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PŘÍRODOVĚDNĚ-HUMANITNÍ
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Bakalářská práce

Fairy-tale Heroines: Evolution of the Concept in Children's Literature and Disney Adaptations

Studijní program: B0114A300068 Anglický jazyk se zaměřením na vzdělávání
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Český jazyk a literatura se zaměřením na vzdělávání
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Zadání bakalářské práce

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Zásady pro vypracování:

Tato práce se zaměřuje na zobrazení hlavních ženských pohádkových postav v anglicky psané literatuře pro děti. Jmenovitě se zabývá dopadem těchto hrdinek na utváření charakterových vlastností čtenáře. Teoretická část pojednává o tom, jak k těmto postavám přistupuje studio Disney ve svých filmových adaptacích, a následně zkoumá, jakým způsobem toto zpracování formuje zejména dětské diváky. Tato část také rozebírá stereotypy diskutovaných ženských hrdinek, které se objevují jak v literárních textech, tak ve filmových adaptacích. Pozornost je věnována kritice, kterou svým specifickým přístupem k diskutovaným postavám studio Disney vzbudilo. Praktická část vychází z diskuze v teoretické části. Detailně se zaměřuje na disneyovskou filmovou adaptaci Legendy o Mulan a jejím cílem je zodpovědět otázku, zda studio Disney reflektovalo zmíněnou kritiku a zda se tudíž snaží o komplexnější vyobrazení ženských hrdinek ve svých filmových adaptacích.

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12. července 2023 Lucie Plantová

Anotace

Tato práce se zabývá vlivem vybraných princezen z psaných pohádek a adaptací studia Disney na děti. V rámci příběhů jsou psychology představeny uznávané teorie o přínosném vlivu pohádek s princeznami na utváření osobnosti dětí. Filmové adaptace studia Disney na druhou stranu obsahují negativní vlivy zjednodušené reprezentace genderu hrdinek, vedoucí ke stereotypům, a dále nedostatečné, chybné a neuctivé vyobrazení jejich rasy či etnika. V práci jsou argumentovány konkrétní pozitivní i negativní dopady literárního, animovaného a hraného zpracování hrdinek na děti. Popsání a shrnutí Disney hrdinek a poté hraného filmu *Mulan* (2020) vede k lepšímu pochopení diskutovaných nedostatků studia Disney a odhaluje postupné komplexnější vyobrazení těchto hrdinek, které informují o náznacích zlepšení.

Klíčová slova

pohádka, děti, studio Disney, Disney princezny, reprezentace genderu, vyobrazení rasy

Abstract

This thesis deals with the influence of selected princesses from written fairy tales and Disney adaptations on children. Psychologists' theories applied to fairy tales with princess heroines inform about the positive influence that the heroines' stories can have on developing children's identities. Disney film adaptations, on the other hand, are frequently criticised for their negative influence concerning the vague representation of the heroines' gender roles and their portrayal of race and ethnicity. The thesis follows with argumentations of both positive and negative impacts the literary, animated and live-action representations of heroines can have on children. Summaries and descriptions of the Disney heroines and then the live-action film *Mulan* (2020) lead to a better understanding of the Disney studio's discussed flaws and reveals a progressive tendency in the heroines' depiction.

Key words

fairy tale, children, Disney studio, Disney Princess, gender representation, portrayal of race

Contents

1. Introduction

Many rewritten fairy tales are being told to children. They are raised on these stories which mostly have happy endings, contain magical beings, and are primarily about battles between good and evil. Undoubtedly, Disney adaptations of fairy tales now constitute an inseparable part of contemporary childhoods, too. During my studies at Technical University in Liberec, I came across Bruno Bettelheim's book *The Uses of Enchantment*, thanks to which I learned about the extent to which fairy tales could affect children's development. Considering the fact that I seek to become a teacher and possibly a parent too, this revelation informed my interest in fairy tales. While carrying out research for my bachelor's thesis, I read Sheldon Cashdan's *The Witch Must Die*, and my knowledge about the developmental function of fairy tales thus expanded. Bettelheim and Cashdan base their respective theories on the claim that the stories they had addressed have significance for children´s psychological well-being and, therefore, a positive impact on children.

Given that children grow up listening to fairy tales, reading and watching them through different means, I started thinking about Disney's animated fairy tale movies featuring princesses, because they are popular among children. These movies are criticised for their stereotypical portrayal of heroines, therefore, I sought to find out how they shape children's identities. I focused on fairy tale heroines considered Disney Princesses – Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora (Sleeping Beauty), Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana, Rapunzel, Merida, and Moana, including Anna and Elsa from *Frozen* (2013), that were part of the Disney Princess franchise and are no longer as they became queens at some point in their stories (Edwards, "Disney Princesses explained"). By focusing on the heroines' portrayal of gender and race, I reveal their possible effect on constructing the identities of young viewers. Parents, teachers, and other adults working with children should be aware of the influence that the negative stereotypes in these films can have on children.

The practical part describes the Disney Princess heroines based on their character behaviour, motivation to fulfil their goals, gender, and race. Based on the description, I classified the heroines with similar personal characteristics and struggles in their stories to clarify which heroines' portrayals show a positive development in their complexity. Given that there are fourteen heroines to consider, an improvement in their portrayal seems to be

inevitable. Therefore, the signs of development of the heroine's portrayal could then be considered to have a good influence on young viewers. Because children are influenced not only by Disney's animated fairy tale films but they are also exposed to recent Disney live-action films based on animated ones, the practical part follows with assessing the live-action film *Mulan* (2020) because this recent film contains both discourses of gender and race. The assessment concludes whether this movie continues with gender and racial stereotyping as in animated counterparts, or whether it offers an attempt to portray heroines more complex as well. The complexity of the female lead's portrayal of gender and race would then result in a more positive influence on child viewers. However, the progress in the portrayal of the heroines is noticeably slow so it is much more likely that live-action *Mulan* will be criticised for similar negative aspects as in animated versions.

2. Purpose and hidden meanings of written fairy tales

Written fairy tales have had an impact on lives from generation to generation. They became embedded in cultures and an inseparable part of childhood. There are several reasons why fairy tales are essential to childhood, for example, they develop skills on how to handle problems, build emotional resiliency to life's challenges, teach lessons and many more (Taylor, "Why fairy tales are important to childhood"). However, few adults know the fairy tales' importance and are reluctant to learn why even seemingly disturbing features of fairy tales (e.g., death) can have a good influence on children. Some critics, on the other hand, discuss the negative aspects of fairy tales that could potentially be harmful to children's development. These aspects – e.g., unrealistic expectations of life, and their future partners, and lower self-esteem (Prakash, "Say no to fairy tales for your kids") – trigger more relevant discussions based on on-screen adaptations, especially well-known Disney ones[1].

Whether written fairy tales are good for children may not be easily answered, but viewing them through psychology can help uncover a positive outlook on fairy tales. An Austrian-born American psychologist Bruno Bettelheim claims that a story has to be entertaining for children to pay attention to it. Moreover, it has to stimulate their imagination to develop intellect and clarify emotions. Through the use of imagination, children might

[1] The issues of Disney studio's adaptations will be addressed in 3. chapter.

consequently come up with solutions to problems that trouble them. This personal development, Bettelheim explains, can happen through reading quality children's literature, more precisely, fairy tales (1991, 5). He examines fairy tales through psychoanalysis and argues that their importance lies in the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious messages they convey. Furthermore, Bettelheim believes that they encourage the development of a child's ego and relieve preconscious and unconscious pressures, which is why the stories are about solutions to universal human problems. This means that as the fairy tales unfold, "they give conscious credence and body to id pressures and show ways to satisfy these that are in line with ego and superego requirements" (6).

An American professor of clinical psychology, Sheldon Cashdan, applies analytical tools of his field and explains how fairy tales can contribute to children's developing sense of self. Moreover, he describes his theory on specific well-known fairy tales to show how they address unhealthy predispositions in the self. In other words, Cashdan's theory takes fairy tales as mirrors of struggles that the self is faced with. He believes that some "Children, in listening to a fairy tale, unconsciously project parts of themselves into various characters in the story, using them as psychological repositories for competing elements in the self" (1999, 15). Hereby, *Snow White* is about vanity and might resonate with children's concerns about their looks and desirability (13); *Cinderella* is about envy and might resonate with its sibling rivalry (14); *The Frog Prince* is about deceit in the form of lying that, Cashdan claims, could contribute to building a personal identity (142), and *The Little Mermaid* is about lust that can show concerns about sexual readiness (168). The following two subchapters develop in detail Bettelheim's and Cashdan's theories about the positive contribution of fairy tales to children's development, which they based on 19th-century translations of the original collected stories.

2.1 Developing aspects of personality (id, ego, and superego) through fairy tales

Bettelheim's psychoanalytic approach to fairy tales is based on the extent to which fairy tales appeal to our conscious and unconscious aspects of the mind – id, ego, and superego (1991, 36). The id, he writes, represents "our instinctual pressures, our animal nature … [The id] is the seat of our wildest wishes, wishes that can lead to satisfaction or to extreme danger" (81, 85). The ego represents the rationality and superego the societal rules which are higher mental functions compared to the id. Through fairy tales, children learn to recognise the danger of

immediate satisfaction through 'listening to' their ego (the rationality) and superego (societal rules), if they want to… In other words, Bettelheim suggests, that fairy tales guide children to be in control (think rationally) and not give in to id tendencies because they would end up suffering (80)[2]. Whereas, rational thinking navigates the heroines to survive in the stories and children should follow such examples[3]. Bettelheim concludes that children learn to integrate opposite feelings that are the sources of their confusion – they are taught by fairy tales to separate complex inner tendencies in their minds (86)[4].

2.2 Developing a sense of self through fairy tales

Cashdan's psychological theory applied to fairy tales explains why there are more female characters in the stories, why the heroes are children, and why the villains must die a violent death or be punished at the end. He considers these aspects crucial for fairy tales' psychological purpose of contributing to developing a sense of the self. Infants, Cashdan writes, "deal with this distressing state of affairs by mentally "splitting" their mother into two psychic entities: a gratifying "good mother" and a frustrating "bad mother" (1999, 27). Over time, the two maternal entities are psychologically "metabolised" and become good and bad parts of the child's developing sense of the self. This "metabolisation" happens when children start using "I" (the first person) as a means of reference and when control by others becomes replaced by self-control (27-28). For this reason, i.e., developing a sense of the self through association with the mother figure, Cashdan claims, there are more female characters in fairy tales. "By transforming splits in the self into an adventure that pits the forces of good against the forces of evil, not only do fairy tales help children deal with negative tendencies in the self, they pay homage to the pivotal role that mothers play in the genesis of the self" (28). Consequently, for the child to engage in such a battle of overcoming negative tendencies in the self, s/he must be drawn into the story on a personal level. For this reason, Cashdan believes, the protagonists of

[2] An example of a female heroine the id pressures might tempt to is Snow White, who, in order to become more beautiful, falls for a trick by the queen and ends up in a sleeping death, or Little Mermaid who in order to attract a prince trades her voice and mermaid identity for becoming a human.

[3] as Rapunzel who plotted an escape from the tower that mother Gothel shut her up in for years (which did not go as planned).

[4] One example of the integration of the aspects of personality is when the prince and princess achieve a connection, as in the ending of *Cinderella* (Bettelheim 1989, 146), or similarly in *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*. Another example of integration is reuniting Rapunzel and her children with the King's son.

the stories are children. Identification with the characters then comes easily because they, too, fail to obey the voice of authority[5] (28).

