

# THE ARCHETYPE OF THE DISNEY PRINCESS



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## **Abstract**

This project examines how the Disney Corporation portrays women through the princess characters in their films. The aspects of the portrayal are investigated and the archetype of the Disney princess is established. Traits such as passivity, dependency on a man, being infantilised yet sexualised, and obedience make up the archetype of the Disney princess. Based on the project's analysis and discussion, the archetype of the Disney princess conflicts with feminism as it contains and promotes a wide variety of gender stereotypes that are restricting the female sex. Nevertheless, we believe that the great popularity of the Disney films and the Disney Corporation's positive reputation serve as important factors in the acceptance of the stereotypical representation of women. Furthermore, the archetype of the Disney princess, due to its nature, is an ingrained part of our society. Thus it becomes difficult to challenge the stereotypes and gender roles that the archetype embodies.

*Key terms: Disney, feminism, archetype, stereotypes, patriarchy, gender roles, androcentrism*

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## 1. Introduction

When one hears the word fairy tale, undoubtedly in most cases, the thought of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* or *Cinderella* will be among one of the first (Bell et al., 1995: 21). Therefore, it is safe to assume that almost every human being is familiar with at least some version of at least one of the most famous fairy tales. These stories have been told for centuries, and even their contemporary interpretations have roots in ancient myths or folktales. Even though the society has changed, a wide variety of rooted aspects are still being preserved within the fairy tales.

As every child of every generation grows up with fairy tales, it is apparent that every period in history will influence the future interpretations of those fairy tales. In the same way, the fairy tales have an impact on the generations of young people. As the Disney Corporation (hereafter, Disney) is the biggest creator of animated films in today's society (Sicklos: 2009), it is the one that holds the most power to influence both the fairy tales and the new generations. Because of this, we deem it important to investigate how Disney portrays women within its interpretations of the original fairy tales. It is a relevant topic in contemporary society as it represents the platform for educating youngsters about essential aspects within our society such as morals, values, gender roles, power relations, expectations of a society et cetera.

In this project we investigate the portrayal of princesses within the following Disney films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Mulan* (1998), *Brave* (2012), and *Tangled* (2010). The particular focus is laid upon discovering what kind of roles these princesses have within their stories, as well as what kind of power relations exist within the narrative. Furthermore, we are interested in what activities the princesses are involved in, and who the actual hero of the story is.

The aim of this project is to reveal the manifestation of stereotypes within the narratives of these Disney films. Additionally, we want to establish the archetype of the Disney princess. To do so, we base our analysis upon three main theories: the theory of archetypes, social constructionism (and stereotypes), and a spectre of feminist theories.

### 1.1. Motivation and Problem Area

From a very early age, most children are exposed to the realm of fairy tales in different shapes and forms, and our project group was no exception to that. Our interest in fairy tales originally comes from childhood, however, our curiosity and a wish for a deeper understanding of them is sparked by an academic in us.

Our initial idea was to investigate original fairy tales in contrast to their modern interpretations. However, as we discussed this matter, we realised that our interests varied from the original fairy tales to Disney's interpretation of them. We soon found our curiosity triggered by the role that Disney plays in society, and our focus ended more specifically to be upon the princess character of the films. This led to a desire to investigate the development of Disney's princess character and whether it can be said that there is a Disney princess archetype. Thus, we decided to analyse many of Disney's princesses from different time periods to see if parallels could be drawn and what traits they typically embody. Furthermore, we chose to investigate how Disney promotes certain stereotypes through their representation of the princess character.

This focus upon the female character also naturally led to a more feminist approach, as we saw it relevant to further investigate Disney's representation of gender, including gender roles, and how the princess fairy tales and the princess archetype itself may conflict with a feminist ideology.

## **1.2. Problem Definition and Research Questions**

- *What is the archetype of the Disney princess and what stereotypes does it encourage?*
- *How does the archetype of the Disney princess represent the woman's position in society, and how does it conflict with feminism?*
- *Why is the archetype of the Disney princess socially acceptable?*

## **1.3. Basic Overview of The Walt Disney Company**

There are very few companies in this world whose name will ring a bell to almost every person once they say it out loud. The Walt Disney Company, named the world's most powerful brand, is definitely one of them (The Walt Disney Company: *Disney named...*, 2016).

The world's second largest media conglomerate in terms of revenue (Sicklos, 2009) was originally founded as a small production of short animated films in October 1923 by the brothers Walt and Roy Disney (*The Walt Disney Company History*, n.d.). In its almost 100-year-long history, Disney has come a long way; from a small business employing insignificant number of people to a company which in the year 2015 employed 180,000 people and owned a substantial number of subsidiaries in five business segments (Media Networks, Parks and Resorts, Studio Entertainment, Consumer Products and Interactive Media) (Forbes: 2015). The aspect that has not changed is that Disney continues to be best known for the products of its film studio which lay the foundation of this project.

Disney has especially monopolised the fairy tale, as both adults and children alike will, when having to think of the great classical fairy tales today, think of the Disney versions of fairy tales such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Cinderella* (Bell et al., 1995: 21). With the Disney fairy tales came the Disney princesses, and Disney soon realised the potential of these princesses (Orenstein, 2006). The Disney Princess became a franchise, and soon the market was flooded with Disney Princess-themed merchandise and toys. At this moment, there are 11 princesses belonging to The Disney Princess franchise. To be called The Disney Princess, the female protagonist has to be either royal by birth (64% of them) or marriage (27%), or has to be significantly heroic (9%) (Orenstein, 2006).

While Disney is a source of entertainment, Henry Giroux, a scholar and cultural critic, argues that “as one of the most influential corporations in the world, Disney does more than provide entertainment, it also shapes in very powerful ways how young people understand themselves, relate to others and experience the larger society” (Giroux, 2009). Because of the size and popularity of the brand, Disney has become an ingrained part of childhood for many. Disney can therefore be said to have a tremendous influence on children, as it is inevitable for children to become acquainted with the brand. Especially the female gender is largely affected due to the focus on the female heroines, as seen with the Disney Princess franchise.

#### **1.4. Introducing Fairy Tales**

Some of Disney’s most famous films were based on fairy tales. Therefore, the following section will provide an introduction to the genre of fairy tales and its characteristics, as well as a subchapter concerning women’s influences, roles and appearances in such tales.

##### **1.4.1. The Genre of Fairy Tales**

Fairy tales started as simple oral tales and they were strongly influenced by the values, rites, and experiences of the contemporary people (Zipes, 2012: 21). Due to the cultural differences, the oral fairy tales existed in many versions. Later on, the stories were written down by authors such as the Grimm Brothers or Charles Perrault. It is the Grimm Brothers’ and Perrault’s versions of most fairy tales that are still known today and have continued to adapt into new and different renditions, such as the Disney films.

The oral tradition within the genre of fairy tales explains why there is usually more than one version of the same story. Fairy tales such as *The Sleeping Beauty*, *Cinderella*, and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* are all stories from the oral traditions (Zipes, 2012: 2-3). Both

Perrault and the Grimm Brothers have authored a version of *Cinderella* and *The Sleeping Beauty*, which are widely different from one another in terms of gruesomeness. In both versions of *Cinderella*, the glass slipper will not fit the stepsisters. In Perrault's version, the two stepsisters try to squeeze their feet into the shoe, but without results (Opie, 1974: 127). In the Grimm Brothers' version, one stepsister chops off her heel and the other cuts off her toes to try to make the glass slipper fit (Ashliman, 2011).

In the literary tradition, the fairy tales originated as written pieces which made it possible to date these type of tales, as well as track their different versions and adaptations. An example of a literary fairy tale is the story *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen. The publishing date for this fairy tale is 7th of April 1837 (Bom and Aarenstrup, 2011), and it can still be found in its original form. Even though the original story still exists, there are numerous adaptations for different audiences; Disney's version being just one of many.

Disney's *Mulan* is also based on a written piece. The poem about the legendary Chinese female warrior Hua Mulan was written around the 12th century, although it is presumed it was inspired by a 600-year-older song, *The Ballad of Mulan* (Klimchak, 2016).

Furthermore, the story of *Tangled* is based on the original story *Rapunzel* by the Grimm Brothers, which is evident from a great number of common traits. For example, the first obvious characteristic is the girl's name, Rapunzel (Grimm in Gag, 2006: 139). The second evident similarity is the girl's long, blond, magical hair (Grimm in Gag, 2006: 139). These are only two out of many striking resemblances between the stories, however the Disney version is naturally modified to fit the audience's age.

*Brave*, however, is the only princess film which is not based on an old fairy tale story, but is created by Brenda Chapman, a contemporary writer and producer, who took some inspiration from the Brothers Grimm (Chapman, n.d.). In Chapman's words, she employed the usage of magic, which is a typical trait of the stories created by the Grimm Brothers.

These fairy tales, no matter from which tradition they originated, create a base which the Disney versions are built upon. Therefore, some of these characteristics are also visible in the structure of Disney's adaptations of these stories.

#### **1.4.2. Fairy Tales and Feminism**

Some claim that the role of storytellers used to be dominated by women as it was both seen as traditional, and an art that women possessed (Zipes, 2012: 23; Haase, 2004: 160). Women were the ones who had the power of spinning stories, and this became an essential

profession once a patriarchal ideology began to dominate society. As such, genres within the mode of storytelling, such as fairy tales, became "a coded text in which the female voice, despite the attempt by men to control it, not only continue[d] to speak but also sp[oke] a secret, subversive language" (Haase, 2004: 16). While patriarchy took over much of the delivery of the fairy tales, some researchers argue that fractures of a matriarchal society can be seen in the old, original fairy tales because indications of female power emerge when these stories are closely analysed (Haase, 2004: 15). Even where attempts have been made at changing the fairy tale and the role of women to that of a more submissive one, indications of a society where women had a different role and greater status can sometimes still be seen.

Over the course of time, the fairy tale heroine has been known to change character. Donald Haase, professor of German literature, points to women's loss of fertility control as the central factor of this change (Haase, 2004: 50). He argues that women slowly lost control of the idea that they were in charge of their own fertility, and that led to a change in view of women and gender roles. Up until around year 1450-1550, it was a general perception that women were capable of controlling their own fertility (Haase, 2004: 40). For women, this meant more options within society, and they were often capable of supporting themselves economically (Haase, 2004: 43).

The change in women's fertility control led to a change in the perception of women. Women began to be ascribed weakness and were seen as close to nature. Furthermore, men became a danger to women because women no longer could control their own fertility (Haase, 2004: 50). Women were ascribed passivity, both because men were the ones to penetrate women in a sexual relationship, thus being the active part, but also because the consequences of the penetration led to passivity in the form of pregnancy and having to take care of a child. This led to a new fairy tale heroine which experienced a large amount of suffering, increased isolation, wicked abductors, long captivity, and whose body was a "vehicle of honour and dishonour" (Haase, 2004: 50).

This leads to the practices of infantilisation which Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist, describes as a practice where a person is treated and perceived as a child (Hall, 2001: 262). This can be used as a strategy to diminish women's position and power as it desexualises them in a way that it makes them nothing more than children, who are often associated with being powerless and submissive (Wyver & Whiteman, 2012: 137). Another practice which often happens simultaneously with infantilisation is that of sexualisation. To sexualise is to make something sexual in character or quality. Thus for children, sexualisation becomes the act of giving them sexual characteristics that should only be appropriate for adults (Wyver &



Whiteman, 2012: 106-109). This can also be used to over-sexualise women by emphasising their sex and turning them into sexual objects (McCall: *The Sexualisation of Women and Girls*, 2012).

Feminists question the impact that fairy tales and media have on the construction of gender, attitude, and behaviour of an individual. Furthermore, they question whether fairy tales are contributing to creating identity problems due to unrealistic goals set for women, or maintain inequality between the male and female gender due to the unequal representation of men and women (Haase, 2004: 26). Some argue that the idealized myths of romance may negatively affect women's perception of themselves because of the unrealistic goals and the discrepancies between women's real life circumstances and the ones of the fairy-tale heroine.

On another note, it can be argued that fairy tales evoke reflection (Haase, 2004: 27) and that the women who are subject to the fairy tales choose to go in opposition to the fairy tales rather than feel like they have to become like the women in the tales: "Fairy tales provide scripts for living, but they also can inspire resistance to those scripts and, in turn, to other apparently predetermined patterns" (Haase, 2004: 103). Thus,

"While the romantic myths idealized in fairy tales may negatively affect a woman's self-perception, Stone's evidence shows that the dissonance that eventually emerges, the struggle that ensues, can provoke a critical and creative engagement: "[...] It is the possibility of such reinterpretation that gives hope that women can eventually free themselves from the bonds of fairy tale magic, magic that transforms positively at one age and negatively at another"" (Haase, 2004: 26).

As such, the actual effect of the fairy tales upon women are unknown, but what is certain is that they do, to some extent, affect women.

## **2. Methodology**

This chapter introduces the theories and the method chosen for this project in order to explain how we address the research questions.

Firstly, we provide reflections on the process of choosing relevant theories. The theories have been chosen from three different fields; first, the field of archetypes, which is represented by the theory of archetypes by Carl Gustav Jung. The second field is concerned with the theory of social constructionism by Vivien Burr and the practice of stereotyping by Stuart Hall, as well

as Rebecca Cook & Simone Cusack. The last field deals with three areas of feminism: the history of the feminist movement, based on the work of Ann E. Cudd and Robin O. Andreasen, general feminist terms represented by Peta Bowden & Jane Mummery, and Denise Thompson, and feminist film theory introduced by Karen Hollinger and Laura Mulvey.

Secondly, we present and introduce feminist literary criticism as the method we have chosen for applying our theories, and lastly, the limitations of this project are introduced to give an idea of the project's scope.

## **2.1. Choice of theories**

The process of choosing theories is a highly important step of the project work, as the choice of theories has a direct impact on the outcome of the analysis.

Since the beginning, archetypes were one of our biggest interests. After a thorough research in the field, we have drawn the conclusion that C. G. Jung's book "Four Archetypes - Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster" would serve the purpose of our project best. The theory itself is very diverse and complex, which enables us to apply it from different angles, and therefore create a detailed analysis. Moreover, we are aware of the close relation between stereotypes and archetypes, therefore we are using Vivien Burr's work "An Introduction to Social Constructionism", and Stuart Hall's "Representation", in order to go in depth with the nature of stereotyping and how it is relevant in our case.

As we have progressed in the research and overall analysis of the chosen Disney characters, it has become more and more evident that we simply cannot omit feminism. We therefore use "Feminist Theory: A Philosophical Anthology" edited by Ann E. Cudd and Robin O. Andreasen, which is a collection of literary works of different influential figures within the field of feminism (Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, and bell hooks). We have decided to use this collection of works because it gives us a deeper understanding of both the history and evolution of the movement, as well as what the theory itself consists of. To introduce the key terms of feminist rhetoric we are using "Understanding Feminism" by Peta Bowden and Jane Mummery, as well as Denise Thompson's "Radical Feminism Today." All of the above mentioned sources are used for analysing how are the princesses represented in the Disney films that we have chosen, what is their social status and position, how are they treated and perceived, and what traits do these princesses have that demonstrate their role as women in the film.

