

# The Myth of the Female Gender in Disney's Animated Movie Frozen

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Preddiplomski sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti (dvopredmetni)

**Monica Melinda Topalović**

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# The Myth of the Female Gender in Disney's Animated Movie Frozen

Završni rad

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Zadar, 2017.



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Zadar, 22. rujna 2017.

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## **The Myth of the Female Gender in Disney's Animated Movie Frozen**

### Summary

Disney's animated movies have been watched by many children throughout the 20th and 21st century, and as such a culture that influences the mass, it has been a target for cultural research in all its aspects. This work mainly includes the representation of gender in some of Disney's animated movies, as the portrayal of gender in these movies is believed to highly support and follow the patriarchal structure in society. In this work, we will analyse important aspects of cultural studies such as the definitions of popular culture, ideology, representation, and gender. We will provide examples of gender representation through some of the Disney princess movies such as *Cinderella* (1950), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *Beauty and The Beast* (1991). We will further present a detailed analysis of the movie *Frozen* (2013), the analysis of the main characters Anna and Elsa and the way they portray gender and gender roles.

Key words: popular culture, Barthes, myth, Disney, ideology, gender, consumerism, Frozen, princess.

## **Mit ženskog roda u Disneyevom animiranom filmu Snježno kraljevstvo**

### Sažetak

U proteklom 20., ali i danas u 21. stoljeću, Disneyevi su animirani filmovi jedni od najpopularnijih izvora zabave kod djece. Takva vrsta popularne, zabavne kulture koja uveliko privlači pažnju masa, čini jednu od glavnih tema istraživanja u kulturnoj teoriji. Smatra se da Disneyevi animirani filmovi podupiru i prate patrijarhalnu strukturu u društvu, stoga ovaj rad obuhvaća prikaz roda u nekim Disneyevim animiranim filmovima. U ovom radu ćemo analizirati neke aspekte kulturne teorije: definicija popularne kulture, ideologija, reprezentacija i rod. Prikazat ćemo kako se prikazuje rod u nekim Disneyevim filmovima, kao što su *Snjeguljica* (1950), *Mala sirena* (1989) i *Ljepotica i Zvijer* (1991). Nakon toga ćemo detaljno analizirati animirani film *Frozen* (*Snježno kraljevstvo*), njene glavne likove i način na koji je prikazan rod.

Ključne riječi: popularna kultura, Barthes, mit Disney, ideologija, rod, konzumerizam, Snježno kraljevstvo, princeza.

## 1. Introduction

The interest in researching certain aspects of Walt Disney's Productions, as a product of popular culture which has become one of the largest consuming commercial cultures throughout the world, has been one of the main topics of cultural studies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It includes the research of the representation of gender, race, age, sex and culture in animated movies, from the first Disney princess animated movie release *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, in 1937, to the latest movies such as *Brave* (2012) and *Frozen* (2013). Even though many believe that most of the Disney movies are orientated only to entertain children, they all contain hidden ideologies that have affected the construction of children's identities by influencing them to follow discourses<sup>1</sup> imposed by the dominant class in society.

We have all been exposed to Disney pictures in some time during our childhood and when we revise their plots we only think of moments of happiness and joy. Most of us will probably even keep a collection for our children and grandchildren, to show them how animated movies were better in the past compared to the modern movies which we will probably criticize as they may be a lot different to the pictures we viewed as children. We may believe that these movies do not need analysing, nor have we tried analysing them, as we believe they have left only positive consequences on us. However, when we analyse these ideologies promoted in animated movies we can actually see how our future identity, and how we see ourselves, is socially constructed. These hidden messages show sexist and racist content and follow certain stereotypes constructed by the dominant class in society. van Wormer and Juby confirm this by saying that a great problem occurs while we analyse these messages shown through the media,

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<sup>1</sup>Michel Foucault first used the concept discourse by explaining it as an organized body of practices which controls the way people think and act. He claims that "discourses work in three ways: they enable, they constrain, and they constitute." Discourses are presented by rules with we must follow to accept them. He says that they are social practices which develop subject positions in which we engage. Some examples are language, a student of film, a netball player (Storey, 128).

in this case through Disney's animated movies, as we see that they have great influence on the forming of children's identity as they influence not only the racial and sexual identity but also their cultural identity (2). Through these movies we are taught our roles in society, we are taught that there are no differences between sex and gender, we are taught how to do gender: how to act as a girl and how to act as a boy.

In this work, the myth and the representation of the female gender in Disney's animated movies will be analysed. An emphasis will be put on the analysis of one of Disney's latest movies, *Frozen* (2013) which is believed to show a shift in presenting the female gender role. The movie *Frozen* has been chosen as it belongs to the new wave of Disney's princesses. According to Krolokke, there are three categories of Disney's princess, Pre-Transition, Transition and Progression, each following a wave of feminism. Elsa and Anna from *Frozen* belong to the third category thus their characters differ from the previous Disney princesses characters (qtd. in Garabedian). The female characters of *Frozen* will be analysed through concepts such as ideology, hegemony, gender, and representation, while the mass consumption of *Frozen* products will be shown in relation to Disney as a popular culture. The representation of the female gender in the movie will be explained through Roland Barthes concept myth, thus showing how the myth of the Disney princess has transformed into an ideology. When defining these concepts, William's definition of culture, John Storey's definitions of popular culture, West and Zimmerman's work *Doing Gender*, Butler's *Gender Trouble* will be used, and also some modern cultural studies that analyse Disney's animated movies such as Towbin et al. research on 26 animated Disney movies.