Furthermore, Cashdan claims that "for a fairy tale to succeed – for it to accomplish its psychological purpose – the witch must die because it is the witch who embodies the sinful parts of the self" (30). Only by her death these bad parts are eliminated, and the good parts prevail (35). However, "young children have difficulty grasping the finality of death, and adults often confuse matters by telling them that loved ones are asleep or have gone away on a long trip" (37). The death of the villain has to be complete, which is why the witch's/villain's demise is violent – there cannot be a loophole for them to return. After their death, a celebration of such a happy ending signifies that – it is to be seen as good that – positive forces in the self have won over the negative ones, and the child thus should feel more secure and self-assured[6].

Bettelheim's and Cashdan's theories about the profound significance of fairy tales on children's psychological development might be confirmed by some experts, and disproven by other critics. However, it can be informative in ways how some people perceive fairy tales because their impact on children should be taken into consideration. In other words, parents should be aware of what influences their children, and contemplate that exposing their children to fairy tales can and will have an impact on them. It is important to emphasize that the psychologists' ideas were based on 19th-century translations of the fairy tales (they contain explicit harsh parts of the stories) which, understandably, some parents want to protect their children from. The focus in further subchapters is on stories featuring heroines (Snow White, Cinderella, the princess from *The Frog Prince*, and the Little Mermaid) on which Cashdan expands his theory of psychological struggles (that the self faces). The 19th-century translations maintain the core of the story with the psychological struggle of vanity forces (*Snow White*), dealing with jealous urges (*Cinderella*), that lying contributes to becoming an independent individual (*The Frog Prince*), and that there is a difference between desire and being ready to handle all aspects of a romantic relationship (*The Little Mermaid*). Specific examples of how Cashdan's theory is applied to fairy tales can provide a better insight that would lean towards an answer whether to protect children from the negative aspects of fairy tales, whether to

[5] For example, Snow White invites the disguised queen into the cottage though the dwarves warned her not to invite strangers in.
[6] Ibid.

read/let children read the stories and comments on how relevant is the psychological impact Cashdan presents, in today's society.

2.2.1 Snow White's vanity

One of the self's struggles Cashdan writes about is within the story *Snow White*. Vanity impersonated by the queen is apparent through her constant asking the magic mirror: "Who is the fairest of them all?". When she learns one day that Snow White is the fairest of them all, she starts plotting to kill her to resume her first place. The queen pays Snow White three visits in disguise, from which two show vanity impersonated by Snow White – the first time, she almost suffocates when "an old woman" laces her; the second time, "an old woman" sells Snow White a poisonous comb. Snow White intends to enhance her looks in both situations – through her vanity, her judgement is clouded and almost dies. One more vanity motif Cashdan mentions is through the glass coffin that Snow White is laid. Her looks continue to be valued; moreover, her looks attract a prince. He wants to marry her, overlooking that she is seemingly dead. Strangely, he wants to take her into his father's palace and place her on display.

From Cashdan's psychological point of view, fairy tales help children confront negative situations through identification with heroines to be able to confront these negative forces in real life. Children take in that Snow White's vain purpose of becoming more desirable will lead only to suffering. Therefore, *Snow White* gives children an opportunity to deal with vanity forces within a fairy tale, so that they might be able to combat them in real life (1999, 54-59). Resisting vanity forces is one of the most challenging struggles in today's society. Children from a young age are exposed to the idea that beauty is skin deep, and they are led to believe that presenting themselves with enhanced looks will make them likeable to others. Teenage girls then cover their faces in make-up in order to attract boys. Cashdan makes a powerful claim that it is possible to learn battling vanity forces in children's lives through a fairy tale.

2.2.2 Cinderella's envy

Another self's struggle Cashdan writes about deals with envy in the fairy tale about Cinderella. Envy emerges in the stepmother, the stepsisters, and Cinderella herself (she envies the privileges usurped by her sisters). Envy has to be successfully resolved with a happy ending; therefore, the self-absorbed and mean-spirited stepsisters are punished with the loss of their sight – forever deprived of the ability to envy others. Only after the sister's jealous nature is

punished, can children find ways of dealing with their own jealous urges, of which there are often plenty in their lives.

The stepmother's envious nature rises as she urges to become queen-mother, and she stops at nothing to ensure that one of her daughters becomes the prince's bride. Her envy of Cinderella is so extreme that she is willing to mutilate her daughters' feet (1999, 97, 99-101). To keep from envy is also a tough struggle. In today's world, we tend to compare our looks, salaries, lifestyles, and many more. From a young age, children, in order to fit in they want to match up with "the cool kids," and if some children cannot, they are sadly excluded by the group and left with jealousy. However, in this materialistic world we live in, it is vital to set priorities, and children should learn not to compare to others because making friends by showing off is a way to attract fake friends. Instead, they should build friendships regarding who they are as a person. In conclusion, Cashdan's claim that children's envy could be resolved through fairy tales seems almost impossible.

2.2.3 Princess's deceit in *The Frog Prince*

The next struggle of the self that Cashdan writes about is within the Grimm's version of *The Frog Prince*. A princess does not keep her promise of loving and having a frog as a companion when the frog helps her retrieve a golden ball from a well. The frog goes to the king and demands what the princess has promised. The king lectures the princess about keeping one's word and that she has to let the frog sit by her side. When the frog tries to climb onto her bed later, she fails again to keep her word. The frog reminds her of the promise, and she furiously throws it against the wall. This deed, as stated in the Grimm version, turns the frog into a handsome prince.

One would assume that lying would be punished, which it is not in this story. Instead, such is rewarded by marrying a prince. Why is it so? Cashdan writes that lying sometimes might serve as a developmental function – i.e., when children lie, and their mothers believe them regardless, they can conclude that parents do not know what the children are thinking, and thus, they cannot control them. Realizing this, children can liberate themselves mentally from their parent's authority, and lying thus contributes to developing their own personal identity (Cashdan 1999, 141-142). Though Cashdan's claim that lying can have a psychological function in a child's development might be in some cases true, however, as the princess

deceived the frog and not her parent, it becomes debatable if this particular story has mentioned effect on children.

2.2.4 The Little Mermaid's Lust

Cashdan believes that the Little Mermaid's lust is the manifestation of a child's sexual desire. The heroine one day sees a ship that was taken down by a storm. She saves the prince who was on its board and safely leaves him on the shore. Since this incident, the Little Mermaid has become obsessed with him. However, in order to attract the prince, she has to follow him, and thus trades her fish tail for legs, therefore, she changes her identity from a mermaid to a human. It is the Sea Witch who helped the Little Mermaid to carry out her transformation that encourages the child to pursue her lustful cravings. In contrast, her grandmother told the Little Mermaid to be cautious and wait until she is psychologically prepared to handle the sexual demands of a relationship.

The witch makes a potion, and she cuts out the heroine's tongue as payment. Though deprived of her voice, she can still rely on her lovely form, as the witch said. Even though she possesses legs, the prince does not see her mature as she cannot engage in conversation. Therefore, the prince does not see her as a potential lover but rather as a sister.

The message of this story is that there is a significant difference between mere desire and sexual readiness. The point is that the Little Mermaid is still a child and not emotionally mature enough (1999, 163-168). It seems arguable that children listening to or reading the story would recognise the Little Mermaid's obsession with the prince as an expression of her sexual desire. Instead, the story carries a powerful example to show children the difference between an obsession with someone and loving someone.

Bettelheim's and Cashdan's theories consider fairy tales to have a developmental function, but they based their opinions on 19th-century translations – i.e., translations that, to a certain degree, follow the original. Jack Zipes, who is recognised as one of the world's best scholars of children's literature, writes: "Ever since the end of the nineteenth century there has been a tendency to protect the innocence of American children by sweetening and purifying the Grimms' tales" (2015, 91). This statement alludes, e.g., omitting punishing evil forces or the witch dying a violent death which Cashdan considers crucial when battling forces within. Moreover, the stories were simplified, so children are not appropriately drawn into them to have

a positive psychological impact. The fairy tales, stripped of their proven psychological significance, are left with only entertainment. However, nowadays, literature is not the prominent medium of influencing children's psychological development; it is the television. Further chapters will examine how Walt Disney Animation Studios transforms written princess fairy tales into films and how they shape children's identities.

3. Disney as a force shaping identities

The invention of the television in 1926 led slowly to television becoming a dominant entertainment medium. Disney's film industry caught an opportunity to attract large audiences, middle-class Americans, to "provide fun and good cheer" (Giroux 1999, 90) by adapting fairy tales. Through these adaptations, the process of 'Disneyfication'[7] began. The Brothers Grimm's *Rapunzel* was originally about the sacrifice of the firstborn[8], a prince falling in love with Rapunzel and her saving the prince, under Disneyfication Rapunzel becomes a princess who is "young and beautiful with a tiny waist and big child-like eyes" (Blackman 2020, "The Disney-fication of fairy tales"), and the story centres around the relationship between her and a handsome man. Disneyfication caused that the story *Little Mermaid* is about "a naked, voiceless and powerless"[9] girl that seeks to marry a handsome young man with whom she fell in love. Whereas, in the original Andersen's story the prince perceived the mermaid in a paternal way, and the story ends with the two not marrying at the end at all[10]. Contrasting written fairy tales that reflected the hardships of life and are considered by psychologists and many more to have a good influence on children's psychological development, Disney studio's adaptations, on the other hand, planned "film versions around satisfying emotional experiences that would remain with the viewer" (May 1981, 463).

Considering early Disney's fairy tale adaptations, an American professor of literacy and language, Jill P. May, pondered the question how Walt Disney Animation Studios has

[7] Disneyfication: the transformation (as of something real or unsettling) into carefully controlled and safe entertainment or an environment with similar qualities (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary Online, s.v. "Disneyfication," accessed July 11, 2023).
[8] The sacrifice was probably inspired by the hardship of the Great Famine (Blackman 2020, "The Disney-fication of fairy tales").
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

interpreted works of children's literature. When Walt Disney bought the rights to children's classic books, May argues, his intention of producing them on screens was "not planned around educational or literary objectives"[11]. She examines in her article the fairy tale *Cinderella* and claims that "he [Disney] sweetens" (464) the tale. The atmosphere between the heroine and the birds and mice is then described as lovable. Moreover, singing is argued to be used to alleviate the atmosphere of bullying by her stepmother and stepsisters. The purpose of the story, May continues, is thus destroyed. However, Disney never formally responded to criticism of his films because his plan had worked, May claims, and Disney indeed managed to capture the hearts of his audience. It is clear that there was probably no reason for Disney and his studio to get involved in an intellectual argument that might point out some weaknesses in the particular productions. More importantly, May is convinced the criticism never reached Disney's intended audience, middle-class Americans who had probably never read the classic fairy tales and, therefore, continued supporting Disney (464-466).

Since the first Disney full-length animated feature film, adaptation of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937, many fairy tale adaptations of the studio have been released to start asking questions about their influence on children. On the one hand, one might think, how can entertaining fairy tale films cause any harm to children? On the other hand, others might wonder, if only entertainment is provided. In other words, what is it the children might take in? In the book *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, Henry Armand Giroux, an American-Canadian cultural critic and educational thinker, examines the cultural politics of the Walt Disney Company and its influence on children. The book is claimed to argue that Disney, "while hiding behind a cloak of innocence and entertainment, strives to dominate global media and shape the desires, needs, and futures of today's children" (Giroux and Pollock, 2010, np). One controversial issue in Disney's animated films that shape children's identities is "the construction of gender identity for girls and women" (Giroux 1999, 98), the other controversial issue is racial stereotyping[12]. Therefore, Giroux's work emphasises that parents, teachers, and other adults working with children should understand how Disney films influence children's values. Children identify with Disney's films as the presented world resonates with their desires and interests (90-92).