In addition, we have chosen to use feminist film theory. Karen Hollinger's "Feminist Film Studies" from 2012 serves as the primary source as it gives an overview of the many ideas within feminist film theory. To further elaborate on one of the main ideas within the theory, we

are using one of the most influential feminist film theorists Laura Mulvey and her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1992). Mulvey and Hollinger provide us with another angle on the case, which will enable us to analyse and discuss the medium of the Disney fairy tales.

## **2.2. Method: Feminist Literary Criticism**

When looking at the archetype of the Disney princess, we cannot exclude the idea of gender if we want to relate the Disney princess archetype with the stereotyping of women and the gender roles that this archetype may set for women. Feminist criticism, therefore, becomes a central approach for us to take as it, with the background knowledge of the feminist movement and the issues that feminists face in contemporary society, provides us with a way of approaching the Disney fairy tales and unravel the Disney princess archetype.

Feminist criticism is a critical approach with the purpose of investigating and revealing a patriarchal ideology in cultural texts. It serves to reveal how some texts, when looking beneath the surface, are dominated by a patriarchal discourse: "Postmodern feminist criticism (...) sets out to document male dominance and female subordination in discourse newly perceived as gendered rather than sex-neutral" (Stern, 1993: 557). Moreover, feminist criticism investigates how texts work to install patriarchal ideology in female recipients (Hollinger, 2012: 7). It is a diverse scholarship that does not consist of a unified set of methodologies, due to the many areas that feminist critics have ventured on:

"The very energy and diversity of our enterprise have rendered us vulnerable to attack on the grounds that we lack both definition and coherence; (...) If we are scholars dedicated to rediscovering a lost body of writings by women, then our finds are questioned on aesthetic grounds. And if we are critics, determined to practice revisionist readings, it is claimed that our focus is too narrow, and our results are only distortions or, worse still, polemical misreadings" (Kolodny, 1980: 6).

Because of the diversity of the scholarship, feminist critics do not have one single methodology that they make use of, but rather approach the problem area with the feminist ideology in mind in order to search for the root of the problem and what solutions may prove suitable. Annette Kolodny, American literary critic, proposes three propositions which are at the theoretical core of feminist criticism studies, and which may give a better understanding of the challenges that are present within the field:

"Literary history (and with that, the historicity of literature) is a fiction; (2) insofar as we are taught how to read, what we engage are not texts but paradigms; and, finally, (3) that since the grounds upon which we assign aesthetic value to texts are never infallible, unchangeable, or universal, we must re-examine not only our aesthetics but, as well, the inherent biases and assumptions informing the critical methods which (in part) shape our aesthetic responses" (Kolodny, 1980: 8).

These propositions give an idea of how feminist critics perceive certain aspects within the critical literary study. They also support the critical approaches feminist critics have taken throughout the years to texts and structures that conflict with a feminist ideology.

The feminist literary criticism, which focuses on texts and the language of the text, demands that the reader understands the ways in which the structures of the primarily male power, which can be said to order our society, have been and continue to be reified by literature and literary criticism (Kolodny, 1980: 17). It is the feminist literary critic's job to reveal the power relations which are inscribed in text, and which often give the man power above and over the woman (Kolodny, 1980: 4). Feminist critics argue that the power relations present within literature "reify the encodings of those same power relations in the culture at large" (Kolodny, 1980: 4). Looking at power relations embedded in texts can therefore reveal how similar power relations are present in a larger context.

### **2.3. Limitations**

For every project that is being written it is unavoidable to encounter several limitations, and our project is not an exception. In the following paragraphs we outline some of the limitations of this project caused by different factors such as theories, methods, topic, focus, et cetera.

In this project, we only discuss Disney princesses. Even though analysing the archetype of princesses created by others could be also beneficial, we have decided to focus only on the princesses portrayed by Disney. Due to the narrow focus, this project's findings cannot be applied to princess characters outside of the chosen Disney films.

Another limitation is our focus on the princess archetype. In the very beginning of our group formation, we were considering the choice of only one princess in order to analyse the development in the princess's portrayal over time. We chose to abandon this idea, as we discovered that such works have been done multiple times already.

The next limitation we have encountered is due to the great complexity of feminist theory, which forced us to choose only certain fragments of the theory. Choosing different fragments could therefore potentially lead to other findings.

The fact we are analysing fictional characters also belongs among the limitations. We are aware that the portrayal of a fairy tale figure cannot be always analysed as if it would be a real person, as the portrayal can be in many cases modified to the children audience.

Another limiting aspect of this project is our focus on specifically female characters, which means that the feminist theory will not be used in its entirety, but mainly as demonstrating the aspects of women's oppression through time and how that may be manifested within some of the parts of the Disney films we have chosen to look upon. For the same reasons, some of the aspects of feminist theory, such as certain negative impacts of patriarchy on men, might be overlooked.

### **3. Theories**

The following chapter will provide an insight into the field of archetypes, social constructionism and feminism. We begin by explaining the four Jungian archetypes. After that, we elaborate on Burr's theory of social constructionism and Hall's stereotypes. Furthermore, we elaborate upon gender stereotypes with the help of the work of Cook and Cusack. Moreover, we introduce some feminist key terms within feminist rhetoric with the help of Bowden & Mummery, and Thompson and the feminist history in the Western society covered by Cudd & Andreasen. Lastly, we turn to feminist film theory introduced by Hollinger and Mulvey.

#### **3.1. Theory of Archetypes**

In order to talk about archetypes, we have to distinguish its meaning first. The term "archetype" comes from two Greek words; *arché*, which means original or old, and *tupos*, which means pattern, model or type (De Coster, 2010). It is impossible to provide one universal definition of an archetype (Jung, 1986). Many scholars have immersed themselves in this issue and many definitions were created. In Jungian archetypal theory, archetypes are modes of behaviour rooted in the collective unconscious, and they are more or less the same everywhere in all individuals (Jung, 1986: 3). The concept of collective unconscious is crucial for Jungian terminology; Jung characterizes collective unconscious as something universal, not just individual (Jung, 1986: 3). It is, in other words, identical in everybody and thus creates shared,

unconsciously inherited and re-appearing patterns of thoughts, which are present in every one of us.

Jung introduces a great number of archetypes during his psychological career, therefore we have chosen the category of archetypes appearing in stories. We will now present the four main archetypes for our analysis; three archetypal characters called 'Mother', 'Spirit', and 'Trickster', as well as one archetypal concept called 'Rebirth'.

Jung describes the qualities of an archetypal mother as: "Maternal solicitude and sympathy, magic authority of the female, wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason (...) all benign, all that cherishes and sustains, that fosters growth and fertility" (Jung, 1986: 16). On the other hand, Jung also names a phenomenon called 'Dual nature of Mother' which acknowledges the negatives of an archetypal mother, such as secrets, darkness, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons (Jung, 1986: 16). In other words, there are two dimensions of an archetypal mother; The Great Mother and The Terrible Mother - also often known as loving biological mother and evil step-mother, although it is important to mention the mother archetype appears under an almost infinite variety of aspects - personal mother, grandmother, stepmother, mother in law, or any woman with whom a relationship exists (nurse, governess et cetera) (Jung, 1986: 16).

When imbalance in the Mother archetype appears, the Mother complex arises. Jung distinguishes two main types of the Mother complex; on son and on daughter. Because of the focus of our project, we will focus only on the Mother complex on daughter. There are four ways in which the complex may manifest, however, we will focus only on two; Hypertrophy of the Maternal Element and Resistance to the Mother.

The first manifestation of Mother complex leads to hypertrophy of the feminine side (Jung, 1986: 21). The hypertrophy is symbolised with exaggeration of all feminine instincts, above all the maternal instinct. Jung claims that the positive aspect of an over-development of the maternal instinct has been glorified in all ages and all tongues (Jung, 1986: 22). That aspect is the mother-love; one of the most moving and unforgettable memories of our lives, the love that means homecoming and shelter.

The second manifestation of the Mother complex is resistance to the mother. The motto of this type is: "Anything, so long as it is not like Mother" (Jung, 1986: 24). Jung states that the resistance to the mother can result in a development of intellect, for the purpose of creating a sphere of interest which the mother has no knowledge about: "This development springs from the daughter's own needs and not at all for the sake of a man whom she would like to impress or dazzle (...) Its real purpose is to break the mother's power by intellectual criticism and

superior knowledge” (Jung, 1986: 25). However, Jung also stated that a daughter which is resistant to her mother can often lack any kind of ambition, as all her attention is focused on how to not be even remotely like her mother (Jung, 1986: 25).

The second archetypal character in fairy tales and myths is the Spirit: “The word spirit possesses such a wide range of application that it requires considerable effort to make clear to oneself all the things it can mean” (Jung, 1986: 86). The crucial aspect of the role of the Spirit is that it appears when the hero is in a desperate situation. The purpose of the Spirit is intervention, inducing self-reflection and mobilizing the moral forces, but more often it is still the gift of a magic talisman to the hero.

The archetype of the Spirit can also be expressed through an animal form and it is not unusual to encounter the motif of helping animals in fairy tales, actually on the contrary. Animals act like humans, speak a human language, and often display a sagacity and a knowledge superior to man's (Jung, 1986: 104).

The next archetype present in stories is the Trickster. The role of the Trickster is to cause problems because only out of disaster can the longing for saviour arise (Jung, 1986: 108). On the other hand, we should not mistake the archetype of the Trickster for the real antagonist (witch, villain et cetera). We could say the main difference between the Trickster and the antagonist is that the Trickster is not evil by nature, even though the consequences of his tricks can be very unpleasant (Crisp, 2010). Tricksters complicate the hero's situation, but often for their own amusement and not with the intention to truly harm another being (Jung, 1986: 110). In other words, we could describe the Trickster as the egocentric joker and rascal, who always acts in his own interest, but he has an important purpose for the story and that is to cause a change in the hero's life.

In the beginning of this chapter, the archetypal concept of Rebirth was mentioned. By a concept it is meant that Rebirth represents a certain important episode or event in the story, not in a character. Jung himself says that the concept of Rebirth is not always used in the same sense, since it has various aspects (Jung, 1986: 47). Therefore, Jung turns to reviewing the concept in five different meanings and forms; Metempsychosis, Reincarnation, Resurrection, Renovatio (also called Rebirth) and Indirect Rebirth. For the purpose of our analysis, only one form called Renovatio is useful, thus only the elaboration for that form will be provided.

The form concerns rebirth in the strict sense; that is to say, rebirth within the span of individual life (Jung, 1986: 48). Rebirth in Jung's opinion represents a renovation of some sort; “a renewal without any change of being, the personality which is renewed is not changed in its essential nature, but only its functions, or parts of the personality are subjected to healing,

strengthening, or improvement” (Jung, 1986: 48). In fairy tales, the hero in the absolute majority of cases undergoes a rebirth; whether it is an escape from bad conditions, finding true love, or overcoming any kind of problem or difficulty, the hero’s life always changes profoundly.

### **3.2. Social Constructionism and Stereotypes**

When speaking of feminism and norms in a society, it is highly relevant to include the theory of social constructionism. In this area it is possible to speak of social constructionism or social constructivism, although Burr uses the former because, according to her, the later term is associated with other theories that could disorient the reader (Burr, 1995: 2). In order to be consistent within the project but also with Burr’s statements we choose to use social constructionism instead of constructivism. The rationale behind this choice is that, according to Gergen, the term of constructivism can also be associated with other theories such as the Piagetian, and a specific kind of perceptual theory (Burr, 1995: 2). Therefore, by using constructionism, disorientation is avoided. Furthermore, the two terms are so closely linked that many scholars think of them as almost identical (Burr, 1995: 2).

The applicability of the theory in this project is justified by the fact that various concepts such as society, power, and feminism are explained. By having access to these explanations, we are led to comprehend the functions of power and connect it to the Disney films.

By looking into the nature of the word it is possible to presume that social constructionism is in some way interconnected with social phenomena, which is to some extent correct. Burr describes it as a theoretical orientation: “Offering radical and critical alternatives in psychology and social psychology, as well as in other disciplines in the social sciences and humanities” (Burr, 1995: 1). Thus, it is a multidisciplinary field since it is influenced by various disciplines (Burr, 1995: 2). In an attempt to provide the reader with a definition of social constructionism, Burr explains that this is not an easy task, since an adequate definition is non-existent. Although, there are some stipulations that must be fulfilled in order to be given the social constructionist stamp. Burr draws four assumptions that determine a social constructionist view:

1. A critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge.
2. Historical and cultural specificity.
3. Knowledge is sustained by social processes.
4. Knowledge and social action go together (Burr, 1995: 3-5).

In the first assumption, Burr emphasizes the importance of being critical of every knowledge that is being portrayed as truth and not taking anything for granted in our society,



whether that includes different categorizations that have been present among us for many years or even the simplest of observations (Burr, 1995: 3).

Additionally, Burr introduces the ‘historical and cultural specificity’ which is connected to the ‘critical stance’ above. By saying ‘historical and cultural specificity,’ she proposes the belief that different understandings that occur in our society are dependent on the specific time, culture, and location these various understandings occur within. Therefore, she asserts that: “we should not assume that *our* ways of understanding are necessarily any better (in terms of being any nearer the truth) than other ways” (Burr, 1995: 4). This assertion is related to the assumption above in the sense that the historical and cultural specificity are an explanation as to why it is important to be critical in regards to generally approved knowledge.

Burr points out that a crucial aspect of social constructionism is daily interactions between individuals, since by doing so, information and therefore knowledge transpires between them and take the form of ‘truths’ (Burr, 1995: 4).

As it is explained above, social constructionism is a multidisciplinary field that is inspired by an abundance of disciplines, giving it a broad nature. The relatability of other concepts to social constructionism is undeniable; among these concepts are both feminism and power.

Upon discussing power, it is very relevant to include Michel Foucault, as he has worked very closely with the notion. Drawing on Foucault statement that knowledge equals power, Burr states:

“The power to act in particular ways, to claim resources, to control or be controlled depends upon the ‘knowledges’ currently prevailing in a society. We can exercise power by drawing upon discourses which allow our actions to be represented in an acceptable light. Foucault therefore sees power not as some form of possession, which some people have and others do not, but as an effect of discourse. (...) When we define or represent something in a particular way we are producing a particular ‘knowledge’ which brings power with it” (1995:64).

Additionally, Foucault regarded knowledge as power over others and similarly the power to define others (Burr, 1995: 64). This is true, since knowledge consists of general truths that are accepted by the majority of the population (Burr, 1995: 63-64). These said ‘truths’ derive from credible institutions, such as the government or a scientific institute, and become the norm through discourse. By mentioning discourse, what is meant is: “a set of meanings,

metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events. It refers to a particular picture that is painted of an event (or a person or class of persons), a particular way of representing it or them in a certain light” (Burr, 1995: 48).

It is crucial to associate power with discourse. Through discourse, certain ideas are promoted in order to benefit those who promote those ideas, whether that is to maintain a certain social order or to maintain the status quo without deviating from it. A very stable idea that has lasted for a really long time is that of family. As Burr states, if seen from a Marxist point of view, the idea of family serves a capitalist economy where the father works and earns the family’s income, whereas the mother tends the home and raises the children (Burr, 1995: 72-73). When this pattern is challenged it is a concern that the economy will be affected.