The aim of the work is to show how certain ideologies can be promoted through animated movies by representing body images in a particular way, through the text of the movie, the songs and also consumable items such as toys. The focal goal is to see how, even though the protagonists in *Frozen* belong to the new generation of Disney princesses, Disney continues



to promote gender stereotypes and discourses that follow the pattern of their "older" princesses.

## 2. Defining Popular Culture

### 2.1. Culture

Popular culture is important to analyse in this paper as Disney's animated movies are a large part of American popular culture. Through the definitions of the terms culture, ideology and representation, we will see how messages are promoted to young children through these movies and why they are so popular.

Popular culture is a difficult term to analyse as it has many definitions which can be described in many different ways. Storey claims that popular culture is actually an empty conceptual category which, even though explained through different definitions, is always compared to other cultures such as, folk, mass, and dominant culture. He claims in order to define popular culture we need to define the term culture to clearly understand it (44).

Culture has many different definitions which have been modified through time. There are many theorists that define culture in different ways. Storey explains that Ray Williams has one of the most important definitions of culture. Williams divides it into three definitions: the *ideal* culture, the *social* and the *documentary*. The ideal refers to the culture or processes of human perfection in relation to certain absolute or universal values. The documentary is the culture that contains a combination of the works of the conscious and imagination which are documented in the thoughts and experiences of people. The social is the culture of a specific type of lifestyle, which is seen in the values of all social spheres not only art and thought. When we analyse culture we must take count of all three of these definitions for the analysis to be correct. He also says that there are three stages of culture: *lived culture* (the culture available only to those who live in its period), *documented culture* (it includes everything from art to actual facts) and the *culture of selective tradition* (it connects the lived and documented culture

of a period). Storey gives examples of Williams definitions by comparing them to the development of Western Europe. He claims that the ideal can be shown through the great intellectuals (philosophers, artists, and poets) whose works can be admired as ideal, the social can be explained through the development of literacy, sports, holidays, religious festivals, etc. which intertwine in a particular way of living. And last, the documentary definition refers to signifying practices-types of everyday culture that are documented in different ways (opera, pop music, etc.) (44-48). We can use Disney's movies as an example of these three definitions. The ideal refers to the success of The Walt Disney Production in being one of the most famous animated movie producers in the world. Their movies keep improving and they are a role model to many other movie producing companies. The documentary would refer to the movies, the texts, and songs that are seen in Disney's movies, while the social would refer to the consumption of the items connected to the movie, birthday parties with themes from the movies, going to the cinema to watch them, etc.

## 2.2. Ideology

Ideology is an important part of culture as it directs the mass into following certain norms and traits that are important for the culture of a society. A broad definition of ideology would refer to ideology as a set of ideas or beliefs that are promoted, followed and accepted in society. These ideologies are promoted by the dominant class in society to contribute to them maintaining authority and power (Storey 3). Thus, it is important for analysing animated movies, as certain ideologies, e.g. about the way a female should look or act, are promoted through these movies to help the dominant class hold onto to their status and power.

Storey continues saying that not only is it crucial to understand the term "culture" but also the term "ideology" when defining popular culture. One of the most important definitions of ideology which is crucial for this paper is the theory by Roland Barthes, the myth. He uses

the concept myth to define a process that happens before an ideology is embedded into our society. He developed his theory under the influence of Ferdinand de Saussure<sup>2</sup>, who first defined the terms *sign*, *signifier*, and *signified*. As reported by Barthes, in his book *Mythologies* (1957), every myth is made of three components which are combined into a tri-dimensional scheme divided into two levels. The primary level is language and it is created of the relation of the signifier and the signified. Together these concepts make a sign. The relation in between the signifier and the signified is abstract and it holds a full denotative meaning (primary meaning). The secondary level is the myth which is again combined of the signifier and the signified but the signifier here is only referred to as a form and has empty meaning, while the signified is a wider concept. Together they make the sign, which in this level, has a deeper connotative meaning (secondary meaning) (110-114). The 3D scheme of the myth can be seen in the picture below.



Picture 1. Barthes table of mythologies<sup>3</sup>

Barthes declares that the main function of a myth is the fact that it is the best way for ideological distortion. As the mass usually believes that the connection between the signifier and the signified is natural, not constructed, it is easier for those who have the power to 'manipulate' them into following certain ideologies (107-108). An example is the front page of

<sup>2</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure is known for developing semiology-the science of signs. He divides language into two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier would be, for example, the word T-R-E-E while the signified would be a concept or mental image (what we see in your mind when we think of a tree). Together they make a sign. The relationship between the two is actually arbitrary as there is no natural connection between T-R-E-E and our image of a tree (Storey, 111).

<sup>3</sup> <https://myth2012.wordpress.com/2012/03/31/the-paradigm/>

a magazine Paris-Match with a picture of an African American soldier saluting to something, probably the French flag.



