animals and animated characters with lots of action (Lyle & Hoffman, 1972). Disney films often rely on animals to serve as major characters and the movies are animated, meaning that children in this age slot may prefer to watch programming such as the Disney film. Other research states that children tend to prefer programs where others are portrayed as dependent on someone else, just as they are dependent on parents (Comstock, 1991). Preschool boys exhibit preferences for action and violence in plot lines (Valkenburg, 2004). Characters with supernatural powers become more attractive to children at this age (Valkenburg, 2004). Also, at eighteen months of age fantasy play begins to emerge (Valkenburg, 2004). However, these children are not yet able to distinguish between fantasy and reality (Valkenburg, 2004). The formal features of television, such as zooms, split screens, and special effects may serve to confuse children and make it harder for them to distinguish between the two (Signorielli, 1991). This is important to consider within the context of Disney animated feature films because children who are viewing them may not be able to understand that the images

they are observing are not real and therefore may come to believe that the images they are viewing are realistic.

Children aged five to eight have a considerably longer attention span than younger children (Valkenburg, 2004). At this age, fantasy play becomes more social as children begin to play more with peers (Valkenburg, 2004). Children also develop a preference for more fast-paced programming and prefer to watch stories with a more adventurous plot line (Valkenburg, 2004). Finally, children aged eight to twelve begin to watch content to learn information about the real world (Valkenburg, 2004). Because gender is such a prominent theme in Disney films, children in this age range may be watching Disney in order to gain information regarding gender performance.

Now that children's viewing patterns and preferences have been established, the discussion will turn to active audience engagement in order to explore how children engage with media.

### **Active audience engagement**

Television viewing is largely a social activity that takes place with others (Buckingham, 1993). When television programming is consumed, people often talk with one another or even back to the screen. Even if viewing occurs in isolation, talk about the programs will often take place with others at a later time (Buckingham, 1993). Buckingham (1993) therefore contends that "talk about television is a vital element of our everyday lives" (p. 39).

Media reception scholars make an important distinction between the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in media programs (Livingstone, 1990). Because

texts are symbolic in nature, the occurrence of certain activities on television addresses more than simply numbers (Livingstone, 1990). Rather than simply stating the number of men and women present on television (denotative), the number of men and women present says something about what culture values as important, such as patriarchal power (connotative) (Livingstone, 1990). This represents a transition from literal meanings in programs to interpretive meanings (Livingstone, 1990). In television programming, the audience is left with the task of making inferences between the denotative and connotative meanings (Livingstone, 1990). Because Disney films rely on cartoon characters, many of whom are animals, the audience must engage in interpretation of the messages presented.

In summary, McQuail (1987) points out that no media viewers are passive but also that no viewers are equal in their activity of interpreting media messages because some may have more cognitive schemas or more media knowledge than others. Each active viewer differs in terms of “motivation, attention, involvement, pleasure, critical or creative response, connection with the rest of life,” among other factors (McQuail, 1987, p. 22). The discussion will now turn to social learning theory in order to examine how children may model characters such as those in Disney animated feature films.

### **Social learning theory**

Social learning theory suggests that individuals may model behavior based on available role models (Tan, 1986). Social learning theory argues that inhibitory effects will be observed when a model is shown being punished for a behavior while disinhibitory effects will be observed when a model is rewarded for behavior

(Baranowski, Perry, & Paracel, 1997). An individual will learn to expect punishment or reward when performing a behavior similar to that of the model observed (Baranowski et al., 1997). When viewing Disney films, children observe some characters being rewarded for their actions while other characters are punished for theirs. If a character in a Disney film is rewarded for his or her behavior the child may choose to perform a similar behavior in order to also get rewards; however, if a character is punished for his or her behavior, the child may choose not to model that behavior.

The process of modeling behavior takes place in multiple steps. The first step in the process of social learning is attention to the external event (Tan, 1986). Tan (1986) contends that events that are “distinctive, evaluated positively, simple, prevalent, and used” are events most likely to be modeled. The level of attention may be determined by the attention span of the observer, personal preferences, and their arousal level (Tan, 1986). Once attention has been given to an event, retention may be accomplished by symbolic coding, cognitive organization, and symbolic rehearsal and enactment (Tan, 1986). However, retention of the event does not mean that the event will be performed by the observer (Tan, 1986), Various motivational processes will determine whether or not the event will be carried out after being observed (Tan, 1986). In order to predict the likelihood that an event will be observed and modeled, differences in types of viewing must be understood.

A problem experienced in determining the effects of media consumption on youth involves understanding how much viewing a child actually participates in; in short, it is necessary to understand how much meaning a child internalizes from viewing



and how much a child engages in interpretation of what is viewed (Comstock & Scharrer, 2001). It is important to note two different types of viewing behavior in this section: instrumental and ritualistic viewing. Instrumental viewing places children as pragmatically choosing programming; this process involves a great degree of selectivity (Comstock & Scharrer, 2001). Instrumental viewing encompasses information seeking, reality orientation and social utility for the viewer; its ultimate goal is to gratify information seeking needs (Rubin, 1984). With this type of viewing, children would watch Disney films in order to gain information about a number of topics including but not limited to ideas regarding gender, occupation, social class, or sexuality. When viewing is instrumental in nature, the content of the program being watched is more important than the medium itself (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999).

However, ritualistic viewing positions the viewer as someone who is concerned with undemanding and entertaining content (Comstock & Scharrer, 2001). Ritualistic viewing mainly serves a diversionary function (Rubin, 1984). This type of consumption involves habitual and mindless viewing (Rubin, 1984). Overall, the majority of viewing by children is ritualistic (Comstock & Scharrer, 2001). This consumption of media for pleasure, rather than to gain information, exposes children to gender stereotyped ideas of what it means to be masculine and feminine in the form of entertainment, such as the Disney animated feature films.

Social learning theory provides implications for gender performance because children who view gender stereotyped programming may be more likely to model, internalize, and exhibit the gender stereotyped behavior that is viewed. Disney films

provide opportunities for children to observe and model behaviors, thereby allowing social learning to occur.

Because most viewing done by children is ritualistic in nature, gratifications of viewing for entertainment value include the ability to engage in fantasy behavior, identify with media characters, and to be transported into the narrative world. These theoretical frameworks will now be explored in greater detail.

### **Fantasy, identification, and transportation theory**

Schramm, Lyle, and Parker (1961) identify three gratifications children receive from consuming television programming. Of these gratifications, the most sought after reward was being able to engage in fantasy behavior (Schramm et al., 1961). It is likely that children consuming media will choose programming that reiterates themes they tend to fantasize about more often, as is predicted in the thematic-correspondence hypothesis (Valkenburg & Peter, 2006). If a person is unable to produce certain fantasies themselves, they may be more likely to turn to a form of media that can produce these fantasies for them (Valkenburg & Peter, 2006). Therefore, the Disney film is an important text to consider because the films may be able to produce fantasies for children that they are not able to produce for themselves.

Linked with fantasy is the concept of imagination. Imagination plays an important part in children's viewing of television and film. The first manifestations of imaginative play begin around twelve or thirteen months of age and peaks around ages five or seven years (Fein, 1981). For these reasons, examinations of animated feature films will be included in this analysis because children in this age group are more likely

to engage in imaginative play as enabled through the viewing of media such as the Disney film.

Because of the small amount of cognitive effort required to view such films, the child may find it easier to consume fantasies produced by others (Valkenburg, 2001). In watching television to be able to produce fantasies, individuals gain ideas regarding social reality; what viewers observe is a reflection of the messages produced by viewing television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1986). The result of repeated exposure to media messages results in cultivation effects occurring. The effects of cultivation do not emerge as a result of one time viewing but instead emerge as a result of long-term, repeated viewing (Morgan & Signorielli, 1990). Therefore, the ideas that are cultivated about gender at an early age due to repeat viewing may also stay with the adult throughout his or her life, illustrating a steady cultivation of values regarding gender.

The visual nature of film also has important ramifications for a child viewing audience because children are confronted with ready-made visuals produced by others therefore leaving the viewer with little room for their own interpretation of the material viewed (Valkenburg, 2001). The Disney film is an example of media that confronts children with ready-made visuals, therefore leaving the child with little room to interpret what is viewed. Also, films operate at a fast pace where images are continually replaced with other images leaving relatively little time to interpret the images before being confronted with a new image (Valkenburg, 2001).

In contrast to those who argue that children have little opportunity to engage in their own interpretation of media texts, proponents of fanfiction argue that the viewing audience has the opportunity to negotiate their own meanings of texts. Jenkins (1992) argues that when spectators participate in the authoring of their own interpretations of films, “fans construct their cultural and social identity through borrowing and inflecting mass culture images, articulating concerns which often go unvoiced within the dominant media” (p. 23). When fans author their own narratives of the media viewed, they become active participants in the creation of textual meanings (Jenkins, 1992).

Consuming films in order to produce fantasies is an important aspect of viewing for children, and the extent to which children internalize ideas presented depends largely on their identification with characters. This identification with characters affords the child a chance to be transported into a narrative fantasy world (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). The desire to identify with characters similar to the self can be a driving force in the decision to consume media. Cohen (2006) defines identification with a character as a process where “an affinity toward the character... is so strong that we become absorbed in the text and come to an empathetic understanding for the feelings the character experiences, and for his or her motives and goals” (p. 184). The viewing experience will be intensified when the audience identifies with a character and transcends reality (Cohen, 2006). This event, known as transportation, argues that the viewer may become so absorbed in the world of the character that he or she may be transported from the role of viewer and instead feel as if they are a part of the narrative (Green et al., 2004). Transportation theory provides important implications for

examining children as consumers of media because if a child becomes transported into the narrative world of the film they are more likely to find enjoyment in viewing, which can result in repeat viewing of the film (Green et al., 2004). Repeat viewing of the Disney film has been enabled because of the opportunity to purchase films for home viewing. If a child engages in identification, the child becomes more likely to remember the actions of the characters as well as dialogue between that character and others. If this occurs, the child may be more likely to internalize and model behaviors shown in Disney films as predicted by social learning theory.

The process of identifying with characters can also be influenced by the extent to which the issues and events in the program resonate with the life of the viewer (Cohen & Ribak, 2003). Similarity in sex, age, and social class may produce stronger identification with characters (Cohen, 2006). Because characters in Disney films are sometimes children and are often portrayed as being dependent on others, children may be more likely to identify with the characters in the Disney film. Identification with characters may become a natural extension of a child's need to understand others in their social world and may provide the child the opportunity for "identity play" (Green et al., 2004, p. 318). Therefore, because "transportation creates an openness to new information" among viewers, children may be able to gain information regarding gender performance by identifying with characters (Green et al., 2004, p. 317). Because children may view the Disney film at an early age, children may gain new information related to their gender identity and may be more likely to develop relationships with those media

characters they have observed; this may increase the possibility of being transported into the narrative world.

Now that the theoretical frameworks have been explored, gender, hegemonic masculinity, and a historical overview of masculinity will be given.

### **Gender, masculinity, and children's entertainment**

The goal of this research project is to understand how representations of gender may impact children viewers. The media assists in the self-socialization process by providing information about gender and by providing models of gendered behavior (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001). Based on Bandura's social learning theory, these models that have presented messages regarding gender have the opportunity to provide children with examples of what are appropriate behaviors and thoughts for each gender (Bandura, 1977).

#### **Gender**

Socialization is the process through which individuals learn to adapt the behaviors and values of a group (Signorielli, 1991). Traditionally, parents, schools, peers, and churches have been largely responsible for the socialization process (Signorielli, 1991). However, the nature of the media and its presence in everyday life has increasingly contributed to the socialization of children. Because the Disney film is such a common presence in children's lives, Disney has become a contributor to the gender socialization process.

A primary consideration in discussing the effects of media when considering what it means to be male or female is the difference between sex and gender. While sex

refers to the biological and anatomical features of an individual, gender refers to a socially constructed set of traits that are routinely given to men and women (Brand, 1995; Butler, 1990). Butler (1990) describes gender as not being as stable or fixed as sex. The behaviors of males and females are often categorized as being stereotypical in nature. While some stereotypes may serve as standardized images and conceptualizations that are not inaccurate in nature, other stereotypes often rely on incorrect information in their portrayals (Signorielli, 2001). These negative stereotypes play on a child's emotions rather than their intellectual knowledge (Signorielli, 2001). If incorrect knowledge is presented regarding gender, stereotypical information presented is negative in nature.

As children develop cognitively, the process of labeling one as male or female becomes more important (Bussey & Bandura, 2004). Labeling individuals as boys or girls allows children to learn how to identify gender but also to learn to categorize features and activities of each gender (Bussey & Bandura, 2004). Being able to categorize the world based on gender also gives the child the ability to categorize themselves (Bussey & Bandura, 2004). Paechter (2007) aptly states that "the distinction between male and female is fundamental to how we understand ourselves as human beings" (p. 6). Children learn that the world is largely organized around this differentiation and that their dress, skills, occupation, and daily activity will be governed by gender distinctions (Bussey & Bandura, 2004). Being labeled as a boy or girl "acts as a selective mechanism that assimilates gender-relevant information, objects, and behaviors" (Karinol, Reichman, & Fund, 2000, p. 378). Children who view Disney

animated films are exposed to how male and female characters behave and may come to adopt those behaviors as their own.

Research conducted by Tobin (2000) showed that boys are required to adhere to standards of masculine behaviors more so than girls are required to perform feminine behavior. Furthermore, the repercussions for boys of not behaving in a masculine manner are worse if this behavior is exhibited in front of other boys rather than in front of girls (Tobin, 2000). Tobin (2000) concludes that “the boys... are under more pressure than the girls to present a narrow range of thoughts and feelings” regarding gender” (p. 33). Boys may learn what gender performance options are available to them by viewing media such as the Disney animated film and may come to understand the repercussions for not performing their gender based on if characters in the Disney film are rewarded or punished for their behavior.

Because gender is seen as a socially constructed practice, Butler (1990) claims that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that is identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (p. 34). This performance of gender requires repeated actions to establish gender identity (Butler, 1990). Individuals are not in essence one gender or another; rather, each person adopts the performance of a gender in order to keep the structures of gender and sexuality alive (MacKinnon, 2003). Both masculinity and femininity are social constructions; these terms are “loosely defined, historically variable, and interrelated social ascriptions to persons with certain kinds of bodies- not the natural, necessary, or ideal characteristics of people with similar genitals” (Gardiner, 2005, p. 35). Gardiner



(2005) argues that individuals who embody masculine or feminine traits are grouped into cultural groups rather than groups based on biological facts. This led to the emergence of the idea of separate spheres for men and women and for those who embody masculine and feminine gender identities. In these spheres, men are expected to be active and independent while females are expected to be passive and dependent on males (Adams & Coltrane, 2005). Therefore, the public sphere became the place for men to prove their masculinity while the private sphere became the place for women to practice femininity (Adams & Coltrane, 2005).

Because gender is socially constructed, different gender performances may exist. Some performances of gender are more dominant than others, and, in the case of masculinity, this concept is known as hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity will be examined in order to provide a backdrop for determining whether masculine gender performances in Disney films are hegemonic in nature.