[11] Ibid.

[12] Both (gender and racial stereotyping) will be discussed in detail in the following subchapters.

Jack Zipes' statement in his book *Grimm Legacies* about "a tendency to protect the innocence of American children by sweetening and purifying the Grimms' tales" (2015, 91) might be a positive development by some. A number of parents try to protect their children from the harsh world outside and prefer their children watching enjoyable films. Their arguments might be that children are too young to encounter death, realize the finality of life, reveal potential life's struggles, and that sometimes there is not a happy ending. Why would parents take away from children Disney adaptations that construct a world of love, hope, adventures, and happy endings? The opposing argument was introduced by Giroux's beliefs that the adaptations can be potentially harmful in ways of their portrayal of gender and race that results negatively in shaping the children's understanding of themselves and the world around them. The following subchapters describe in detail the issues of gender and race in characters of Disney Princess heroines and present specific effects on children viewers. This insight then provides a better understanding of the negative aspects and can serve as a caution when deciding if to let children view these films.

3.1 Gender representation

Concerning criticism of Disney adaptations, one of the most controversial issues in Disney's animated films is the construction of gender identity (Giroux 1999, 98). The representation of gender in Disney Princess films has, Giroux observes, remained relatively constant since the 1937 release *of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. An Argentinian university teacher, researcher and doctor of philosophy, Alejandra Martinez, has discussed stereotypical patterns found in Disney Princess movies. One pattern in these stories she discusses in her article 'Awakening Rebellion in the Classroom: Analyzing and Performing Disney' is the idea of a female being the opposite and, more importantly, complementary to the male character. Another pattern Martinez mentions concerns marriage being presented as an ultimate goal for the female character. There are heroines whose primary objective is not to get married; however, throughout the story they nevertheless become associated with romantic love that leads to marriage, as is the case with, for example, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Mulan, Rapunzel, and Anna. These heroines are made to follow a quest for love and eventually enter into marriage while being passive, dependent, and emotional. Some heroines, however, Martinez points out, challenge this stereotype and do not marry. Moreover, they are portrayed as being stronger than men, which is what happens in the case of Merida from *Brave* (2012) and Elsa from *Frozen*

(2013). While Merida is allowed not to consider any suitor at all, Elsa's case is more problematic as her uncontrollable power actually makes her untouchable and thus difficult to become a wife. Young viewers, Martinez concludes, are thus made to think that a path to eternal happiness is only through marriage, and being independent leads to being single and having a lonely life (2016, 31-32). Martinez comments that "Disney seems to be whispering to little girls: "Don't be too strong or you'll die single." If love and marriage are shown as the only path to eternal happiness, Disney's message to girls is strong" (32). Though Martinez's statement of how influential can an ending with a wedding be to children is justified by real-life influence on them, it needs to be taken into consideration that fairy tales are stories about love and a happy ending is celebrated in most cases with a wedding. After all, the underlining reason for a wedding is love which is dominant in the stories and sometimes other than romantic love seen in Disney Princess films are then overlooked – parental (e.g., Belle and her father), and sibling (e.g., Anna and Elsa).

3.1.1 Changes in gender representation through Disney Princesses

The first three princesses, in order of their release, Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora (Sleeping Beauty), are constructed around the stereotypical "women are to stay home and take care of the housework". Henry Armand Giroux examined the Little Mermaid Ariel, Jasmine, Belle, Pocahontas, and Mulan, which are in his opinion attempts to portray heroines differently. At first, the struggle in *The Little Mermaid* (1989) appears to "be engaged in a struggle against parental control, motivated by the desire to explore the human world" (1999, 99). Ultimately, the struggle to gain independence from her father leads Ariel to make a deal with the Sea Witch, Ursula, who takes her voice to gain a pair of legs so that she can charm the handsome prince, Eric. Giroux points out that "When Ursula tells Ariel that taking away her voice is not so bad because men don't like women who talk, the message is dramatized when the prince attempts to bestow the kiss of true love on Ariel even though she has never spoken to him"[13]. Girls delighted by Ariel's rebellious teenage nature are positioned to believe that the ultimate goal is catching a handsome man. Ariel, too, Giroux states, becomes a metaphor for the traditional housewife[14]. Taking into consideration Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, and Ariel, their gender

[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.

roles are narrowly defined which could lead to parents not exposing their children to these characters and films which show the heroines as passive and centred around men. Similarly to *The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin* (1992), featuring Princess Jasmine continues negative stereotypes about women and girls. Jasmine's life – who she marries – is defined by men. When a street tramp, Aladdin, falls in love with her, she becomes an object of desire (as she is beautiful), Giroux explains, and means for Aladdin how to become wealthy (100).

The gender theme, Giroux claims, becomes more complicated in *Beauty and the Beast*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*. On one side, Belle, the heroine of *Beauty and the Beast*, is portrayed as a bookworm, independent woman. However, on the other, Giroux states, she is portrayed as a model of etiquette who turns the Beast into a sensible, caring, and loving civilised man. Giroux summarizes that "Belle simply becomes another woman whose life is valued for solving a man's problems" (101). Pocahontas appears to challenge gender stereotypes, Giroux continues, but she is made over historically to resemble a bright, courageous supermodel. Her character is drawn in relation to the men who surround her (similarly to Jasmine) – her father, who wants to marry her off to one warrior of the tribe, and a colonist John Smith, her love interest. The history of colonialism and its genocidal legacy is not mentioned as it never happened, and the story unfolds as a "love conquers all" narrative. In *Mulan*, Giroux suggests that gender stereotyping is modified. The character of Mulan is presented as a bold female warrior who cancels traditional gender roles by dressing up as a boy to join a war. However, in conclusion, Mulan is like the other princesses. She, too, is on a quest to find a man, which she accomplishes by catching the most handsome one (101-103). Professor Johnson Cheu, who does scholarly work in media and cultural studies, shows through the character of Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) that there is a positive development concerning the gender theme. He mentions that references to Tiana's physical attributes are at a minimum; instead, the focus is placed on Tiana's work ethic. This positive shift from beauty not being highlighted in the film suggests its progressivity, providing young viewers with a heroine who is more concerned with material success (2013, 88-89). To summarize, the progressive changes in the portrayal of gender in Disney Princess films can be traced since the release of *The Princess and the Frog* in 2009. Due to this positive shift, the following heroines continued to alter the gender theme even more.

Cole Reilly, a university professor whose expertise is in gender analysis, among others, considers in her article 'An Encouraging Evolution Among the Disney Princesses?' Rapunzel, Merida, Elsa, and Anna to be "arguably the most empowering princess generation yet in terms of balancing power and personality for feisty, fun, formidable females" (2016, 55). Rapunzel in *Tangled* (2010), Reilly highlights, challenges the vain purposes of age and beauty stereotypes in Mother Gothel by prioritising freedom, adventure, friendship, and love. She is not the typical damsel in distress; she uses means (Flynn Rider) to escape the tower she has been forbidden to leave to fulfil her dream. Moreover, she connects with Flynn along the way, escalating into love. While facing the villain Gothel, Rapunzel surrenders her freedom for Flynn's life, whereas he willingly dies rather than allow her to make this sacrifice. After getting rid of Gothel, Rapunzel's tears heal Flynn, and their love is celebrated with a wedding. In their case, Reilly points out, they do not marry for looks or marry while still strangers to each other like many of Rapunzel's predecessors. While on an adventure, they learn a lot about each other, and falling in love even changes them into better people (Rapunzel stepping up to her oppressor Gothel and Flynn abandoning his life as a thief) (57).

Reilly underlines that in *Brave* (2012), Merida struggles between being a princess and herself; as her mother taught her, she cannot be both. Merida resists her mother's marriage arrangement but Merida is not able to change her mother's mind, therefore, she leans towards magic to solve her problem. In her case, her mother, Queen Elinor, is turned into a bear. While Queen Elinor is a bear, she realises how strict she is towards Merida and chooses to ease down her expectations. Merida forgives her mother and does everything she can to change her back. In the end, Merida does not need to marry, and the choice is up to her to choose someone one day. While *Brave* is about a mother-daughter relationship, *Frozen* (2013) focuses on the bond between two sisters, Anna and Elsa. Elsa's magical power threatened her surroundings, so their parents decided to lock her up. When their parents die, the sisters are set on taking over, reigning the kingdom, and finding a path to each other as they were separated for thirteen years. Elsa's fear of hurting people disrupts her coronation as Queen of Arendelle, and she decides to flee. Anna stands up for her sister and decides to find her and bring her home. Anna encourages Elsa to trust herself and her powers by believing in her and loving her. Not only does Anna look out for her sister, but Elsa does too. Elsa disagrees that Anna and Prince Hans should marry as they do not know each other. Elsa has higher hopes that Anna will not marry the first man she likes.

Elsa's character, Reilly highlights, breaks the stereotype of a princess marrying a stranger and presents a type of true love kiss that is not romantic but sisterly (57-59).

Lauren Dundes and Madeline Streiff, researchers in issues related to gender and identity, examined Moana, the newest member of the Disney Princess franchise. She is praised because she is "a brave heroine with a sense of humor and a commitment to saving the world without romantic distractions" (2017, 1). She has an adventurous spirit that clashes with obeying her father and not going beyond the reef. Her struggle against an overprotective father resembles Ariel's in *The Little Mermaid* (1989). As Moana's father wants to keep her safe, she, on the other hand, wants to explore the world and prove to him that she can be independent. This rebellious attempt resonates with the young audience, Streiff and Dundes believe, as they, too, have to mature and become independent enough so that fathers would ease up on them (6).

Between the introduction of Snow White and Moana has passed 79 years. To some extent, do these heroines represent women's role in society and how they were/are perceived. At first, housewives, and carers, were passive and dependent on men. The Disney Princesses' development reflects a shift of women to be more independent and break free of inferiority. The heroines became strong and self-reliant; they set higher goals than settling down with the most handsome man. The stories became orientated on family bonds (e.g., *Brave, Frozen*, *Moana*), which are crucial to one's life. Why is it important to have a positive development in the heroine's portrayal?

3.1.2 What can children learn from Disney Princesses' gender narratives

Two professors at the University of Southern Mississippi decided to carry out a project to answer whether these narratives are powerful enough to impact forming expectations and desires of women and men. Their students wrote an essay that reflected on their learning experience with Disney. As a result, the participating students unintentionally internalized three gendered metanarratives. Firstly, the students identified with the concept of a rebellious teenager; therefore, Olewski and Sellers suggest, Disney stories shaped their understanding of their identities. Secondly, the students' essays involved the significance of physical beauty, which was culturally embraced as the marker of a successful princess/woman. These physical characteristics, Olewski and Sellers state, could affect students' self-acceptance and self-esteem. Thirdly, the idea of heteronormative domesticity was placed in the princess culture by

insisting on marriage and happily-ever-after love, which Olewski and Sellers found reflected in students' desire to find true fairy-tale love (2016, 40-44). That is why parents should be aware of how these narratives shape their children's identities because it was proven that they do. Firstly, the danger of absorbing the heroines' rebellious attitude discussed in the professors' article could be potentially harmful to teenagers; however, it can also serve as a lesson when the rebellious act ends badly[15], and as a means to build a personal identity in taking a stance concerning the teenagers' lives[16]. Secondly, imprinting the idea that through physical beauty can children succeed in life can be devastating to their developing self-esteem, and it could then result in confusing their personal values. Thirdly, in some cases children could internalize the wish of finding a fairytale-like love which could lead to setting unrealistic expectations of their future partners. Despite fairy tales frequently showing a happy ending through finding love and marrying, it does not need to be perceived by viewers as the only option how to find a happy ending. Overall, the film industry's attempt to portray the heroines' gender role in a better way, was definitely a step in the right direction concerning good influence on both girl and boy viewers.