Picture 2. Cover page of Paris-Match magazine<sup>4</sup>

Barthes explains that the primary level, language, contains the signifier—a photo of an African-American soldier and the signified—an African American soldier. The secondary level, myth, contains the signifier—a photo of an African American soldier, but in this case, it has no form and the signified—colonialism, power, great France, bringing the sign to show how France is a great country with power that even the African Americans salute them. As said before the mass does not understand this connection between the signifier and signified and they find this photo quite natural. But when we research the deeper meaning we find that it shows how France was the dominant force, the colonizer, who violently took over their colonies and are forcing the people of the colonies to salute to their flag. This shows how a great force can use their power to "manipulate" the mass in making them believe that their actions are justified and natural (115).

Ideologies are formed by the representation of certain objects which contain meaning.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://arthistoryunstuffed.com/roland-barthes-mythologies/>

These meanings help the formation of an ideology, therefore, the term representation is important for analysing culture.

### 2.3. Representation

Another important term for analysing animated movies is representation as it shows how the dominant class presents certain ideologies in their work. Representation is a term used by Stuart Hall. In his work *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices* (1997), he claims that the connection between representation and culture exists through language. Culture is about shared meaning, language is used to make sense of things, and languages work through representation as they are systems of representation. Representation in language allows meaning to be produced which is important for culture, as he defines culture as *shared meanings*. Representation through language allows the production of meaning. Meaning is important for culture as culture is, lately, being defined through a social definition stating it is a set of practices thus culture includes the production and exchange of meaning between members of a society. We as members of society give objects meaning, the way we represent them allows us to give them meaning. This meaning can be an emotion, an image, a mental concept, words, etc. We produce these meanings by conforming to certain norms, by accepting certain traditions and by containing a social life which primarily leads to the connection with cultural practices. (15-21). Representation is an important factor when analysing popular culture, as it is a culture consumed through media (language) by a large mass, therefore Hall claims that members of a society that share similar cultural practices will share similar meanings of objects, conform to similar norms and accept similar traditions (16). The female gender in *Frozen* is represented in a way for the mass to accept it, to be able to sympathize and to understand it. The female protagonists are represented in a way that follows 'normal' conventions of how to act and look like a woman. This representation, that gives

subjects meaning transforms into a discourse which is then embedded as an ideology in a society. After defining these certain points, culture, ideology, and representation we will continue by defining popular culture.

#### 2.4. Popular Culture

All of the above-mentioned terms lead us to easily understand the definitions of popular culture. Storey claims that there are six ways to define popular culture. The first is very simple and claims that popular culture includes music, TV, movies, and books that are consumed and enjoyed by the mass, referring to ordinary people rather than experts (5).

The second way of defining it would be to say that it is everything left behind after deciding what is considered as high culture. This definition can follow on the one mentioned above as it is believed that the taste in a certain culture defines the class one belongs to. High culture is for those of the highest classes, the most prestigious, while the others, those of lower classes, can enjoy popular culture. High culture may also be defined as *ideal culture* as Williams argues. It is said that popular culture is a mass produced culture, commercially spread, while high culture is formed of individual artists, therefore, not commercial (Storey 6).

Following on is the third definition which refers to popular culture as the equivalent to mass culture. It is mass produced for mass consumption. It can be referred to as a type of mass media, consumed by a large number of people, and the messages it produces are spread through horizontal communication signals which can be used to "manipulate" the mass. Therefore it is easily turned into a commercial culture whose main goal is to make large amounts of profit (Storey 8).

Furthermore, the fourth definition claims that popular culture is the culture of the people. Through this definition, it is sometimes referred to as folk culture, rather than a mass culture. It

is usually then associated with the working class, but that is a downside of the definition as it is not then the culture of all people, but only a certain class (Storey 9).

The fifth definition can be connected to the concept *hegemony* by Antonio Gramsci. He says that hegemony refers to the way the dominant groups in society manipulate the subordinate group with their intellectual and moral power. This is crucial for defining popular culture as it refers to the influence of politics on producing it (Storey 10).

The sixth definition of popular culture refers to its relationship with postmodernism. The main point in this relation is the fact that postmodernism promotes the idea that there is no distinction between high and popular culture anymore (Storey 12).

Even though all of these definitions are different they do have something in common, popular culture is always defined as the culture which followed the rise of industrialism and urbanization at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As it is highly connected to Capitalism it follows onto consumerism, meaning that it not only depends on the promotion and production, of movies, TV shows, radio stations but also on the whole industry of manufacturing items such as toys, clothes, stationary items, furniture and even cars. All of them consumable items making popular culture even more popular. Here we can see the connection of popular culture and Disney's animated movies. Walt Disney movies, as a large part of American popular culture, cover all six definitions, they are movies which are enjoyed by many "ordinary" people. These movies are the culture of the mass, a commercial culture, a culture of the working class. They are not referred to as high culture as the media it produces is not referred to as ideal culture. van Wormer and Ruby claim that not only is the Walt Disney corporation based on movie productions but their corporation has spread onto theme parks, clothes lines, toys, etc. leading it to be one of the largest multi-billion corporations in the world. (6). This has many positive effects on the way they promote certain ideologies and the trust of the mass, as they turn every movie into a brand, a brand many children desire. This allows them to share their ideologies

and discourses in an easier manner.