In order to maintain the status quo, certain attributes are distributed among the genders and people in general in order to justify the reason why the current way of things is the right one. To do so, it is necessary to include the theory of stereotypes. In Stuart Hall’s “Representation” (2001) he writes about the process of stereotyping and how it: “reduces people to a few, simple, essential characteristics, which are represented as fixed by Nature” (2001: 257).

This process is necessary for people in their daily lives in order to make sense of the world (Hall, 2001: 257). This happens by inserting objects and people into categories in order to comprehend them better. Additionally, Hall mentions the fact that stereotyping: “divides the normal and the acceptable from the abnormal and unacceptable” (2001: 258). By this quote, it can be drawn upon that this form of categorisation and differentiation of people enforces inequalities, since people are divided between those who are normal and those who are not, meaning the people that are seen as the ‘other’ (Hall, 2001: 258). Hall states that stereotyping is closely related to Foucault’s power/knowledge since: “it classifies people to a norm and constructs the excluded as the ‘other’” (2001: 259).

Gender stereotypes create inequalities between men and women. These stereotypes are based on the differences in biological, psychological and sexual functions. Gender stereotypes are rooted in culture and will therefore change depending from which culture those stereotypes originated from. Women are given an inferior status within society through stereotypes, which portray women as property of men and thereby generating disrespect. By doing so, the value of women is reduced (Cook & Cusack, 2010: 1). Cook and Cusack provide an example of this as women are seen as property of men as the father “gives” his daughter away to another man at weddings (Cook & Cusack, 2010: 3). This notion of women being objects owned by men

permits violence against women both sexually and physically. Women are often given various adjectives, one of them describing their nurturing nature. This characterization justifies the fact that they are expected to bear children, while this task is also often perceived as their main purpose in life (Cook & Cusack, 2010: 12). It is not only the stereotypes associated with the female gender that affect society's view on women, but the stereotypes connected with being a man, as they are posted as opposites. Therefore, the stereotyping of men as strong also results in women being characterised as weak.

### **3.3. Feminist Theory**

This chapter will provide some information on key terms and essential aspects of feminism in general, the feminist movement, including its emergence and development through time, and feminist film theory. Feminist theory provides us with a closer look at some of the traits and elements of women's oppression through history, some of which may be present in Disney's fairy tale films. We are focusing particularly on the oppression of women and not on the feminist movement as a whole (which includes all inequalities between the sexes) because we are analysing the female characters, namely the princesses, in these fairy tales.

#### **3.3.1. Crucial Elements of Feminist Rhetoric**

Feminism has been given many definitions over the years but has yet to receive a universal one that covers the many understandings and aspects of the term (Thompson, 2001: 5). Feminism is an ever changing, diverse concept due to the many new issues that arise over time, and feminism has addressed many different types of problems which have granted the term a status of being very complex and diverse. As Peta Bowden and Jane Mummery note: "(...) feminism is best understood as a dynamic, multifaceted and adaptive movement that has evolved and changed in response to the different practical and theoretical problems faced by women" (2009: 7). Yet there are some key terms and key aspects that are unavoidable when venturing into feminism.

Social constructionism is an essential thought within feminism, as it "is intended to emphasize the fact that sex, sex differences, relations between the sexes, the very category of women itself, are due to social arrangements and not to biological necessity, that these are questions of culture not nature. To insist that the situation of women is socially constructed, and not naturally given, is a necessary emphasis given the justificatory role still played by biological explanations for women's social subordination" (Thompson, 2001: 6). Social

constructionism allows women to challenge the hierarchy because it is socially constructed and not set-in-stone, and thus has the option to be rearranged.

With the idea of social constructionism comes the idea of gender. In feminist rhetoric, gender and sex are two different entities that are very closely linked. Sex refers to the biological differences between men and women, while gender is a matter of culture. Feminism uses the term gender to talk about the social classification of masculine and feminine, of what is proper female and male behaviour (Bowden & Mummery, 2009: 83-84). What is masculine and feminine is socially determined, and while it is expected that women should behave feminine and men masculine, these expectations are open to challenge and modification because they are socially constructed. Both sexes can take on different gender identities, but the norms often decide what gender behaviours are appropriate and what are not.

This relationship between the two sexes, male and female, is of central discussion. A general understanding of feminism is that it is a fight for a world where women have a fully human status (Thompson, 2001: 5). This statement presupposes that women do not already have a fully human status in the current world, and it is one of these issues that feminism addresses. Instead, it is the man who has the status of being fully human:

“Male domination means that male represents the ‘human’ norm at the expense of a human status for women. Men's interests and values are set up as universal 'human' interests, and genuinely human values like reason, virtue or courage are appropriated as exclusive to men. At the same time, male domination means that the female is regarded as subsidiary, subservient, ancillary to, or absent from, the human norm, while the interests, values and rights of women are denied, trivialized or derided, and women's time, energy and attention are expropriated for men's use and pleasure. Under conditions of male supremacy, women are allowed, at best, a second-rate human status acquired through relations of subordination to men; at worst, women's needs and interests are ignored, and women are treated as if [they] had no rights and no claim to be accorded human respect and dignity” (Thompson, 2012: 12).

It is this male domination that is a key term within feminism, and it is what feminism wishes to challenge. The male domination is often disguised as something else and ensures compliance through this disguise. Therefore, it can be difficult to see, and it becomes feminism's job to expose the male domination as domination and expose it for the dehumanizing system that it is (Thompson, 2001: 8).

Another word covering the idea of male domination as a practice that sets up men's experiences and values as universal is the term *androcentrism*, which is also defined as the practice of placing the male human being at the centre of one's world view (Code, 2000: 20). This idea of male domination comes in many shapes and sizes, and the term *patriarchy* is another term often used within feminism to cover the idea of male dominance over women. Its original meaning is "rule of the father", both over the mother, but also the father's sons and daughters (Thompson, 2001: 60). The meaning has since undergone a change as feminism has adopted the term and changed the focus to that of "rule of men over women". Here, men receive the dominant role and women the submissive one due to the nature of the two sexes: "Maternal and wifely work – caring for and nurturing the interests of others – then, is women's work and inferior, while the activities of economic production and political decision-making are men's work and superior" (Bowden & Mummery, 2009: 18).

What these terms have in common is the idea that the dominance is embedded in society and is socially constructed, and that men possess dominance solely due to their sex. Feminism is, therefore, challenging the society and its structures which hold women in an inferior position and give men a dominant status. It is an attempt to change the society from being androcentric to one that includes women's experiences and opinions as valid knowledge.

### **3.3.2. Development of the Feminist Movement**

Feminism has been manifesting itself in waves, and its first wave is typically seen as beginning with Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of the Right of Women" in 1792, which is arguably one of the first pieces of literature within the field of feminism (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 7). In her article "Of the pernicious effects which Arise from the Unnatural Distinctions Established in Society", Wollstonecraft is attempting to raise awareness of this pressing issue (the lack of equality between the sexes) and asking for a change in society by giving concrete examples of the misdoings of society (particularly men) upon women (Wollstonecraft in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 7). She speaks of the excessive importance of aesthetics of a woman in society, as well as emphasising on the so called non-existence of women, meaning that a woman's identity is directly tied to that of her man, without whom she does not matter, indicating that a woman is merely a shadow of a man (Wollstonecraft in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 12).

Wollstonecraft's main point is that women are not secondary to men genetically, but because of their denied education they are assumed to be so. She argues that all mankind should

stand up for this issue, however she addresses men specifically by stating that the change would benefit them greatly because women would be able to fulfil themselves (learn how to respect themselves) and therefore become free to love them in a true way, become better wives and better mothers, et cetera (Wollstonecraft in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 11-16). Her strategy seems to have been to reach not only women but also men, who were, at that time, holding all the power.

The first wave, however, is identified as addressing the problem of inequality particularly in the political and economic sphere, which was based on the argumentation that women have equal reasoning abilities as men (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 7). This first wave has “result[ed] in women’s suffrage in the 1920’s, liberal feminists also won property rights for women, more reproductive freedoms, and greater access to education and the professional realm” (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 7).

The second wave occurred around 1949 upon the arrival of “The Second Sex” by Simone de Beauvoir (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 7). This wave is characterised by the movement beyond political and economic equality, which, although essential, has not entirely put a stop to women’s oppression (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 7). Second wave feminism pushes for complete economic equality, striving at achieving profound change both in the political and in personal elements of everyday life. Hence, the famous statement, the personal is the political, emerges (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005). These points, among many others, are also covered by de Beauvoir in her book “The Second Sex”, where she provides many historical events and artefacts of women oppression. The introduction of the book is primarily focusing on the otherness that is a female which is evident even from the Bible where Eve is seen as a secondary, faulty, and subordinate being (de Beauvoir in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 29). She also states how a woman cannot imagine herself without a man, but men have no problem seeing themselves without a woman (de Beauvoir in Cudd & Andreasen 2005: 29). De Beauvoir is using myths and history to prove her point that women have been oppressed by men and society for as long as we can remember. Furthermore, she states that a woman is biologically defined by her ability to give birth, while socially her position and role is defined by society, where a woman is being a passive actor (de Beauvoir in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 30). She is also comparing women oppression with racism, stating how the world is dominated by particularly white males who make all the rules (de Beauvoir in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 31). Her last point in this brief introduction is that women are shaped by society to be inferior to men: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that

produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine” (de Beauvoir in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 35).

The occurrence of the third wave around 1980’s focused on all varieties of women, meaning that there began to be more awareness on the dissatisfaction of women of colour with the disregard of their (quite different) experiences of oppression (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 7-8). For example, “hooks challenges both the pattern and the assumption, first by arguing that although women everywhere suffer oppression, different groups experience different forms of oppression due to the ways in which different types of oppression (racial, economic, sexual, etc.) interact” (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 9). This was the time when the criticism of the obliviousness towards different kinds of oppression experienced by non-white and non-upper-middle class women started to appear. Hooks criticised second wave feminists for having overlooked this problem, and for having focused primarily on the class that they belonged to - middle class or upper-middle class white women (hooks in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 60). Therefore, hooks criticised feminism for creating “(...) the ideology of “common oppression”” (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 64), and suggested that this field is in need of a new theory which acknowledges the existence of diverse feminist positions. Furthermore, this wave of feminism is concerned with gender binarism – the placing of people into specific genders and sexes constructed by society (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 8).

In conclusion, the “(...) central claim of feminism [is] that women are systematically and unjustifiably disadvantaged by society” (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 71).

### **3.3.3. Feminist Film Theory**

Feminist film theory is said to be formed in the beginning of the 1970’s and stems from the women’s movement in the 1960’s. The women’s movement increased the focus on the inequality between genders, and film soon became the focus to some feminists (Hollinger, 2012: 7). The early feminist film theory consisted of two areas of interest: (1) the critique of mainstream cinema, which could be said to “bind women to a “natural” female role of passivity and maternal nurturing under a dominant patriarch” (Hollinger, 2012: 7) and contribute to uphold a patriarchal system, and (2) the uprising of an alternative and radical cinema led by feminist filmmakers who challenged the traditional cinema with feminist films (Hollinger, 2012: 7).

The first approach to be recognized within feminist film studies was the ‘images of women’ approach. The approach criticized the mainstream Hollywood films for presenting

images of women that conflicted with women's real lives and supported, even though it may not have been a conscious choice made by men, a patriarchal ideology (Hollinger, 2012: 8).

The approach was quickly criticized by many feminists who disagreed with the critical methodology used and saw the approach as limited due to a lack of theory supporting the claims that were made, such as whether these negative images of women directly influence women's perception of themselves (Hollinger, 2012: 9).

Another approach that thus emerged was cinefeminism, an approach that:

“(...) proposed close analysis of individual film texts, but it conceived of itself as moving beyond the simple enumeration of stereotypes of women presented in films to an analysis of how films work ideologically to construct women as signs in a complex textual system that supports and even naturalizes patriarchal ideology by defining women as other to men. Rather than seeing cinema as referring to reality, these critics saw it as a construction reflective of male and desires that are projected onto female figures on screen” (Hollinger 2012: 10).

The approach focuses not solely on the image of women, but more specifically on the image of women as seen through men's eyes. One of the most well-known works within cinefeminism is Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Here, Mulvey argues that the gaze is male, meaning that the spectator position that is offered by the Hollywood film is masculine and that the female characters' function as objects of male desires (Hollinger, 2012: 11). The female characters in films represent two concepts. The first is the 'to-be-looked-at-ness', as Mulvey calls it, meaning that women are there to evoke visual pleasure to the male gaze (Mulvey, 1992: 346). It is a passive role that women have, while men have the active role of both looking at the women and forwarding the story (Mulvey, 1992: 347). Secondly, women represent 'castration anxiety' to the male gaze, as they lack a penis and therefore imply a threat of castration (Mulvey, 1992: 348). For men to avoid this castration anxiety, Mulvey argues that they can take upon two courses of action. Firstly, men can turn the woman herself into a fetish so she becomes reassuring rather than dangerous. This can for example be seen with female stars who are overvalued and thus not seen as a danger but rather as a fetish object (Mulvey, 1992: 348). Secondly, men can demystify the woman and assert control by punishing, devaluing or forgiving the woman, thus subjecting her (Mulvey, 1992: 348).

While Mulvey received much criticism, some of her points and ideas still stand within the feminist film theory as they raised the focus on the gender division in Hollywood films.



Mulvey also called for a new counter-cinema, which opened up for a discussion of whether female filmmakers should focus on a wholly new cinema or work to solve some of the problems that are already present within mainstream Hollywood cinema (Hollinger, 2012: 13).

Another issue that Mulvey's essay raised and which became one of cinefeminism's central concerns was the question of the female spectator (Hollinger, 2012: 14). The female spectator is to be understood as the implied reader and not as an actual person. Feminist critics tried to define the female spectator and her position, and here Mulvey argues that "they really have no alternative but passive identification with their own cinematic objectification, with to-be-looked-at-ness" (Hollinger, 2012: 14).

Some even challenge the gendered spectator and argue that gender has nothing to do with identification, but that other aspects such as sympathy affect the identification with the characters (Hollinger, 2012: 16). However, gender specific spectatorship should not be completely invalidated, as it can be seen how certain films attract an audience of a specific gender, and the different ideas about gendered spectatorship may have some truth to them.

## **4. Analysis**

### **4.1. Introduction**

In the following part of our project we will analyse different aspects of the Disney princesses' characters, as well as explore repeating patterns in order to answer our questions: *What is the archetype of the Disney princess and what stereotypes does it encourage? and how does the archetype of the Disney princess represent the woman's position in society, and how does it conflict with feminism?*

For the sake of clarity, we have divided our analysis into three parts. The first part is dealing with the original princesses represented by Snow White from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and *Cinderella* (1950). The second part is concerned with princesses of the so-called renaissance era - a period starting around the 1990's when Disney restored its tradition of princess films after 30 years. These princesses are Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Mulan* (1998). The last part analyses the modern princesses, from which we have chosen Rapunzel from *Tangled* (2010) and Merida from *Brave* (2012).

Firstly, the storyline and conflict of each film is analysed to see what is of central significance. This step of the analysis is important because the social position of every princess is revealed, as well as the situation which she, both as a person and a woman, finds herself in.