### **Hegemonic masculinity**

According to Reynolds (2002), masculinity is “largely a set of ideological and cultural practices rather than a biological given” (p. 97-98). Instead of masculinity being what it means to be a man, masculinity serves as a set of assumptions of what men are like; these assumptions are most often placed on those with male bodies (Reynolds, 2002). According to Rotundo (1993), manhood is “a human invention, manhood is learned, used, reinforced, and reshaped by individuals in the course of life” (p. 7). Malin (2005) describes masculinity as “an invisible but very real social construction” because people often do not think of dominant identities as actual identities (p. 3). The

construction of gender “is a process through which various forms of power are reproduced and power becomes indelibly inscribed onto everyday life” (Kimmel, 1993, p. 30). Children who consume Disney films are exposed to Disney’s standards for what constitutes masculinity as they view the film.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe hegemonic masculinity as “normative” and claim that hegemonic masculinity requires that all men position themselves in relation to it even if they cannot embody it (p. 832). According to Connell (1995), at any time:

one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answers to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (p. 77).

Bederman (1995) calls manliness “a standard to live up to, an ideal of male perfectibility to be achieved” (p. 27). However, even if all men cannot embody the dominant form of masculinity, all men are assumed to benefit from it (MacKinnon, 2003; Malin, 2005).

What is considered hegemonic and controlling may change based on the historical time period, and the struggle for hegemony might result in older forms of masculinity being replaced by newer ones, resulting in what Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) call “a struggle for hegemony” (p. 833). According to Connell (1993), one “cannot be masculine in a particular way... without affecting the conditions in which that form of masculinity arose: whether to reproduce them, intensify them, or subvert them” (p. 602). Oates and Durham (2004) claim that hegemonic masculinity “serves to equate whiteness, heterosexuality, athleticism and (of course) males with power” (p.

303). In order to uncover hegemonic masculinity as a set of assumptions about what it means to be male, masculinity must be made visible and be understood as a social construction instead of natural (Pennell, 2002).

Masculinity is therefore not just a set of stereotypes about men but is also a system of power that is conferred upon those who embody masculine identity (Reynolds, 2002). The distinction between power and masculinity can be difficult to make because being male and being masculine have long been the standard against which gender and social power are measured (Reynolds, 2002).

Now that hegemonic masculinity has been defined, a historical overview of masculinity will be presented in order to understand what forms hegemonic masculinity has taken from the time period beginning in the 1920s until present date. This will allow for comparisons to be made to determine if what has been considered hegemonic masculinity historically has also be reflected in the production of Disney animated films throughout time.

### **Historical overview of masculinity**

In order to explore if and how representations of masculinity have changed over time in Disney animated feature films, it is necessary to understand how masculinity has evolved over time. This section will describe what forms hegemonic masculinity has taken beginning in the early twentieth century until present date. It is important to note that these descriptions of masculinity reflect ideas regarding white masculinity as experienced from a middle class perspective.

First, masculinity in the era from the 1920s to the 1940s will be examined. The Great Depression and widespread unemployment provided a shock to men because they lost the ability to provide for their families (Kimmel, 2006). Because of this shift in work relations:

the dominance of the wage form, and the development of industrial struggle, were conditions for the emergence of forms of masculinity organized around wage-earning capacity, skill, and endurance in labor, domestic patriarchy, and combative solidarity among wage earners (Kimmel, 2006, p. 611).

Therefore, men could no longer use the workplace to prove their masculinity (Kimmel, 2006). Men had become emasculated both at work and home because men lost their status as a provider with their wives and families (Kimmel, 2006).

Because men had lost status both in the workplace and at home, men attempted to focus on rearing of their sons to educate them to become successful men, thereby redeeming some of their own lost masculinity (Kimmel, 2006). By performing masculinity in this way, “masculinity could be redefined away from achievement in the public sphere and reconceived as the exterior manifestation of a certain inner sense of oneself” (Kimmel, 2006, p. 136).

Masculinity in the period from the 1950s to the 1960s experienced shifts as well. After World War II, men experienced temporary exaltation as veteran’s benefits and a preference for male workers provided a boost for the economic standing of men and their ability to provide for their family (Gerson, 1993). According to Morgan (2005), periods following war tend to downgrade involvement in the domestic sphere. Rather, in post-war periods, military men and heroic figures are exalted (Morgan, 2005). Celebrating masculinity through involvement in military and in military exploits is

publicly celebrated (Higate & Hopton, 2005). This is evidenced in the toys that young boys are encouraged to play with; toy soldiers and toys with military themes are commonly associated with boy's play (Higate & Hopton, 2005). Ultimately, these influences "may lead to [individuals] equating manliness with military ideals" (Higate & Hopton, 2005, p. 434). Men involved in the war had the opportunity to prove their manhood by protecting their country, but this provided only temporary relief for men struggling to prove their masculinity (Kimmel, 2006). The post war period for men was also marked by "difficulty reintegrating, unexplained lethargy, emotional mood swings, and nightmares" (Kimmel, 2006, p. 148).

After the war, the fatherhood movement once again became a popular way for men to demonstrate their masculinity by ensuring that their sons were raised to be "real" men (Kimmel, 2006; MacKinnon, 2003). The aftermath of the war had led to an increased emphasis on familial involvement (Coontz, 1992). During the 1950s and 1960s, providing for the family through rearing sons and being a breadwinner continued to serve as a staple for middle class notions of masculinity (Kimmel, 2006). Due to the emergence of the family wage, which attempted to secure workers (mainly men) with income sufficient enough to provide for a family, men were hailed as responsible for providing for their wives and children (Gerson, 1993). This allowed women to focus on domestic activities and shielded children from entering the workforce at a young age (Gerson, 1993). The Victorian ideals embodied in the "cult of domesticity" held that women should be defined by the activity in the private sphere while men should gain identity by involvement in the public sphere; these notions experienced a resurgence

during the 1950s (Gerson, 1993; Coontz, 1992). Therefore, as men were experiencing more pressure to be a breadwinner and to help raise their children, women were also being held to high standards regarding mothering and other domestic activities (Gerson, 1993). This led to ideas being developed that claimed that separate spheres existed for men and women; these spheres were said to be biologically determined (Gerson, 1993). However, it was during this time period that men once again believed that it was “as fathers, not as employees nor even as soldiers, that they experienced the autonomy and control that had once marked... manhood” (Kimmel, 2006, p. 164).

Masculinity during the late 1960s and 1970s provided another time for men to reformulate the notion of makes the ideal man. The Vietnam War and resistance to it resulted in the soldier being seen as a failed man, and the quest to conquer the frontier became a less popular and possible endeavor in America (Kimmel, 2006). During this time, the women’s rights movement, gay rights movement, and civil rights movement further threatened men (Kimmel, 2006). Soon, the “very groups who had been so long excluded from American life were making their own claims for identity” (Kimmel, 2006, p. 179). Women and homosexuals openly challenged institutionalized heterosexuality, and, thus, masculinity (Connell, 1993; MacKinnon, 2003). During this time, men also experienced difficulty in earning a family wage (Gerson, 1993). The industrial and manufacturing society was being replaced by an economy dependent on information services, and men’s traditional masculine participation in the workplace was replaced with a more feminized version of work (Adams & Coltrane, 2005). During this time women began to enter the workforce in larger numbers (Gerson, 1993).

The transition to the 1980s and 1990s brought more reconstructions of what it meant to be masculine. The election of Bill Clinton as president signified a move towards a new type of man being the leader of the free world (Kimmel, 2006). Clinton became a representation of a new and conflicted masculinity characteristic of men in the 1990s (Malin, 2005). Clinton served as a new prototype for men: he never served in the military and was married to an educated and successful woman (Kimmel, 2006). Malin (2005), in his book addressing masculinity and Bill Clinton in the 1990s, discusses Clinton's crisis of masculinity resulting from his sexuality coming under scrutiny. This left many questioning his place as a role model for children and his ability to perform under pressure. Malin (2005) argues that the Clinton era was not the first time that a crisis of masculinity was experienced but rather offered a very real popular culture setting with a prominent public figure to analyze meanings and forms of masculinity. In fact, Connell (1987) questions the idea that masculinities are ever in a state of crisis but instead argues that masculinity has "powerful tendencies towards crisis" (p. 158).

During this period, men joined homosocial groups in order to restore male bonding and allegiance and supported groups such as the Boy Scouts in the hopes that their children could grow up to be real men (Kimmel, 2006). Men also began to go off on all male retreats in order to go into the wilderness and attempted to fulfill their feelings of isolation and loneliness by bonding with other men (Kimmel, 2006). This retreats into the wilderness attempted to fulfill a need men had due to having "lost our ability to claim our manhood in a world without fathers, without frontiers, without manly creative work" (Kimmel, 2006, p. 211).

During these decades, men also once again recaptured the idea of muscularized masculinity by jumping on the health and fitness bandwagon (Kimmel, 2006).

According to Oates and Durham (2004), “the hyper-developed male body [served] as the embodiment of physical and cultural power” (p. 301). The athletic male body served as a means for hegemonic power to be maintained (Oates & Durham, 2004). If the workplace was no longer an arena where masculinity could be proved, the male body itself would signify masculinity (Kimmel, 2006).

As we move into constructions of masculinity in the 1990s to present date, men have been frustrated for almost a century in the quest to prove their manhood. Immigration of non-natives, the civil, gay, and women’s rights movements, and drastic changes in the structure of work left men questioning how to, once again, reclaim their manhood. Over time, men have turned to techniques used in previous decades in hopes of finding the answer to the masculinity problem (Kimmel, 2006). As Kimmel (2006) states, “American white men brought the promise of self-made masculinity, but its foundation has all but eroded” (p. 218). Kimmel (2006) claims that men tend to believe that the answers to how to be a man is to simply have “more masculinity” by trying to prove themselves through physical strength, self-control, and power over others (p. 218).

Technology and globalization of the marketplace even further changed men and their relationship to work (Kimmel, 2006). A reformulation of masculinity was called for in response to technological change and economic restructuring (Connell, 1993). Now, forms of masculinity appeared that are “organized around the needs of transnational capital and the creation of global markets” (Connell, 2003, p. 258).



During this time, another newly formulated construction of masculinity became more prominent: the metrosexual. The metrosexual can be defined as the straight man concerned with fashion, his appearance, home décor, and the latest cultural trends (Kimmel, 2006). The metrosexual has provided an enormous opportunity for companies to market male cosmetics and other products historically deemed “unmanly” (Malin, 2005). The metrosexual represents a type of masculinity that has found success through “high-end consumerism” as opposed to physical strength (Kimmel, 2006. p. 225).

An emergence of a “new soft man” has also been witnessed (Malin, 2005). This man is more emotionally sensitive than his masculine predecessors (Malin, 2005). This new man symbolizes a “move towards a new, more progressive man in touch with himself as well as with contemporary criticisms of masculinity” (Malin, 2005, p. 27). Malin (2005) argues that Clinton, as well as men in general, must act to balance this new sensitive man with older “tougher” forms of masculinity. It is with this form of masculinity that men must balance anxieties dealing with both homophobia and “traditional notions of machismo” (Malin, 2005, p. 29). Jeffords (1994) also discusses this negotiation of identities by exploring Reagan era masculinity which was conflicted by notions of the hard male body as well as the sensitive family man.

Now that consideration has been given to what forms masculinity has historically taken, media portrayals of men will be examined.

### **Portrayals of men in the media**

Previous research has examined the rate and nature of male and female portrayals in children’s programming and this research shows that male characters appear on the

screen more often, are more often engaged in activity, and are given more speaking roles than their female counterparts (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). These male characters were also more assertive, independent, athletic, and responsible than female characters (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). Male characters also exhibited more aggressive behaviors (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995).

Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) sought to examine if gender representations had experienced change from the 1970s to the 1990s. The authors found that the representations of male characters had indeed changed, but this change was that the behaviors most often exhibited by male characters had increased in magnitude and quantity. Basically, male characters were becoming more aggressive, more athletic, and more independent than in previous decades (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). Female characters, however, were becoming less stereotypical in nature by being more independent and being afforded more speaking roles (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). Overall, the representations of females in the media are changing, but male representations are only becoming increasingly stereotypical in nature (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995).

Holub, Tisak, and Mullins (2008) conducted a study examining gender differences regarding hero attributions. Boys are traditionally more likely to identify with sports heroes or heroes that were aggressive in nature (Musgrave & Reid, 1971). The results of the study supported the idea that boys predominantly chose male heroes who had more prestige than those chosen by females (Holub et al., 2008). Key descriptive words used to describe the child's hero were chosen by the child participant;

the participants were instructed to indicate to what extent their hero matched the adjective presented. Among the adjectives used for the instrumental attributes included words such as “strong,” “energetic,” “smart,” “hardworking,” “brave,” and “clever.” Adjectives used to describe the prestige attributes of the heroes included words such as “well-known,” “famous,” “popular,” “dresses well,” “rich,” “exciting job,” “and “good looking” (Holub et al., 2008). The results of the study indicated that identification among male child audience viewers is gender biased.

Research by Baker and Raney (2007) examined the number of males and females present in cartoon programming as well as the physical appearance, personality traits, and communicative behaviors of males and females. Their findings show that male characters were present 65.7% of the time compared to 34.4% for female characters, demonstrating that males occupy more lead roles and screen time than female characters in children’s cartoon programming (Baker & Raney, 2007). These characters were also more often white than members of other racial groups (Baker & Raney, 2007). Roughly one-fourth of the characters analyzed were muscular; all muscular characters were male (Baker & Raney, 2007). Male characters were found to be more emotionally controlled than their female counterparts, were more likely to express anger, and were more likely to threaten others (Baker & Raney, 2007).

Research by Signorielli and Bacue (1999) found that males receive more recognition than females on television shows, indicating higher values being held for males. Also, men were typically older than women; very young and very old characters for both genders were practically invisible (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Related to their

findings regarding age was the occupation of characters; even if men were older, they still had employment outside the home whereas females were more likely to be shown as not working or as employed inside the home (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Men were also found to be more likely to be cast in gender-neutral jobs but no males were found to be employed in traditionally feminine occupations (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999).

Now that media portrayals of men have been examined, the discussion will move to a discussion of previous research conducted regarding Disney films.

### **Previous literature on Disney films**

The history of Walt Disney and the films produced by the Disney Corporation provide further insight to the gender constancy Disney helps cultivate. The Disney films, theme parks, and merchandise saturate our culture. Disney retains the power to make the audience “long nostalgically for neatly ordered patriarchal realms” (Zipes, 1995, p. 40). Giroux (1995) argues that the world of Disney has become a site of commodifying memory and rewriting narratives of identity, particularly memory from a patriarchal standpoint. This allows Disney to rationalize “the authoritarian normalizing tendencies of the dominant culture that carry through to the present” (Giroux, 1995, p. 47). Through reconstructions of popular fairy tales, Disney produces certain knowledge, values, and desires (Giroux, 1995).

Ward (2002) has discussed the implications of the Disneyfication of our society with regard to gender. Ward (2002) argues that “to be human, according to Disney, is defined by gender” (p. 120). Specifically, being male means that one must pursue their dreams and become an active part of society (Ward, 2002). Being part of the social

structure in the Disney world is easier for male characters than female characters because of the patriarchal structure in the films (Ward, 2002). Even films showing Disney princesses place the princess in a male dominated world that they must learn to negotiate (Ward, 2002).