3.2 The portrayal of race through Disney Princesses

Another controversial issue in Disney's animated films is the representation of race. "Critiques implicate Disney films in reinforcing White institutional power by framing non-White racial identities as 'Other' through racial binarism and primitivism, reinforcing negative racial stereotypes" (Kee and Grant 2016, 68). In other words, in Disney's earlier films, negative depictions of non-White identities were common and, therefore, particularly damaging because different representations were rare. For many decades children of colour were offered no positive representations in visual culture.

Cultural critic Henry Armand Giroux examined *Aladdin* (1992). This film is considered one of the most controversial examples of racist stereotyping because the Arab culture is depicted in a decidedly racist tone highlighted by grotesque, violent, and cruel supporting characters. Despite that, this movie became successful and won two Academy Awards (1999, 104). This positive acceptance from the American audience and the Academy of Motion Picture

[15] For example, Ariel turns towards magic, loses her voice, and risks her life in an attempt to make Prince Eric fall in love with her.
[16] Sometimes parents, especially fathers, forget that teenagers are no longer little children.

Arts and Sciences clashes with the negative criticism of researchers, experts, Arab people, and other people noticing harmful racial stereotyping. Giroux points out the claim of a former South Bay Islamic Association spokesperson, Yousef Salem that characterized the film: "All of the bad guys have beards and large, bulbous noses, sinister eyes and heavy accents, and they're wielding swords constantly. Aladdin doesn't have a big nose; he has a small nose. He doesn't have a beard or a turban. He doesn't have an accent. What makes him nice is they've given him this American character"[17]. Regarding the accents, the "bad" Arabs have thick, foreign accents, while the Anglicized Jasmine and Aladdin speak in standard American English (105).

A professor of Education at Eastern University, Dorothy Hurley, focused her examination on the binary colour symbolism, which results in associating white with goodness and black with evil. To reveal the symbolic marker of goodness and badness Hurley chose *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937) and *Cinderella* (1950). Snow White's stepmother, the queen, is dressed in black; she lives in a black castle that has black rats, and she has a black crow-like bird. In contrast, Snow White is surrounded by white birds, the prince arrives on a white horse, and they ride off to his white castle. The good in *Cinderella* is seen in the heroine's blond hair and blue eyes. The prince lives in a white castle; the white-haired fairy godmother turns brown mice into white horses and a pumpkin into a white coach. In contrast, Cinderella's stepmother and stepsisters are visibly darker-skinned. The wicked stepmother's beloved pet is a black cat named Lucifer. The coding of good and evil follows to some extent, Hurley notices, in the following movies of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Aladdin* (1992) as well (2005, 224-225). Examining the representative non-White heroines shows how stereotypical, moreover, incorrect their portrayal is. As a result, this becomes a severe issue with child audiences who do not have a positive race representative they can identify with.

3.2.1 Changes in the portrayal of race through Disney Princesses

Celeste Lacroix, a professor at College of Charleston, whose research is orientated in race and ethnicity in popular culture, examined Jasmine of *Aladdin* (1992) and Pocahontas as they are the first two heroines from the Disney Princess franchise that are non-White. She based her

[17] Ibid.

inspection on physical appearance that differentiates them from the White princesses. Pocahontas is further presented with apparent Native American stereotypes.

Jasmine is Arabian, but her skin tone is much darker for the Middle Eastern setting of the story, Lacroix argues. Jasmine carries many White features, such as a delicate nose and small mouth. The most noticeable physical feature is her overly large almond-shaped eyes. In Lacroix's opinion, Jasmine's character was made to be sexually appealing, making her race seem less of defining quality. Pocahontas is a Native American drawn with large almond-shaped eyes whose features, Lacroix informs, were modelled from an Asian American actress. However, her body is depicted athletically, appearing to be almost an Amazon, Lacroix describes. Pocahontas is tall with long, strong legs and a developed bust. Her strong will is shown through her loyalty to putting the needs of her people before her desires. This stereotype of the noble savage, Lacroix highlights, is iconic and racist to Native Americans. Her personality and behaviour are related to her ethnicity and form a contrast to John Smith's Whiteness. Another stereotype is Native Americans' unique relationship with nature which is seen in her relationship with animals, even the trees, water, and the wind. Despite being portrayed as physically different from their White predecessors, Lacroix summarizes, the choices of their portrayal sexualize and exoticize them both (2004, 220-222, 224-225).

Johnson Cheu assesses the heroines Mulan and Tiana from the films *Mulan* (1998) and *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). The idea of the film *Mulan* was originally adapted from the legend of Hua Mulan. The Disney version consists of distinctive Chinese cultural traits and historical facts. Mulan is pressured to go through a feminizing process to become a proper woman and, therefore, a proper bride. However, she has doubts about what kind of identity she has to have/perform and decides to run away. Such a reaction which serves the character to find her identity is, Cheu explains, an example of Americanization in the adaptation of the legend (2013, 115). Keith Booker, a professor and a writer, comments that "The film, which focuses on an invasion of China by the Huns, also continues the racial coding that had been so problematic in films such as *Aladdin*. Thus, the evil Huns are not only depicted as savage and ruthless but as being significantly darker than the Chinese, who here serves as the ethnic norm" (Booker 2010, 64-65).

Cheu comments that it took Disney more than 70 years from presenting the first animated princess fairy tale, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), to depict the first black-born

Disney Princess in *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). Princess Tiana is black, but it has been argued that she is not representational of blackness. In other words, she is "just a princess," that happens to be of a different complexion, not a *black* princess. Walt Disney Animation Studios' strategy thus applied lies in representation that will allow the studio to profit without losing its audience. In fact, Tiana's hard-working ethic to accomplish her American dream of running her restaurant appeals to all viewers. Moreover, the screen time for Tiana being human is far less than her screen time as a frog. Cheu concludes that despite that Walt Disney Animation Studios finally addressing the need for inclusivity in its representational strategies, it has not managed to show the complexities surrounding race discourses (2013, 84-86, 94).

Hannah Dittmer, concerned with the representations of Oceania, examines Moana, who represents the indigenous culture of the Pacific people. Walt Disney Animation Studios tried to produce a culturally accurate film; however, the pressure of producing a blockbuster film, Dittmer argues, became more dominant. As a result, several paradisiac clichés of sparkling blue water, white beaches, tropical landscapes, and coconut bikinis were included. Portraying Islanders as laughing, singing, and dancing all day, in Dittmer's opinion, supports the stereotype of them being primitive and savage (2021, 27). Despite criticism from indigenous Pacific anthropologists, young Polynesian viewers, Dittmer believes that "the presence of such strong Polynesian characters on screen may give Pacific youth and children the opportunity to identify with relatable role models who evoke feelings of pride in their cultural identity" (28).

Despite the repeated attempts to include different races and ethnicities in the Disney Princess franchise, it is a first step towards a better portrayal, thanks to the amount of criticism surrounding the films. Keeping in mind that the intended audience is American, the film makers want to please mostly them; however, Walt Disney Animation Studios should consider portraying characters more accurately and, therefore, respectably. Why is inclusivity so important in the Disney Princess franchise?

3.2.2 What does Disney Princesses' portrayal convey about race

Dorothy Hurley explains that children are provided cultural information about themselves, others, and the relative status of group members through the print form (especially children's literature) and forms of electronic media (especially television) (2005, 221-222). She writes about the awareness of impacting children with White privileging and binary colour

symbolism. Leading children to see "White" as positive and dark as negative is harmful in relation to self-acceptance. One teacher, Hurley informs, that taught Latino children in kindergarten reported having a dark child in the class, and he wanted to turn White as he did not like his colour. Such "social worthlessness" cases are being imprinted into children through Walt Disney Animation Studios, among others.

The significance of children seeing themselves in a positive light, Hurley explains, is crucial to forming a positive self-image in children. While the absence of representatives of different ethnicity or race might not be intentional, they have damaging effects that should not be underestimated (227-228). Though the accurate representation of different people is something that Walt Disney Animation Studios struggles with, it is the beginning of a new era of the heroines' portrayal that would resonate with much more children viewers. Having representatives of different ethnicities and races in visual media could potentially lower the film's heavy criticism regarding the race theme, and would positively result in having a good influence on child viewers.

4. The portrayal of Disney Princesses

This chapter provides detailed summaries of the individual films and descriptions of selected Disney Princesses based on experience with the particular films. The reason for this is to point out how are the characters constructed by the Disney Studio. The heroines' story, behaviour, motivation to fulfil their goals and dreams, as well as gender and race, are going to be listed. The purpose is to illustrate the claims concerning the gender and racial stereotypes that were discussed in the theoretical part, but also possibly additional ones which can lead to a better understanding of the arguably "positive" and "negative" aspects of the films regarding their influence on children audiences. The summaries and descriptions are in the next subchapter developed into a classification of the individual heroines based on certain similarities to chart out a noticeable development in their portrayal. The following heroines are described in order of the films' release.

Snow White from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)

At a wishing well, Snow White wishes that love would find her. Her wish comes true, and the shy princess hides from a prince, probably even embarrassed that she wears ragged

clothes. She does not have a conversation with the prince, they are strangers, and she bases her love on his charming looks and his expression of love through a song. However, Snow White's life, which she had known her whole life, ends when the huntsman spares her life. She is forced to stay in hiding from the jealous Queen. As Snow White is mourning, the animals in the woods lift the atmosphere, and her mood improves as she sings a song.

Incapable of caring for herself, the animals help her find a place to stay. As a typical princess, it did not cross her mind that she would take matters into her own hands and either find shelter herself or the prince. She takes shelter in the dwarves' cottage and gets excited when she assumes seven children live there. She suddenly sees a purpose in becoming a temporary mother and looking after the place, as the only skills she possesses are cleaning and cooking, which are stereotypical housewife duties that she performs despite her status of a princess. The dwarves adjust to Snow White's mothering (washing before eating and a set bedtime). Despite being old, Snow White finds them incapable of caring for themselves based on their lack of basic habits (tidiness, cleanliness). They let her be dominant in the household not just because she is royalty, but all become taken away by her beauty and want to please her.

Her naivety is shown through her perception of love and her blind respect for older people. When the alarmed birds attack the Queen in disguise as an old peddler woman, she sides with her as if the older woman is weak and, therefore, cannot harm her. Her lousy judgement of people leads her to eat a poisoned apple. In the end, the prince hears rumours about a maiden that sleeps in a glass coffin, guessing it is probably his love, kisses her and mourns that he lost her. Unexpectedly she wakes up, and they travel to his castle.

Cinderella from *Cinderella* (1950)

Cinderella dreams of happiness but leaves the audience guessing what would make her happy – probably finding people who care about her and not treating her as her step-family. The good in Cinderella can be seen through her character as she always obeys with a respectful voice all tasks she has to carry out and her friendly attitude towards animals. On the other hand, the evil in her step-family is acted out through horrible slave-like behaviour towards Cinderella, which is escalated with the stepsisters ripping her beautiful dress (made by animal friends) apart before the ball. They are jealous of her beauty, fearing that her attendance at the ball would

lower their chances of impressing the prince. With her dress ruined, she was so fed up with her life that she gave up. A fairy godmother magically appears and helps her attend the ball.

The prince is supposed to choose a wife by looking at maidens, not even engaging in dance or conversation. When the beautiful Cinderella enters the room, the prince notices her and picks her to dance with. It takes one dance, and they consider being in love and kiss. However, when the clock strikes midnight, she runs away from her love than dares to stand in front of the man in her ragged clothes after the spell wears off.