Afterwards, we turn to the physical appearance of each princess. The aim is to evaluate whether the looks of the Disney princesses show the same pattern, such as age, skin colour, body type, clothes et cetera. In other words, the purpose of this section is to demonstrate how Disney portrays its princesses, in order to uncover whether Disney reproduces certain beauty ideals, as for example those set by Western society. We also want to focus on how much attention is paid to the appearance of every princess.

The same aim applies for the evaluation of the princess' personality and development. Questions such as: "How does the princess act and behave? What does she want? What does that say about her?" will be in our minds during the analysis so we can evaluate how Disney represents women's actions and thoughts.

The next step of our analysis is to examine the activities of every princess. In other words, we want to find out what the princesses are occupied with in the film. We see this as a crucial section because it has the greatest potential to demonstrate the stereotypical expectations of feminine behaviour. To do this, we have created detailed diagrams that demonstrate the activity of every princess in percentage, as well as calculated how much time of each film is dedicated to the princess. The diagrams' purpose is to show in how many feminine and masculine activities the princess engages (if in any) and evaluate whether the princess does or does not confirm gender expectations. To understand the diagram easily, read the activities clockwise, and the description from left to right.

Lastly, we look at the relationships each princess has. This part serves the purpose of finding out the importance of the princess in comparison with the other characters, as well as what role the other characters play for the princess.

We see the aspects of appearance, personality, development, and activities as important because they are significant parts of the archetype which we attempt to establish. Therefore, they are indispensable for our analysis. Moreover, we investigate these different aspects with the help of our theories in order to reveal why the Disney's representation of women conflict with feminism.

#### **4.2. The Original Princesses**

Snow White from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and Cinderella from *Cinderella* (1950) are known as the first two Disney princesses. Both films are based on a classical fairy tale and share similar traits, as both of them include a main evil female figure, a maiden in distress, and a virtuous prince. The parents of the princesses are not present in the lives of Cinderella and Snow White, leaving them under the care of their stepmothers. We

suggest that the beauty of the original princesses is their main characteristic and essential to their character. It is what causes the conflict, but also what leads to their salvation.

### **Storyline and Conflict**

The looks of the princesses play a major role in the establishment of a conflict. It is the looks of Snow White that directly result in the arise of a conflict, as it is Snow White's beauty that the evil queen is challenged by and is determined to get rid of. The evil queen is also Snow White's stepmother and she embodies the archetype of The Terrible Mother (Jung, 1986: 16). We see this as an example of an archetype changing into a stereotype, as stepmothers in fairy tales are usually depicted as wicked women who hate their stepdaughters.

Just as Snow White is challenged by her evil stepmother so is Cinderella. In both cases, it is the beauty of the princesses that frightens and provokes the evil stepmothers and stepsisters. From this we can interpret that Disney is promoting two stereotypes: The first one is that if a woman is powerful, she is evil, and if she is powerless, she is pure and virtuous. The second one is that Disney is supporting the idea that women are cantankerous amongst each other, and they are often jealous of one another because of vain reasons, such as beauty.

It is the beauty of Cinderella that evokes envy in the stepmother and the two stepsisters and makes them treat her badly. In addition to this, while the two princesses are portrayed as beautiful, the evil stepsisters are portrayed as hideous, and the evil stepmothers as stern and lacking warmth. The antagonists can be described as what Elizabeth Bell in her essay "Somatexts at the Disney Shop: Constructing the Pentimentos of Women's Animated bodies" calls *femme fatales*, deadly women (Bell in Bell et al., 1995: 115). Here, Bell argues that Disney transforms the vain, active, and wicked woman of folktales into *femme fatales*. These *femme fatales* are portrayed in a way that they appear beautiful with an accentuated body while possessing a sinister and mature personality (Bell in Bell et al., 1995: 115-116). In opposition to the soft shapes and strokes of the princesses, the *femme fatales* have sharp features and an excess of feminine sexuality, giving them immense power, especially combined with their predatory looks which "(...) heightens the dangerous consumptive powers of the *femme fatale*" (Bell in Bell et al., 1995: 117-118). It is this sexual power that the *femme fatales* use to seduce the men with. They only live and think of themselves as sexual subjects due to the authority and power that they possess. Meanwhile, the princesses remain merely sexual objects because of the lack of power and authority obtained through over-sexualisation (Bell in Bell et al., 1995: 116). Our assumption is that if the woman is given power within the Disney films, she is always represented as evil and only the male figure has the ability to nullify her power. We find that

the two archetypes almost become oppositions of one another in both looks and behaviour. This serves to further emphasise what characteristics a princess must embody.

The conflict in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* escalates when the stepmother creates a poisonous apple to kill Snow White. The use of poison is traditionally seen as being a woman's weapon, and it is also known as women's most common tool for committing suicide (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: *US Suicide Methods*, n.d.). Psychologists argue that the reason behind it is the fact that poison leaves women's beauty intact. We see a paradox in the narrative here, as the stepmother perceives Snow White as her rival because of her fairness, yet she chooses a weapon which preserves Snow White's beauty even after death. The use of poison enforces another stereotype since it is associated with dishonesty and cowardice. In other words, it is seen as a weak method of killing someone, thus suitable for women. It also emphasises the importance of the princess' beauty as it is the only element that can save Snow White from her deep sleep. Because of the beauty having been preserved, the prince is compelled to kiss her even though she is no longer alive. Feminists often criticise the kiss that brought Snow White from the dead, as it was not consensual. In this situation, we see two apparent stereotypes: first, the absolute essentialness of beauty in a woman's life. Second, the presumption that a woman's body is nothing more than an object, to which men have access even without the woman's permission (Cook & Cusack, 2010: 1).

### **Personality and Development**

The princesses are passive in their character and let the prince and the evil stepmothers set the course of the story. This can be illustrated by the fact that they accept the mistreatment done to them by the evil stepmothers and stepsisters. While they both dream of love, they do nothing to obtain it. They sing of love and dream of a prince, but accept their life as it is, and the oppression that they are subjected to, much similar to the women before the first wave of the feminist movement (Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 7). We cannot deny a clear promotion of the women's dependency upon a man and their oppression in these Disney films, as the princesses hold no real power to influence and change their lives.

They are simplistic in their dreams and thoughts, as all they wish for is to find the love of their life and marry. We find it important to state that education is never mentioned in any of the Disney princess films and therefore, it could be argued that their simplicity derives from the lack of education. Denying women access to education is a common practice within patriarchy, and even today, it can be found in many places around the world. We claim that making education inaccessible to women serves men as a tool of ensuring women's inferior

position in society. Without education, a woman's devotion is given to the man; in Snow White's case to the prince. Thus, the princess, the story, and the world revolve around the prince, or more specifically, the man.

Because the stories place the man in the centre, they depict an androcentric society. It is the prince that the princess ultimately wants, and only the prince can give the princess freedom and power. This goes hand in hand with the passivity that the princesses express, as the prince becomes the active part in the story and ultimately decides the future of the princess. The princesses cannot control the course of their own lives without male intervention (Zipes in Bell et. al., 1995: 36). This can be seen in both cases, as it is the prince that saves the princess from her miserable life. He is already the one with the power due to his status as a prince, and while Snow White is born a princess, she is still treated as a common girl, a servant. The prince, through his position, elevates the princess and gives her a royal position almost equal to his own. Even though Snow White is born royal, she is only treated as royal once she marries. We argue that the royal position of the princess is seen as insignificant until she marries.

Both Snow White and Cinderella show great naivety through their stories. For example, Snow White accepts an apple from a stranger even though the dwarfs warned her not to talk to anyone. Cinderella's naivety is shown when she is convinced that her stepmother will let her try on the glass slipper, retreating to her room to change her attire, where the stepmother locks her in. With this naivety, we claim that Disney implies a woman's weakness, as well as their inability to make solid, rational decisions.

Furthermore, Snow White demonstrates traits of the Mother archetype in the form of Hypertrophy of the Maternal Element (Jung, 1986: 22). Even though Snow White is only 14 years old, she takes on the role of the dwarfs' mother the second she enters their house, where she is genuinely shocked that a mother would allow such a chaos in her home. We observe two stereotypes that arise from this situation: first, blaming the mother for the untidiness, which suggests that the housekeeping is a woman's job. Second, the implication that no matter the woman's age, her maternal instinct will always be sparked in the presence of those who need to be taken care of.

Cinderella also demonstrates the Hypertrophy of the Maternal Element as she takes care of the animals as if they were her children. But more importantly, she demonstrates what has become the stereotype of duties of a mother. She is cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry which simply said, are the activities seen as a woman's job in the eyes of a patriarchal society. We thus argue that Disney supports the idea that women's position in society is subordinate to men by ascribing them inferior work.

## **Appearance**

In general, much focus is laid upon the looks of both princesses. The appearances of the princesses become their main quality, thus their personalities and other qualities are reduced to a minimum. As Snow White is introduced, it is her beauty that is noteworthy mentioning: her fair skin and red lips. When Cinderella is about to meet the prince, it is her looks that are of central importance as that is what will catch the prince's eye. We can support this by the fact that the prince in both stories comment and compliment only the looks and the voice of the princess. Thus, the princess needs to be visually pleasing to the prince, as it is through a single look that the prince falls in love with her. Furthermore, Cinderella goes through a beauty makeover to be able to go to the ball, which is implying that a poorly dressed woman cannot charm any man. Therefore, we claim that once again the looks play the most important role within these Disney films.

Interestingly, Snow White was originally a seven-year-old girl, although Disney modified her age and depicted her as a 14-year-old. We believe that by modifying her age, Disney gives her power since she suddenly becomes sexually attractive to the prince. Furthermore, we also think there is a clear mismatch between her actual age and the age she depicts. While she is supposed to be a child, she still resembles a woman through her appearance and many of her actions. This helps making the romance between a 14-year-old and a prince acceptable. On the other hand, she also has childish characteristics, which we believe serve to take away the power that a fully grown woman should have.

The clothes that these princesses are wearing promote the idea that the beautiful looks add to the power of the princesses. In the beginning of both films, the princesses are dressed in poor looking clothes that do not enhance their bodies, which are their essential source of power. Also, the poor dresses symbolise their low status, and the effort of the female antagonists to take all the power away from them. Later on, both Snow White and Cinderella change into their characteristic dresses, which highlight their bodies. Thus, we argue that the clothes the princesses are wearing imply that if women do not dress to look beautiful and reveal their bodies, their power will decrease.

The high heels represent another stereotypical expectation of how women should dress. Furthermore, putting heels on a 14-year-old girl aids to her being easily sexualised because heels are associated with being one of women's sexual appeals. Not to mention, Snow White wears high heels for a major part of the film. By making princesses wear heels in almost every situation, Disney insinuates that the beauty standards come before everything else, even the

health and comfort of a woman, because the core of her existence is to please men with her looks. This stereotype, which is being maintained within patriarchy, is of specific critique by feminist film theorists. The theorists highlight the over-sexualisation of women in films, as well as their inferior importance within the plot, as they usually serve as beauty objects (Indiewire, 2013). Our observation of Snow White and Cinderella's appearance, resulting in their over-sexualisation thus supports this critique by feminist film theorists.

### **Activities**

The activities of the princesses give a clear illustration of their passive behaviour and inferior position. The princesses, who are supposed to be the main characters, appear approximately half of the length of the films, and moreover, both Cinderella and Snow White do not achieve much during the little air time they have. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* has a length of 82 minutes, out of which Snow White can be seen or heard for 42 minutes. For Cinderella, the numbers are similar; the duration of the film is 74 minutes, in which Cinderella is present 32 minutes in total. To give a demonstration of this, the activities of the two princesses have been put into diagrams.

As it can be seen in Diagram 1 (see on the next page), more than half of Snow White's screen time is spent by doing three activities; being with the dwarfs (24.8%), talking to the forest animals (17.10%), and cleaning and cooking (16.7%). Almost the same can be said about Cinderella. In Diagram 2, it can be seen that almost half of Cinderella's screen time is spent on doing chores and singing. It should be noted that despite the chart showing Snow White as singing for 7.5 % of her air time, she is almost never seen cleaning and cooking without singing, thus she is actually singing roughly 22.8 % of the time, and the same applies for Cinderella. In the Disney princess films, ever-present singing and talking to animals are again childlike features of the characters. Snow White and Cinderella both express their dreams and hopes through singing or talking to their animal friends and we believe this adds to the innocence, naivety, and infantilisation of the princesses. This corresponds with the statement of Mulvey (1992: 347) which states that women play a passive role, meaning that the male characters step in and aid to the progression of the story. Thus, the story moves forward only under the male influence.

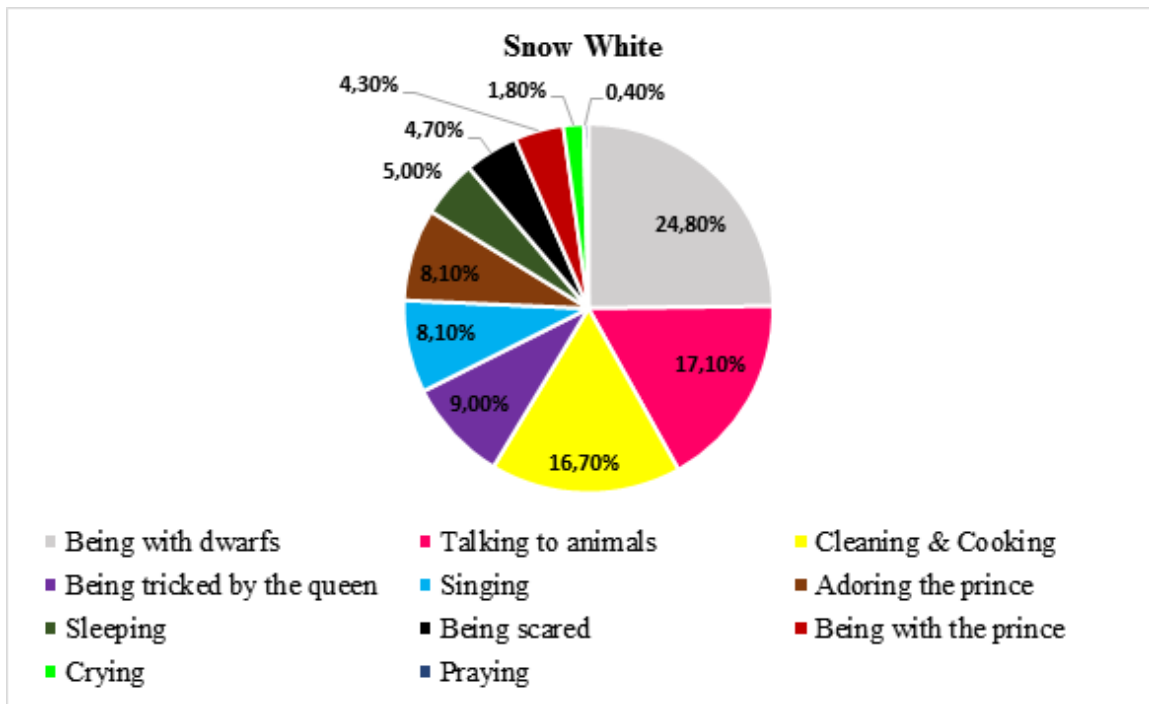


Diagram 1

The activities such as cleaning and cooking, which both Cinderella and Snow White spend a large amount of time doing, are what feminism categorises as inferior work (Bowden & Mummery, 2009: 18). The socially constructed idea of cleaning and cooking being a woman’s job is one of the main critiques of feminist theorists, and this aspect is also criticized in Patrick D. Murphy’s essay “The Whole Wide World Was Scrubbed Clean: The Androcentric Animation of Denatured Disney” (Murphy in Bell et al., 1995: 128). He makes the point that women are a domesticated presence that remain ready to serve young boys and that ‘good’ females are limited to domesticity. We see that both Cinderella and Snow White are given a passive, maternal, and domestic role in their own film due to their sex, and that they remain ready to serve whatever male figure they encounter. This is clearly seen in the character of Snow White as she stays at home to cook and clean after the dwarfs while they go to work.