Findings by others that examined Disney films also illustrate the need to undergo a thorough examination of gender roles in Disney feature films. Research by Hoerrner (1996) utilized both cultivation theory and social learning theory to analyze gendered behaviors in Disney films. Hoerrner's findings showed that female characters engaged in more prosocial behaviors such as control of aggressive impulses and sympathy towards others. However, the study revealed that male characters engaged in more antisocial behaviors such as physical and verbal aggression. Therefore, the models made available to each gender vary with the models available to males endorsing violence and aggression. Representations of male characters such as those in Disney films demands examination in order to understand the implications of modeling behaviors offered to young boys who view Disney films.

Research by Junn (1997) sought to examine portrayals of love, romance, marriage, and sexuality in select romantic and non-romantic Disney films from different time periods. The findings suggest that in non-romantic films, males are more often lead characters are given more screen time than female characters (Junn, 1997). Also, in all films, characters were more likely to experience the absence of mothers rather than the absence of fathers (Junn, 1997). Sexuality in Disney films has changed historically with

more sexually-related depictions occurring in more recent romantic Disney films as opposed to older Disney films (Junn, 1997).

In a study examining gender, race, age, and sexual orientation in Disney animated feature films, Towbin et al. (2003) found that Disney films continue to portray limiting images of gender. Male characters were portrayed as being aggressive, emotionally controlled, and as the rescuers of women (Towbin et al., 2003). Themes regarding sexuality were also uncovered, the most prominent one being that women lack sexual agency when advances are made by men (Towbin et al., 2003). Villain characters were also more likely to be portrayed as being non-white, indicating a negative portrayal of minorities (Towbin et al., 2003).

Tanner et al. (2003) examined images of family and couples in Disney animated feature films. The findings show that alternate family forms, such as stepfamilies, community as family, and adoptive families, were the most common type of family structure (Tanner et al., 2003). Also, marriage appeared to be the expected course for couples in Disney films (Tanner et al., 2003). A couple would meet and immediately fall in love and would be married shortly afterward (Tanner et al., 2003). Furthermore, all couples shown in the films were heterosexual (Tanner et al., 2003).

Other research has examined the portrayals of older characters in Disney films (Robinson et al., 2007). The research findings indicate that the number of older characters in current Disney films is on the rise from earlier decades with the average number of older characters being seen in current movies being 3.8 (Robinson et al., 2007). Older characters were also predominantly white and were cast in minor rather

than major roles (Robinson et al., 2007). Finally, older characters in the films analyzed were more likely to be male than female (Robinson et al., 2007).

Therefore, based on this review of the literature, the following research questions are posed.

### **Research questions**

RQ1: Does the role of the male character (good, evil, or neutral) influence representations of character descriptions, physical descriptions, sexuality, family structures and practices, socioeconomic status, and aggression?

RQ2: Does the centrality of the male character (central or peripheral) influence representations of character descriptions, physical descriptions, sexuality, family structures and practices, socioeconomic status, and aggression?

RQ3: Have representations of masculinity in Disney full length animated feature films reflected or not reflected popular trends in hegemonic masculinity over time?

In order to answer each research question, a mixed methodology approach will be utilized. A description of the methods that will be used to answer these research questions are given in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the methodology employed to conduct the study. This chapter will include a description of mixed methodology research, an explanation of the sampling techniques used, will discuss the units of analysis, will explain how quantitative and qualitative methods were used, and will offer definitions of each variable of interest.

The analysis of character role and character centrality employed both quantitative and qualitative methods. Chi square tests were used to calculate the occurrence of each variable of interest compared to the role of each character; following this, examples and interpretations of the findings were offered. Following the analysis of character role and centrality will be the qualitative analysis of masculinity historically. This analysis sought to examine whether representations of masculinity in Disney films have or have not changed to reflect historical trends in hegemonic masculinity.

#### **Mixed methodology research**

This research project utilized both qualitative and quantitative research methods, thereby making it a project using mixed methodology approach. Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) define mixed methodology research as “collecting, analyzing and interpreting qualitative and quantitative data in a single study... that investigates the same underlying phenomenon” (p. 267). The present study used fully mixed quantitative and qualitative data collection methods that occurred concurrently and also included an integration of findings from both methodological camps during the interpretation phase.



Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2009) argue that using mixed methods approaches allows the study to have more credibility than if a singular method was employed and that the use of mixed methods allows the structure of the research design to be more flexible in nature. In order to come to conclusions that are not constrained by the method used, both qualitative and quantitative analysis will best provide the researcher with “unique insights that cannot be obtained by the other method” (Benoit & Holbert, 2008, p. 622).

By using a mixed methodology approach, the researcher is in the best position to provide a more complete understanding of a research problem (Creswell, 2003). Wilson advocates for the integration of quantitative and qualitative research, saying, “quantitative data are composites of qualitative data; the numbers mean nothing unless the researcher puts meaning behind the numbers” (p. 15). Other advantages to using a mixed methods approach include the ability to make stronger inferences about observed phenomenon as well as the opportunity to answer questions that using just one methodology cannot (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). Rose (2001) states that mixing methods allows for “a richly detailed picture of images’ significance to be developed” (p. 202).

According to Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, and Way (2008), “one method might be chosen specifically to fill in the gaps or shortcomings of another” (p. 349). Because quantitative data cannot completely explain the context of the findings and offer in-depth interpretations of what is viewed, the use of both quantitative and qualitative data can assist the researcher in offering more complete research findings.

## Sampling

Movies selected for this study were selected by using a proportionate stratified sampling procedure where the movies were first stratified by decade and then arranged by gross earnings. For each decade period, a median split was created. Movies with earnings above the median in each decade were included in the sample. This procedure allowed for a list to be formulated that represented movies most commonly watched by children and that were the most popular films among multiple generations of viewers. Table 1 shows a listing of all movies before the sampling technique was employed.

Twenty-two movies were included in the sample (See Table 2.). Movies included in the sample were produced in the time period ranging from 1937 through 2007. Criteria for inclusion was that each movie in the sample had a “G” or “PG” rating given by the Motion Picture Association of America, was initially released in movie theatres, had a continuous plot line, and was ranked as a Disney or Disney/Pixar “high-seller” based on box office success.

Box office success was determined by gross reports provided by [boxofficemojo.com](http://boxofficemojo.com). Box Office Mojo is a website owned by the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) that reports box office information; the site is regularly cited in the *Wall Street Journal* and *Forbes* (*About box office mojo*). The site has over one million visitors each month (*About box office mojo*). Domestic lifetime grosses were used for ten movies and worldwide lifetime grosses were used for the remaining twelve movies. Worldwide grosses were used when available. The box office information for *Robin Hood* was taken from IMDb.com.

**Table 1** Complete List of Disney Films

| Movie                                  | Date released | Production company | Domestic Gross | Worldwide Gross |
|--|---------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i> | 1937          | Disney             | \$184,925,486  | N/A             |
| <i>Pinocchio</i>                       | 1940          | Disney             | \$84,254,167   | N/A             |
| <i>Dumbo</i>                           | 1941          | Disney             | N/A            | N/A             |
| <i>Bambi</i>                           | 1942          | Disney             | \$102,247,150  | N/A             |
| <i>Cinderella</i>                      | 1950          | Disney             | \$28,040,000   | N/A             |
| <i>Alice in Wonderland</i>             | 1951          | Disney             | N/A            | N/A             |
| <i>Peter Pan</i>                       | 1953          | Disney             | \$87,404,651   | N/A             |
| <i>Lady and the Tramp</i>              | 1955          | Disney             | \$93,602,326   | N/A             |
| <i>Sleeping Beauty</i>                 | 1959          | Disney             | \$51,600,000   | N/A             |
| <i>101 Dalmatians</i>                  | 1961          | Disney             | \$144,880,014  | N/A             |
| <i>The Sword in the Stone</i>          | 1963          | Disney             | \$12,000,000   | N/A             |
| <i>The Jungle Book</i>                 | 1967          | Disney             | \$141,843,612  | N/A             |
| <i>Robin Hood</i>                      | 1973          | Disney             | \$32,056,467   | N/A             |
| <i>The Fox and the Hound</i>           | 1981          | Disney             | \$63,456,988   | N/A             |
| <i>The Little Mermaid</i>              | 1989          | Disney             | \$111,543,479  | N/A             |
| <i>The Rescuers Down Under</i>         | 1990          | Disney             | \$27,931,461   | N/A             |
| <i>Beauty and the Beast</i>            | 1991          | Disney             | N/A            | \$377,350,553   |
| <i>Aladdin</i>                         | 1992          | Disney             | N/A            | \$504,050,219   |
| <i>The Lion King</i>                   | 1994          | Disney             | N/A            | \$783,841,776   |
| <i>Pochantas</i>                       | 1995          | Disney             | N/A            | \$346,079,773   |
| <i>Toy Story</i>                       | 1995          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$361,958,736   |
| <i>The Hunchback of Notre Dame</i>     | 1996          | Disney             | N/A            | \$325,338,851   |
| <i>Hercules</i>                        | 1997          | Disney             | N/A            | \$252,712,101   |
| <i>Mulan</i>                           | 1998          | Disney             | N/A            | \$304,320,254   |
| <i>A Bug's Life</i>                    | 1998          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$448,191,819   |
| <i>Tarzan</i>                          | 1999          | Disney             | N/A            | \$448,191,819   |
| <i>Toy Story 2</i>                     | 1999          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$485,015,179   |

**Table 1 Continued**

| Movie                            | Date released | Production company | Domestic Gross | Worldwide Gross |
|----------------------------------|---------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <i>Emperor's New Groove</i>      | 2000          | Disney             | N/A            | \$169,327,687   |
| <i>Atlantis: The Lost Empire</i> | 2001          | Disney             | N/A            | \$186,053,725   |
| <i>Monsters, Inc.</i>            | 2001          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$525,366,597   |
| <i>Lilo and Stitch</i>           | 2002          | Disney             | N/A            | \$273,144,151   |
| <i>Brother Bear</i>              | 2003          | Disney             | N/A            | \$250,397,798   |
| <i>Finding Nemo</i>              | 2003          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$864,625,978   |
| <i>Home on the Range</i>         | 2004          | Disney             | N/A            | \$103,951,461   |
| <i>The Incredibles</i>           | 2004          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$631,442,092   |
| <i>Chicken Little</i>            | 2005          | Disney             | N/A            | \$314,432,837   |
| <i>Cars</i>                      | 2006          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$461,983,149   |
| <i>Meet the Robinsons</i>        | 2007          | Disney             | N/A            | \$621,426,008   |
| <i>Ratatouille</i>               | 2007          | Disney             | N/A            | \$621,426,008   |

**Table 2** Disney Films Analyzed

| Movie                                  | Date released | Production company | Domestic Gross | Worldwide Gross |
|--|---------------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i> | 1937          | Disney             | \$184,925,486  | N/A             |
| <i>Pinocchio</i>                       | 1940          | Disney             | \$84,254,167   | N/A             |
| <i>Bambi</i>                           | 1942          | Disney             | \$102,247,150  | N/A             |
| <i>Peter Pan</i>                       | 1953          | Disney             | \$87,404,651   | N/A             |
| <i>Lady and the Tramp</i>              | 1955          | Disney             | \$93,602,326   | N/A             |
| <i>Sleeping Beauty</i>                 | 1959          | Disney             | \$51,600,000   | N/A             |
| <i>101 Dalmatians</i>                  | 1961          | Disney             | \$144,880,014  | N/A             |
| <i>The Jungle Book</i>                 | 1967          | Disney             | \$141,843,612  | N/A             |
| <i>Robin Hood</i>                      | 1973          | Disney             | \$32,056,467   | N/A             |
| <i>The Little Mermaid</i>              | 1989          | Disney             | \$111,543,479  | N/A             |
| <i>Beauty and the Beast</i>            | 1991          | Disney             | N/A            | \$377,350,553   |
| <i>Aladdin</i>                         | 1992          | Disney             | N/A            | \$504,050,219   |
| <i>The Lion King</i>                   | 1994          | Disney             | N/A            | \$783,841,776   |
| <i>Toy Story</i>                       | 1995          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$361,958,736   |
| <i>Tarzan</i>                          | 1999          | Disney             | N/A            | \$448,191,819   |
| <i>Toy Story 2</i>                     | 1999          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$485,015,179   |
| <i>Monsters, Inc.</i>                  | 2001          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$525,366,597   |
| <i>Finding Nemo</i>                    | 2003          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$864,625,978   |
| <i>The Incredibles</i>                 | 2004          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$631,442,092   |
| <i>Chicken Little</i>                  | 2005          | Disney             | N/A            | \$314,432,837   |
| <i>Cars</i>                            | 2006          | Disney/Pixar       | N/A            | \$461,983,149   |
| <i>Ratatouille</i>                     | 2007          | Disney             | N/A            | \$621,426,008   |

### **Coding procedure**

Rose (2001) describes content analysis as “counting the frequency of certain visual elements in a clearly defined sample of images, and then analyzing those frequencies” (p. 56). For the content analysis, a coding book was designed in order to define each variable of interest (See Appendix A and B.) Then, in the initial phase of the research project, each movie was watched and occurrences of each variable of interest were noted on a separate coding sheet for each character being analyzed. While viewing each video, attention was also paid to new emergent themes that were uncovered; these themes were then added to the list located in the appendix in order to adjust for character dimensions not mentioned in the research that was reviewed.

### **Units of analysis**

Two units of analysis were studied in this research project: characters and time period of movie production. Only male characters were analyzed, and these characters were chosen based on their inclusion in the “Cast” listing area on the IMDb website. The IMDb is a website that contains over 300,000 movie titles, listings of cast and crew members, and production details regarding films (Kaufman, 2002). This website has a user base of more than ten million people a month (Kaufman, 2002). By using IMDb to retrieve cast listings, a comprehensive list of both major and minor male characters was formulated for inclusion in the analysis. Characters who were included on the “Cast” listing page of IMDb but whose identity was not revealed in the movie, who spoke fewer than five lines, and who were not significant to the plot line were excluded from the analysis.

## **Variables of interest**

The independent variable for this research project was character role. The independent variable was compared against other variables of interest which include character descriptions, physical descriptions, socioeconomic status, sexuality, family structures and practices, and aggression. Each variable is explained in greater detail in the following paragraphs

### **Character role**

The male character featured as the lead protagonist in the film was coded as the hero. These characters were identified by the amount of dialogue they participated in, the amount of screen time given to the character, and their significance to the plot line. Male characters who supported the hero and were on the side of good but who were not major characters were classified as hero sidekicks. A category of neutral existed for characters that were not heroes, villains, or sidekick characters but whose presence was significant to the plot line. The male character featured as the lead antagonist in the film was coded as the villain. Male characters who supported the villain and acted with them but who were not major characters were classified as villain sidekicks.

### **Character descriptions**

*Character type.* Each character was coded as being human, animal, or other. The category of other existed for characters that were toys, aliens, and other non-human/non-animal figures.

*Race.* The race of each character was noted. If the race of the character could not be determined, their race was coded as “unable to determine.”