The consumable items that followed the release of *Frozen* show how it is a great example of popular culture. Michelle Law explains the success of the movie *Frozen* in *Sisters Doin' It for Themselves. Frozen and the Evolution of the Disney Heroine* (2014). She states that since the movie release in November 2013, the movie achieved outstanding success. In the following six months it made over \$1 billion making it Disney's highest-earning movie ever. It also won the Academy Award in 2013 for Best Animated Film Feature and Best Original Song ('Let it Go') which was at the top of the US Billboard for weeks, being number one for the longest period since the release of the soundtrack *Titanic* (James Cameron, 1997) (18). The appearance of consumable items, such as dolls, toys, clothes, accessories, bed linen, that followed the movie release is quite responsible for this large success. Wohlwend comments that these items enable children to reenact movie scripts by owning the same items as the princesses in the movie. Girls can purchase the same dress Elsa wears in the movie, blonde wigs, tiaras, and jewelry. They can purchase dolls that sing songs from the movie, helping them memorize them, and also rewatch the movie as many times as they want due to the development of technology. ("Damsels in Discourse" 57-58). This all favours to Butler's definition of gender as a performative act, meaning, it is stylized, repeated and public, which again confirms the fact that Disney constructs certain discourses about gender not only through screens but also through the items that they sell (Ray 13). The craziness about these animated movies allows Disney to spread the ideologies they prefer. However, their power does not come just from selling toys. Henry Giroux asserts that Disney monopolizes media power as it "controls ABC<sup>5</sup>, numerous TV and cable stations, five motion picture studios, 466 Disney stores, multimedia companies, and two major publishing houses" (156). He continues saying that not only do they own media-

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<sup>5</sup> ABC-the American Broadcasting Company-a TV network



orientated companies but they have opened a Disney Institute, which offers the learning of different skills such as gardening, cooking, and movie production. This allows Disney, one of the most powerful media conglomerates, to have a large part in the production of culture, not only in America but throughout the world. (157). This all leads us to Gramsci's hegemony, which is crucial for understanding the way certain aspects of popular culture impose ideologies and discourses. Disney is the 'dominant class' with power, emphasis on media power, which controls and manipulates the 'lower classes' and the consumers of popular culture.

We will continue with analysing terms such as gender and sex, to have better input when analysing the movie Frozen.

### 3. The Representation and the Myth of the Female Gender in Animated Movies

The representation of gender roles in popular culture is a topic that is being thoroughly researched in all aspects. As Disney's movies are a part of popular culture, and as their content changes over time, they are also a target for many researchers. One of the main criticisms towards popular culture, including animated movies is the manner in which they represent gender, especially the female gender.

As said above, Hall claims that representation is a set of shared meanings (15). This imposes that whatever object we try to represent we give it a meaning which it contains. So, as do only members of similar societies understand the meaning, the members must understand and accept these meanings, therefore their representation must be universal. Due to this, the female gender is often represented in a way which confirms the patriarchal structure in society as it is then easier for the members, as they live in them, understand and accept them. The women are represented as ladies in dresses, with long hair, well-mannered, tidy, and valuable. These being the traits many see in women in society or wish to see more of. While you watch these animated movies you see the production of the meaning of gender, and when the movie finishes, even

though you are not physically watching this representation you still have these meanings as concepts in your thoughts (Hall 17).

Not only do Disney's animated movies represent the physical appearance of the female gender in a socially constructed way, they also promote an ideology that claims that there is no difference in between gender and sex. However, it is important to understand the difference between these two terms. Leavy and Truier-Bieniek give us a clear and basic definition: "Sex is biological: it is physiologically what prompts us to be assigned as male or female. Gender is socially constructed; it consists of the ideas we have of masculinity and femininity and how we apply these notions to people based on their designated sex assignment." (2). All of the definitions of gender fall back on Simone de Beauvoir's definition<sup>6</sup>-one is not born as a woman, one learns to become one (Ray 12).

As said in the introduction animated movies teach us these ideas about our gender, they represent gender in a certain way. They teach us how to do gender, a concept West and Zimmerman thoroughly explained in their book *Doing Gender* (1987), where they claim that if you are of a certain sex, society expects that you believe that your gender is an equivalent to your sex, therefore we believe that one should follow the norms of that gender. Their term doing gender came as a feminist approach proposed in the 1980s. Their proposal was to understand gender as the product of social doings, rather than as a set of traits, or roles. To do gender is to achieve being categorized as a member of the female or male sex and preserving this categorization. For example, short hair is for boys, long hair for girls. Men can not wear dresses while women can not wear baseball hats, and so on (qtd. in Pavlidou 417).

Another approach comes from Judith Butler-gender performativity. In her book *Gender Trouble* (1990) she argues that gender identity is institutionalized through a stylized repetition

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<sup>6</sup> In her book, *The Second Sex* (1949), Beauvoir claims that gender is culturally constructed and promoted in favour of the patriarchal structure and masculinity as only the female gender is marked (Grider Ray, 12).

of acts and through the stylization of the body. Butler even goes a step further and asserts that not only gender but also sex itself is a construction arguing that bodies are cultivated (qtd. in Pavlidou, 420). Not only are there differences between the sexes and genders presented in Disney's animated movies but also between femininities and femininity which is important for analysing them. Wohlwend refers to Paechter's distinction between femininity and femininities to explain the fact of girls understanding certain messages from Disney's movies:

Paechter (2006) draws a distinction between femininity and femininities: femininity refers to a set of shared ideals that construct a vision of what girlhood should be, while femininities are the multiple, overlapping, and diverse ways that individuals actually 'do girl' in lived situations. For example, Disney Princess media circulates a femininity that values a particular set of beauty ideals with exaggerated physical attributes (large eyes, thick eyelashes, long hair) and coquettish posture (tilted head, arched back) and storylines with damsels-in-distress passivity" ("Are you Guys Girls?" 8).