Cinderella is grateful for the wonderful ball, and her faith in the dream of happiness coming true strengthens again. However, she jumps back into her servant's life the next day instead of taking matters into her own hands and waits if the man finds her. Cinderella is pleasantly surprised that the man she had danced with the night before was the prince and wants to marry the maiden he had danced with. As Cinderella goes to her room to dress up for the test of the glass slipper, her stepmother locks her up, deducing that she has danced with the prince. It is only with the help of her animal friends that she can get out of her room. After the prince and Cinderella reunite, a wedding ceremony is held.

Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty* (1959)

External forces mainly influence the character of Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty*. As a baby, she was cursed by an evil fairy Maleficent because she did not receive an invite to Aurora's christening. "Before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday, she pricks her finger and dies." The king and queen take measures to protect Aurora from Maleficent's curse. She grows up in a cottage in the middle of a forest with three aunts (fairy godmothers) keeping her safe. On her sixteenth birthday, she wanders the forest, wishing to meet someone as she is very lonely. She meets a stranger she attracts with her singing, and they dance. She trusts him because she has dreamt of him several times before. As she was lonely for many years, she did not crave friends but immediately a man as if only through romantic love could she overcome her loneliness. It is their looks that draw them to each other. Neither of them knows that their marriage was arranged a long time ago. After all, it is a nice coincidence that they fall in love because otherwise, they would be forced to marry by their fathers. However, Aurora, unknowing that she has fallen in love with Prince Phillip, is devastated that she cannot be with the man from the forest, making it harder for the fairies to bring Aurora back to the castle. Giving her time

left alone, Aurora curiously follows a green light that turns into a spinning wheel. Maleficent's voice manipulates her into pricking her finger, and she falls asleep. Thanks to the prince and the help of the three fairies, Aurora awakens alive by love's first kiss.

Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* (1989)

Ariel is not a typical teenage mermaid who would enjoy living her life under the sea with her family, kind, and friends. Her fascination with the human world leads her to encounter a handsome human prince with whom she falls in love. After Ariel saves Prince Eric from drowning, he falls in love with his rescuer, whom he can tell only by her singing voice. Her father, Triton, always warned her about humans being bad; however, building her trophy room with human artefacts, she gets a different idea about humans. She lives in a fantasy that she and Prince Eric would be together, but her furious father tears down her hopes when he learns she is not in love with some merman but a human. As Triton acted upon his hate towards humans, understandably, it drove Ariel away to do something terrible. On the other hand, hatred of humans was justified as humans hunt for seafood which are members of their kingdom. Desperate Ariel turned towards magic to solve her problem. She visits the sea witch, Ursula, and makes a deal with her. Ariel faces the tough choice of abandoning her family for a man if she succeeds in making Prince Eric fall in love with her in three days, incapable of speaking. It is not a far-fetched risk for Ariel, as she learns from Ursula that Eric is her true love, meaning there is a high probability that he might kiss her despite her being mute.

Though humans know the same language as Ariel (she understands them as she nods), they do not conduct a way for them to communicate together. Otherwise, she would express that she is the one who had saved him but lost her voice. Before Ariel and Eric kissed, Ursula interfered. She uses magic to pretend that she is the one that saved Eric and hypnotises him. At their wedding, animals attack Ursula, and Ariel's voice returns. It is too late for true love's kiss, and Ursula tricks Triton into taking Ariel's place, becoming a lost soul, and he does. Only when Eric shows off his heroic skills killing Ursula and saving the lost souls and the kingdom itself does Triton's hate fade away, changing Ariel into a human as his belief that all humans are bad changes and blesses them. Ariel and Eric marry in the end.

Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991)

Though Belle's books give her cravings for adventures, she has them only because she has not found a suitable partner yet. With no friends, people considering her odd to read books, and not being interested in suitors, she finds temporary comfort in books that help her to become more extraordinary. Because she is also the most beautiful maiden in the village, she has a suitor, Gaston. He believes he deserves the best and that the best woman is the most beautiful in his world. Belle considers him handsome, but his other characteristics, being rude and conceited, make him repulsive. Her character thus challenges the stereotype of love at first sight based on looks.

When Belle learns her father is lost, she does not hesitate to rescue him. Her craving for an adventure is fulfilled as she takes her father's place as a prisoner. While her father was treated as a prisoner, Belle was treated as a guest. At first, the Beast leads her to her room and invites her for dinner, which leaves Belle surprised by his behaviour. Her curiousness leads her to the forbidden west wing, and as the Beast catches her, she frightenedly attempts to escape the castle. After the Beast saves Belle from hungry wolves, she seems to trust him, and, consequently, spends more time with him willingly. Despite the fact that they slowly fall in love, she still misses her father, and when she learns he is in danger (because he wants to save her from the Beast), the Beast sets Belle free, putting the life of Belle's father before his struggle to break his curse.

Belle seems not to be a damsel in distress but an active heroine who protects her father. She also stands up to people terrified of the Beast and explains that he would not hurt anybody and is kind and gentle. Nobody listens to her; she is powerless in the village; instead, they support the strong man Gaston as he raises fear among the people. While Belle is locked away and cannot warn the Beast about the people coming for him, enchanted teacup Chip helps her and her father break out. Without time to spear, she rides to the castle to save her love. Only when the Beast sees that Belle has returned to his castle does he start to fight back against Gaston. Her love for the Beast breaks the curse, and a wedding is celebrated.

Jasmine from *Aladdin* (1992)

Jasmine is bored with her life as a princess living only behind the walls of a palace. Her ultimate struggle is craving independence regarding the choice of whom she marries. Her father,

the sultan, respects the law of a princess marrying a prince as only they are worthy of becoming a sultan. Despite Jasmine fighting the stereotypical arranged marriage, she follows the same stereotype of marriage being an ultimate goal. She mindlessly decides to run away, and while she visits the marketplace, she is very excited about everything she sees. Unfortunately, she does not know how things work among the common people. A thief, Aladdin, spots her and is charmed by her beauty. Luckily, he interferes when she is about to lose her hand for not paying for an apple. Aladdin leads her to his home, and they bond over feeling trapped in their lives. They almost kiss; however, they are interrupted by the guards. When Aladdin learns Jasmine is a princess, he is willing to pretend to be someone he is not to impress her, and lies to Jasmine. Sadly, Jasmine shows no interest in Aladdin in disguise as Prince Ali until he agrees that Jasmine is not a prize to be won and that she should make her own choices regarding her life. In the end, Aladdin's conscience allows him to be honest and a hero battling Jafar and giving freedom to the Genie. The law of a princess marrying a prince is altered, and Jasmine and Aladdin can marry.

Bourenane comments that Jasmine is created according to how Westerns imagine the oriental female figure; therefore, she is over-sexualised. Her outfits are revealing, seeming almost like a belly dancer. Her character is highlighted with oriental exoticism and danger as she has a pet tiger. Moreover, Jasmine has an unrealistic proper American accent to appeal to the American audience (2020, 245). After all, her character and fate are determined by powerful men surrounding her (the sultan who wants a successor, sinister advisor Jafar who wants to become a sultan, and Aladdin who wants to break out of the life of a street tramp). Ultimately, the sultan changes the law to "the princess can marry whomever she deems worthy", but only because the sultan had seen Aladdin battling Jafar and giving freedom to the enslaved Genie. Aladdin has proved to the sultan that he is worthy, so he changes the law. He did not change it because her daughter loves him, but because Aladdin is a hero and such a hero will protect the town of Agrabah.

Pocahontas from *Pocahontas* (1995)

Pocahontas is a person that is one with nature. She is enjoying her life as a chief's daughter and is supposed to marry; however, she does not find her suitor appropriate for being "serious". When Pocahontas encounters John Smith as a member of the English sailors claiming her land,

they argue about the English's intentions with her people's land. While he believes that her people, including her, are savage and everything should be civilised, she wins him by showing him her world, and they fall in love. Pocahontas tries to prevent a massacre between the English and the Native Americans by protecting John Smith from death by her father, the chief. Her curiousness and attraction to John Smith became crucial when they attempted to persuade the two sides of a conflict not to fight. Their love for each other reminded the men that they should not be controlled by anger and fear. The English returned with John Smith on board to treat his wound. Pocahontas chooses to stay with her people.

Concerning physical appearance, Pocahontas has an athletic figure with eyes that suits her to be Asian, not Native American. She has beautiful characteristics of long dark hair constantly flowing in the wind and big lips. Cappiccie et al. examined the portrayal of Pocahontas and mentioned the area of her looks. The way that the creators drew her was based on four women: paintings of Pocahontas, a Native American consultant, a Filipino model and a white supermodel. As a result, Pocahontas is sexy, sensual and exotic. Her dress especially draws attention to her physical body, which does not resemble the clothes of Native American women of the period. Pocahontas' age was altered to develop an appropriate romance with John Smith (realistically, she was between 10-12 years old). Moreover, Pocahontas' sneaking off to meet John Smith is unrealistic as members of the tribe had to obey the strict commands of a parent. Her defiance of her father fits her into coming-of-age stories that appeal to American children. Though the true story of the arrival of Europeans to America was a tragedy, the tale is made to show a way to multiculturally accept and understand each other (2012, 53-55).

Mulan from *Mulan* (1998)

Though Mulan does her best, she cannot fit her role as an obedient young Chinese woman. She is stubborn and tends to express her opinions which others do not perceive well. She sees an opportunity to bring her family honour through fighting for the Emperor, as she failed to impress the matchmaker and become the proper bride and marry. As her motivation to become a soldier was primarily to save her father's life, she uses the experience in disguise as a man to show who she is inside. She learns to behave as a man thanks to a small dragon Mushu sent by her ancestors. Though initially weak, she is intelligent and determined to fit in. On her journey of training to become a soldier, she starts liking the most handsome man around – General Li

Shang. Through her intelligence, she becomes a true hero. She cannons the snowed mountain creating an avalanche when the Huns attack her unit, but a sword wounds her and as they attend to it, they discover she is female. Her life is spent; however, she is to return home. Discovering that the Huns are still a threat to all of China, she wants to warn her unit. When the Huns attack, while the soldiers use their strength to get into the temple to save the Emperor, Mulan uses her wits to get inside with her fellow soldiers (disguised as concubines). Thanks to her plan, she could save the Emperor and kill the evil leader, Shan Yu. Though offered to join the Emperor's council, she prefers to go home and reunite with her parents. Mulan comes home with the villain's sword and the Emperor's crest to prove to her father that she is not a disgrace to the family. Her father greets her with a relieved hug that she has come home safely and assures Mulan that having her as a daughter is the greatest gift and honour. On the other hand, her grandmother expresses that she should have brought home not a sward but a man. She shares an opinion with the Emperor, as he told Mulan's love interest Li Shang: "The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare and beautiful of all." In the end, Mulan brings her family honour even more, when Li Shang comes to her village (expressing he wants to be with her).

Cappiccie et al. examined Mulan's character and pointed out that when Mulan sings the song "Reflection," the viewers learn that part of her motivation to go to the war is to find herself, which is unrealistic of Chinese culture but a feature of Americanization. The Chinese, however, favour the Confucian philosophy of parental duty when Mulan takes her father's place in war. Throughout the film, Mulan is accompanied by two animals, a dragon and a cricket, who mock Chinese culture and have a comedic function by altering history and mixing up East and West (2012, 52-53).

Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* (2009)

Since Tiana was a little girl, her dreams were clear-cut. She was not interested in boys and marriage; she wanted to fulfil her father's wish of running a restaurant. Tiana contrasts with her friend Charlotte, who is spoiled and rich and centres her life on finding a man. Even Tiana's mother persuades her to ease down with work and find love. When wishing on the Evening Star and hard work is not enough for Tiana's dream to come true, she makes a deal with enchanted Prince Naveen as a frog. He will give her money to run her restaurant if she kisses him. Kissing

him does not go as planned, and Tiana is too turned into a frog. They experience an adventure to find a voodoo practitioner Mama Odie who would change them back to their human form.

Though Tiana despises Prince Naveen at first for his easy life as a rich, he shows his witty skills by tricking others into doing his way (crocodile Louis to take them to Mama Odie and a trap to scare off the hunters); she starts liking him. They bond over cooking and dancing even more. While still frogs, Prince Naveen plans to propose to her as he loves her; however, he changes his mind. He follows the plan to transform into a human by kissing and marrying Charlotte so that Tiana can live her dream. However, Tiana struggles with what she wants because she also has feelings for him. After the villains are taken care of, Tiana admits to Naveen that she loves him, and Charlotte agrees that she would kiss him to turn them back to humans so they could be together. However, the kiss is not successful, and only after they marry as frogs do they turn back to humans (because Tiana becomes a princess by marrying Naveen).

Gregory comments that Tiana's representation of the African American race contrasts with Tiana being portrayed as a strong, young African American working hard in New Orleans and suddenly being a frog. As a result of Tiana spending most of the film as an animal, the place left for Tiana to represent her race rests on Disney's main message that blacks are decent, honourable, loving and hard-working people (2010, 439).

Rapunzel from *Tangled* (2010)

Rapunzel has lived in a tower for seventeen years. Naturally, she wants to leave it for at least one day. Her "mother", Gothel, using Rapunzel for the magical hair she has, has forbidden her to leave it. When a thief Flynn Ryder accidentally finds the tower, he climbs it to hide from the royal guards chasing him for taking a crown. Though Rapunzel does not know much about the world outside, apart from the exaggerated things that Mother Gothel said, she can handle a man who broke into her tower. Using a frying pan as a weapon and using Flynn to guide her to see the lanterns set out on her birthday makes her strong and on top of things. Moreover, she is innocent and kind and makes allies along the way. She can get her and Flynn out of dangerous situations thanks to singing and using her hair as a rope or torch in the water. On the adventure, they fall in love.

Through the character Mother Gothel it is apparent that Rapunzel is also easy to manipulate and make her doubt as Gothel orchestrates the situation that looked like Flynn had

abandoned Rapunzel because all he cared for was the royal crown. They head back to Rapunzel's tower. When Rapunzel realises she is the lost princess, it does not make her powerful enough to stand up to the villain Gothel. Only when Flynn, with the help of their friends, escapes his death sentence and returns to the tower can he save Rapunzel from Gothel. Though stabbed and slowly dying, he takes matters into his hand, cutting Rapunzel's hair and removing her powers. With Gothel dead, he made peace that even though he could not have the life with Rapunzel, at least he had saved her from Gothel. Unexpectedly, Rapunzel's tears carry her power and heal Flynn. She is reunited with her parents, and Rapunzel and Flynn marry.

Merida from *Brave* (2012)

Merida has an adventurous spirit. She is interested in archery and enjoys freedom from her duties as a princess. Her mother is strict with forcing her to be a proper princess, while Merida does not understand the life drawn for her. Her parents present her with a tournament between three clans to find a suitor for her. Clever Merida finds a loophole to compete in the tournament for her hand. She wins it, and her mother is furious with her. An argument ends with unforgivable gestures – Merida ruins their family tapestry, and her mother throws her precious bow into the fire. As Merida runs away, she feels that there was enough talking and that the only thing that would change Merida's fate of becoming a proper princess and a bride is magic. A witch gives Merida an enchanted cake to help her with her problem. To Merida's surprise, the cake turns the Queen into a bear. Horrified Merida and the bear Queen travel back to the witch's cottage in an attempt to turn her mother back to human form. However, the witch had gone, leaving them only a cryptic message about breaking the spell.

Hopeless at first, the two undergo a bonding adventure in the forest. They assume that the answer to breaking the spell is fixing the family tapestry, so they return to the castle. King Fergus finds the bear Queen but refuses to believe it is his wife. As he locks Merida in her room, thinking she is insane, he and his men go after the bear. With the help of her three brothers, tempted by the enchanted cake and turned into bears, she can come to her mother's rescue. Merida's motivation rises even more as she has to break the spell; otherwise, the transformation will be permanent, and she will lose most of her family. Riding on a horse, she fixes the tapestry and defends her mother from the hunters. As an evil bear, Mordu, finds all of them, the mother duels him and wins. Mother and daughter forgive each other, and the spell is broken. As a result

of their mend relationship, they become more understanding of each other, and Merida can one day marry whomever she decides to.

Anna from *Frozen* (2013)

Anna is excited about the coronation day of her sister Elsa as it is the day when the castle is opened for people, and there will be a celebration with a party. She hopes that she might even find true love. Though her love makes her determined to find Elsa at the North Mountain, she does not possess the skill to make the journey alone, and therefore, when she meets Kristoff, she makes him find Elsa with her. After confronting her sister to come home, Elsa is anxious about Arendelle being covered in eternal winter and has no idea how to undo it. Her uncontrolled feelings lead to hurting Anna, which results in Anna slowly turning into ice. Kristoff does everything he can to save Anna. He brings her to creatures that can help with magic – the trolls who tell them that only an act of true love can save her. Assuming that Hans, her fiancé, is the answer, they ride to Arendelle. However, Hans tricked her the whole time because he wanted to become a king and rule Arendelle. As he leaves her to freeze to death, with the help of her friend snowman Olaf, she realises that Kristoff loves her and she loves him, meaning that there is a chance to save Anna. As she and Kristoff race to kiss each other, Anna decides to save herself or save her sister. Her pure loving heart decides to save her sister from Hans' attack, which symbolises an act of true love between sisters, and Anna is saved.

Elsa from *Frozen* (2013)

An accident, which happened while Elsa was playing with her sister when they were small, made some feel afraid she might hurt someone again. Her parents thus take precautions to avoid another accident by locking Elsa up and closing the castle to the public. Moreover, the parents taught Elsa to keep her power under control by keeping her magical gloves on – not using her power at all. After her snow magic shows, when an argument with Anna triggers her, Elsa decides to run away. For some time, she feels free, letting go, and expressing herself with her power.

Elsa is the more down-to-earth sister who disagrees that Anna and Hans should marry the day they meet. Though Anna dreams of finding true love, Elsa does not have the privilege of being concerned by potential suitors and living an ordinary life as a princess/future queen. Her concerns are only by her dangerous powers. While Anna is motivated by love towards Elsa,

Elsa, on the other hand, lives in constant fear, which enables her to learn how to control her power. For the kingdom's sake, her decision to go into exile could go more smoothly. Elsa, who put up walls for a long time, thinks that being alone will lead to others being safe; however, as she learns that no one is safe as she brought winter on all of Arendelle, her fear and hopelessness leads to hurting her sister.

After a group of men attack her ice castle, she is brought back to Arendelle and convicted of treason by Hans, who is told that Anna is dead because of her powers. Though she escapes, she concludes that her death is the only way to save everyone from her powers. As she has given up, her sister saves her from Hans. Anna protected Elsa instinctively, not knowing that putting her sister before her life was an act of true love and would save her. Elsa, amazed by the love and faith put into her by her sister, finds that love is the answer to her powers and not living in denial and fear.

Moana from *Moana* (2016)

Her birth determined Moana's life as she is a chief's daughter and is supposed to follow his steps. She was taught that no one ever goes beyond the reef to be safe. However, she has an adventurous spirit and is drawn to the ocean. When the tribe discovers that there are no fish in the reef anymore, Moana's temptation to go beyond the reef rises. She wants to obey her father and become a devoted island member; however, as the future chief, she wants to save her people. Only after her grandmother shows her the caves where the islanders hid their canoes and orders her to find the demigod Maui who can restore her island as it is dying does she take in that the ocean chose her for this journey. When Moana finds Maui, she convinces him to return the stone to Te Fiti Island to become a hero. She is the one that protects the stone from pirates and keeps Maui motivated to fulfil his goal. After an unsuccessful attempt to get to the island, Maui gives up, and for some time, Moana does as well. Only after her grandmother reminds her who Moana is and Moana takes it in does she try to deliver the stone again and succeeds with the help of Maui, who comes back to help her.

Tamaira and Fonoti's examination of Moana suggests that the way that Moana is taken away by Indigenous stories told by her grandmother is a respectful tradition to the Pacific people. Then, when Moana's grandmother dies, her presence as a spirit highlights the importance of especially elderly women who were taken as guides and counsellors in the Pacific

narrative tradition. Maui also takes time to teach Moana to sail and navigate; therefore, she becomes a voyager who guides her vessel herself, which confronts the gender assumption in the Pacific that voyaging and navigation are a skill of men. The portrayal of Moana's character also confronts the patriarchal hegemony in the Pacific as she is independent, brave and confident (2018, 305, 307-309).

Through these descriptions of the heroines, it is evident that there is a noticeable positive development in their portrayal. This development is due to several reasons: the films' creators tend to fight negative stereotypes, become inclusive of different races and ethnicities, and loosely,[18] if not at all[19], base their films on "classical" fairy tales. There is an evident growth in the heroines' portrayal as they are not passive and the typical damsels in distress; they are fighters whose goal is higher than settling down with a man. Moreover, inclusivity, though still undoubtedly problematic, starts to reach more and more child viewers in a positive way as they encounter a representative heroine to look up to. Finally, the films' creators' choice of transforming fairy tales into animated films might have been seemingly harmless and, therefore, a good choice at first; time revealed that similarly to original fairy tales, the Disney studio's adaptations contain harmful stereotypes to children viewers. The studio's tendency to create new animated films that are not based on existing sources of fairy tales seems like the right way to go to fight the negative stereotypes of previous films.

4.1 Classification of Disney Princesses

The classification in this subchapter strengthens the claims of the heroines' slow development. They are grouped based on several factors: the heroines' motivation (what they act upon), their behaviour, what they do/what happens to them, and how strong their character is. The result of considering these factors is seven groups formed mainly by two heroines at a time. The groups are chronologically formed from "the worst" to "the best" heroines to point out their development and the potential good influence on child viewers: 1. A Victim, 2. Passive, 3. Impulsive, 4. Afraid, 5. A Fighter, 6. A Protector, and 7. A Saviour. As a result, the heroines' grouping can serve as one of the plausible markers to show which heroines' films could have a good influence on child viewers.

[18] For example, *Frozen* (2013) is loosely based on Hans Christian Andersen's *Snow Queen*.
[19] For example, the films *Brave* (2012), and *Moana* (2016) do not have literary origins.

Group 1: A VICTIM

The first group could be summarised by a quote that they are victims of "I am a princess". That means their motivation is very poor, making them victims of circumstances determined by different characters. These princesses are Aurora (Sleeping Beauty) and Jasmine.

Aurora's life is built on a curse that a dark fairy, Maleficent, put on her as a baby (before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday, she pricks her finger and dies). On her 16th birthday, she is brought back to her parents' castle/her original home to reunite with her parents happily and then marry her through an arranged marriage to Prince Philip to secure peace between the two kingdoms. In other words, the circumstances of an attempt to save her life from a vengeful fairy who feels wronged for not being invited to Aurora's christening placed her in a cottage in the middle of a forest for 15 years. Secondly, her love life was set up as a baby, making her a strategic pawn between two kingdoms. Aurora gains motivation when she meets a man. However, when she is dragged back to her kingdom and mourns over her love interest, her delicate state causes Maleficent to lure her into pricking her finger, and she falls asleep. It is only with the help of three fairy godmothers that Prince Phillip can break the curse.