*Age.* Characters that spoke and behaved as if they were twelve years old or younger were coded as children. This would include characters that had the physical characteristics of children and who were portrayed as being dependent on others for care. Characters in the thirteen to nineteen age group were coded as being adolescents. Characters between twenty to thirty-nine years of age were coded as being a young adult. Characters in the age range of forty to sixty-four years were considered middle-aged. Characters were determined to be middle class based on their appearance and also on the presence of adult children. Characters that spoke and behaved as if they were sixty-five and older were coded as being old/elderly. Individuals in this age range are often determined to be old/elderly based on the appearance of wrinkles, balding, the presence of white hair, or the use of aids for walking (Robinson, et al., 2007). A classification of “unable to determine” was given to characters on which no age determination could be made. This was often used for characters that were non-human or animals (Neuendorf, 2002; Signorielli, 1989).

### **Physical descriptions**

*Fitness.* A description of each character was given in order to determine if the character was slender and fit or if the character was overweight.

*Muscularity.* A description of each character was given in order to determine if the character was muscular or had no muscles.

*Showing physical strength.* When a character’s physical fitness was showcased the character was coded as possessing physical strength. A character that engaged in physical activity to prove they were stronger than others or who did physical activity to demonstrate their fitness was coded as showing physical strength. Showing off the



character's muscles was also coded as showing physical strength. Cases where characters used their physical strength to rescue others were also included in this category. If the character did not exhibit physical strength, they were coded as not showing physical strength.

### **Socioeconomic status**

*Occupation.* The occupation of each character was written in to determine if, for example, characters identified as heroes were more likely to work in certain industries than a villain characters.

*Social class.* Characters were identified as being a member of the lower/working class if they did not have or barely had the necessities needed to live and if they worked in industries and jobs typical of individuals in the lower/working class. Characters were identified as middle class if they worked for a living and were dependent on that work for survival, and if they had the necessities for life as well as some luxuries. Characters were identified as upper class if they were well-to-do and were not dependent on a monthly income to live. (Neuendorf, 2002; Signorielli, 1989).

*Dress.* Observations regarding the clothing of each character were made. This allowed the researcher to see if patterns existed between the social class of characters and the manner in which they were dressed.

### **Sexuality**

*Sexual orientation.* The sexual orientation of each character was classified as being heterosexual, homosexual, or unable to determine. Male characters were coded as being heterosexual if they showed interest in female characters, engaged in romantic behavior with female characters, or were married/engaged to female characters. Characters were

coded as homosexual if they showed a sexual preference for other male characters. If a determination of the character's sexual orientation could not be made, a classification of "unable to determine" was given (Signorielli, 1989).

*Romantic involvement.* Characters were classified as being romantically involved if they showed interest in a female character or if female characters showed interest in the male character. Characters were coded as not being romantically involved if they did not show interest in female characters and if no female characters exhibited interest in them (Signorielli, 1989).

*Being sexual in nature.* If a character made sexual comments or sexual advances on another character, they were coded as being sexual in nature. Also, if a character had comments and advances made on them, they were seen as being sexual in nature. Examples include a female character approaching a male character and commenting positively on his appearance or a female character flirting with a male character. Characters that engaged in none of the above behaviors were coded as not being sexual in nature.

### **Family structures and practices**

*Marital status.* Each male character was classified as being single, dating/in a relationship, married, divorced, widowed, or "unable to determine."

*Having children/family life.* Characters were coded based on their family structure. Characters that lived with one biological parent who had remarried were coded as being a member of a stepfamily. If the character had a child but was not married, they were coded as being a single parent. If the character was a child who had a single parent, they were classified as having a single parent. If the character was adopted into a family and

possessed no family of their own, they were classified as being a member of an adoptive family. Characters that had no family, biological or adoptive, but that lived with others in a community-like setting were coded as having community as family. An example would be Tarzan who lives with animals and considers them his family. Characters that had a mother and father that were married were classified as being a member of a nuclear family structure. If the family structure of the character could not be observed, a coding of “unable to determine” was given (Tanner et al., 2003).

*Performing homemaking activities.* Presence or absence of this variable was evaluated based on homemaking activities performed. If a character was seen buying, gathering, or preparing food for their family, was shown playing with children, babysitting them, or spending time with a child the character was coded as performing homemaking activities. Instances where the character was shown cleaning or straightening the house or living area were coded as performing homemaking activities.

### **Aggression**

*Perpetrator of physical aggression.* Characters that engaged in hand to hand fighting, used weapons to harm others, used objects to harm others, chased others with the intent to harm, and trapped other characters were coded as being a perpetrator of physical aggression (Luther & Legg, 2007).

*Perpetrator of social aggression.* Characters that engaged in social isolation, name calling, threatening, or stealing were coded as being a perpetrator of social aggression. (Luther & Legg, 2007).

*Victim of physical aggression.* If a character was involved in hand to hand fighting, was hurt with weapons, was hurt with objects, was chased with the intent to harm, or was trapped by another character, they were coded as being victims of physical aggression.

*Victim of social aggression.* If a character was socially isolated, was called names, was threatened, or was stolen from they were coded as being victims of social aggression (Luther & Legg, 2007).

*Being emotionally controlled.* A character that refused to show emotions was coded as being emotionally controlled. Characters that cried or were emotionally affected by events were coded as not being emotionally controlled.

### **Data analysis procedure**

The analysis of character role and character centrality used both quantitative and qualitative research methods. A content analysis of each character was performed initially. This allowed for an analysis of character role and character centrality to be given. The variable of character role (hero, hero sidekick, villain, villain sidekick, and neutral) served as the independent variable. The character roles of hero, hero sidekick, villain, villain sidekick, and neutral were re-coded in order to analyze character role and character centrality. For character role, hero and hero sidekick characters were coded as being good, villain and villain sidekick characters were coded as being evil, and neutral characters were coded as being neutral. For the analysis of character centrality, hero and villain characters were coded as being central while hero sidekick, villain sidekick, and neutral characters were coded as being peripheral. Chi-square tests were performed in order to determine how often each character type could be said to identify with each variable of interest. An interpretation of the numerical findings as well as examples from the texts

were offered in order to expand on the theoretical perspectives mentioned previously. This provided insight into what the common representations of male characters in Disney animated feature films were.

### **Historical analysis**

For the analysis of masculinity historically, a qualitative content analysis was performed. The data collection process in qualitative research was accomplished in this study by observing the occurrences of certain types of masculinity in order to see how these occurrences matched with hegemonic masculinity historically. This follows procedures laid out by Marshall and Rossman (1995) which encourage a systematic recording of events, behaviors, or artifacts. For the purposes of this study, films served as the artifacts examined.

In order to perform this content analysis, observations were made and organized into a coding book that was developed based on previous research, a method that Kondracki, Wellman, and Amundson (2002) claim allows for “easy identification, indexing, and retrieval of content relevant to research questions” (p. 224). This process allowed the researcher to make observations and inferences and to use those inferences to answer research questions (White & Marsh, 2006). What was observed was then categorized into themes in order to determine the “presence or absence of certain ideas, theories, or biases” (p. 224). White and Marsh (2006) claim that “qualitative content analysis focuses on creating a picture of a given phenomenon that is always imbedded within a particular context, not on describing reality objectively” (p. 38). The results of qualitative content analysis need not be reported with the use of numbers (White & Marsh, 2006). White and Marsh (2006) argue that the results may be presented as “a narrative of

findings about the phenomenon being studied with quotations to illustrate the conclusions” (p. 39).

This process was deductive in nature, meaning that key themes that had already been identified in previous research were compared to the present study in order to draw conclusions (Kondracki et al., 2002). This study examined both the manifest and latent context of the texts in order to draw conclusions that were both visible and not immediately observable (Kondracki et al., 2002). White and Marsh (2006) claim that in doing so, observations made can be compared to existing literature and research questions, and attention can be paid to new and emergent themes that were not initially chosen for consideration. Therefore, both confirming evidence that supports existing finds was considered as well as disconfirming evidence that suggested new areas for study not initially anticipated (White & Marsh, 2006).

In order to develop a coding system, each time period from the 1930s until present date was included. In order to conduct the analysis, each film was watched and notes were made regarding what ideas regarding masculinity each film presents. Then, comparisons were made between each film and hegemonic masculinity within the decade of film release to determine if ideas regarding masculinity in the films followed current trends in masculinity. Data collection for both the character and movie levels of analysis took place concurrently.

The next chapter will present the results of this research project.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter will present the results of the research project. First, the results for the analysis of character role and character centrality will be given to determine if the representations of character role (good, evil, or neutral) and character centrality (central or peripheral) influenced the representations of character descriptions, physical descriptions, socioeconomic status, sexuality, family structures and practices, and aggression. The discussion of masculinity historically will analyze how and if representations of masculinity in Disney animated feature films reflects or does not reflect historical trends in hegemonic masculinity.

#### **Analysis of character role**

For this analysis, hero and hero sidekick characters were coded as being good, villain and villain sidekick characters were coded as being evil, and neutral characters retained their classification as neutral. Chi-square tests were used in order to determine the percentages for each variable of interest. Examples and interpretations of the findings will be presented. The results will be presented by using the categories of character descriptions, physical descriptions, socioeconomic status, sexuality, family structures and practices, and aggression.

#### **Character descriptions**

*Character type.* Overall, good characters were most likely to be animals (44.4%), evil characters were most likely to be humans (54.5%), and neutral characters were most likely to be humans (40%) ( $\chi^2$  (df = 4,  $N = 91$ ) = 5.303,  $p = .258$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Race.* Good (66.7%), evil (63.6%), and neutral (60%) characters were most often white ( $\chi^2(df = 6, N = 91) = 8.146, p = .228$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Age.* Good (31.5%) and evil (59.1%) characters were most likely to be middle aged. Neutral characters were most likely to be old/elderly (60%) ( $\chi^2(df = 10, N = 91) = 34.365, p < .001$ ). An example of a good middle aged character is the Great Prince from *Bambi*. This character appears to be in the forty to sixty year age range. This can be determined due to the action and prestige of the character, as well as his physical appearance. The Great Prince has a child, Bambi, who ages throughout the film and becomes an adult. This leads to the conclusion that the Great Prince is middle aged because he has an adult child. Also, the Great Prince is an authority figure for the animal community; such wisdom and his leadership position has evolved due to his experience, and, thus, age. The Great Prince also has a well developed body with a large rack of antlers, a sign of age in the deer community. An example of an evil middle aged character is Al from *Toy Story 2*. Al appears to be middle aged based on his hair and facial features. He is balding and attempts to hide this fact by combing his hair over. He also wears a mustache and goatee, further adding to his aging appearance. Maurice from *Beauty and the Beast* is a neutral character that was coded as being old/elderly (See Figure 1). Maurice is bald with large white tufts sticking up on each side of his head. He also has a large white mustache. The presence of white hair and the absence of hair on top of his head signify that Maurice is older. Also, Maurice becomes lost and confused when traveling through the forest; such forgetfulness can be a sign of someone being old or elderly.



### Physical descriptions

*Fitness.* Good (81.5%) and evil (68.2%) characters were most likely to be slender and fit compared to neutral characters, and neutral characters were most likely to be overweight (60.5%) compared to good and evil characters ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 10.048, p < .05$ ). An example of a good character that was slender and fit is the Prince from *Sleeping Beauty*. The Prince is not overweight and wears clothing that clearly displays his physical build. He has a frame that is of average size. He is tall and slender. Another good character that is slender and fit is Peter Pan. Peter Pan has an average build and is not overweight. The Sultan from *Aladdin* is a neutral character that was overweight.

*Muscularity.* Overall, good (72.2%), evil (72.7%), and neutral (93.3%) characters were more likely to not be muscular than they were to be muscular ( $\chi^2(df = 4, N = 91) = 11.897, p < .05$ ). Pumba from *The Lion King* is an example of a good character that was not muscular (See Figure 2.). Pumba is an overweight warthog and has no muscles visible. Compared to these characters is Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast* (See Figure 3). Gaston has very large and visible muscles.



**Figure 1** Maurice as an older character.  
Maurice's white hair and body build shows that he is older (*Lion King screen grabs: Maurice*).



**Figure 2** Pumba's lack of muscularity.  
Pumba is overweight and has no visible muscles (*Groink*).



**Figure 3** Gaston's muscularity.

Gaston has very large visible muscles (*Disney clip-art.com: Beauty and the Beast*).

*Physical strength.* Characters that were good (37%) were more likely to display physical strength than were evil (18.3%) and neutral (26.7%) characters ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 2.751, p = .253$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

### **Socioeconomic status**

*Occupation.* Good (11.1%) and evil (13.6%) characters were most likely to be royalty. Neutral characters (13.3%) were equally likely to be inventors, royalty, and diamond miners ( $\chi^2(df = 34, N = 91) = 80.605, p < .001$ ). The Prince in *Sleeping Beauty* is a member of royalty as is King Triton from *The Little Mermaid* who is the King of the mermaid community; Simba from *The Lion King* is also considered royalty as he is the King of Pride Rock. Evil characters that are royalty are Prince John in *Robin Hood* and Scar from *The Lion King*. Neutral characters that were inventors were Maurice and Gepetto from *Pinocchio*. Maurice makes random inventions; his most recent invention in the film was a machine that chopped wood without the aid of a human. Gepetto is a clock maker and also makes puppets. A neutral character that is a member of royalty is the Sultan from *Aladdin*. Finally, Doc and Grumpy from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* are diamond miners.

*Social class.* Overall, good (24.1%) and evil (27.3%) characters were most likely to be members of the upper class while neutral characters (26.7%) were most likely to be members of the lower/working class ( $\chi^2(df = 6, N = 91) = 5.511, p = .480$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Dress.* Evil characters (54.5%) were more likely to be well dressed than good (40.7%) and neutral (13.3%) characters. Neutral characters (40%) were more likely to be poorly dressed compared to good and evil characters. ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 5.874, p < .05$ ).

This analysis was important because it allowed for observations to be made regarding whether characters of particular social classes were well dressed or poorly dressed. An example of an evil character that was well dressed is Captain Hook from *Peter Pan*. Captain Hook wears a large hat with a feather in the brim, and he wears a long red coat. His shirt has ruffles and he wears black dress shoes. It is interesting to note that Captain Hook is well dressed because he was also coded as being a member of the upper class. Another evil character that was well dressed is Jafar from *Aladdin*. Jafar wears a floor length dress robe and cape that is black and trimmed in red. He also wears a large head dress and carries a golden saber. Jafar is also a member of the upper class. Examples of good characters that were poorly dressed are Aladdin and the Lost Boys from the movie *Peter Pan*. Aladdin, when initially seen in the film, is wearing worn clothing; his pants have patches in them. Initially, Aladdin is a member of the lower class. He describes himself as a “street rat.” When the Genie sees his clothing, he tells Aladdin,

“That fez-and-vest combo is much too third century. Those patches. What are you trying to say? Beggar?”

The Lost Boys are also poorly clothed. They are dressed in clothing that resembles different animals such as foxes, rabbits, and raccoons. The clothes are patched together and do not appear to be clean. An example of a neutral character that was poorly dressed is Mr. Smee from the movie *Peter Pan* (See Figure 4). Mr. Smee wears a blue and white



**Figure 4** Mr. Smee's dress.

Mr. Smee wears clothing that does not match in or fit; his stomach hangs over his shorts (*Fanpop: Disney villains*).

striped shirt with shorts that do not match. The clothes do not fit and his stomach hangs over the edge of his shorts.