Paechter's distinction shows how women tend to follow these ideologies that make them believe they have to look and act a certain way. Women follow the discourse of being like Disney's princesses, by desiring to be exactly like them. The body images of certain characters in these movies tend to be a core subject of many works. Towbin et al. conducted a research on twenty-six feature-length Disney films, where they came to similar conclusions. They analysed gender and race images in these pictures and concluded that gender stereotypes are still portrayed in these movies. Gender is continuing to be portrayed very traditionally, and any modifications to these portrayals are very limited. Even though some of the newer female characters are portrayed as strong, adventurous, they are still presented to be in a position where they need to be saved, usually by a man. Men are physically active and attractive, heroic, non-expressive, while women are emotional, beautiful and orientated towards housework. They continue by saying that the characters are usually shown very sexual: small waists, large breasts, big eyes

and eyelashes. (35, 36). Wiersma (2001) also concluded, after researching sixteen Disney films, that only four females (an actress, sheep tender, thief, and fairy) had occupations that were outside their homes (qtd. in Towbin et al.). Disney tends to try and mask the ideologies they promote to benefit them to appear desirable by the mass, which attends to their manipulation of society. Hoffmann argues that they try to mask their ideology by giving the woman the main lead, naming the movie after her, making her look independent which make others, mostly females, believe how she is very important (3). The manner in which Disney represents gender is crucial for the formation of children's identities as they see the characters as role models thus they try to identify themselves in relation to the personalities of the characters.

### 3.1. The Categorization of the Disney Princess

One important character in most Disney's movies is the princess. Every princess may appear different, however, they mostly only differ in hair and eye colour while everything else remains identical. Through these princess characters, Disney intends on educating young girls about their gender roles. Garabedian claims that it is believed that most of Disney's characters reflect the society and era in which they appear so we may see a change in the gender roles and traits that Disney spreads over time (23). Not only do these animated movies "teach" girls certain gender traits, they also promote the idea of wanting to be a princess. Juliana Garabedian quotes Krolokke and explains her categorization of Disney's princesses. Krolokke divides the Disney princesses into three categories showing that Disney forms its characters in relation to the changes in society. The three categories she divides the princesses into, parallel with the first three waves of feminism.

| Pre-transition                         | Transition                       | Progression   |
|--|----------------------------------|---------------|
| Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) | The Little Mermaid (1989)        | Brave (2012)  |
| Cinderella (1950)                      | Beauty and the Beast (1991)      | Frozen (2013) |
| Sleeping Beauty (1959)                 | Aladdin (1992)                   |               |
|  | Pocahontas (1995)                |               |
|  | Mulan (1998)                     |               |
|  | The Princess and the Frog (2009) |               |
|  | Tangled (2010)                   |               |

Table 1. Disney's princesses divide into Krolokke's three categories<sup>7</sup>.

Krolokke claims that the *Pre-transition* category (from 1937-1959) was developed during the time of the first wave of feminism, thus three Disney princesses appeared: Cinderella, Snow White, and Aurora. The women in the first wave of feminism fought for the right to vote as well as equal rights to men in other spheres such as employment. The gender roles of the princesses in this first category reflect the state of American society during that period, when women were mostly housewives, hardly in any working positions. Towards the end of this era (late 1959), only 39 % of the female population was employed. The second category *Transition* occurs during the late 1960s and early 1970's and it relates to the second wave of feminism. As female gender roles became modified due to feminism, women's rights, the sexual revolution,

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<sup>7</sup> (Garabedian 23)

Disney followed this progress and inherited it into its princesses. The princesses in this period are more independent (as like the women in society, they then had a right to vote, a right to education), adventurous, they are trying to break the path that is expected of them, by going against social norms, their families and societies expectations (Ariel<sup>8</sup> decides to become a human, Jasmine<sup>9</sup> does not marry someone from her social class). The third category *Progression* follows the third wave of feminism, but Disney presented its new protagonist more than a decade after the beginning of the wave which occurred in the 1990s. According to Ritzer, the third wave of feminism continues following the second by putting emphasis on terminating public sexism, female stereotypes and the representation of women which does not allow them to be considered as a complete human being. A new subject in the third wave is the focus on intersexuality with the emphasis on queer women and non-white women and is also largely against essentialism (Ritzer 1997). Disney broke the pattern from its Transition period to Progression in 2012 with *Brave*, and in 2013 with *Frozen*. Merida<sup>10</sup> in *Brave* (2012) does not follow any gender stereotypes and is a completely different female protagonist than the princesses before, while *Frozen* shows two strong female protagonists that do not depend on male love to save themselves (qtd. in Garabedian 23-25). These categories show that the ideology promoted in the certain era is reflected on screen. The princesses show girls how to perform their gender in an enchanted, exciting way. Unfortunately, representing gender roles is not the only theme in these princess movies. The portrayal of female's bodies is also a major theme as it also imposes certain ideologies on how a woman should look.