In general, the story is driven by the male characters or the antagonists. For example, it is the male mice that unlock Cinderella’s door so she can try on the glass slipper, and the dwarfs that chase the evil queen over the edge of a cliff in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Therefore, it is our contention that the princesses are just secondary participants in their own stories, basically on the same level as the animals.



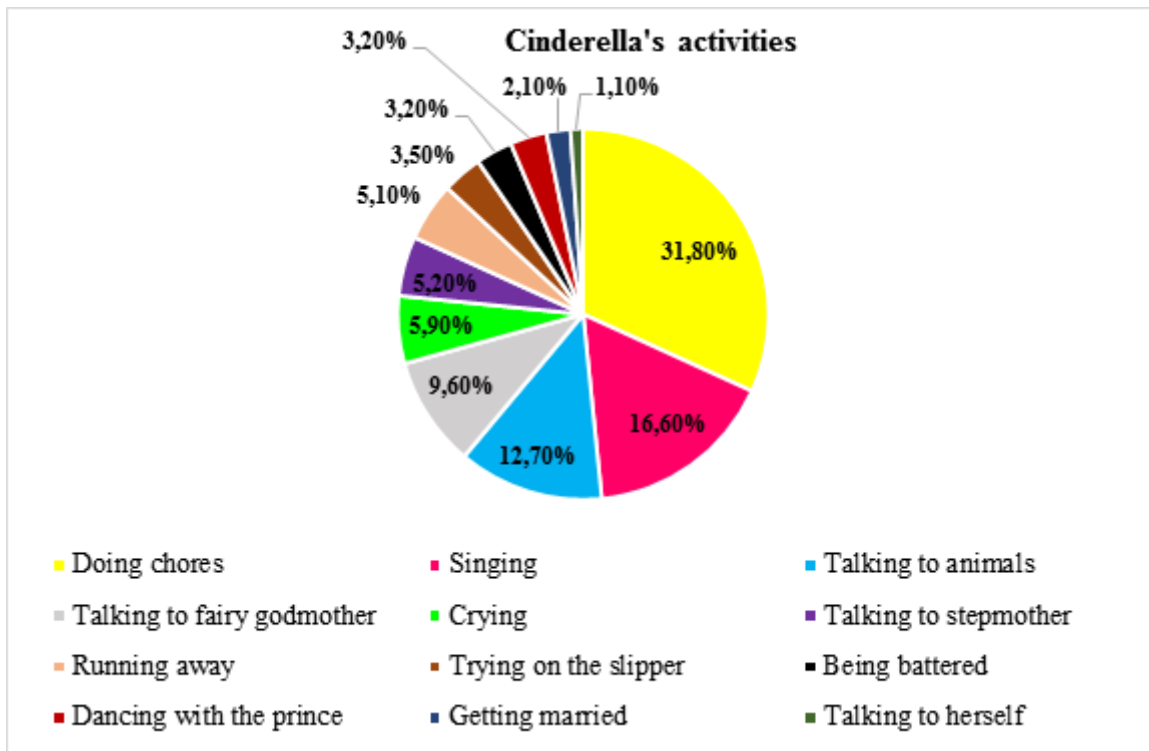


Diagram 2

## Relationships

The relationship with the prince plays a crucial part in the princess' life and future. Both of the original princesses dream about meeting a prince and marrying him. They fantasise about being rescued from their lives by a handsome prince and living happily ever after. It is worth mentioning that both Cinderella and Snow White fall in love immediately after meeting the prince, which indicates the obsessiveness over finding a man. The dream of being rescued is taking away power from the princess and empowering the prince as the princess does not actively try to change her life but instead accept the abuse of her family.

Other important characters in the films are the ones who embody helpers. In the case of Snow White, the helpers are the animals and dwarfs, and in the case of Cinderella, the helpers are also the animals, as well as her fairy godmother. Almost all the conversations are between the princesses and the animals. We claim that Disney, by giving the animals approximately the same amount of screen time as the princess, emphasises the unimportance of the female character as a lead in her own film.

Snow White's second important relationship is with the dwarfs. As already mentioned, she takes the role of their mother, thus she should be completely asexualised in their eyes. However, the dwarfs are easily manipulated by Snow White's beauty, which we interpret as indicating that even the dwarfs see her as a sexual object.

When it comes to Cinderella, unlike Snow White, her helper is a fairy godmother. Fairy godmothers are the only powerful female characters which do not possess an evil nature. In the case of *Cinderella*, the fairy godmother represents the archetype of the Spirit. The Spirit appears when a character is in a desperate situation, such as when Cinderella's stepmother denies her the access to the ball. Once more we are represented with a powerless princess who needs the force and powerfulness of others to achieve her goals.

The common relationship that both princesses have is with a prince, which again emphasises the androcentrism in the Disney princess films. Even though the prince's screen time indicates that he is a minor character, he is of a crucial importance as the salvation of the princess is completely dependent upon him. Furthermore, the power relation between the prince and the princess is evident in the way the prince approaches and behaves towards the princess. When Snow White meets the prince for the first time, she is frightened of him as he invades her personal space. In *Cinderella*, the prince does not tolerate the princess' decision to leave the ball and he continues to physically prevent her from leaving by holding her hands. Such behaviour emanates from patriarchy and its belief that men are entitled to a woman's body.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Based on the aspects that have been highlighted through this section, we can conclude that the princesses' character is stagnant. Neither Snow White or Cinderella fight to achieve a change in their lives, but are pushed in that direction by the help of others such as the animals, the dwarfs, and the fairy godmother. Both stories depict an androcentric society because everything revolves around the prince, the man. We believe that the princesses do not have to develop or learn new talents to make their wish of marrying come true, but achieve this through their beauty and the help they receive. As a conclusion, Snow White and Cinderella are flat and static characters. Their flatness is caused by possessing fewer personality traits, as they do not need to possess any additional qualities. The beauty is of the sole importance to them because that is what the man, and the one with the power, evaluates them on. The stagnancy of their character is a result of their passivity and the man being the one who actively influences the course of the story.

### **4.3. The Renaissance Princesses**

This section focuses on the films *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Mulan* (1998) which fit in the same category as they take place in the renaissance era. However, the two princesses do not have similar plots, and they differ from one another in both character and appearance.

Despite that, neither one of them is depicted as the perfect princess (hence woman), and both of them defy patriarchy and male power to some extent.

### **Storyline and Conflict**

The conflict and storyline are relevant to analyse as they reveal an underlying androcentric and patriarchal ideology. In both cases, a conflict arises because the ambitions of the princesses do not match their father's expectations and the expectations of society, such as the appropriate gender behaviour for the princesses.

Due to Ariel being a mermaid, she is fascinated with humans and the human world as it is foreign to her. Because of that, she often disobeys her father's order to not come to the surface, and even though she is under constant watch of the servant Sebastian, it does not prevent the main conflict of the story. When we look into the history of women's oppression, the need to control the woman by a male figure is evident (de Beauvoir in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 29). In the case of Ariel, Disney continues in the tradition of limiting the freedom it gives to the princess. Therefore, we can observe a visible preservation of the stereotype which involves male dominance exercised through the control of women, which is typical within a patriarchal society.

The conflict is triggered by the evil witch Ursula whose goal is to overthrow king Triton, Ariel's father. Ariel is, in her naivety, manipulated by Ursula to sign the deal which grants Ariel's wish to get legs in exchange for her voice. Ariel has always been dazzled by the human world, but the thought of leaving the sea and changing her body permanently has never occurred until she sees the prince, Eric. This implies that it is natural to leave your home and change yourself drastically in order to get a man and get married. We consider this a strong message that is sent to the audience; namely that young girls may assume that it is natural and acceptable to change themselves for the sake of the man.

In the case of the film *Mulan*, we are introduced to a Chinese girl from a good, yet non-royal family in ancient China. Mulan belongs to the minority group of princesses that were not born as royals, and she is the only non-royal princess who does not get married at the end of the film. Perhaps because of that, Mulan is also one of the two princesses who gets a sequel to the first film, the other being Pocahontas (1998). Both Mulan and Pocahontas gets married in the second film, which clearly indicates the need for marriage of a Disney princess. Here we encounter a preservation of yet another stereotype, which is also discussed by some feminist theorists suggesting that a woman needs a man, while on the other hand, a man does not need a woman (De Beauvoir in Cudd & Andreasen 2005: 29). This tradition is deeply rooted in the

patriarchal system and, as is evident from this and many other examples, continues to be seen through the stereotypes presented in the Disney films. This indicates that the majority of Disney films end with marriage of the princess thus insinuating that marriage is crucial for her social status and is expected in a patriarchal society.

Mulan is an only child, same as 82% of the Disney princesses, however, she has both parents, which is quite unique as most of the princesses are either orphans or have only one parent - the father. We interpreted in two ways: firstly, Disney is implying importance of the father over the mother, which also stems from a patriarchal ideology. Secondly, the suggestion that a woman cannot take care of herself and her child on her own implies a mother's dispensability. Therefore, we are often presented with a dead or missing mother in Disney's films. By contrast, the father, if the princess is not an orphan, is always present.

In *Mulan* a patriarchal hierarchy is very prominent; this is justified by the fact that Mulan's father has the traditional role in the family and therefore makes all the decisions. The hierarchy is further intensified when young girls are expected to marry and consequently get under the influence of another man; which in this case will be her husband. The importance of marriage is undeniable, since Mulan is going through a thorough beauty makeover in order to increase her chances of finding a man. By achieving this expectation, she will bring honour to her family and by extension her father. This mind-set depicts marriage as an obligation and a stipulation for women in order to preserve the traditions and the patriarchal order.

The foundation of the conflict in the film is based on the Huns invading China, which results in Mulan taking her father's place in the Chinese army, as he is too old to participate and she worries for his safety. The main conflict thus arises when Mulan starts pretending to be a man and enrolls in the army, challenging the traditional gender roles. All the power she obtains within the troop is based on her pretence of being a man. Here we see a clash within the Disney narrative as it characterises Mulan as a strong, independent woman, yet she is only respected for it as long as she stays within the act of being a man. We claim that Disney creates a strong narrative around Mulan, but all her power is taken away once her sex is revealed. Therefore, we believe that Mulan's biggest battle is not with the Huns, but with the patriarchal system that prevents her from being who she really is.

### **Personality and Development**

We see this section as important to analyse because both Ariel and Mulan challenge patriarchy and undergo a rebirthing episode which changes their lives profoundly. However, at

the end they accept the superiority of men and both return to the traditional role of a woman; a wife and a mother.

Everything that happens to Ariel is a coincidence, good luck, or a result of other's actions; a stereotype promoting the image of women being completely unable to participate actively in forming their own lives. She remains passive in everything she does with only one exception, and that is when she saves Eric from drowning. We could label this action as Ariel's only active deed. Otherwise, she continues to be nothing more than a decoration. Thus, once again, we can interpret this as Disney's way of promoting women's passivity, as well as their objectification.

Furthermore, Ariel shows indications of undergoing rebirth in the sense of having a profound change in her life (Jung, 1986: 47). In her case, the rebirth is permanent as she stops being a mermaid and she marries Eric. However, we could argue whether this change can be considered as an improvement, as Ariel leaves everything she has because of a man. Ariel's rebirth is based on Eric, which further demonstrates the presence of an androcentric society.

The same passivity enforced upon Ariel can be observed in the case of Mulan. She possesses many of the inappropriate and undesirable features for a woman living in ancient China; she is clumsy, lacks elegance, and the worst of all - speaks her mind. In many occasions, Mulan is expected to bow to men. However, as Mulan is custom to speaking her mind in front of her father, it outrages the other men present which results in their disapproving response: "You will do well to teach your daughter to hold tongue in men's presence" (*Mulan*, 00:15:40). This is yet another example of a stereotype being supported by the Disney films, as it is promoting the idea that women should be silent, especially in the presence of men. Despite this passivity being enforced by the surrounding society, she is still an active and outspoken character. Thus, Mulan is attempting to fight against the gender roles presented in the film. However, she does not seem to do it intentionally but it rather seems to be a part of who she is. Thus, we argue that Disney has created an active princess, though it is only prior to her experiencing the power of being a man that she is unintentionally opposing the patriarchy that is present in her society. Whereas after her exposure to men's opportunities and power she realises the inequality between the sexes and attempts to intentionally break the patriarchal hierarchy.

It is worth noting that her character development happens because she is pretending to be a man, therefore having the opportunities a man has, which in turn implies that as a woman she would not be able to achieve the same development. This can be supported by the fact that when she is coming back to her home, she returns to the expectation of her getting married and

following the path of the ideal woman. By doing so she will participate in the maintenance of the status quo. What is meant by status quo here is, according to Burr, the matrimonial union of a heterosexual family which is a central component of a capitalist economy. Everything that deviates from this pattern is perceived as a threat (Burr, 1996: 74).

### **Appearance**

Just like the original princesses, much focus is put upon Ariel's and Mulan's looks, and both undergo the process of infantilisation and sexualisation to further diminish their power. Disney's representation of the princesses creates a certain picture of the ideal woman. Ariel's visage corresponds to the typical appearance that the majority of Disney princesses have. She has white skin; in total 64% of princesses are white females, the remaining 36% are princesses of different skin colour and ethnicity - Indian, Asian, Arabic, and Afro-American. Each of the minority ethnicities is represented by only one princess. In this way, Disney is demonstrating its idea of diversity, representing the white females as the ideal women, while the other ethnicities become unique cases.

Furthermore, the age of the princesses might seem unimportant, but the opposite is true. Ariel is 16 years old, therefore she belongs to the youngest group represented in total by 54% of the princesses in the age 14-16 (Koski, 2015). When we look into the genre of fairy tales we will find that the main character is often a child. Portraying a princess who is in between two stages - child and adult - serves very well one purpose; Disney can attribute children's traits to women. In this way, women are represented as infantile and thus unable to take care of themselves. In other words, all the real power is taken away from them, because as foolish as it is to give power to a child, it is more foolish to give it to a woman. However, Disney, through sexualisation, finds a way to give the princess *a* power without giving her *the* power.