## **Sexuality**

*Sexual orientation.* Good characters (59.3%) were more likely to be heterosexual compared to evil (3%) and neutral (6%) characters; the sexual orientation of evil and neutral characters was more difficult to determine ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 13.328, p < .005$ ). No characters were coded as being homosexual. An example of a good character that was heterosexual is Linguini from *Ratatouille*. Linguini, a chef, becomes romantically involved with his coworker. They carry on a romantic relationship throughout the majority of the movie. Another good character that was clearly heterosexual is Mike from *Monsters, Inc.* (See Figure 5). Throughout the film, Mike is involved with Celia. The two characters regularly kiss and go on dates, and Mike affectionately calls her his “googly bear.” It is important to note that while good characters were most often heterosexual, the sexual orientation of evil and neutral characters was much more difficult to determine. Most evil and neutral characters were not romantically involved with another character and expressed no interest in any female characters. Even if an evil or neutral character expressed interest in a female character, such as Gaston from *Beauty and the Beast*, the female rebuked their advances.

*Romantic involvement.* Good characters were equally likely to be romantically involved (50%) as they were to not be romantically involved (50%). Evil (86.4%) and neutral (86.7%) characters were more likely not to be romantically involved than were good characters ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 12.821, p < .005$ ). An example of a good character





**Figure 5** Mike as a heterosexual character.

Mike and Celia go on dates and are romantically involved, indicated that he is heterosexual (*Photos of Mike Wazowski*).

that was romantically involved is the Beast from the movie *Beauty and the Beast*. The Beast imprisons Belle in his castle, but, as the film progresses, he falls in love with her and attempts to win her over by attempting to be more caring and civilized. At the end of the film, Beast and Belle are romantically involved. The Prince from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* is another good character who is romantically involved. After learning about the princess who is kept in a glass coffin, the Prince finds her and bestows upon her true love's first kiss. Therefore, the Prince is romantically involved with Snow White. An example of a good character that was not romantically involved is Remy from *Ratatouille*. Throughout the film Remy never expresses interest in any female characters. Rather, Remy is interested in pursuing his dream of becoming a chef rather than pursuing a female. Similar to Remy is Sulley (*Monsters, Inc.*) who never is never romantically involved with a female character during the film. As with the category of sexual orientation, evil and neutral characters were most likely to not be romantically involved.

*Being sexual in nature.* Overall, characters that were good (51.9%) were sexual in nature more often than were evil (4.5%) and neutral (26.7%) characters ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 15.851, p < .001$ ). Prince Eric in *The Little Mermaid* is sexual in nature when he embraces and kisses Ariel. Buzz from *Toy Story 2* is also sexual in nature; when he sees an attractive woman the wings on his space outfit shoot out to the side to signify that he is aroused. Simba is also sexual in nature. When Nala finds Simba hiding in the jungle the two run through the forest and ultimately kiss and embrace (See Figure 6).

### **Family structures and practices**

*Marital status.* The marital status of good (55.6%), evil (54.4%), and neutral (40%) characters was most likely to be single compared to the other classifications of

marital status ( $\chi^2(df = 8, N = 91) = 28.622, p < .001$ ). An example of a good character that is single is Peter Pan. Even though Peter Pan is admired by many mermaids and by Wendy, he remains single throughout the film. He complains that “girls talk too much” and asks Wendy to act as a mother; this proves his disinterest in dating a female. Sulley is also single throughout the film. He has no female admirers nor does he express interest in any female characters. An example of an evil character that is single is Gaston. Gaston attempts to win the affection of Belle; he even goes so far as to tell the townspeople,

“I’d like to thank you all for coming to my wedding. But first I’d better go in there and propose to the girl.”

However, she rejects his offer of marriage and at the end of the film he has no girlfriend or wife. Examples of neutral characters that are single are Doc and Grumpy. The dwarves live in a house with other men and no women are present in their lives except for Snow White. Even though Snow White lives with them, she is not romantically involved with Doc or Grumpy. At the end of the film the dwarves are still single while Snow White is romantically involved with another character.

*Having children/family life.* Good (35.2%), evil (18.2%), and neutral (33.3%) characters were all most likely to have community as family ( $\chi^2(df = 10, N = 91) = 32.651, p < .001$ ). Examples of good characters that had community as family are Timon and Pumba. Timon and Pumba have no biological family present; instead they consider each other as family. They are seen living together and interacting with each other on a daily basis without other forms of family life present. The characters become upset when Simba considers leaving the trio in order to pursue a relationship with Nala. An example of an evil character that had community as family is Captain Hook. Captain Hook also



**Figure 6** Simba's sexuality.  
Simba and Nala embrace and later kiss, thus illustrating that he is sexual in nature (*The wonderful site of Nala*).

has no wife or children present; instead, the members of his ship crew appear to be his only family. Examples of neutral characters that had community as family are Mr. Potato Head, Hamm, and Rex from *Toy Story*. These characters also have no family present other than one another. As with Timon and Pumba, these characters live together and interact with each other and the other toys in the room.

*Performing homemaking activities.* Good (81.5%), evil (100%), and neutral (73.3%) characters were more likely not to perform homemaking activities compared to performing homemaking activities ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 5.874, p = .053$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

### **Aggression**

Categories for physical aggression included engaging in hand to hand fighting, using weapons to harm, using objects to harm, chasing other characters with the intent to harm, and trapping others. Categories for social aggression included engaging in social isolation, name calling, threatening others, and stealing.

*Perpetrator of physical aggression.* Evil characters (72.7%) were more likely than good (38.9%) and neutral (33.3%) characters to engage in hand to hand fighting ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 8.390, p < .05$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Evil characters (36.4%) were more likely to use weapons to harm others than were good (16.7%) and neutral (20%) characters ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 3.578, p = .167$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Overall, evil characters (18.2%) were more likely than good (13%) and neutral (13.3%) characters to hurt others with objects ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = .361, p = .835$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Evil characters (22.7%) were more likely than good (9.3%) and neutral (20%) characters to chase other characters with the intent to harm them ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 2.795, p = .247$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Evil characters (31.8%) were more likely than good (1.9%) and neutral (6.7%) characters to trap others ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 15.960, p < .001$ ). An example of an evil character trapping another character is Captain Hook. Captain Hook traps Tinkerbell in a lantern after lying to her by saying he would not harm Peter Pan. Stromboli from *Pinocchio* also engages in this type of physical aggression when he locks Pinocchio in a cage in order to prevent him from escaping from the carnival (See Figure 7). Skinner from *Ratatouille* also traps Remy in a cage and places him in the trunk of his car so that he cannot go to the kitchen to help Linguini cook.

*Perpetrator of social aggression.* Overall, characters that were evil (13.6%) were slightly more likely than good (11.1%) and neutral (13.3%) characters to engage in acts of social isolation ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = .120, p = .942$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Evil characters (18.2%) were more likely than good (11.1%) and neutral (13.3%) characters to engage in name calling ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = .683, p = .711$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Characters that were good (29.6%) were more likely than evil (27.3%) and neutral (6.7%) characters to threaten others ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 3.339, p = .188$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.



**Figure 7** Stromboli engaging in aggression.  
Stromboli engages in physical aggression by trapping Pinocchio (*The villain*).

Evil characters (36.4%) were more likely than good (5.6%) and neutral characters to steal from others ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 16.431, p < .001$ ). The Sheriff routinely stole money from the poor people, claiming that he was collecting taxes even though the townspeople could not afford to pay. Mr. Clayton from the film *Tarzan* also steals when he attempts to capture the gorillas in order to ship them to England to have them sold. Horace and Jasper also engage in this form of social aggression. Horace and Jasper steal Pongo's puppies in order to give them to Cruella de Vil who plans to have them made into fur coats.

*Victim of physical aggression.* Characters that were good (90.7%) were more likely than evil (63.6%) and neutral (53.3%) characters to be the recipients of physical aggression ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 13.081, p < .005$ ). Mr. Incredible from *The Incredible* is routinely the victim of physical aggression. He is thrown into a rock by a machine, Syndrome throws a bomb at him, and he is shocked and frozen by Syndrome. Chicken Little is also the recipient of physical aggression as he is locked in his locker and gets chased by alien invaders.

*Victim of social aggression.* Characters that were good (27.8%) were more likely than evil (13.6%) and neutral (13.3%) characters to be the recipients of social aggression ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 2.606, p = .272$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Being emotionally controlled.* Ultimately, good (77.8%) and evil (77.3%) characters were only slightly more likely than neutral characters (73.3%) to be emotionally controlled ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = .133, p = .936$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.



### **Analysis of character centrality**

For the centrality of character analysis, hero and villain characters were coded as being central while hero sidekick, villain sidekick, and neutral characters were coded as being peripheral. Chi-square tests were used in order to determine the percentages for each variable of interest. Examples and interpretations of the findings will be presented. The results will be presented by using the categories of character descriptions, physical descriptions, socioeconomic status, sexuality, family structures and practices, and aggression.

#### **Character descriptions**

*Character type.* Overall, central characters (44.2%) were most likely to be humans while peripheral characters (43.8%) were most likely to be animals ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 2.217, p = .330$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Race.* Central (74.4%) and peripheral (56.2%) characters were most likely to be white ( $\chi^2(df = 3, N = 91) = 11.723, p < .05$ ). Mr. Clayton and King Triton are examples of central characters that were white, and being white appeared to confer upon them certain privileges of ruler-ship and leadership. These characters enjoyed high social status and held control over others. The Huntsman from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* and Mr. Snee are examples of peripheral characters that were white; however, these characters were limited in agency when it came to being allowed to make decisions. These characters were both in positions of subordination. It is important to note that while white characters represented the majority of characters that were presented, there were small occurrences of characters that were considered non-white. Aladdin and Jafar were identified as being of Middle Eastern decent. Mowgli (*The Jungle Book*) was coded as being Indian based on his

appearance and the location of the story. Aladdin and Mowgli are presented as good characters while Jafar is presented as evil. Jafar is a cunning character that engages in acts of aggression; he is also eliminated at the end of the film (See Figure 8.). Jafar also has an accent while the other characters do not. I experienced trouble coding many of the characters in the film *The Lion King*. The film is set in Africa and employs many African names, music, and rituals. However, the race of many characters was not completely clear. Ed and Banzai, both hyenas, were clearly non-white, but it was difficult to make a specific determination of their race (See Figure 9). The representations of these two characters were not positive. The hyenas engaged in both physical and social aggression and are portrayed as lazy and unintelligent. Also, the race of Mufasa was difficult to determine. Mufasa was voiced by James Earl Jones, an African American actor; however, the lion enjoyed a large amount of prestige and had a lighter mane color than other lions. This made the race of Mufasa difficult to code.

*Age.* Overall, central characters (44.2%) were most likely to be middle aged while peripheral characters (27.1%) were most likely to be old/elderly ( $\chi^2(df = 5, N = 91) = 22.727, p < .001$ ). An example of a central character that was middle aged was Captain Hook. Captain Hook was determined to be middle aged based on his physical appearance and leadership position. Captain Hook has facial hair which alludes to the fact that he is slightly older than a young adult. He also is the captain of a pirate ship, a position that would require experience and leadership. Examples of peripheral characters that were old/elderly include Doc, Grumpy, and Friar Tuck (*Robin Hood*). Doc and Grumpy were determined to be old/elderly also because they are balding and have white hair (See Figure 10). Friar Tuck was determined to be old/elderly because he is balding



**Figure 8** Jafar's race.

Jafar is classified as a character of middle-eastern descent and is portrayed negatively in the film (*Faust and Aladdin*).



**Figure 9** Race of the hyenas.

The hyenas have dark skin and are portrayed in dark settings illustrating that they are not white (*Fanpop: The Lion King*).

and has white hair. Friar Tuck is also not very physically fit and has some trouble getting around, a characteristic of the aging population. His voice is somewhat shaky, indicating that he is older.

### **Physical descriptions**

*Fitness.* Both central (88.4%) and peripheral (56.2%) characters were more likely to be slender and fit than be overweight ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 11.468, p < .005$ ). Tarzan is a central character that was slender and fit (See Figure 11). Tarzan has an muscular frame and wears revealing clothing allowing the audience to see his slender physique. He also participates in physical activity, such as running and climbing through trees, that makes having a slender and fit frame necessary. Linguini is another central character that was slender and fit rather than being overweight. Linguini is tall and lanky. An example of a peripheral character that was slender and fit is Jasper. Jasper is very tall and lean and is also not overweight.

*Muscularity.* Both central (53.5%) and peripheral (95.8%) characters were not muscular more often than they were muscular ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 22.186, p < .001$ ). Robin Hood is a central character that was not muscular. Robin Hood wears clothing that allows the audience to see his average build; he is not overweight nor is he muscular. An example of a peripheral character that was not muscular is Maurice. He is overweight and has no visible muscles and appears to not be physically fit.

*Physical strength.* Characters that were central (44.2%) were more likely than peripheral characters (18.8%) to show physical strength ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 6.889, p < .05$ ). Mr. Incredible is an example of a central character that possessed physical strength. Mr. Incredible is able to stop a speeding bus with his bare hands, is able to pick up and



**Figure 10** Age of Doc and Grumpy.

Doc and Grumpy are visible in this photo; both have white hair and features that show they are old/elderly (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*).



**Figure 11** Tarzan's physical fitness.

Tarzan is not overweight and wears clothing that reveals his toned physique (*News about your favorite cartoons: Disney Part.*)

throw a car, and is able to pry open a metal door. He also becomes angry with his boss and throws him through several walls. Sulley is another example of a central character that shows physical strength. Before going to work Sulley does push-ups and lifts weights in order to stay in shape. He flexes his arms in order to show his muscles. Sulley also rips a metal door off a hanger, thereby demonstrating his physical strength.

### **Socioeconomic status**

*Occupation.* Central characters (20.9%) were most likely to be royalty. Peripheral characters (4.2%) were equally likely to be inventors, royalty, diamond miners, thieves, and music composers ( $\chi^2(df = 17, N = 91) = 26.285, p = .069$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Social class.* Central characters (34.9%) were more likely to be of the upper class while peripheral characters (27.1%) were most likely to be of the lower/working class ( $\chi^2(df = 3, N = 91) = 7.207, p = .066$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Dress.* Central characters (55.8%) were more likely to be well dressed than peripheral characters (25%) ( $\chi^2(df = 2, N = 91) = 9.267, p < .05$ ). Gaston is an example of a central character that was well dressed. Gaston is outfitted in a shirt that reveals his chest, broad shoulders, and arm muscles. He wears gloves, tight fitting pants, and brown boots. His clothes are matching in color and fit well. Mr. Incredible is another example of a central character that was well dressed (See Figure 12). When Mr. Incredible decides to return to his job as a superhero, he contacts a famous designer in order to have a new superhero suit constructed. The suit is red with black accents and has his superhero logo on the front; the outfit fits Mr. Incredible well. An example of a peripheral character that was not well dressed was Friar Tuck. Friar Tuck wears a large brown robe that is dingy.