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<sup>8</sup> Ariel-the main female protagonist in Disney's animated movie *The Little Mermaid* (1989)

<sup>9</sup> Jasmine-the main female protagonist in Disney's animated movie *Aladdin* (1992)

<sup>10</sup> Merida-the main female protagonist in Disney's animated movie *Brave* (2012)

### 3.2. The Representation of Body Images in Some of Disney's Animated Movies

We have said so far that Disney tends to create its characters by reflecting the era in which they occur. This makes it easier for children to identify themselves in relation to the characters. Towbin et al. claim that young girls identify themselves through the princess, who may portray unrealistic ideas and stereotypes but also invaluable life principles. This interferes with the development of a positive self-image for some girls as they continue to try and achieve the same image as their beloved princess character. (21). On this Chyng (2001) comments: "In many films, both human and animal female characters are portrayed as overly sexual; they typically have unnaturally small waists, large breasts, big eyes, and batting eyelashes" (qtd. in Towbin et al. 35-36). Most of them have perfect skin, with no deformations, such as sun spots, scars or pimples. They are also always dressed in gowns, which highlight their skinny figures but also impose an ideology of beauty. Owning these physical attributes and expensive, fancy, clothes make a woman beautiful. This can all lead to dissatisfaction if one can not achieve the traits of a princess as they believe they must follow them to be beautiful. Even though Elsa and Anna belong to the third category of princesses which follow the main points of the third wave of feminism, the female characters are once again essentialised, sexualized and represented in a way that objectifies them.

### 3.3. Examples of Disney's Princesses

Following are some examples of the body images of Disney's princesses and also the analysis of the myths they promote.

#### 3.3.1. *Cinderella (1950)*

Cinderella is a story about a girl who is forced to stay with her evil stepmother after her father's death. She is made a servant in her own home and spends her days cleaning and cooking. She holds the traits of a Disney princess as she is Caucasian with blonde hair, big blue eyes, a

small nose, a very skinny figure and she has a wonderful voice. These traits all conform to Paetcher's femininity values. The Prince is also shown in a familiar way, he is a prince, wealthy, tall, and handsome. Using Barthes' analogy of the myth we can see here that the first level of his 3D scheme shows a 'natural' presentation of a woman. She cooks and cleans and gets married in the end. This was quite natural at the time and it is today. Analysing the second level of the message promoted we find that the myth that is proposed is that only if a woman cooks, cleans, sows and obeys orders from wealthy people, she will marry a prince. This myth has turned into an ideology, where girls are taught to act the same way as Cinderella in hope that they will get married well and live happily ever after.



Picture 3. An example of a realistic Cinderella body.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.3.2. *The Little Mermaid* (1989)

The story is about Ariel, a mermaid, living in her father's kingdom. Being unsatisfied with living in the sea she wants to be human and live on land. She also has femininity values: long hair, big eyes, a very slim figure with a tiny waist, while the main male protagonist is presented as tall, handsome and wealthy. Wohlwend's comment on this movie is that "[In contrast,] Disney's Princess Ariel is a feminine identity text with a female protagonist who

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<sup>11</sup> <http://emgn.com/entertainment/6-real-women-were-transformed-into-disney-princesses-and-the-results-will-shock-you/>



'wins' by attracting a powerful male hero through beauty, kindness, and self-sacrifice" ("Are you Guys Girls?" 4). Ariel ends up transforming her whole body just to be with the man she loves. Towbin et al. state that this movie shows a mixture of gender ideologies as Ariel is presented as a strong, independent woman, who does not take orders from her father but in the end, even in spite her intellectual qualities she decides to change her body to be with the "one" (38). The first level of the myth, language, can be described as a mermaid and a man falling in love. Due to this love, she will do anything to be together. As they end up together we believe that the movie shows a great and happy story. However analysing the story through Barthes second level, myth, we see that even independent women must transform their physical appearance, leave their family, traditions, and culture to find a man. This spreads the idea that after a woman gets married she must forget her identity, as she now belongs to her husband, thus her previous life has no significance.



Picture 4. Ariel as a human<sup>12</sup>

### 3.3.3. *The Beauty and the Beast* (1991)

Belle, the Beauty, a pretty girl unsatisfied with her life and just like Cinderella and Ariel, she also holds the classical elements of femininity, long hair, big eyes, a small nose and slim

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<sup>12</sup> <http://emgn.com/entertainment/6-real-women-were-transformed-into-disney-princesses-and-the-results-will-shock-you/>

figure. She meets the Beast after her father is imprisoned by him. The Beast is quite wealthy and lives in a large mansion, with nearly all the traits of a Disney's prince, but he is very ugly. Belle falls in love with the Beast, and, the spell, that made him ugly disappears so he becomes a handsome Disney prince. Analysing the message through Barthes primary level, we see a story of a woman who falls in love with a man despite his physical appearance. We applaud this woman as she has done a good action, and seen the true side of a man. Analysing the myth we see that the story promotes the idea that if a woman falls in love with an ugly and abusive man, she will be rewarded, move to a castle and he will become a prince. But is this quite possible off screen? According to Beres, issues such as control and abuse over women are romanticized in these animated movies. This imposes that some women may interpret this abuse as a sign of love and believe they have a strong and loving partner beside them (qtd. in Towbin, et al. 25). Not only does this have bad consequences on women but it also teaches young girls that even though someone might be even "only" verbally abusive, if you are good to him he will change his ways and become a good and nice person. Ideologies such as these make women believe that they should stay in abusive marriages as their husbands, just like the Beast may change one day.