Jasmine's story is about trying to break free from the law that a princess has to follow. Her life was lined up by her status of a princess, which means that by a certain age, she has to marry someone worthy, which means only a prince. Ultimately, she is looking for marriage but not a prince who would take her as a trophy to be won. Facing decisions made for her and orders she has to obey leads her to run away. Feeling powerless, she meets a thief Aladdin with whom she bonds because he seems to understand her feeling trapped in her life (as he does as well) and that she should make decisions regarding her life. While Jasmine cannot come up with ways she could marry Aladdin, he, on the other side, chooses a way of deception that would lead to marrying her. Ultimately, it all comes down to heroic deeds, which Aladdin carries out – defeating the villain Jafar and giving freedom to enslaved Genie. Only when the sultan claims Aladdin worthy of becoming a sultan can Jasmine marry him. The motivation of both princesses is love that leads to marriage. While Aurora celebrates her happy ending by coincidence – her encounter in the woods and Prince Phillip are the same person, Jasmine's fight for free will comes to pass when she gains the permission of her father to marry Aladdin.

Group 2: PASSIVE

The second group quote would be, “I will wait for my prince.” These princesses do not take matters into their hands and are passive waiters for their happy endings. What makes them different from the previous group is that these heroines have more chances to earn their happy ending; however, they fail to do so because they let their princes do the hard work. The heroines are Snow White and Cinderella.

Snow White is wanted dead by her stepmother, the Queen, because she is more beautiful than her. Snow White has to ensure her life by finding a place to stay, and when she encounters the dwarves’ cottage, thanks to her animal friends, she can offer her skills as a housewife until her prince finds her. After the Queen’s failed attempt to put her into eternal sleep, her prince finds her, and they live happily ever after.

Cinderella has put up with a servant’s life for long enough to deserve one evening off to attend a royal ball. Her step-family ensures she will not participate, but a fairy Godmother helps her. Cinderella enjoys ball dancing with a man; however, she runs away from him because of the temporary spell wearing off. As she returns to her usual chores the next day, she is delighted that the man she had danced with is the prince and will find her sooner or later as only her foot will fit the glass slipper. She abandons her slave-like life to become a princess when he finds her.

Their motivation is not for ensuring a better life for themselves; it is love. They place their trust in men to do this. While Snow White’s happy ending is possible only after the dwarves kill the Queen, the prince finds her and breaks her curse; Cinderella’s is possible only with the help of her fairy Godmother and her animal friends.

Group 3: IMPULSIVE

The following quote characterises the third group, “I will do anything for my prince,” as they place their love-at-first-sight interest before themselves and their people. Their love is formed based on looks. These heroines differ from the previous ones as they are active in the lengths they are willing to take for love. The heroines are Ariel and Pocahontas.

Ariel is fascinated by the human world, which clashes with her father’s strict protective nature. When she saves the life of a human Prince Eric and falls in love with him, her father is

furious, and she leans towards magic to solve her problem. Turning into a human to make Prince Eric fall in love with her comes with the price of losing her voice. Though she charms him with her cute looks and makes him laugh, Eric is still unsure whether to go along with it or wait if he recognises the voice of his rescuer in someone. When Ariel gets back her voice and turns back into a mermaid, Eric does everything he can to save her from the sea witch Ursula. Eric saves the whole sea world, which proves to Ariel's father that not all humans are evil, and he changes Ariel into a human so that she and Eric can be together.

Pocahontas' tribe faces a horrible threat from the English settlers who sail there to find gold and establish a colony under the English flag. Despite this, Pocahontas falls in love with the enemy, the handsome John Smith. Her act of love has put some sense into her father, and he decides not to be the one who starts a fight. Though the fight is prevented, Pocahontas decides to stay with her tribe and lets John Smith go home to have his wound treated.

They are fuelled by love for someone not of their kind, placing them in a position to turn their back on their people. Moreover, their impulsive steps put them in a position of life danger. Ariel's happy ending rests in the hands of her prince, who fights to save her from the sea witch and her father, who was impressed by Eric, who saved the whole sea world. Pocahontas risks her life to save John Smith from death showing her father that he should not act upon fear. She desperately wants him to do the right thing: act upon love and mercy to make them better people. This risk pays off as the English lower their weapons and leave their land.

Summary of groups 1-3

Unsurprisingly, the stories portraying the seemingly weakest heroines (Aurora, Snow White, Cinderella, and Ariel) follow their literary story. Child viewers absorb negative stereotypes of fairy-tale princesses, which they might unintentionally project later in their lives. The stories contain some positive outtakes, such as not taking anything from strangers; parents mean well but can have clouded judgement as they are imperfect and do not solve problems with magic because it always comes with a price. However, the negatives outweigh the positives when considering letting children watch these "Disney classics." Jasmine was created through broken Western lenses of their perception of the princess' struggle with an arranged marriage in Arab culture. Finally, erasing the reality of the genocidal history of the Native Americans to

make Pocahontas' story romantic is just one of the several wrong aspects that make the movie a bad influence on children.

Group 4: AFRAID

The fourth group is formed by the only heroine Elsa who has a unique struggle that differentiates her from others. Her quote, "My powers are out of control", summarises her character. Though born with magical powers, she was never taught to control them. Elsa's goal is to keep her powers from harming people, and when she fails to do so, she decides to hide from the world entirely. Unexpectedly her sister Anna finds her and tells her that Elsa's power has frozen over the kingdom. Elsa does not know how to solve the situation, and when Prince Hans learns that Elsa cannot control her power, he plans to kill her. At first, Elsa tries to run, but Prince Hans confronts her that she killed Anna by freezing her heart. As Elsa feels immense guilt, she gives up. Only after Anna saves her from Hans' deadly attack does she realise that love is the key to controlling her power. As a result of her parents' reluctance to her powers, it was suppressed as something dangerous. Their decision to isolate her caused her incapability to live with it. Though she alone did not find a way to control it, it is thanks to her sister that she realises that the answer is love.

Group 5: A FIGHTER

The fifth group are fighters described with "I can do it". These heroines are motivated not by love but by their dreams and determination to prove something. They are portrayed as strong and clever. These heroines are Rapunzel, Merida and Tiana. Rapunzel is an obedient daughter to Mother Gothel. Rapunzel was taught that life outside her tower is scary and dangerous. Rapunzel respects that her magical hair would make her a prisoner in the wrong hands, so she puts up with life behind walls until her eighteenth birthday. Distracting Mother Gothel and having leverage over Flynn Ryder, she uses him to fulfil her dream of seeing lanterns set in the evening on her birthday. When her dream came true, she immediately realised she had found another one – be with Flynn. They had fallen in love and fought against all odds to be together and succeed.

Merida desperately wants to shake off her responsibilities as a princess. She decides to compete for her hand in marriage in archery and succeeds. Her mother, who dictated her whole life, is furious, and Merida turns to magic to solve her problem. As she wants her mother to

change, her wish is granted, and her mother, as a temporary bear, changes her mind about Merida marrying.

Tiana is modest, and she was taught to work hard to accomplish her dreams. She shared a dream with her father to open a restaurant. Working hard is not enough, and when Tiana has an opportunity to make a deal with a frog prince Naveen – she kisses him, and he gives her money for the restaurant. Tiana unexpectedly turns into a frog, and on the way to breaking the spell, she shows him that a path of working to gain what one wants is the right path in life, whereas he never had to work for anything and he did not learn to value things and love them accordingly. They grow feelings for each other and are turned back into humans through marriage.

These all fight for different things – Rapunzel wants to leave her tower to see lanterns. It pays off because this deed enables her to find out that she is a lost princess, that Mother Gothel used her for her powers, and she finds love; Merida fights against her responsibilities and her demanding mother; and Tiana not only finds a way to make her dream come true but also finds love.

Summary of groups 4-5

The first signs of growth in the heroine's portrayal are due to not following their literary origins completely (or at all) but recreating the heroines in new ways. This applies to Rapunzel, Tiana (The Frog Prince), and Elsa (The Snow Queen). Merida, on the other hand, is not based on literary origins. As a result, the heroines do not follow the typical princess stereotypes (passively waiting for a happy ending by marrying a prince). They have dreams they fulfil and struggles that they overcome. This attempt to portray heroines better is because they are more realistic and relatable to children. Though Rapunzel and Elsa have magical powers, they are not superheroes but are young women who are still discovering who they are. Moreover, Rapunzel's and Tiana's choice to marry was not based on looks, but they experienced adventures that made them know each other and even be willing to sacrifice for each other. The heroine's movies make them a good choice for children to watch.

Group 6: A PROTECTOR

The heroines of group six are protectors summarised with a quote, “I am doing this for my family.” These heroines do not have time to think about themselves when things get rough. They put themselves out there to save someone they love. The heroines are Belle and Anna. Belle takes her father’s place as a prisoner to the Beast. In her village, she is considered odd because she is not interested in marriage but in books, and when she interacts with the Beast, she learns that his curse made him on the edge of society too. Though the Beast does his best for Belle to feel at home, she still thinks about her father. Learning that he is in danger, she comes to his rescue and saves him from the villagers’ attempt to place him in a sanatorium. As the villagers head for the Beast’s castle, Belle realises she loves him and rides to the castle to help him. As they kiss, the curse is broken, and they marry.

Although Anna wants to find true love, she is motivated mainly by bringing her sister home. Her love for her makes her undertake a dangerous hike to North Mountain to talk her sister into undoing the winter she cast upon their kingdom. Anna is not successful. Though she faces death by freezing, she chooses to save her sister from death. Though both of them end up finding their true love, primarily they are heroines putting the lives of others in front of theirs. While Belle saves her father and her love, Anna saves her sister and her whole kingdom.

Group 7: A SAVIOUR

The last group are heroines that undertake an adventure earning to be called saviours. Their quote would be, “I am going to save them all”. These two heroines do what it takes to save their families and people. They are not only strong and clever, but they are also fierce fighters and determined learners. These heroines are Moana and Mulan.

Moana feels belonging on the sea and wants to sail beyond the reef. As her tribe faces the consequences of Te Fiti Island disintegrating because the demigod Maui has stolen its power source, she overflows with her purpose of sailing across the sea to find Maui and forcing him to place the stone of power back on Te Fiti Island. As they succeed, the ocean and islands heal.

Mulan saves her father’s life as she takes his conscription order to fight the war against The Huns. Her training goes well, and they go forward to fight the Huns. She is the one who saves her unit; however, her disguise is seen through. Sent home by her unit, she learns that The Huns survived and wants to warn that the Huns are still a threat to the Emperor and all of

China. Her bravery and inventive plan led to getting rid of the Huns and saving all of China. Going on their adventures is a dangerous risk as it can cost their lives. Moana, though a teenager, found the courage to fight for her people when no one else was eager to follow old beliefs. Not only does she succeed, but she also does most of the work, making Maui's help almost insignificant. Mulan, though a woman, excels in her training to become a soldier; her strategy skills save her unit, then the Emperor, and the whole of China from the threat of the Huns.

Summary of groups 6-7

A first step of a better portrayal is shown through the heroines' dreams of accomplishing something for themselves and struggles concerning their persona; the more significant step is shown through heroines that can fight for their family (Belle and Anna) and their people (Moana and Mulan). Though it might seem surprising to place Belle and Anna on the close peak of heroine evolution as they have their flaws, for example, choice of partners (the Beast and Hans), and stereotypical endings as they marry, they have shown the power of love that makes them deserving to be there. Belle's protective nature over her father came naturally, and she was not afraid to sacrifice herself for him. Anna's love for her sister has no limits, and she sacrifices her life in a blink to save her from harm. Undoubtedly, they deserve their happy endings. Moana and Mulan stand on the peak of heroine evolution as their story is a noble one to save their people, and they do so though it can cost their lives.