There are patches for worn places on the robe. Horace and Jasper were also peripheral characters that were poorly dressed. Horace and Jasper wear dark clothing that does not fit them properly; their pants are not long enough and the clothes are not fashionable.

### **Sexuality**

*Sexual orientation.* Central characters (60.5%) were more likely to be heterosexual than peripheral characters (31.2%) ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 7.820, p < .05$ ). An example of a central character that was heterosexual is Pongo (*101 Dalmatians*). Pongo meets a female dog and has puppies with her, therefore establishing his heterosexuality. Lightning McQueen (*Cars*) is another heterosexual central character. While stranded in Radiator Springs, McQueen meets Sally and develops a relationship with her. During the film they go on a date and at the conclusion of the film they are in a relationship with one another. The fact that central characters were heterosexual more often than peripheral characters is an important research finding. The characters that received the most screen time and dialogue are most often easily identified as being heterosexual while minor character's sexuality is not visible and more difficult to determine.

*Romantic involvement.* Central characters (58.1%) were more likely than peripheral characters (14.6%) to be romantically involved ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 18.873, p < .001$ ). Aladdin is an example of a central character that was romantically involved. When Aladdin first sees Jasmine, the Sultan's daughter, he becomes infatuated with her and wishes to become a prince so that he can court her. He states "I am going to marry her!" The Tramp is another central character that is romantically involved (See Figure 13). When Tramp and Lady begin to date, they carve their initials in a heart on concrete. They



**Figure 12** Mr. Incredible's dress.  
Mr. Incredible wears an attractive and well fitting superhero suit, thus illustrating that he is well dressed  
(*Comic vine: Mr. Incredible*)

also go on a “date” to a local restaurant where they gaze adoringly into one another’s eyes, and the restaurant owner calls Lady his “girlfriend.”

*Being sexual in nature.* Characters that were central (48.8%) were more likely than peripheral characters (25%) to be sexual in nature ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 5.576, p < .05$ ). An example of a character that was sexual in nature was Linguini. Linguini embraces and kisses a female chef and tells her “I love you.” Another central character that was sexual in nature is Woody. Woody has sexual advances made towards him by Bo Peep. She kisses him and tells him,

“What do you say I get someone else to watch the sheep tonight?”

### **Family structures and practices**

*Marital status.* Central (37.2%) and peripheral (66.7%) characters were most commonly single compared to the other categories of marital status ( $\chi^2(df = 4, N = 91) = 10.095, p < .05$ ). Chicken Little is an example of a central character that is single. Chicken Little only expresses interest in a girl at one point in the film, but at the film’s end he is in a relationship with no one. Captain Hook is also a single central character. Captain Hook is not involved with any women and throughout the film he does not have a relationship with any female characters. An example of a peripheral character that is single is Friar Tuck. Friar Tuck is not romantically involved with any other female characters.

*Having children/family life.* Overall, both central (18.6%) and peripheral (41.7%) characters were more likely to have community as family more often than any other family type ( $\chi^2(df = 5, N = 91) = 9.697, p = .084$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Performing homemaking activities.* Peripheral characters (18.8%) were more likely than central characters (11.6%) to perform homemaking activities ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = .884, p = .347$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

### **Aggression**

*Perpetrator of physical aggression.* Characters that were central (58.1%) were more likely to engage in hand to hand fighting than peripheral characters (35.4%) ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 4.712, p < .05$ ). A central character that engaged in hand to hand fighting is Tramp; Tramp fights off other dogs when they threaten his girlfriend. Bambi also engages in hand to hand fighting. When another deer shows interest in Bambi's mate, Bambi and the deer lock horns and use their hooves to fight one another. Bambi also fights off hunter's dogs in order to save his girlfriend.

Characters that were central (23.3%) used weapons slightly more often than did peripheral characters (20.8%) ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = .078, p = .781$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Characters that were central (16.3%) were more likely than peripheral characters (12.5%) to hurt others with objects than were peripheral characters ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = .265, p = .607$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Overall, peripheral characters (18.8%) were more likely than central characters (9.3%) to chase others with the intent to harm ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 1.653, p = .199$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Characters that were central (16.3%) were more likely to trap others than were peripheral characters (4.2%) ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 3.734, p = .053$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.



**Figure 13** Tramp's romantic involvement.

Tramp and Lady share dinner and kiss, illustrating his romantic involvement (*Sight and hound: Film's best dogs*).

*Perpetrator of social aggression.* Central characters (20.9%) were more likely to engage in acts of social isolation than were peripheral characters (4.2%) ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 5.998, p <.05$ ). An example of a central character that engaged in an act of social isolation is Simba. When Simba returns to claim his status as rightful ruler of Pride Rock, he battles Scar and tells him to,

“Run away, Scar. Run away and never return.”

Overall, characters that were central (23.3%) engaged in name calling more often than peripheral characters (4.2%) ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 7.220, p <.05$ ). Peter Pan engages in name calling when he calls the Lost Boys “blockheads.” Woody also engages in name calling when he tells Buzz,

“Shut up! Just shut up, you idiot!”

Lighting McQueen also participates in name calling when he says of Doc Hudson,

“Crazy grandpa car... what an idiot!”

Characters that were peripheral (27.1%) were more likely than central characters (23.3%) to threaten others ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = .176, p = .675$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

Central characters (16.3%) were more likely than peripheral characters (8.3%) to steal from others ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 1.348, p = .246$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Victim of physical aggression.* Central characters (86%) were more likely than peripheral characters (70.8%) to be the recipients of physical aggression ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = 3.061, p = .080$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Victim of social aggression.* Overall, characters that were central (25.6%) were more likely than peripheral characters (18.8%) to be the recipients of social aggression ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = .617, p = .432$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

*Being emotionally controlled.* Central (76.7%) and peripheral (77.1%) characters were almost equally likely to be emotionally controlled ( $\chi^2(df = 1, N = 91) = .001, p = .969$ ). These differences were not statistically significant.

### **Analysis of masculinity historically**

This section will present the results for the analysis of masculinity historically. Hegemonic masculinity in each time decade from the 1930s through the 2000s was compared to the constructions of masculinity present in Disney films during each decade of film production.

#### **1930s**

Because the focus of the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* was centered on Snow White and because the Prince in the film had very few speaking lines and very little screen time, no judgment about masculinity of the Prince could be made. When analyzing the dwarves, the most common theme of masculinity concerned the use of homosocial support groups. Homosocial support groups attempted to restore male bonding and allegiance by providing an atmosphere void of women in order to fulfill feelings of isolation and loneliness (Kimmel, 2006). The dwarves all lived together in one house and all worked together. The dwarves lived with no female assistance until Snow White arrived. They were perfectly happy to let their cabin remain dirty and to not bathe regularly. When Grumpy learned that there was a woman in the cabin he exclaimed,

“Angel, ha! She's a female! And all females is poison! They're full of wicked wiles!”

### **1940s**

*Pinocchio* and *Bambi* are the two films that were chosen for analysis within the 1940s. The major theme regarding masculinity in *Pinocchio* involved the importance of fathers assisting in the rearing of children. The fatherhood movement served as a way for men to raise their children to become successful men and members of society (Kimmel, 2006). This allowed men to redeem some of their own lost masculinity. Gepetto, the man who created Pinocchio and served as his father, attempts to teach Pinocchio how to become a real boy. He urges Pinocchio to attend school and make the right choices. After becoming lost, Pinocchio realizes the importance of having his father and he returns home to save him. Therefore, the relationship between father and son proves important as the father helps the child become a successful member of society, a theme similar to ideas regarding hegemonic masculinity from the 1940s. This is a representation of an involved father rather than a domineering father. Gepetto is compassionate and devoted to his son rather than concerned with setting rules and punishing the child for bad behavior. Also, this film experienced an absence of a mother figure. During the 1940s and 1950s, the idea that men and women inhabited different spheres (public and private) was experiencing a resurgence. However, the mother, who is historically responsible for domestic activity and the raising of children, was absent from the film. The father was therefore given all responsibility for child rearing.

*Bambi* also stressed the importance of the fatherhood movement. When Bambi's mother is killed by hunters, the Great Prince of the Forest takes Bambi to raise him. The



Great Prince teaches Bambi how to be alert and look for hunters and teaches him how to rule the forest. At the end of the film, Bambi stands next to the Great Prince, having learned to be a future ruler of the forest. Once again, the mother in this film was eliminated, leaving the father solely responsible for child rearing.

### **1950s**

*Peter Pan*, *Lady and the Tramp*, and *Sleeping Beauty* are the movies included for the analysis of masculinity throughout the 1950s. Themes regarding masculinity for *Peter Pan* included the idea that returning to the frontier could afford men the opportunity to prove their masculinity (Kimmel, 2006). The return to the frontier was an attempt by men to fulfill their feelings of loneliness and to reclaim their manhood (Kimmel, 2006). Peter Pan, John and Michael Darling, and the Lost Boys proved their masculinity by defeating the villainous Captain Hook while they were in Never Land. Another theme of masculinity for *Peter Pan* involved the use of homosocial support groups. Peter Pan and the Lost Boys existed without any females living with them aside from Wendy, who acted as a mother. Therefore, the boys served as support for one another without significant female guidance.

The major theme from *Lady and the Tramp* also involves the notion that returning to the frontier can help prove one's masculinity. The Tramp lived his life on the streets and expressed disdain for civilized living. Tramp says, "life on the leash" is not a way to live. He explained to Lady that,

"There's a great big hunk of world down there, with no fence around it. Where two dogs can find adventure and excitement. And beyond those distant hills, who knows what wonderful experiences? And it's all ours for the taking."

Tramp felt that he could only truly live by staying on the “frontier” and by having no constraints placed on his actions. This would allow Tramp to truly act as a man and to embody a sense of masculine identity.

Because *Sleeping Beauty* centered on Aurora, a princess, and because the Prince had a limited number of lines, few judgments regarding the Prince’s masculinity could be made. However, like the Prince in *Snow White*, the Prince’s masculinity seems to revolve around securing the love of a woman. The Prince does this by rescuing Princess Aurora. This movie can be contrasted with femininity. Aurora remains at the mercy of others to help her escape from the witch’s spell. The Prince, however, possesses agency when it comes to rescuing the princess. Male and female characters maintained different representations in this film.

### **1960s**

*101 Dalmatians* and *The Jungle Book* were the two movies chosen for analysis within the 1960s. The major theme regarding masculinity in *101 Dalmatians* is the fatherhood movement. Once again, the importance of men helping rear their children is valued highly. Pongo also represents an involved father concerned with loving his children rather than acting as a domineering figure. Pongo assisted in taking care of his children and when he found out that his children had been stolen he decided to search until he could find them and bring them home. Pongo was very involved in homemaking activities regarding his children. It is interesting to note that Perdita, Pongo’s mate, was not as involved in the rearing of the children as Pongo. Overall, Pongo had more screen time and dialogue in the film and Pongo had more agency regarding his children. It was Pongo that

initiated the process for locating the puppies and that routinely formulated ideas regarding how to get the puppies home. The presence of the mother was marginalized in this film.

Themes of masculinity in *The Jungle Book* include the fatherhood movement and the use of homosocial support groups. Mowgli had been orphaned and the panther Bagheera chose to and raise him. Bagheera was responsible for educating Mowgli on how to survive in the jungle and protecting him from danger. Therefore, Bagheera assisted Mowgli in becoming an educated member of society. Even when Bagheera was sad at the thought of forcing Mowgli to return to a human village, he urged him to do so because he understood that this would be the best way for Mowgli to grow up normally and become a man. The use of homosocial support groups is also an important theme of masculinity in *The Jungle Book*. Mowgli, Bagheera, and Baloo, a large bear, appeared without the presence of other females. Others that Mowgli has contact with were exclusively male. Therefore, Mowgli and the other males in the film rely on the use of all male groups for support.

### **1970s**

*Robin Hood* was the only movie chosen for analysis in the 1970s. The major theme regarding masculinity is the effect of the loss of the family wage. The difficult some men experienced in earning a family wage signified a problem for men as they lost the ability to control their work situation and to provide for their families. Robin Hood stood up for the less fortunate in order to provide for those who could not help themselves. The evil character, Prince John, maintained a high standard of living despite the economic struggle experienced by families in his kingdom. Robin Hood and his sidekicks attempted to lift the community out of financial struggles. During several scenes, Robin Hood is shown

helping a family of rabbits or other families who are concerned with being able to provide for their children. This movie can be read as a response to the struggles men experienced in being able to be providers.

### **1980s**

The only movie chosen for analysis in the 1980s was *The Little Mermaid*. This movie was difficult to analyze because the focus of the film is on Ariel, a princess character. The male leads, Prince Eric and King Triton, were not the focus of the film and had less screen time than the lead female character. However, based on King Triton's actions, the fatherhood movement emerged as a theme of masculinity. This film shows both an involved and loving father and a domineering father. King Triton has a strong regard for rules and punishes Ariel when she breaks them. King Triton became increasingly concerned about the behavior and well being of his daughter, Ariel. He attempted to regulate her actions and her involvement with humans. However, at the end of the film he has become a loving and supportive father figure. His involvement in his daughter's life and attempts to protect her illustrate the desire for fathers to be involved in their children's lives. At the end of the film, King Triton's daughter has married a prince and has thus secured a strong financial future for herself; she also has married a man that she loves. Due to his guidance and acceptance of Ariel's love for a human, King Triton enabled his daughter to have a stable future.

### **1990s**

*Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, The Lion King, Toy Story, Tarzan, and Toy Story 2* were the films chosen to include in the analysis of masculinity in the 1990s. The first film that will be considered is *Beauty and the Beast*. The major theme of masculinity for this

film involved the emergence of the “new soft man,” a theme of hegemonic masculinity in the 1990s. The “new soft man” attempts to balance his tougher masculine side with a softer, more sensitive version of the self. The Beast had been placed under a spell which can only be broken by having a woman fall in love with him. However, he had been living in isolation years and did not have the social etiquette needed to interact with others. The Beast even demands that Belle,

“...will join him for dinner. That is not a request!”

However, the Beast begins to behave in a more civilized manner and attempts to be friendly to Belle. The Beast learned to balance his uncivilized ways with an acceptable form of masculinity in order to win the affection of Belle. Learning to balance his rough exterior with an inner sensitivity represents the Beast becoming an example of the “new soft man.”

In the film *Aladdin*, a Westernized version of masculinity was presented despite the fact that the film is set in the Eastern world. The film is set in the Middle East and the characters have Arab names. Despite these facts, the characters (with the exception of Jafar, who has a European accent) have voices that are not inflected with Middle Eastern accents. The film also embraces Western ideas toward marriage rather than following Middle Eastern tradition where the suitor is chosen for the girl; instead, Jasmine is allowed to choose her mate. They are confined in the Arab world, but when the characters embrace more Westernized ideas, their problems are solved. The character Jafar, who does not embrace Western ideas, is eliminated. Also, the masculinity of Aladdin is secured not through his body or through his place in the home, but rather through his street smarts. Aladdin is able to survive and eventually secure the love of his princess because he is able

to gain access to the palace and is able to woo her father. This represents a move towards a different type of masculinity than has been witnessed previously. Although Aladdin does prove his manhood by securing the love of a woman, he does not do so by having a muscularized body or by having a family. Instead, Aladdin used intelligence and determination in order to prove that he was a man.