As long as the princess is sexually attractive, she possesses a power. We can see that beauty is all the princess needs to find a man. In the case of Ariel, the importance of beauty applies even more, as she is mute the whole time she spends with Eric. The message Disney, perhaps unintentionally, sends to the audience might be overheard by some people, but from a feminist point of view it is sound and clear: woman's strongest power is her beauty, she does not have to speak to get a man and, perhaps, it is even better that way.

As for Ariel's facial characteristics, we can see traits visible in children: a small face, tiny nose and abnormally big eyes, which is typical for Disney characters. Paradoxically though, their bodies do not resemble children at all. The princesses are very petite, but they already have attributes symbolising female fertility: breasts, minuscule waist, and broad hips. We could

interpret this in two ways; firstly, we cannot deny the importance placed on fertility. Even though the princess is barely an adult, her body already implies the ability to bear children. Without this ability, her main purpose - giving birth - vanishes. Therefore, if the very reason for her existence is absent, she becomes useless. Secondly, Disney supports the idealisation of female appearance that imposes impossible demands upon women's looks. Furthermore, with facial features of a child and a body of an adult woman, Disney is sexualising children which is in itself contradictory, as they are supposed to be un-sexualisable. The sexualisation is enhanced by the princess' clothes as well. For example, Ariel is dressed merely in a bra made of seashells, which could be considered as inappropriate in consideration of her age. An extreme example of the sexualisation of the Disney princesses is further demonstrated by the fact that they are often used as characters in pornography. This can be seen in numerous pornographic websites based upon the Disney films (DisneyPorno.net, DisneyPorn.com).

Mulan represents the minority group of princesses who do not have white skin colour. Her facial and bodily traits are almost identical to those possessed by white princesses, the only exception being her eyes. Mulan, thus, represents the features that Disney is fond of, without completely disregarding her background. Here, we can see how Disney recreates an archetype into a stereotype by promoting beauty ideals of the Western society, but not completely omitting important aspects of one's heritage.

Although a slim body has been a desired female standard from the late 20th century, Mulan submerges to standards of Ancient China. She is being shamed for being too skinny, and thus unable to bear sons. That demonstrates perfectly the undervaluation of female offspring, and the promotion of the stereotypical view on the woman, since the very purpose of having children is to bear male heirs. When looking back in history, we find that the arrival of a daughter often symbolised a great disappointment, especially if the male heir was needed (Hogdson, 2007: 58). Again, the underestimation of many roles of women, and women in general, is evident. According to the standards introduced in the film, a woman's purpose in life is to get married and bear children, while men provide for the family. Feminists criticise this division of the sexes because it focuses on women's ability to give birth, which takes away much of the woman's power and puts her in the role associated with nurturing (de Beauvoir in Cudd & Andreasen, 2005: 30).

In the beginning of the film Mulan is going through a grooming process, as a preparation for the matchmaking session. A notable aspect is the whitening of Mulan's face and how much excessive makeup she is required to wear. This is an indication of the view on femininity and how many expectations a woman has to fulfil in order to be accepted by society. These

expectations are imposed upon girls from a young age, including the notion of marriage. Worth mentioning is that Mulan's attire includes a dress which seems additionally restrictive. This attire is neither flexible nor practical, thus further ensuring passivity of women. We see the symbolic importance of the attire, where the trousers, hence menswear, is a symbol of privilege, to which women are not entitled to.

*Mulan* categorises women into two groups. The first one is being the acceptable gender role in the Chinese society; and by extension every society. This role requires the woman to marry and bear children while being passive and silent. By following these requirements, the woman is accepted and respected by society. If she refuses to follow these requirements she is immediately stigmatised as the second type; the "other" or, in other words, the abnormal and unacceptable (Hall, 2001: 258). Mulan wishes to be accepted which explains her desire and struggle to belong within her society. As Hall mentioned in his theory of stereotypes, the categorisation of people enforces inequalities, which explains why Mulan is looked down upon during the film. That is demonstrated in two scenes; first when she tries to warn people of danger, but is ignored. Second, when she attempts to talk to her father about the war and his response is: "I know my place, it's time you learn yours" (*Mulan*, 17:13). In both scenes, she is not treated as an equal simply because of her gender, which is more than evident in the statement: "She's a woman [Mulan], she'll never be worth anything" (*Mulan*, 1:15:34). As a result, her opinion is, the same as she, seen as inferior and thus completely ignored. We argue that this supports a patriarchal ideology where a woman is not allowed to speak her mind due to the man's superiority.

### **Activities**

Ariel and Mulan engage in more activities than Cinderella and Snow White, yet these activities do not empower the princesses. *The Little Mermaid* has a total footage of 80 minutes and Ariel appears in approximately half of the film. Ariel's first appearance is in the sixth minute, and she spends 11 minutes out of her screening time as mute. The other half of the film is dedicated either to male characters or to animals. It may seem peculiar that the, presumably, most important figure is performing only in 41 minutes out of 80. If we look into other Disney princess films, we will find that one half of the film dedicated to the princess is actually a norm. This phenomenon is often criticised by feminist film theorists who highlight the inequalities between men and women in films and the film industry in general. The amount of screening time, the number of men and women, but also the difference in activities which men and women



do in the films are just a few examples of a great number of critics towards uneven conditions in the film industry (Indiewire: *Gender Inequality in Film...*, 2013).

To provide a detailed idea about Ariel’s activities, we have created Diagram 3 with percentage representation of each activity. As we can see from the diagram, three activities take more than 57% of Ariel’s screening time. Firstly, being manipulated by Ursula (20.5%), secondly, doing the things her father has forbidden (20.1%), and thirdly, being scolded for her disobedience (17.3%). These three activities create another image about Ariel’s nature. Disney creates several pictures of women. The first being that women are easily manipulated, thus not eligible to handle power. The second being that women cannot be trusted with following set rules, and therefore have to be constantly controlled, and the third being that women have to be reminded of their inappropriate behaviour. It is evident from this that a systematic infantilisation of women is present.

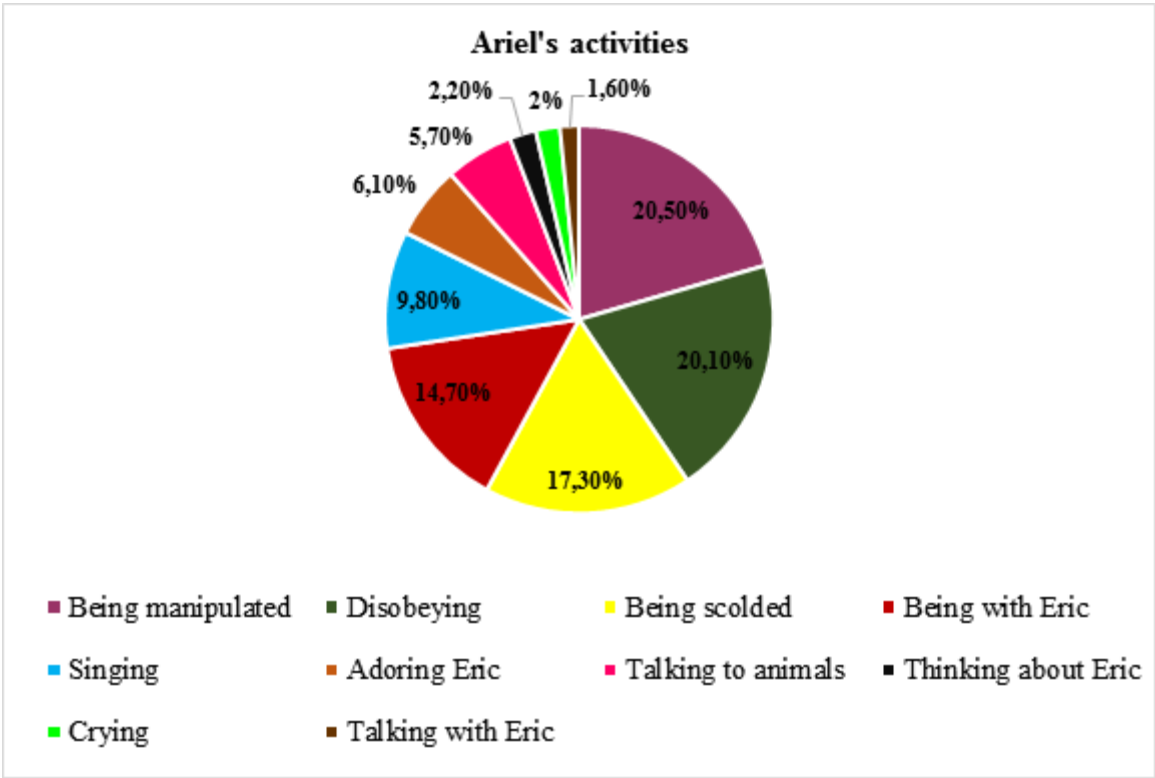


Diagram 3

The duration of *Mulan* is 81 minutes in which Mulan appears for 35 minutes in total. She is similar to the other princesses in the sense that the little amount of time that she spends as a woman, she spends on domestic activities. However, as her male alias Ping she does not engage in any form of housework, further enforcing gender roles.

Unlike the other princesses, Mulan’s first appearance on screen is showing her studying. The unlikeness of that scene lies in the fact that Disney seldom mentions a princess’ education, although Mulan is indeed studying for an exam; an exam at the matchmaker’s who tests her abilities to act as a proper woman and wife. The little amount of attention that Disney pays to princesses’ education exemplifies the strong presence of a patriarchal system, as well as the androcentric society as the princess is only being educated to be a good wife to her husband.

While disguised as Ping she spends a fair amount of time either training to be a soldier (10.1%) or participating in a battle or any other form of fighting (13.9%). That is a striking difference from other princesses who act carefully and appear as gentle characters. Mulan is indeed more ambiguous and ‘flawed’ than the other princesses. Although, the issue of the film does not lie in Mulan being a not relatable character, but more on the fact that Mulan’s course in the film is succeeded by the mere fact that she is given male privileges.

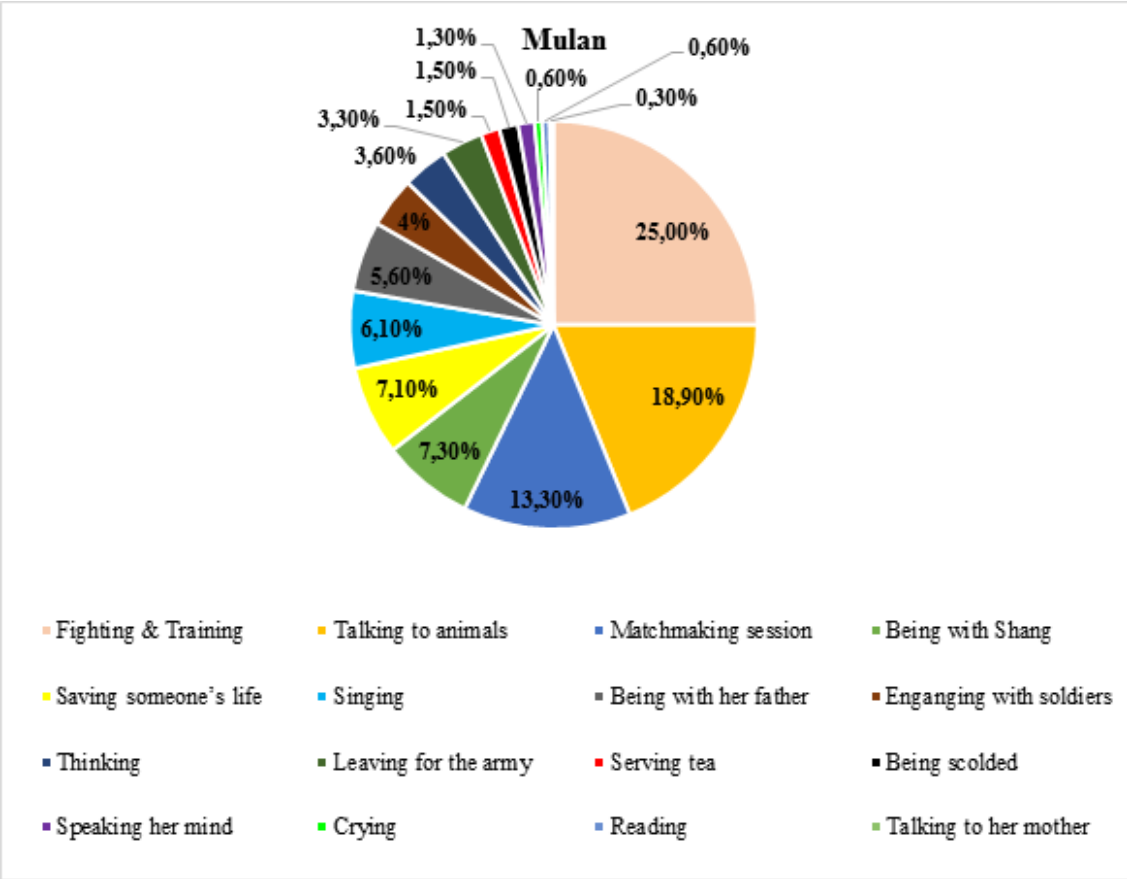


Diagram 4

It is important to point out that even though it appears as Mulan undergoes rebirth, it is not rebirth as such, because the change in Mulan’s life vanishes once she is forced to leave the army. Furthermore, Mulan appears to be empowering and liberating for women, but it is our

claim that essentially she is not. Mulan is only liberated because she is perceived and treated as a man, thus experiencing the privileges that men experience in a patriarchal society. As a man she has the power to speak her mind and be respected. As soon as her identity is revealed, she loses all of her privileges, including her voice. This is clearly demonstrated when Mulan tries to warn people that the Huns are attacking and everyone chooses to shrug her off and ignore her; interestingly enough those who ignore her are men. When she is frustrated and points out to Mushu that no one will listen, his answer is: “Hey, you’re a girl again, remember?” (*Mulan*, 1:08:27). For him it makes sense that as a woman her opinion holds no power or interest. The same point is demonstrated when Mulan tries to warn the young captain Shang, resulting in his rejection of her advice. She challenges him by questioning him: “You said you trusted Ping; why is Mulan any different?” (*Mulan*. 1:07:00). In this scene she challenges the notion that a woman is inferior to a man, thus representing a feminist mind-set. We can therefore argue that Disney emphasises that men have opportunities women do not, and by extension enforces gender inequalities and supports the male privilege.

### **Relationships**

The absence of the mother is a typical trait within the Disney princess films, as is evident both in *The Little Mermaid* and the original princess films. This can be said to derive from the fact that there is no importance attached to the mother-daughter relationship, as well as too little figurations by which women can represent themselves (Haas in Bell et. al., 1995: 196). This is clearly illustrated by the few roles that women in fairy tales undertake: the powerfully evil such as the stepmothers, the generously good such as the fairy godmothers, the silent other such as the princesses themselves, or the absence of the mother as seen by the princesses’ biological mothers (Haas in Bell et. al., 1995: 196). Thus, mothers and their work are both devalued and erased through their absence, and this affects the picture of women in general because it reduces the quality and personality of the woman. However, even with the absence of the mother, the princesses are often accompanied by figures embodying the traits of the Mother archetype. The companion’s main role is to protect and advise the princess, and that is exactly what the crab Sebastian and the dragon Mushu do. It is ironic how Mulan is one of the few Disney princesses whose mother is present, and despite that, the role is taken over by a small dragon, which is an indication of diminishing the role of the real mother within the film. We argue that by replacing the mother figure with a male character, Disney is further demonstrating the presence of androcentrism.