The classification of the Disney Princess heroines, points out the specifics of heroines, enabling viewers to see that the studio can portray heroines differently and more positively. As a result, child viewers do not need to take in the "old classic princesses movies" (first three groups) and dream of finding love, marrying and living happily ever after; they can take in the new generations of heroines that can step up for themselves (group 5), can do whatever it takes for their family (group 6), and become warriors that can save them all (group 7). The final part of this thesis is dedicated to the live-action movie *Mulan*. Walt Disney Animation Studios has affected many generations of children, part of The Walt Disney Studios are live-action movies that now seek to recreate the animated fairy tales and their leading heroines in their own way. For example, *Cinderella* (2015), *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), *Aladdin* (2019), *Mulan* (2020), *The Little Mermaid* (2023), and coming out in 2024 *Snow White*. These movies are mostly PG

rated (they contain some unsuitable content for children), and *Mulan* (2020) is rated PG-13 (with some inappropriate content for children under 13).

Understandably, live-action movies were created not primarily for child viewers but for a broader range of audiences. On the other hand, animated movies have a profound effect on children because they are suitable for children from approximately five years old. Though most live-action movies continue to be mostly musicals as their animated versions, it has yet to be discovered if they will become too a powerful part of childhood, shaping the understanding of children themselves, the world around them, and others.

5. Mulan from *Mulan* (2020)

The choice of the movie *Mulan* and its heroine for examination is due to being a recent narrative that includes both gender and race discourses. The plot gives a better understanding of the portrayal of gender and race which are explored in further subchapters. As a result, it functions as a model how The Walt Disney Studios forms its heroines and highlights the issues introduced in their animated counterparts. Their influence on children should not be overlooked.

5.1 Plot

In a flashback to Mulan's childhood, she is in her mother's and the villagers' eyes out of control, behaving more like a boy than a girl. As her father puts it, she has to hide the gift of her strong *qi* as it is something for warriors, and she should become a proper future bride to bring honour to her family. Northern invaders, the Rourans, are the story's villains that side with a so-called witch. The leader wants to avenge his father's death and their lost land by killing the Emperor and then sitting on his throne; the witch wants to live in a land where her power of *qi* is not vilified.

Mulan fails to please the matchmaker, making her a disgrace to the Hua family. A moment later, an Imperial edict has to be carried out, and Mulan's father has to fight. The family knows he will not return as the previous war crippled him. Only by taking his place would he survive, and Mulan disguises herself as a man to fill his place. She slowly learns to fit in and unleash her inner *qi*. In a battle, she duels the witch and learns that to be one with her *qi*, she has to drop her disguise. Thanks to Mulan, the enemy is defeated. She is expelled from the army for being a woman, and the witch comes to her again, asking her to join her, but Mulan chooses to fight

for the kingdom and the Emperor. Though she faces death by execution by coming back to the army, she reveals the Rourans' plan to her unit, and her unit stands behind her.

As Mulan fights her way to the Emperor, the witch turns sides to support Mulan. Mulan wins against the leader of the Rourans and saves the Emperor. He offers her to be an officer in the Emperor's guard, but she chooses to return home and make amends with her family. As she apologises to her father for losing his sword, he assures her she is most important. The Emperor's Guard gives a gift from the Emperor – a sword with engraved four virtues so that Mulan would never forget to be: loyal, brave, true, and devoted to her family.

5.2 Gender

Zhuoyi Wang (2021), a professor of East Asian Languages and Literatures at Hamilton College, in his article 'From Mulan (1998) to Mulan (2020)', examined how the live-action Mulan was constructed with its designed gender injustice and racial inaccurateness. He mentions that the director of Mulan, Niki Caro, decided to make the movie more realistic by omitting the dragon Mushu who would only "take away her spotlight in the usual Disney way" (2022, 6) as a main hero. Instead of a dragon (symbolising the masculine), Mulan has a phoenix (symbolising the feminine) as a guardian that shows up when Mulan needs strength[20].

Wang points out the severe gender issue that makes up the whole plot of Mulan wielding *qi*. Mulan's father is amazed by her power but also very concerned as it is not for a daughter but a son, and she risks dishonouring her family. Instead, she should be concerned with bringing her family honour as a daughter by marrying. The *qi* gender discrimination is further highlighted in a scene when the witch Xianniang suggests to Mulan that they should be "fighting structural injustice and gendered oppression together" (7). Mulan, however, continues the noble path to fight for the kingdom and save the Emperor. When Mulan returns to the army after being banished for showing her true self, her fellow soldiers side with her and decide to follow her lead. This act of defiance against the traditional gender roles assures Mulan that she has chosen the right path and that there is a place for people like [Xianniang and herself] in the kingdom" (8), and therefore a place for women with *qi*.

[20] Ibid.

5.3 Race

Wang then continues to look into the portrayal of race and suggests that the creators compromised the middle ground concerning the attempted changes for a better representation. That "results in internal contradictions that hurt the persuasiveness of its attempted adherence to Confucian values"[21] (12). Also, it does not follow the Chinese tradition of praising rather than punishing Mulan for joining the army to save her father. Secondly, concerning the interpretation of *qi*, "in the Chinese tradition, *qi* is often understood as a gender-neutral life energy" (13), which clashes with the creator's portrayal of *qi* in the movie as only men can wield it. This perception only brings a harmful gender stereotype; however, necessary for the plot of the story. Wang indicates that the movie has a powerful message; sadly, it is delivered at a cost to the film's cultural accuracy. The story's point is for Mulan to stop hiding her *qi* and, therefore, to be true to herself and her powers. In other words, it reveals a cross-cultural message to all women that they should trust themselves and express their power despite the male-dominated world.

Thirdly, the general Chinese audience did not accept the movie well also despite the creators' efforts to accurately design Mulan's make-up and create an authentic architectural style of her home. The part about the fake Chinese custom of an interview with a matchmaker is highlighted by the Chinese viewers' criticism because Mulan's specific make-up does not suit their own aesthetic tastes. The other harsh criticism was placed on the buildings, which the Chinese audience considered an "Orientalist" error. The creator's choice was far from Mulan's legendary origins; however, the choice was made on the best actual location to shoot the film. Finally, another cultural problem of the movie is the portrayal of villains with racist European depictions of Inner Asian steppe nomads (Wang 2022, 12-14).

Bringing the legend of Mulan from animation to life on screen was not received well. Contrary to original expectations, the adaptation embodies a negative gender stereotype of women, and, moreover, contains an insufficient portrayal of the Chinese race and culture. Hopefully, future Disney adaptations will present a sign of progress concerning such topics.

[21] For example, as Mulan believes in the principle of xiao, she would never join the army to disobey her parents.

The portrayal of gender and race should not be so problematic when creators find inspiration in fairy tales which attract wide child audiences.

6. Conclusion

To be an adult comes with a great responsibility when it comes to influencing children from the position of either a teacher or parent. Given that fairy tales (written or on-screen adaptations) are a significant part of children's childhood, it should naturally provoke questions about their influence on children's development. However, not many adults reflect on fairy tales as the fairy tales' part of childhood is taken for granted. The matter should not be overlooked simply because fairy tales have been consumed by children for generations. Adults' critical thinking about the influence of fairy tales on children could lead to a better understanding of the potential positive and negative effects of fairy tales and, therefore, be more aware of sources that influence their children's development. Being reluctant to explore the power of fairy tales on children's development could, as discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, negatively influence their self-esteem, they could end up with mixed personal values, and internalize unrealistic expectations of life and future partners.

The first chapters of the thesis present a perspective of written fairy tales through research in psychology. Introducing psychological views on fairy tales can be a first step to understanding the potential strong and weak points of how fairy tales can contribute to developing a child's identity. However strong the presented Bettelheim's and Cashdan's arguments may seem to people exploring the credible psychological significance of fairy tales for the first time, it cannot be taken as an absolute truth how influential fairy tales can be to children. Including Cashdan's practical examples of applying his theory (fairy tales consist of struggles that mirror what the child's developing sense of self faces), it reveals that his understanding of fairy tales is arguable, thus, he represents one of many attempts to try to answer how fairy tales can influence children.

The chapters that follow focus on how Walt Disney Animation Studios have recreated fairy tales as film adaptations. Similarly to written fairy tales, Disney on-screen fairy-tale adaptations have become a part of childhood that influence children's development. The thesis attempts to outline what effects these films can have on children, regarding the way the

heroines' gender and race is portrayed. Though some adults might consider the adaptations as a good influence on children, research and critical thinking of the films leads to uncovering what effect the Disney Princess franchise heroines can have on children viewers. This issue should not be overlooked. One of the underlying problems of the adaptations is that written fairy tales contain stereotypes that Disney Studio reproduces, or worse, brings out new ones. The attempts to come up with new fairytale-like stories such as *Brave* (2012), or *Moana* (2016) show a positive development in not reproducing negative stereotypes of the heroines' genders role. Despite the fact that progress has been made in the field of gender portrayal, the representation of race and ethnicity remains problematic.

The practical part presents an assessment of the Disney heroines that confirms the negative aspects of their gender and race portrayal outlined in the theoretical part of the thesis and brings out positive signs in some of the heroines' development. As a result, it not only confirms the negatives that give credence to what was stated in the theoretical part but also provides additional focus on the positive side of the heroines' portrayal that proves the apparent positive development. An attempt to further classify the heroines by their particular similarities provides apparent evidence in the development of the heroines' portrayal. This clear separation of the heroines can show which heroines start to have a good influence on children. Each heroine is sorted from the "victim" to "the saviour".

The last part of the thesis introduces the live-action films because these films have young audiences too, and the question of how these films influence child viewers, thus, can be applied to them as well. Live-action *Mulan*'s (2020) assessment indicates that The Walt Disney Studios struggle with the portrayal of gender and race in these films as in the animated ones. The story's plot and message are based on a negative gender struggle and an inaccurate portrayal of Chinese race and culture. In other words, the problematics of Disney animated films reach Disney live-action films and need to be taken into consideration when discussing the impact of fairy tale adaptations on children. The studios should be under high suspicion, and critical debate by adults that are teachers, parents, or other people that decide what sources influence the children. To summarize, adults should be more aware that fairy tales can potentially negatively influence children's understanding of themselves, others, and the world around them.

Fairy tales and childhood go hand in hand. New generations of children will continue to develop a love for fairy tales, either through literature, animated films, or live-action

adaptations. They are deeply rooted in cultures worldwide, shaping and connecting the lives of many. Some children might prefer to bond with their parents or grandparents over their favourite fairy-tale book. Some will treasure animated classics, laughing as if it were the first time they had seen them, not the hundredth time, viewing them differently every time as they grow up each time they watch them. Others might fall in love with the newest cinema adaptations, which bring new versions of closely familiar stories.

The questions that remain for teachers and parents: Read written fairy tales to children? Let them watch "Disney classics"? Go to the cinema to see new adaptations with them? Children need fairy tales. Fairy tales have mystical lands where everything is possible; they are inhabited by talking animals, magic books, and potions. For some time, children believe that these lands exist and that magic is real. No one should be deprived of magic and the fantasies it can create because once they grow up, the magic fades away. However, teachers and parents should understand how fairy-tale media influence their children's shaping identities and be able to select suitable ones for them.

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