The major themes of masculinity in *The Lion King* include the notion of returning to the frontier, the fatherhood movement, and the use of homosocial support groups. The notion that returning to the frontier assists men in proving masculinity can be observed through the actions of Simba. When Simba believed that he was responsible for his father's death, he ran away from Pride Rock in order to start a new life. Simba avoided his past by escaping to a new frontier where he could have a fresh start, and, thus, a place to attempt to prove his masculinity. The meerkat, Timon, and warthog, Pumba, illustrate another theme of masculinity: the use of homosocial support groups. These companions traveled without females and had no romantic interests. When Nala, Simba's childhood girlfriend arrived, Timon and Pumba became angry that he considered leaving their all male pack for a female. A final theme of masculinity in *The Lion King* involves the fatherhood movement. Mufasa represents a loving and involved father figure. When alive, Mufasa taught Simba about his responsibilities as the future ruler of Pride Rock. He assisted in the caretaking of his son and was largely responsible for his upbringing. Mufasa told Simba that the stars in the sky are kings of the past and said,

“They will always be there to guide you and so will I.”

By providing guidance and instruction to his son, Mufasa is able to help his son to become a successful member of society. Also, by following his father's guidance, Simba is

ultimately able to prove his own masculinity and is thus able to take his place as ruler of Pride Rock.

The major theme of masculinity found in *Toy Story* was the emergence of a “new soft man.” Woody wrestled with the possibility that he was no longer Andy’s favorite toy. Woody said,

“What chance does a toy like me have against a Buzz Lightyear action figure?”

In order to eliminate the threat posed by Buzz, Woody attempted to eliminate him.

However, Woody realized that this was not acceptable behavior and he went to extremes to rescue Buzz. He even said,

“Please help me. He’s my friend. He’s the only one I’ve got.”

This represents the emergence of a “new soft man” who attempts to get in touch with himself and to accept changes in his environment. Woody learned that he could not resort to violence in order to get rid of Buzz; instead, he accepted Buzz’s presence in his life and balanced his anxieties regarding the situation. At the same time, Buzz began to question his own masculinity. He believed that he truly was a “space ranger” and was responsible for “universe protection.” However, Woody finally told him,

“You are a toy! You aren’t the real Buzz Lightyear! You’re- you are an action figure!”

This represented a transformation in Buzz’s masculinity as he realized he was not the tough and strong space ranger but was instead made out of plastic and sold in toy stores everywhere. When both Woody and Buzz learned to balance their anxieties resulting from a crisis of masculinity, they became able to take their place as members of Andy’s community of toys.

The major theme observed in *Tarzan* regarding masculinity involved the notion of returning to the frontier as well as the idea that being civilized can prove one to be a man. Throughout the movie, Jane educated Tarzan and attempted to make him someone that could be a contributing and educated member of society. Jane urged Tarzan to accompany her to England; this meant leaving his jungle and family behind. Tarzan considered this opportunity but instead chose to remain in the jungle. By making this decision, he had rejected civilized life in favor of remaining on the frontier; this allows Tarzan to take his place as ruler and to prove his masculinity. At the film's end, Tarzan beat his chest and howled like an ape; he had embraced his life as what Mr. Clayton calls a "savage." Also, Tarzan proves his masculinity not through having a hard muscularized body (which he does have) but instead through learning not just how to be a man but how to be human. His muscularized body is not enough to prove his masculinity; he must alter his inner self and become more human in order to become a civilized man. Tarzan does use his body to help prove his masculinity at the end of the film when he must use physical strength to defeat Mr. Clayton, but Tarzan is rewarded for his bravery by becoming the leader of the gorilla pack as well as securing the love of Jane. *Tarzan* appeared to be a unique movie considering the time period in which it was produced. Tarzan did not resemble a modern prince such as those found in *Aladdin* or *The Lion King*. Tarzan lived in a jungle and remained uncivilized for a long period; it was not until half way through the movie that he learned to speak English. This movie seems as if it belonged to an earlier time period compared to the other movies produced in the 1990s.

The major theme of masculinity observed in *Toy Story 2* was the use of homosocial support groups. When Woody was stolen by Al the Toy Collector, Buzz, Rex,



Hamm, Slinky Dog, and Mr. Potato Head pursue the captor to return him safely home.

Very few female characters exist in the film, and their actions were not directly related to the main male characters. The males acted as an all male group. Their involvement with female characters was not central to the story line; rather, it was how they performed as an all male group that lead to Woody being returned successfully. By rescuing Woody, the men are able to restore their allegiance to one another and to illustrate the importance of all male bonding and loyalty.

## **2000s**

*Monsters, Inc.*, *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*, *Chicken Little*, *Cars*, and *Ratatouille* are the movies included in the analysis of masculinity during the 2000s.

*Monsters, Inc.* will be the first movie considered. The themes of masculinity concern the resurgence of the fatherhood movement and the emergence of the “new soft man” form of masculinity. Sulley, an oversized monster who made children scream to produce energy for the city, became responsible for returning a small girl child to her family. At first Sulley was terrified of the child, but he eventually developed a loving relationship with her. Sulley represented an involved father figure. Sulley cared for her and made sure that she was provided for. He even became sad when he returned her to her biological family. Even though Sulley made his living by scaring children, he embraced his softer side with the child. Therefore, even though he continued to work by being scary, he balanced this tough and muscular side of himself and took on a more sensitive role in care giving.

The main theme regarding masculinity in *Finding Nemo* involves the fatherhood movement. This film, like *The Little Mermaid*, showed both a domineering and involved father figure. After his wife is killed, Marlin became the sole care giver for his son, Nemo.

When Nemo was captured by a scuba diver, Marlin swam across the ocean looking for his son. Marlin experienced great regret that Nemo was captured, saying,

“I promised him I’d never let anything happen to him.”

Ultimately, Marlin was reunited with Nemo and embraced a more loving and care-free attitude towards fatherhood. At the heart of the story remains the idea that fathers are extremely important members of children’s lives.

The major themes regarding masculinity that were found in *The Incredibles* includes the notion of masculinity being in crisis, the return of the fitness craze, and the resurgence of honor for law enforcement officers. The health and fitness crazed emerged as a way for men to prove their masculinity by using the male body, and the resurgence of honor for law enforcement emerged as a result of the terrorist attacks of 9-11 (Oates & Durham, 2004; Kimmel, 2006). The masculinity of Mr. Incredible can be said to be in crisis because he was prevented from performing his job as a superhero. He withdrew from his family and attempted to commit to a job as an insurance adjuster. He was very unhappy with work and constantly wished he could return to his fulfilling life as a superhero. At the film’s end, superheroes were allowed to resume their work, resulting in an end to Mr. Incredible’s crisis of masculinity. The return of the health and fitness craze is witnessed as Mr. Incredible began to focus on getting back in shape in order to battle evil superpowers. He began to work out and lift weights in order to recover his more youthful figure. This led to Mr. Incredible forming a hard muscular body in order to help him prove his masculinity. Also, this film shows a resurgence of honor for law enforcement, a theme of masculinity in the 2000s that emerged after the terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>. When the world realized that with superheroes working they would

remain safe, superheroes were welcomed back into the public and celebrated. This is similar to the honor brought to rescue teams and law enforcement following the terrorist attacks.

The major theme of masculinity in *Chicken Little* stressed the importance of fathers taking part in the rearing of their children. This theme was not a trait of hegemonic masculinity observed in the 2000s. In the film, Chicken Little had become an embarrassment to himself and to his father, Buck Cluck, because he had made false claims about the sky falling. The entire community laughed at him and his father tried to reassure people that a similar event would not happen again. His father was even reluctant to allow his son to participate in baseball because he feared that he would be an embarrassment. However, after Chicken Little confronted his father, Buck Cluck realized that he had not been supporting his son. He learned to encourage his son and to trust his judgment. Buck Cluck tells his son,

“You need to know that I love you, no matter what.”

At the end of the movie, Buck Cluck assisted his son in saving the entire town from an alien attack; the entire town became proud of Chicken Little and saw him as a hero. Buck Cluck became an involved and loving father.

The major theme of masculinity in *Cars* centered on the effects of technology and market globalization and on the emergence of the metrosexual. The effects of technology have emerged as business has become increasingly centered on a global market, and the metrosexual is a man concerned with his appearance as well as his muscularity. These were traits of hegemonic masculinity observed during the 2000s. In *Cars*, Lightning McQueen, an upper class race car, became stranded in a small, run-down town named

Radiator Springs. Radiator Springs was once a bubbling tourist location for cars passing through. However, a new interstate was created, bypassing Radiator Springs. This left the town without any business. McQueen witnessed the effect that technological changes had on Radiator Springs, and he helped the town prosper once again. The appearance of the metrosexual also takes place in *Cars*. McQueen was extremely concerned with his appearance and maintaining his speed. He expressed anger because he had to display the logo for the lesser known “Rusteze” brand and wanted to be the spokes-car for Dinoco. Because McQueen was so concerned with his image and appearance, he represents a metrosexual character. This is a theme not witnessed in any other Disney film.

It was more difficult to determine what type of masculinity was seen in *Ratatouille*. Although the main character in the film is male, Remy’s masculinity did not match any existing category of hegemonic masculinity identified in the literature. Therefore, I have developed a new category for the masculinity which I describe as seeking personal fulfillment in ways not defined traditionally by standards of masculinity. *Ratatouille* loves cooking and leaves his family in order to pursue his dreams. It is not through muscularity, through being a father, through romantic involvement, or by returning to the frontier that Remy proves himself to be a man. The behavior of Remy represents a break from previous notions of masculinity.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research project was to examine how male characters were portrayed in Disney full length animated feature films. Also, this project sought to explore whether representations of masculinity in Disney films reflected or did not reflect popular constructions of hegemonic masculinity throughout the time period from the 1930s to present date.

The theoretical framework for this study included the use of social learning theory, transportation theory, imagination, and identification with media characters. An examination of gender, hegemonic masculinity, and an historical overview of masculinity was given. Finally, a discussion of the media portrayals of men in the media and discussion of the Disney film genre was offered in order to highlight past research examining Disney films. The study utilized a mixed methodology approach in order to examine character role and character centrality and to examine how and if Disney films have reflected trends in hegemonic masculinity historically.

#### **Summary of results**

RQ 1: How character role influenced character descriptions, physical descriptions, socioeconomic status, sexuality, family structures and practices and aggression.

Good characters were most often middle aged, were slender and fit but not muscular, and were members of royalty. They were most likely to be heterosexual, were equally likely to be romantically involved as they were not to be, and were most often sexual in nature. They were also most likely to be single and to have community as

family. They were most likely to be the recipients of physical aggression compared to evil and neutral characters.

Evil characters were most often middle aged, were slender and fit but not muscular, were well dressed, and were most often members of royalty. The sexual orientation of evil characters was more difficult to determine than that of good characters. They were also most often not romantically involved and not sexual in nature. These characters were single the majority of the time and had community as family more than other family structures. Evil characters were more likely to trap characters than were good and neutral characters. Evil characters were more likely to steal from others than were good and neutral characters.

Neutral characters were most often old/elderly, were overweight, and were not muscular. They were most often inventors, royalty, and diamond miners. The sexual orientation of neutral characters was most often unable to be determined. Neutral characters were also not romantically involved and most often not sexual in nature. Neutral characters were most often single and had community as family.

RQ 2: How character centrality influenced character descriptions, physical descriptions, socioeconomic status, sexuality, family structures and practices and aggression.

The results for the second research question of how character centrality influenced representations of character descriptions, physical descriptions, socioeconomic status, sexuality, family structures and practices and aggression revealed the following results. Central characters were most often white, middle aged, slender and fit but not muscular, and were more likely to show physical strength than peripheral characters. They were

well dressed, were heterosexual, were romantically involved, and were sexual in nature, and also single. They were also more likely than peripheral characters to engage in hand to hand fighting, social isolation, and name calling.

Peripheral characters were most often white, were old/elderly, and were slender and fit but not muscular. Peripheral characters were also most likely to be single.

RQ3: How representations of masculinity in Disney full length animated feature films reflected or did not reflect popular trends in hegemonic masculinity over time.

The results for the third research question of how and if representations of masculinity in Disney films reflected or did not reflect hegemonic masculinity historically revealed the following results. The results indicate that ideas regarding masculinity that were presented in Disney films generally did not match with hegemonic trends in masculinity historically. This means that what was observed regarding masculinity in a Disney movie during the year of production was not what was historically observed regarding masculinity. For example, a common theme in movies produced by Disney during the 1950s was the return to the frontier; however, this was historically observed in earlier decades. Also, the use of homosocial support groups was observed in the 1930s; this was a trend in masculinity that was seen in the 1990s. However, it was found that representations of masculinity in Disney films are starting to mirror masculinity historically as time progresses. Masculinity in Disney films in the period from the 1980s to present matched historical masculinity more often than did representations of masculinity in Disney films from the 1930s to 1970s.

Of the different themes of masculinity that were observed, the fatherhood movement was the most common theme observed. The fatherhood movement was present in five out of eight decades examined. The next most common themes observed were the use of homosocial support groups and the notion of returning to the frontier. Overall, it seems that the most common message being sent to children in Disney animated feature films is that fathers are essential in the rearing of children.

### **Theoretical implications**

This section will compare the results of the study to determine what implications the results have when compared to social learning theory as well as fantasy play and identification. It is first interesting to note that the movies that were included in the analysis were largely films that featured male leads and would thus be desirable for male audiences. Furthermore, the films from the 1980s onward, with a few exceptions, featured more male leads than did movies in previous decades. The fact that Disney is producing more films that may be consumed by boys may illustrate that Disney is attempting to tap into the boy consumer market more so than in previous decades.

This analysis found that major characters were more likely to be physically fit than to be overweight. Because major characters occupy more screen time and engage in more activity than minor characters, the opportunity for children to view these characters and model their behaviors is greater. Because major characters are portrayed as being slender and fit, this can be a positive model for children to follow as seeing this may encourage positive attitudes toward being healthy.

The results regarding sexuality show that being good means being romantically involved, being heterosexual, and being sexual in nature. This mirrors results found in



previous research on Disney which found that the majority of characters in the study whose sexual orientation could be determined were coded as being heterosexual, (Tanner et al., 2003). However, little information is given in these films regarding relational development. Instead, the characters meet, fall in love, are married, and often have children immediately. There is no information given that supports the idea of getting to know a partner. The Disney characters observed in this study are rewarded for their sexuality by marrying a princess or being romantically involved at the film's conclusion. There was a difference found between the present study and previous research regarding the marital status of characters. Research by Tanner et al. (2003) found that marriage was the expected course for couples. However, this research study found that good, evil and neutral as well as central and peripheral characters were most likely to be single; being married was the second most common marital status observed. Still, if social learning occurs, children may internalize the idea that being sexual in nature is a positive model to follow because the characters on the screen have been rewarded for being sexual.

Also, there is a lack of representation in the films of characters of a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. This may mean that children might not engage in fantasy play or may not choose to model these characters because sexual orientations other than heterosexuality are not represented.