Picture 5. Belle as a human<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <http://emgn.com/entertainment/6-real-women-were-transformed-into-disney-princesses-and-the-results-will-shock-you/>

#### 4. The Analysis of the Movie Frozen

I have chosen to analyse the movie Frozen as it belongs to the new generation of the Disney princess movies. In the analysis of the female characters and the messages they convey, Barthes' analogy of the myth will be used to see if these messages contain deeper meaning as in the previous examples of Disney's princess movies. After giving a short summary of the story, I will analyse the representation of the body images of the main characters. After this, three myths that appear in the movie will be analysed.

##### 4.1. The Plot of the Movie Frozen

*Frozen* (2013) is a movie about two sisters Anna and Elsa, who are the princesses of Arendelle. Elsa, the eldest was born with magical powers enabling her to interfere with the weather by making it snow, and also the ability to freeze anything she touches. The sisters were very close in their younger years but were forced to break the relationship after an accident where Elsa struck Anna with ice. As Elsa is disgusted with her powers she agrees to her parent's terms, she stays away from Anna and is locked away in her room. The sisters grow further and further apart, Elsa locked away trying to control her magic and Anna, loomed around the empty castle dreaming of the "one". Due to disastrous weather that occurred during one of their parent's trips, the ship sinks and both of their parents die. After 3 years, Elsa comes of age to become queen. Anna is so happy as the gates of the castle will finally open, she will be able to meet people, maybe even the "one", but Elsa is worried that she will not be able to control her powers. The coronation goes well and after a few hours, Anna believes she has found the "one"-Prince Hans, a man she had just met thus comes to Elsa for her blessing. Elsa refuses to give Anna her blessing and the sisters get into a fight. Elsa unable to control her emotions and powers turns summer into winter, freezes everything around Arendelle, and runs off to the North Mountain. After a long search for her, Anna, Kristoff (a man Anna meets on her voyage), Sven (Kristoff's

reindeer) and Olaf (a snowman) bring her back. But an accident occurs again. Elsa freezes Anna's heart, which can only be melted by the act of love. In the end, Anna freezes, and Elsa hugs and kisses her, which brings her back to life. They then all live happily ever after, with the open gates and Elsa being able to control her powers.

#### 4.2. The Presentation of the Body Images of the Main Characters in Frozen

We will analyse the two main characters, Anna and Elsa.

Both the sisters have similar figures, skinny waists, middle-sized bust, slim figures, unproportional in size (their heads are a lot larger than their bodies) and very long and thick hair. They have the unique Disney princess body shape and image, which confirms Paetchers femininity values as the princesses we mentioned above. Their clothing throughout the movie generally includes of long fancy gowns which represent their status and prestige, and also highlight their figures. Their hair is also very tidy, messed up only when no one sees them<sup>14</sup>. They have big eyes, a small nose, and perfect sized lips. They also both have great vocal skills which they present throughout the movie.

#### 4.3. Elsa, Anna, Barthes, and the Myth

Elsa and Anna belong to Krolokke's third category of Disney princesses, Progression, which follows the third wave of feminism. These princesses are different from the previous ones as they do not follow the same Disney princess pattern. They are independent, adventurous, powerful and in no need for finding a prince to marry. After the movie *Brave* (2012) changed the idea of the "older" princesses by "modernizing" Merida, a new category of princesses

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<sup>14</sup> 12:54. Anna wakes up with drool coming down her face and her hair is a mess, but before she leaves the room she tidies her self up.

(Progression) appeared. Frozen followed doing the same, modernising Elsa and Anna. These princesses do not depend on any man, they are independent, adventurous and in no need of finding a prince. In the following section, we will explain a number of myths that are represented in the movie Frozen.

#### 4.3.1. *Myth I: The "one"*

Even though Anna and Elsa should represent the new modern independent princess, throughout the movie Anna wants to meet the "one", which we can see in the following lines of one of the songs: "Cause the first time in forever, I won't be alone. I can't wait to meet everyone. What if I meet The One? For the first time in forever, I could be noticed by someone. And I know it's totally crazy, to dream I'd find romance, but for the first time in forever, at least I've got a chance." (Frozen, 2013, 14:30). She reflects the previous ideology of Disney's princesses who have to find a perfect prince to marry. In the end, she concludes that Prince Hans is not the "one", which gives "hope" for young girls as they see that sometimes the prince can be a negative character. She falls in love with Kristoff which is a twist for a Disney princess as he is of a lower status and class. The first level of the myth implies that Anna sees that the prince is not for her, as he was only trying to take advantage of her for his own welfare. She sees that she has feelings for Kristoff, who was there for her during her journey and wanted to save her when she froze. This spreads a positive message and breaks the Disney pattern of a princess having to marry a prince. On the other hand, looking at the deeper meaning, analysing Anna through Barthes' concept, the myth, we see that Disney continues to promote the idea that a woman must find the one to be complete. Anna's goal was to find the one. Should this be a primary goal for women?