The relationship with Eric is the crucial one, as Eric is the force standing behind every decision Ariel makes. However, we cannot omit to mention that the relationship between them is the one least developed, and Ariel's actions are driven more by her dreams and fantasy than by reality. The relationship starts with Ariel falling in love with Eric's looks and Eric with Ariel's voice, which might sound as immature and superficial, on the other hand, sexual attraction is based on superficial standards. This way, it might seem as if Disney allows its princesses to have sexuality. However, in our opinion, Disney is merely promoting the stereotype of love at first sight, which is represented in completely assexualized way. We believe that reproducing such stereotypical norms in films leads to the formation of women's sexuality, as they feel they have to adapt to what is presented as a social standard. Furthermore, we cannot forget to mention that the standards for women's sexuality are set by men, which again encourages the androcentric society.

Another interesting point in Ariel's relationship with Eric is the fact that she is voiceless for most of the time they spend together. Through that, Disney is sending another hidden message which says that there is no need for women sharing their opinions, and no need for hearing them, from the male perspective. In other words, having a voice does not play a role in getting married, as long as the woman is beautiful. If we look into other Disney princess films, we will find that most of the princesses who do get married in the end of the film (73% of them), do not know their future husbands at all, which further emphasises the superficial relationship.

Women's insignificance is also demonstrated in *Mulan*, for example in Mulan's relationship with her father. Mulan's personality conflicts with her father's wish to stay the patriarch and leader of the family, which puts a strain on their relationship. It starts with Mulan's interference and attempt to defend her father while he receives the emperor's order. This scene shows the true character of Mulan, and simultaneously the way society views the role of the woman. Mulan is seen as silly, and the emperor's council reprimands Mulan's father for not being able to control his daughter, and does not address Mulan directly. Her father is also expected by society to uphold the traditional gender roles. She is scolded by her father when attempting to express her opinion regarding his participation in the war, where instead of being heard she is told to learn her place. This is clearly an example of gender inequality that is heightened by the fact that her mother and grandmother are passive during the argument, which emphasises the insignificance and passivity of women.

In Mulan's case there is no prince but a male presence, as expected, could not be omitted. That male is Li Shang, who has the role of the captain in the army and by extension is in charge of Mulan and the rest of the soldiers. In the beginning of the training process Mulan is clearly

failing and by doing so receiving the disapproval of Shang. As soon as she becomes a better soldier and saves Shang's life in the battle, she gains his respect and trust. Their relationship is shattered as soon as her identity is revealed and is only repaired after she has saved the emperor. Statistically, Mulan is one of the few princesses who is not married by the end of the film, although that can be deceiving. After her reunion with her father, her grandmother states unimpressed: "Great, she brings home a sword. If you ask me she should've brought a man" (1:19:59). Mulan saved the emperor and China but her accomplishments are not impressive until Shang appears at her household. Somehow it can be said that the day was once again saved by the 'prince'. This demonstrates the presence of androcentrism, as the woman's accomplishments are annihilated if she has not found a man.

Disney is a form of discourse which promotes certain truths that lastly become the norm. The truths that are promoted throughout the film are that women should be silent, obedient, get married, and not try to challenge the man. Mulan is often put in place and has been humiliated by the matchmaker and the emperor's council. Only one time was she defended in regards to insults and that happened to be when the emperor's council challenged her worth: "That creature is not worth protecting" (*Mulan*, 1:15:31) and "She's a woman; she will never be worth anything" (*Mulan*, 1:15:36). Despite the fact that Shang defends her in the specific situation, it is not the case for the rest of the occasions. Not even her mother and grandmother attempt to defend her in front of her father although it is apparent that they do not agree with the way he speaks to Mulan. By subjecting the audience to this kind of behaviour towards women, the idea that it is right to do so is promoted. From a social constructionist point of view this behaviour towards women is constructed as 'truth' and therefore becomes part of the social norm (Burr, 1995: 48).

### **Concluding Remarks**

While the Disney princesses of the renaissance era show more personality traits, there still seems to be strict gender norms set for both princesses. Ariel is adventurous, yet her father wishes that she becomes more like her sisters and acts appropriately for her gender and status. The same goes for Mulan, who experiences a great amount of resistance from the people around her because she does not act in the typical way for a woman.

The films still depict an androcentric society, as the focus from all the characters surrounding the two princesses is upon finding a man. For Ariel, Eric becomes the center of her world and she is willing to give up on everything to be with him. Both princesses return to the traditional gender roles as the men are the ones who control the course of the story. Even with

Mulan being a very active character, it is the fact that only when she pretends to be a man she is capable of breaking free from the restrictions enforced by gender roles. As a result, the princesses remain flat and static characters; Ariel has fewer personality traits, as well as almost no development within her character. Mulan undeniably has a more complex personality but her evolvment comes only from her pretence of being a man.

Furthermore, we can see that a patriarchal system is being enforced and maintained by many of the characters surrounding the princesses, thus leading them into the traditional gender roles that restrict the female sex.

#### **4.4. The Modern Princesses**

Two of the modern princesses are Merida from *Brave* (2012) and Rapunzel from *Tangled* (2010). Both storylines revolve around a mother-daughter relationship. In *Brave*, the relationship is represented in a positive way between a princess and her birth mother who have a problem in understanding each other. This conflict stems from the stereotypical assumption that every teenager rebels against their parents. *Tangled* revolves around a relationship between a princess and her abductor, a stepmother. Hence, the stereotype of an evil stepmother still prevails in the newer Disney princess films.

#### **Storyline and Conflict**

The storyline and conflict in *Brave* depicts Merida in the beginning of the film as a strong and independent young woman, but as the story progresses she is forced take on passive and submissive characteristics, which are present in both the renaissance and the original Disney princesses. The conflict revolves around Merida's disagreement with the norms of society. She does not wish to marry and thus challenges the traditional gender role of the princess.

It is what comes with the marriage that Merida strongly dislikes, as it means that she must take on a different role; that of a queen. Once she is married, she will be restricted and will not be able to do the things that she loves because they are not fit for a queen. Instead, she must do the same things as her mother, which involves taking care of the king's needs and looking and behaving ladylike. This forced marriage is an indication of taking power away from women, and through rebellion against the marriage, Merida exerts a certain amount of power. However, after her successful rejection of marriage she is again placed in a position of a powerless child. This position stems from the fact that even though Merida avoided marriage and thus obeying her potential husband, she is still obliged to obey her parents. We can interpret

that, in this way, Disney is denying Merida power by not giving her a choice of freedom. This supports the fact that a princess always ends up being controlled, either by her husband or by her parents, no matter what choice she makes.

The conflict ends when both Merida and her mother realise their wrong doings as they gain a better understanding of one another, and that leads to a reparation of their relationship. Furthermore, the relationship is repaired only after Merida sews the fabric, consisting of an image of their family, together, which she tore with her sword in the act of rebellion. We observe here that only with her acquiring a new ‘womanly’ skill, sewing, is she able to mend the bond she has with her mother. This indicates that her growth comes from behaving as is socially acceptable for a woman, changing towards being more obedient, gentle, and silent. We argue that Disney is once again promoting the enforcement of gender roles, as Merida shapes her personality in accordance to the standards of society. This is clearly illustrated through the progression of the story, as Merida in the beginning of the film is depicted as strong and independent, while she is forced to take on passive and submissive characteristics later on.

The storyline and conflict of *Tangled* revolves, like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Cinderella*, around beauty and the means women will use to obtain it. The conflict arises with the antagonist’s wish for eternal youth and beauty which is so strong that it extends to the extreme and results in the abduction of a child. In our opinion, Disney is representing women as willing to do anything to reach the beauty standards of society. In this particular case, the portrayal of an aging woman is taken to the extreme by implying the loss of sanity when it comes to the fading beauty. The antagonist of *Tangled* is similar to the one of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* because both women are represented as irrational and obsessive about permanently preserving their youth.

Furthermore, our contention is that the tradition of princesses always waiting to be saved by a man enhances the obviousness of the support of a patriarchal system. For example, Rapunzel is saved twice by a man during the film, and even though he is a thief who employs unethical methods, he is still perceived as the hero of the story. It is our claim that only the man has the ability to take the power away from the antagonist and thus liberate the princess, which gives men additional power over women because they are the ones controlling their fate.

## **Activities**

Merida’s activities are represented in a way which indicate the power of her character, however, by the end of the film her power is reduced and the character returns to the role of a child.

Merida's main activities are practicing with a bow and arrow, and riding her horse (labelled as "Being by herself" in the Diagram 5, see below). Acquiring these skills is yet another characteristic of the resistance to the mother archetype, as Merida masters these abilities to create a sphere of interest for which her mother is not skilled. Attaining these skills is what makes Merida's character look powerful, however, these skills are an insignificant source of power and thus she remains weak.

Furthermore, the complete lack of power in making decisions stems from the fact that she is a child. Yet it does not prevent her from being, from a societal point of view, ready for marriage. In other words, all of her power stems from miniature acts of rebellion against the societal norms, but the real weakness is shown in that without a man, she is nothing. As mentioned before, Merida remains a child, who is growing as her disobedience is reduced and shaping into what is socially acceptable for girls. Namely, she is allowed to remain a tomboy in some aspects, but is lectured to change in others. In this way we observe a latent manifestation of the advocacy of gender roles, as Merida is moulded to fit into the stereotypical gender role.

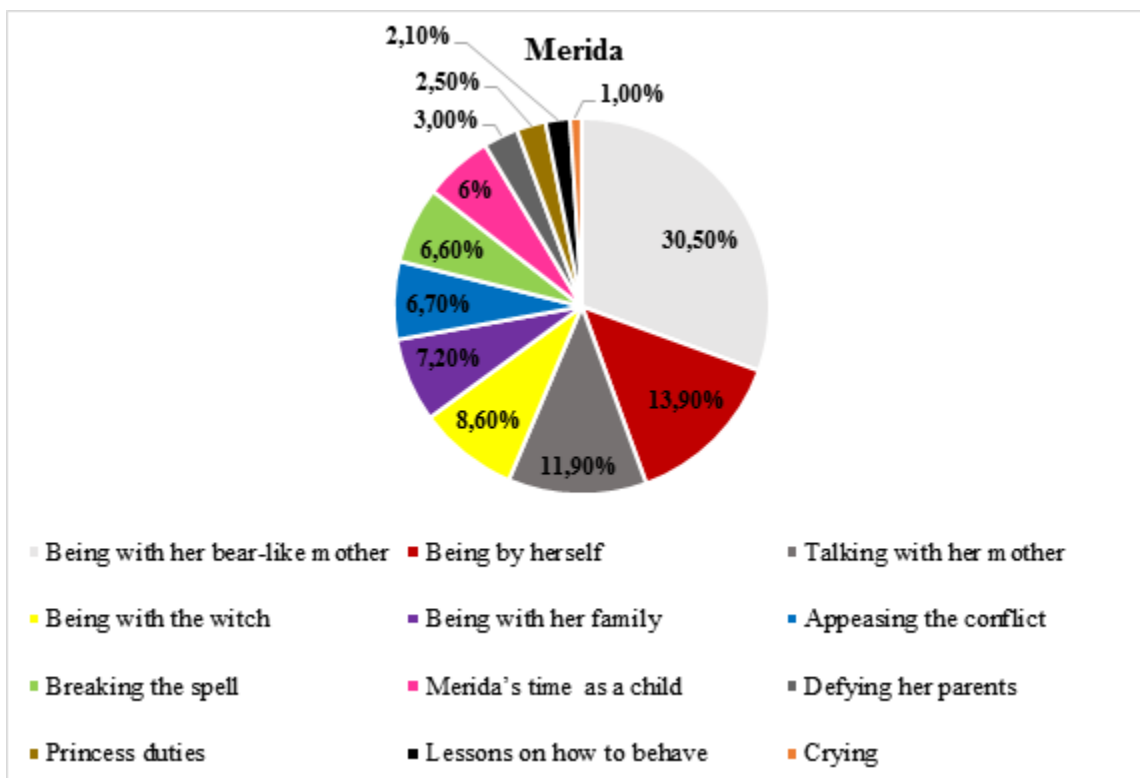


Diagram 5

Merida's purpose, while it is not finding a man, is non-existent. By the end of the story, she does not find a man, but nor does she find another ambition in life; she merely stays a child. We argue that this indicates that while Disney is attempting to create a powerful female role



with the implementation of minor aspects of power and more physical activity, it remains a fragment of what an empowering female role should look like based on feminist ideals.

As the key aspect of *Brave* is the mother-daughter relationship, it is no surprise Merida spends approximately 45% of her screen time in the company of her mother Elinor. Beside the time which Elinor spends as a bear, their time together is filled with arguing, admonition, and Elinor's effort to discipline Merida. We observe here that Elinor accepts and embraces the patriarchal limitations on women, while Merida is still defying them. However, Merida, by the end of the film, she begins to accept the gender roles that are being imposed on her. We view this as a return to a submissive role a woman has stereotypically always embodied.

It is our assumption that while Rapunzel is more active than the original princesses, she is still not the main engine which drives the story forward. The advancement of the story still remains dependent upon a man, which also insinuates an androcentric society.

Rapunzel appears to be very active throughout the film, for example she uses her hair to move around places and she hits the intruder with a cooking pan which indicates her ability to defend and take care of herself. Furthermore, she is able to make peace among men in a pub by singing to and with them. In other words, she seems to have some powerful aspects, however, the real power lies with the man without whom she would have never left the tower in the first place.

The film itself is attempting to shatter stereotypes by, for example, creating an extremely large male character who ends up singing and playing with unicorn figures. However, the main stereotype remains, and that is that a woman always marries the man who saves her because she would otherwise be powerless without him. We believe that it is still the male figure who plays the active part as it is him who saves Rapunzel from the evil stepmother by making a decision and cutting off her hair, thus freeing her from the stepmother. At the same time, the act further reduces Rapunzel's power, as her hair loses its magic, the only powerful aspect of her character.

As is evident from Diagram 6 (see on the next page), one half of Rapunzel's screen time is spent in the company of Flynn; a quite unique trait for Disney films, as usually the princesses spend very limited time with their male saviours. However, the question who is the most important character in *Tangled* arises, as Flynn actually gets more screen time than Rapunzel. That again leads us to the conclusion that the Disney princesses, although proclaimed to be the film's leads, are actually secondary participants within the plot.