The most common types of aggression shown in the films include engaging in hand to hand fighting, stealing, name calling, and engaging social isolation. Furthermore, the results found that central characters are more likely to engage in most of these types of aggression; central characters, which include hero characters, may be more likely to be modeled by children because, as stated by Tan (1986), events or characters that are

“evaluated positively” are more likely to be modeled than events that are evaluated negatively. Ultimately, the major characters, good characters specifically, would therefore be characters that children would be most likely to model. Even after engaging in acts of aggression good characters appear to be rewarded for their actions by receiving the love of a woman or by being praised by others. This sends a message that even if aggressive measures are used to achieve your goals, you will be rewarded.

Other research findings are also disturbing. Based on the results of this study, it was found that children are not exposed to positive representations of the aging. Neutral characters in Disney films held minor parts compared to middle aged and young adult characters, and these characters were often overweight. These representations may reinforce negative stereotypes children hold regarding elderly individuals. Older characters in prior research were also found to be in minor roles (Robinson et al., 2007). This is of concern as previous research has shown that children often hold negative stereotypes of older citizens and consider them less important members of society (Robinson et al., 2007). Future Disney films and children’s media should work to incorporate more positive representations of aging characters.

Also, the films in the analysis were lacking when considering racial representations. The majority of all characters were white with only a small number of Middle Eastern characters shown; no instances were observed of characters being Hispanic or of Asian descent. Children of minority races are especially limited when choosing role models. It appears that Disney is sending the message that being good means being white.

Also disturbing is the representation of families in Disney films. Nuclear families were not as present as other family types, meaning that children were not able to witness a strong family unit when viewing the films. Also, when single parents were present, the parent present was more likely to be the father than mother. Therefore, children who are from single parent households do not have access to scripts in the films that may resemble their own lives if their mother serves as the primary caregiver. These results are similar to findings by previous scholars who found that when a single parent was present, the parent was more likely to be a father than a mother (Do Rozario, 2004; Junn, 1997). This marginalization of mothers in the films may also send messages that teach children to undermine the presence of female figures in their lives. It is also interesting to note that the mothers in these films were often marginalized during decades of film production when the presence of mothers in the family experienced a revival. Equally interesting is that during these decades the father was historically responsible for being the breadwinner. However, few if any of the father illustrated how they made a living in order to provide for their child. Overall, there are few examples of positive representations of family for children to model in Disney animated feature films.

Other findings by previous researchers regarding family structure were mirrored in the present study. This study fell in line with research by Tanner et al. (2003) that found that community as family was a popular form of family structure. However, the present study found some differences from previous research with regards to family structure. The present study found that having community as family was the most common family type, followed by being a member of a nuclear family. Other research on families in Disney also found that community as family was a common family type but prior research also

found that stepfamilies and adoptive families were prominent, a finding not supported by this study (Tanner et al., 2003).

When considering the opportunities for children to engage in fantasy play based on what was viewed in the Disney films sampled, several findings emerge. First, research predicts that children consume media in order to produce fantasies they are not able to produce for themselves (Valkenburg & Peter, 2006). Disney may become a producer of these scripts for fantasy play for children because of the fast paced visual nature of the films. However, it seems that Disney produces few different scripts for how to engage in romantic behavior with female characters. For example, Lumiere approaches the female duster in the film and makes a sexual advance towards her. When she refuses, saying, "Oh, no, no" Lumiere responds with, "Oh, yes, yes!" In Disney's world, being good does appear to mean being sexual and also not taking no for an answer. This is a disturbing finding because it positions the female character as lacking sexual agency and the ability to refuse sexual advances made by males. This also may show children that the woman's feelings regarding sexual behavior should be downplayed when compared to the man's feelings. If children act out scripts of fantasy play that center around romantic involvement, children may use such a fantasy as described above when interacting. If such ideas regarding gender performance are internalized, these ideas may follow the child into adulthood resulting in a cultivation of negative values regarding males and females.

Another example of a fantasy script regarding sexuality and romantic involvement that has the potential to be acted out by children is the notion that females are helpless to save themselves. In several films, such as *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, the Prince must come to the rescue of the princess and bestow upon them true

love's first kiss to save them from evil forces. This may lead to children believing that women have no agency when it comes to defending themselves and making choices, and it also may lead children to believe that men are responsible for rescuing women from situations because they cannot protect and rescue themselves. Once again, if children consume these ready-made examples of fantasy play that have been produced by Disney, they are left with little room to engage in their own interpretations of what was viewed and may come to internalize these ideas regarding gender performance.

Overall, the representations of male characters were found to be limiting in nature. Children are sent conflicting and negative messages regarding age, family, sexual orientation, aggression, race, and sexuality. Children are presented with narrow and unhealthy options for choosing characters to model. If modeling were to occur, ideas presented in the Disney films regarding these concepts may be internalized and may stay with the child as they enter adulthood. What is modeled and internalized by the child may not be positive and accurate.

### **Practical implications**

The results of this study have important practical implications for caregivers such as parents or teachers. Based on what is viewed in the Disney film, stereotypical and counter-stereotypical images are sent to children regarding a number of factors including physical attributes, sexuality, family, and aggression. Messages regarding these themes may be learned or reinforced based on what is viewed in the Disney film.

Caregivers must be aware of what messages are being sent in Disney films so that they can mediate their children's interactions with them. Research by Tanner et al. (2003) suggests that caregivers can use the Disney films as a springboard for discussions

regarding their familial situation by mirroring their situation with those shown in Disney films. Research by Towbin et al. (2003) suggests similar practices, saying that this enables caregivers to play an active role in the social learning that takes place with their children. When caregivers are critical consumers of media, they become better able to teach their children media literacy. If caregivers are not involved in the viewing process with their children, children may passively consume and internalize mediated messages and cultivation effects may emerge.

Caregivers can attempt to uncover messages regarding race, sexuality, and aggression by highlighting what is seen in the movies and bringing these issues into the open. Caregivers can ask children questions that address how characters behave based on their gender or race and can attempt to mediate the messages that are received. For example, a parent may choose to address the fact that a prince meets a woman and immediately marries her; the parent could ask questions addressing what would have happened if the couple could have waited longer to get married in order to get to know one another better. Caregivers can also address, for example, how characters of minority races are portrayed in order to discuss issues of racism in the film. Addressing issues of age can also be important in order to allow children to develop less negative and stereotypical ideas regarding the aging population.

The findings of the present study have implications for the Disney Corporation as well. Research has consistently shown that Disney produces narrow representations of its male and female characters (Do Rozario, 2004; Tanner et al., 2004; Towbin et al., 2003). Based on the findings by the present study as well as other findings by other scholars, it is apparent that Disney needs to be more conscientious when constructing their characters,

both male and female. More positive portrayals of aging characters should be included in films as well as more positive portrayals of races other than Caucasian. Minority characters occupy narrow and limiting roles in the films and the presence of minorities in Disney films is not an accurate representation of actual demographics. Also, Disney needs pay close attention to the amount and type of aggressive activities shown in their films. Children have the potential to identify with these characters, and because children regularly consume Disney films and products these aggressive acts may be modeled by children. Representations of sexuality in Disney films should also be moderated in order to include age appropriate content regarding romantic involvement in the films.

Finally, these findings have important implications for professionals such as teachers. Because children may use fantasy scripts taken from Disney films and enact these scripts during play, teachers should be aware of the representations of men and women in Disney films in order to be able to mediate play between children. Disney films could also be incorporated into educational activities for children. Both teachers and parents, as previously mentioned, can assist children in re-authoring Disney stories to produce different results. Teachers can coach children in narrating Disney stories in order to achieve more accurate representations of characters on the dimensions of aggression, sexuality, race, and family structures.

### **Limitations and directions for future study**

Several limitations exist in this project. These limitations will be identified and areas for future research will be identified so that future scholars may be able to improve on these issues.

First, the results of this project are limited in their external validity. Because not all Disney films were analyzed and because not all characters in each film were included, results indicated here may not be generalizable to the population as a whole. Including female and minor characters in the analysis may result in more complete understandings of how masculinity and femininity interact with one another. Also, some of the films in the sample are films marketed as “Disney Princess” films to girls, and examples of male behavior are not as prominent in these films as compared to films marketed solely to boys. An analysis of all Disney full length animated feature films and characters would be beneficial in order to produce strong external validity.

Also, each film began production several years before the film was released in theatres. Therefore, observations that were made for a particular movie may not have matched up with masculinity during each time period. If the films were released and constructions of masculinity had changed from the start of production to the release of the film, the results for the analysis of masculinity historically may have not been completely accurate.

Another limitation in this study lies in the coding process. Due to the amount of texts in the sample and due to time constraints, I served as the sole coder of all of the films. Inter-coder reliability was not achieved in this project, thereby lowering the internal validity, or accuracy of the accuracy of the findings. The reliability of the study was also lowered due to the fact that I served as the sole coder. Having multiple coders would have helped ensure that the variables were coded in a consistent and stable manner. Ultimately, this project would have benefited by having multiple coders.



Also, this study was descriptive in nature and therefore could not measure actual effects and perceptions of the film's content. Interviews were not conducted and questionnaires were not distributed to children. Responses on such items would be beneficial in determining how children actually perceive these films and how children perceive male behavior portrayed in the films. The use of focus groups, for example, would allow the researcher to observe how children interact with one another while viewing the films. Instances of dialogue and play between the children would help the research community understand the relationship between media depictions and children's perceptions.

Therefore, a more ethnographic approach that situates the researcher in the environment of the research subjects could better gauge children's interpretations of Disney films. This would assist in determining what readings are made based on Disney film viewing. Stuart Hall's (1980) work suggests that multiple readings of texts can be made; these readings can reinforce the hegemonic meanings, reject hegemonic meanings, or accept some parts of the message while rejecting others. The results indicated in this project, however, indicate only the interpretations of the researcher. If ethnographic research methods were utilized children's engagement with media could be measured. Even though not all children are affected by media in a uniform manner, some measures could be made regarding children's perceptions of Disney animated feature films.

As mentioned in the first chapter of this project, research on girls and their representation in the media has garnered considerable attention from scholars in a number of fields. Because the field of men's studies and masculinity studies is still relatively new in nature, more research needs to continue to address representations of men and boys in

the media. Because boys are expected to adhere to gender performance standards more so than their female counterparts, understanding whether media texts constrain or enable gender performance is important to research.

### **Concluding remarks**

This study has attempted to shed light onto the representations of male characters and representations of masculinity in Disney animated feature films. Based on the research findings, Disney does not appear to be making progress toward more accurate and positive representations of male characters. Male characters that were heroes and central were portrayed as being younger, slender, sexual and romantically involved, aggressive, and as having family structures not commonly seen in society. These representations of male characters are very stereotypical in nature and may not provide young boys with positive role models for gender development.

Even though Disney films commonly portrayed the fatherhood movement in their films, Disney does seem to be making some progress on how they portray themes regarding masculinity in more recent decades; these themes are beginning to embrace more current attitudes regarding masculinity. This is an encouraging finding. It is hopeful that the Disney Corporation will continue to embrace updated attitudes regarding representations of masculinity in their films. It is now necessary for Disney to begin to update their representations of male characters to provide more positive male role models. Ultimately, children's consumption of media such as the Disney animated feature film should be monitored and discussed in order to support positive gender development.

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APPENDIX A  
CHARACTER CODING BOOK

| <b>Theme</b>                  | <b>Definition</b>   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>Independent variable</b>   |   |
| Character role                | -hero<br>-hero sidekick<br>-villain<br>-villain sidekick<br>-other  |
| <b>Character descriptions</b> |   |
| Character type                | -human<br>-animal<br>-other   |
| Race                          | -Caucasian<br>-African American<br>-Hispanic<br>-Middle eastern descent<br>-Asian<br>-other   |
| Age                           | -child<br>-adolescent<br>-young adult<br>-middle aged<br>-old/elderly<br>-unable to determine<br>(Signorielli, 1989)  |
| <b>Physical descriptions</b>  |   |
| Fitness                       | -slender and fit<br>-overweight   |
| Muscularity                   | -muscular<br>-not muscular  |
| Showing physical strength     | -showing muscles<br>-proving their superior strength against others<br>-performing tasks to demonstrate their fitness<br>-rescuing others from situations where<br>possessing physical strength is beneficial |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Socioeconomic status</b>            |   |
| Occupation                             | -occupation will be written in  |
| Social class                           | -lower/working<br>-middle<br>-upper<br>-unable to determine<br>(Signorielli, 1989)  |
| Dress                                  | -well dressed<br>-poorly dressed  |
| <b>Sexuality</b>                       |   |
| Sexual orientation                     | -heterosexual<br>-homosexual<br>-unable to determine<br>(Signorielli, 1989)   |
| Romantic involvement                   | -romantically involved<br>-not romantically involved<br>-unable to determine<br>(Signorielli, 1989)   |
| Being sexual in nature                 | -making sexual comments about others<br>-making sexual advances on others<br>-having sexual advances made on them<br>- having sexual comments made by others on them  |
| <b>Family structures and practices</b> |   |
| Marital status                         | -single<br>-married<br>-divorced<br>-widowed<br>-unable to determine  |
| Having children/family life            | -being a member of a stepfamily<br>-being a single parent<br>-having a single parent<br>-being in an adoptive family<br>-community as family<br>-being a member of a nuclear family<br>-unable to determine<br>(Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman, & Lund, 2003) |



|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Performing homemaking activities   | -providing food or sustenance for family<br>-taking care of children<br>-cleaning the household   |
| <b>Aggression</b>                  |   |
| Perpetrator of physical aggression | -hand to hand fighting<br>-using weaponry<br>-hurting with objects<br>-chased with the intent to harm<br>-trapped others<br>(Luther & Legg, 2007) |
| Perpetrator of social aggression   | -engaging in social isolation<br>-name calling<br>-threatening<br>-stealing<br>(Luther & Legg, 2007)  |
| Victim of physical aggression      | -being the recipient of physical aggression   |
| Victim of social aggression        | -being the recipient of social aggression   |
| Being emotionally controlled       | -walking away from an emotional situation<br>-not crying or showing emotion<br>-claiming not to be emotionally affected                           |

APPENDIX B  
CHARACTER CODING SHEET

| <b>Variable of interest</b>   | <b>Definition</b> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|
| <b>Independent variable</b>   |                   |
| Character role                |                   |
| <b>Character descriptions</b> |                   |
| Character type                |                   |
| Race                          |                   |
| Age                           |                   |
| <b>Physical descriptions</b>  |                   |
| Fitness                       |                   |
| Muscularity                   |                   |
| Showing physical strength     |                   |
| <b>Socioeconomic status</b>   |                   |
| Occupation                    |                   |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Social class                           |  |
| Dress                                  |  |
| <b>Sexuality</b>                       |  |
| Sexual orientation                     |  |
| Romantic involvement                   |  |
| Being sexual in nature                 |  |
| <b>Family structures and practices</b> |  |
| Marital status                         |  |
| Having children/family life            |  |
| Performing homemaking activities       |  |

|                                    |  |
|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Aggression</b>                  |  |
| Perpetrator of physical aggression |  |
| Perpetrator of social aggression   |  |
| Victim of physical aggression      |  |
| Victim of social aggression        |  |
| Being emotionally controlled       |  |

## VITA

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