#### 4.3.2. *Myth II: The woman with power*

In contrast to Anna, Elsa does not speak of the "one" nor is she romantically connected to any man in the movie. She is a woman with power, she can change the weather, build her own castle and even save her sister. Analysing it through Barthes' myth we can say that the first level shows that a new protagonist has arrived, a princess that does not talk of the "one" nor marry the "one" in the end. Analysing it this way we can see that Elsa really is a member of the Progression category which represents the female in a new light. However, when we analyse the myth, we can see that this can actually be understood as when a woman has the power she does not need a man by her side. When a woman has too much power, she frightens men and is not able to find a partner.

Another myth that appears connected to Elsa's powers is in the fact that she can not control them. Analysing the first level of the message, her inability to control her powers can be prescribed to the fact that she is young, and the audience feels sorry for her. But analysing it as a myth we see that she is represented as a woman who is not able to control the power she contains. Only when she includes her emotions, love, she is able to control them. This follows on to the discourse that women are unable to contain high and powerful positions and that they use emotions to handle them.

Furthermore, another myth also appears. Elsa's parents force her to hide her powers, they lock her away and keep the public out of the castle. Analysing the message through the first level of language we see how it is actually positive that she is locked away as she hurt Anna while playing with her magic. We understand the consequences. However, analysing the myth we see that her father (the patriarchal role model) is the one who tries to hide her powers from the world. She is a woman, her strength can not be seen as it is presented as dangerous. Elsa: "But she won't remember I have powers?" Father: "It is for the best"..."We will protect her. She can learn to control it. I'm sure. Until then...we will lock the gates. We'll reduce the staff. We

will limit her contact with people and keep her powers hidden from everyone. Including Anna." (Frozen, 2013, 7:26-8:10). Her father also helps her try to conceal her powers. He gives her gloves and tells her to repeat: "Conceal it. Don't feel it. Don't let it show." (Frozen, 2013, 9:08).

#### 4.3.3. *Myth III: The family-orientated woman*

Furthermore, the reason these protagonists belong to the third category is seen at the end of the movie, when Anna freezes, Elsa is the one to save her. This is also a progress in Disney's princess movies as it is usually a male who saves the female protagonist. Analysing the first level of this message we see how a woman does not need a man to save her. We are happy for Elsa and Anna as they are close again. However, when we analyse the myth we view the message another way. The female is once again represented as someone who needs to be saved. It also shows the gender role of a woman to be family-orientated as the love of the two sisters saved Anna's life. A woman is represented as someone important to her family, someone who helps and saves them. This ideology of women needed to be saved runs through most of Disney's movies, but the saviour only changes. The idea of women being family-orientated is an ideology put forward by the patriarchal structure to tame women into believing they must be that way.

## 5. Conclusion

After analysing the representation of the female gender and the myths promoted in the movie *Frozen* we can come to the conclusion about how and why these females are portrayed in a way that attends to the norms of popular culture.

Even though these female protagonists are shown as new and modern protagonists whose characters differ from the traditional Disney female protagonists, Disney continues to promote certain traditional and conservative traits and values of women. Through

Barthes' analogy, we can see how every important factor of the movie *Frozen*, that differentiates it from the past categories of Disney princesses can be analysed to show the deeper meaning which conforms to Disney's previous movies. The main goal of this paper was to see how the female gender is represented in *Frozen* and do Elsa and Anna truly belong to the third category of Disney princesses. Through the analysis, I was able to conclude the following. Elsa has powers which she has to hide as she is unable to control them, which relates to the fact that women who have powerful positions must hide their power or are defined as incapable to attain them. Her powers give her independence but they make her too independent thus not domesticated enough to find a partner. Similarly, powerful women in our society are claimed to be less family-orientated therefore in no need of a partner. Anna also shows traits of a traditional Disney princess, even though she falls in love with a man of a lower status, which differs from previous princesses, throughout the movie she longs to meet the "one" which again conforms to the traits of previous Disney princesses. We see through this analysis that even though it is believed that Disney has followed the third wave of feminism, it continues to use gender stereotypes and represent women in a certain way.

Moreover, the representation of these female characters, conform to the traditional view of the female gender. The meanings given to females through representation has continued in a traditional tone so the members of the same society, of the same culture, can understand it. The meanings given are shared and enable us to view the world in the same way. This way of representing gender allows Disney as a popular culture to maintain its position in the consumable world.

Furthermore, the ability of Disney to promote certain ideas about gender is due to the fact that it produces many consumable items that are the desire of many children. Children are being controlled and their roles divided through movies. Not only are their identities being constructed through screens but also through consuming, as popular culture is a commercial



culture clearly connected to marketing and consuming. Not only do the roles, seen in the movies, define one's gender but so do the toys sold in stores after the movie release: girls choose pink Barbie dolls to be accepted by their peers while boys will mostly choose blue action figures (4). All in all these discourses can be unified to a discourse of femininity and masculinity. We are shown how we have to act to confine to a certain gender group, moreover what we have to like to be accepted and forced to consume certain items only for our certain gender group. We do not view these ideologies and myths in a negative manner but we continue accepting and consuming elements of popular culture, which enlarges Disney's power. With this power they are able to share certain ideologies, such as cultural homogeneity, not allowing democratization in alternative media and they continue to promote and construct gender and racial stereotypes (Giroux 157).

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