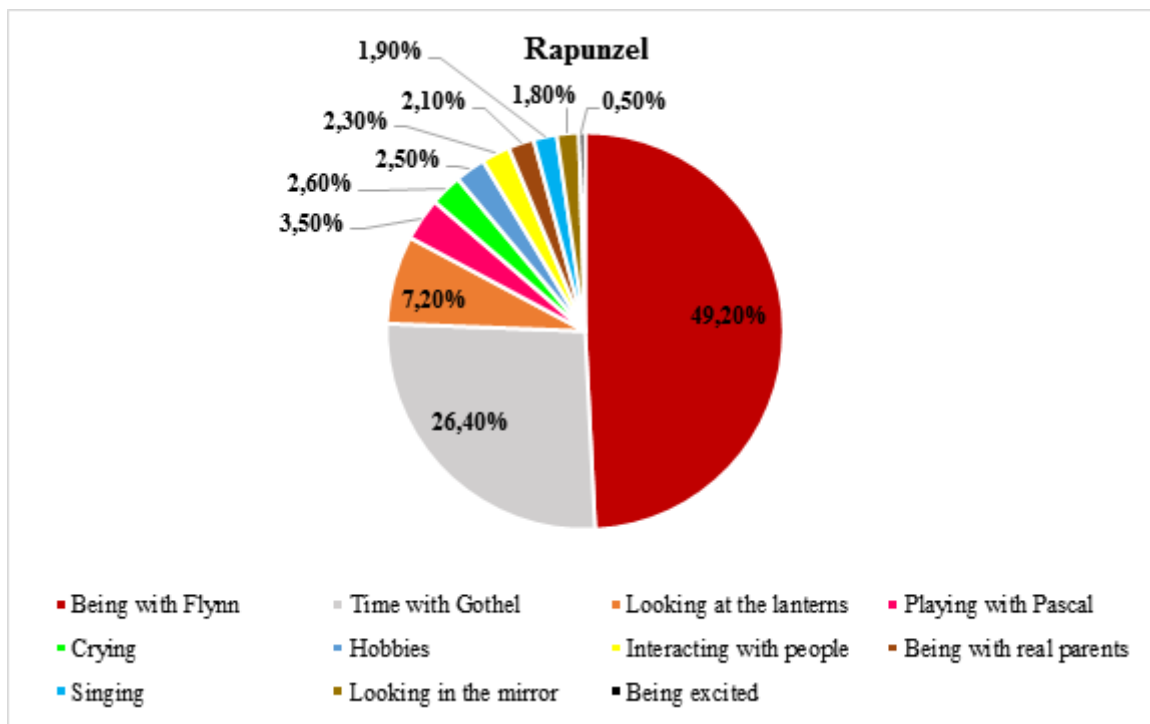


Diagram 6

If we skip Rapunzel’s time with her stepmother, which was mostly spent talking, the next biggest activity is connected to Rapunzel’s fascination with the lanterns. Seeing the lanterns with her own eyes is her biggest ambition and she spends a great amount of time daydreaming about them. However, she makes no effort to fulfil that ambition until she secures a man’s protection. Thus, we encounter once again Disney’s emphasis upon the passivity of the princesses. We can conclude from this that the princesses typically do not influence the progression of the story, instead, they remain static until either the antagonist or the man step in.

To summarise, although Rapunzel seems to be an active character, she is not transgressive like some of the men represented in the film, she is actually rather passive. If the male character was to be taken out of the film, chances are that Rapunzel would never have left the castle due to lack of courage and support from an outside source. Thus, we affirm that while she is not as passive as the original princesses, it is still the man’s actions that make the story progress.

## **Relationships**

The mother-daughter relationship is the biggest motif in *Brave*. It is the mother who embodies a patriarchal ideology and attempts to make Merida fit the typical role of a princess. In the case of *Tangled*, it is the relationship with Flynn, the male character, that makes it possible for Rapunzel to reach her goal and experience happiness. Thus, the relationships that the princesses have play a crucial role in their future.

Merida has a strong bond with her father, Fergus, as they are very similar in their ways; Merida, like her father, does not care about proper attire and appropriate manners, but would rather ride her horse and practice her archery skills. Furthermore, Fergus, while still giving importance to marriage, is not overly concerned with Merida's rebellion against it. While her mother, Elinor has a specific idea about how a princess behaves, how she looks, and whom she marries which stems from tradition and social order set by a patriarchal ideology. These ideas contradict with those of Merida, which results in their conflict. Elinor believes that a princess should not use weapons or ride horses, but that she should be gentle, striving for perfection in both her appearance as well as her behaviour. We believe that Disney is challenging this view, at least superficially, by creating Merida who opposes the gender roles through her character and behaviour.

Putting it very bluntly, the relationship Merida has with her parents consists of an interplay of 'bad cop' – 'good cop' dispute, where her mother is portrayed as a 'bad cop' by forcing her to marry, while her father is represented as being a 'good cop' by not being too harsh on Merida for her refusal. Hence, we argue that a woman is once again represented as a negative character, from which the conflict arises.

Rapunzel's relationship with Flynn exemplifies androcentrism, as once she meets him her whole world starts revolving around him. This once again gives the impression that the man plays an indispensable part in a woman's life. Furthermore, we claim that Disney returns to the stereotype present within the plots of original princesses, where the man plays the central role.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Merida seems to be developing, however, in the end, she still remains a flat character. Her character can be seen as being superficial, as her only ambition is to avoid marriage and not become like her mother. Therefore, she remains a simple child. Nevertheless, her growth and development can be seen in ending the rebellion phase after the realisation that her mother is not the enemy. This may seem paradoxical as Disney is attempting to represent Merida as a princess that is breaking the gender norms. Yet in the end, the newly restored relationship with

her mother causes her to change into an obedient and gentle character, which we believe is the stereotypical gender norm within the Disney princess films.

Rapunzel exhibits rebirth both when her hair gets cut off, as well as when she returns to her real parents and becomes a princess. Both are achieved with the help of Flynn, as he helps prevent her victimisation. Therefore, it is only through the help of a man that she is able to develop and grow. A man, in this case, is therefore a crucial part of the progression she achieves in her character, and Disney once again emphasises the importance of the man. This is supported even further by the fact that once a man enters her universe, he becomes the centre of it. Thus we argue that *Tangled* clearly exhibits traits of androcentrism and enhances the importance of a male character.

Both Merida and Rapunzel are represented as powerless, without being able to decide the direction of their lives. The main difference in their lack of power is that Merida is attempting to change it, while Rapunzel is passively waiting for a solution: a man to rescue her.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

While the Disney princesses are from different time periods, similarities between them can still be seen once the stories are analysed. We argue that these similarities constitute the archetype of the Disney princess, as they are traits that have persisted over many years.

In all of the cases, is it an androcentric ideology that dominates the society the Disney princesses are a part of. Many of the princesses themselves see the man, who often is a prince and the saviour at the same time, as the most important aspect of their lives. Moreover, it is the man or a female antagonist that make the story progress and ultimately decide the future of the princess, who remains powerless. Furthermore, the people surrounding them enforce a patriarchal system where a man is of utmost importance and the one element a woman should strive to find in order to get married. This pressure from their surroundings is illustrated in both *Mulan* and *Brave*, where their achievements are overlooked because they do not correspond with the traditional gender norms.

The obsession over getting married is another trait of the Disney Princess archetype. In patriarchy, a married woman takes on the role of the housekeeper and caregiver, which often results in annihilation of her power, as well as in her domestication. We argue that marriage serves as an efficient tool in eliminating a woman's influence in society, as her role is seen as being a nurturer. At the moment, only one of the Disney princesses did not get married at the end of the film. Therefore, we claim that Disney is presenting marriage as a necessity for women.

Another trait of the Disney princess archetype is the sexualised yet infantilised appearance and personality. This trait is defined by combining features and characteristics of young children together with the bodies of grown women. Through that, Disney creates a female figure whose body is showing signs of sexual maturity, thus being able to conceive. However, her behaviour and mental maturity is on the same level as that of a child. This representation can lead to the impression that physically grown women are mentally immature, and thus dependent on a male figure. Therefore, we believe the archetype of the Disney princess consists of two opposite forces, as the princesses are represented as sexually attractive children.

## 5. Discussion

As it can be seen from the analysis, the characteristics of the Disney princesses, which make up the archetype, conflict with the feminist ideology in many different areas. So *why is the archetype of the Disney princess socially acceptable?*

Feminist film theorists argue that films have catered for men for many years and still are catering for them to some extent. If one follows Laura Mulvey's idea that the gaze of the film recipients is male, which can be derived from the idea that the structure of today's society is androcentric, then the characters in most films are shaped in such a way that they are pleasing to men's gaze. As such, we claim that this understanding of men as the dominant figure has forced women into roles that reduce certain qualities, such as intelligence, competence, or personality and amplify others to conform to men's expectations and desires. The looks of women have, in this case, received most of the focus, and that has resulted in a superficial depiction of women based on men's ideals of beauty. This is clearly illustrated in the Disney princess films, where it is the beauty of all the princesses that the prince notices, and is even further supported by the fact that they rarely have time to get to know each other before declaring their love. It is our contention that the representation of women, as given through the archetype of the Disney princess, has not been challenged or received much scepticism because the shallow representation of women in film is ingrained in today's society and can be seen as a part of the norm.

Furthermore, archetypes are built up over a long period of time and they are not easily diminished once they are formed. They become truths within society and they are perceived as the norm. Therefore, they remain subtle and almost hidden because we get used to them, and we do not question them or what they represent. Thus, the form of the Disney princess remains

as an acceptable figure because it has received the status of an archetype and therefore is not questioned in its character. Combined with Disney's power and the positive reputation that it possesses, we believe that the archetype of the Disney princess becomes difficult to challenge and criticise. Disney has been known for its innocence and continues to present this image of itself, which further serves to negate any criticism aimed towards it (Giroux in Bell et al., 1995: 45).

The archetype that is embodied within the Disney princess promotes the stereotypes of women being passive and inferior to their male counterparts. These stereotypes are conflicting with the modern idea of women being viewed as more active and independent members of society, especially in contrast to the passivity and dependency upon men seen both within the pre-feminist era, as well as within the archetype of the Disney princesses. This stereotyping of women from the Disney princess archetype may not seem to pose a threat for the norms of present in modern society, but as Cook and Cusack (2010) claim, there is a tendency for individuals to follow stereotypes. We affirm this as it is evidently possible for the archetype of the Disney princess to affect the view of women in modern society. One of the main issues of portraying women as the Disney princess archetype, is the popularity of these films, which ensures a broad and young audience that may perceive these ideals as the norm for their genders.

After a short research of the applied films, it was revealed that out of the 22 producers, 21 are male. All the films we have investigated in this project, except *Brave*, were produced by men. This fact supports the idea that the princess archetype, which exists in the films, is in fact the idea of how women should behave and look like according to the male population. We claim that it is contradicting that a genre which is most popular among young girls is mostly controlled by men, whose perception of women will be passed on the girls and undeniably affect them.

The mere fact that only men essentially are in charge of the chosen Disney films is an enforcement of another stereotype diminishing women. As only one woman is a part of the production of the chosen Disney films, we can safely assume that the number of women in film production is significantly lower. Furthermore, this piece of information can inspire a critical stance towards the Disney films. As mentioned previously, they are essentially directed towards a female audience which can indicate a need of a female perspective throughout the films. This is evidently challenging when female producers are not prominent in this particular domain.

As it was discussed in the theory section, possessing power can indicate various definitions, but most importantly it can be shown through defining others. The producers of the films create an abundance of examples regarding women that will, in the future, be followed by the young audience. Their power is exerted by the fact that they create a template that young

girls will, unavoidably, follow. Roughly said, they influence an entire generation and by extension the course and state of society. It can be presumed that this is the reason for the reaction feminists have on the Disney films. They are directed towards young girls, but in reality, we believe they are intended to benefit the male gaze, meaning that when the young girls turn into young women they will subconsciously follow the ideals they were taught from the films they were fond of as children.

At the same time, we argue that some of the more contemporary Disney films attempt to create powerful women figures in their effort to disguise the presence of the archetype. As can be seen from the analysis, at first glance, the modern princesses depict a dose of individuation, with hints of embodying a strong female character. However, their power still either comes from their beauty, or is at the end taken away. In this way, Disney is superficially removing the archetype they greatly employed in their previous films, but without actually implementing any real change within them. What these actions seem to achieve is to mislead the audience that they are diminishing and changing the stereotypes of the current society, while we believe they simply push the stereotypes under the carpet, which can, unfortunately, be effortlessly lifted.

Thus, it is our contention that Disney may at first glance seem to empower women and comply with a feminist ideology in their newer films, but only succeed in doing so superficially. They give the princess' character just enough power on the surface to give the impression that they are strong and independent characters. In reality, the power still lies in the hands of the man, making the modern princesses just as passive and dependent on the man as the original and renaissance princesses. Therefore, we claim that the modern Disney films still depict an androcentric society, where the woman is inferior to the man.

## **Conclusion**

To begin with, every archetype has characteristics such as personality traits, ambitions or values. The Disney princess archetype, which we have established, is no exception. The characteristics started to shape the archetype in the beginning of the Disney production, and the archetype is present within Disney films to this day. We argue that among the most distinct traits belong the sexualised yet infantilised appearance and personality, high degree of dependence and passivity, as well as obsession over a man and subsequently getting married.

The biggest strength and weakness of every archetype is its age. As the archetype gets older the chances of its replacement also get lower, as it is deeply rooted in society. However,

it is inevitable for the archetype to encourage stereotypes on its long way. The stereotypes connected to the Disney princess stem directly from the archetypal traits. For example, the most distinct characteristics of the Disney princess archetype, such as the essentiality of beauty, passivity, and dependence on men, are also the most significant stereotypes. Therefore, we can conclude that what is seen as the archetype of the Disney princess, is also the embodiment of a wide variety of stereotypes that have been and still are present in today's society.

We argue that the archetype of the Disney princess illustrates negative connotations because it involves stereotypical characteristics that design women as being inferior to men. In this way women are represented as passive characters, dependent on men, assigned stereotypical gender roles, and provided with only one source of power - their beauty. As is evident, we claim that all of these characteristics are naturally conflicting with feminism which strives for both gender equality, an element that is sufficiently lacking in these children films, and the abolition of a patriarchal system.

To answer the question of why the archetype of the Disney princess continues to be socially acceptable, we turn to the archetype's establishment within society. Namely, archetypes are formed through time, embedding themselves within the everyday actions of society. These archetypes pass through unnoticed because the society becomes eminently custom to them, insofar that it overlooks it. Thus, we believe that society stops questioning the archetype which continues to be preserved within the Disney princess films. Additionally, altering the Disney princess archetype becomes troublesome when we consider the reputation and hence influence Disney exerts upon society.



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- Cinderella (1950) [DVD]. Directed by Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. USA: Walt Disney Productions.
- The Little Mermaid (1989) [DVD]. Directed by Ron Clements and John Musker. USA: Walt Disney Pictures.
- Pocahontas (1995) [DVD]. Directed by Mike Gabriel, Eric Goldberg. USA: Walt Disney Pictures.
- Pocahontas II: Journey to a New World (1998) [DVD]. Directed by Tom Ellery, Bradley Raymond, Jim Kammerud. USA: DisneyToon Studios
- Mulan (1998) [DVD]. Directed by Barry Cook and Tony Bancroft. USA: Walt Disney Pictures.
- Mulan II (2005) [DVD]. Directed by Darrell Rooney and Lynne Southerland. USA: Disneytoon Studios, SD Entertainment.
- Tangled (2010) [DVD]. Directed by Nathan Greno and Byron Howard. USA: Walt Disney Pictures.
- Brave (2012) [DVD]. Directed by Mark Andrews and Brenda Chapman. USA: Walt Disney Pictures.