



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

*School of Education and
Communication*

Beyond Happily Ever After: Unveiling Gender Dynamics in Disney's Fairy Tale Romances

A CDA on female gender representation in
animated Disney movies

COURSE: *Master Thesis in Media and Communication, 15 hp*

PROGRAMME: *Sustainable Communication*

AUTHOR: *Adele Fanolla*

TUTOR: *Paola Sartoretto*

SEMESTER: *Spring 2024*

ABSTRACT

Writer: Adele Fanolla
Title: Beyond Happily Ever After: Unveiling Gender Dynamics in Disney's Fairy Tale Romances
Subtitle: A CDA on female gender representation in animated Disney movies
Language: English
Pages: 46

Media representations of gender can significantly influence children's gender role beliefs. Gender representation by frequent media elements in young children's lives, such as Disney movies, is therefore bound to have an impact on their upbringing. By analysing a sample of four movies – *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Frozen* (2013) – this thesis investigates gender representation in Disney animated films and its evolution over the last four decades. Using a multimodal approach of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study explores how these films represent female protagonists, drawing on theories of gender performativity, stereotypes, and social roles. The analysis reveals that earlier Disney princesses conform to conventional femininity, emphasising romantic and domestic ideals. In contrast, later movies, while still carrying some stereotypes, present more modern and progressive portrayals of female characters. Overall, this research highlights a significant transition in gender representation from traditional to more nuanced portrayals, situating these changes within broader societal shifts. The findings underscore the impact of society's development on representations of gender and the evolving nature of female characters in popular media.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Disney, Feminist theory, Film analysis, Gender performativity, Gender representation, Gender roles, Media studies

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 Research problem	4
1.2 Aim and research questions	5
1.3 Structure.....	6
2. Literature review.....	7
2.1 Previous studies	7
2.2 Research gap.....	10
3. Theoretical framework.....	12
3.1 Performing gender	12
3.2 Gender stereotypes.....	13
3.2.1 Power dynamics and social norms	14
3.3 Social roles	16
4. Method and material.....	18
4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis	18
4.1.1 Fairclough’s three-dimensional model.....	20
4.2 Empirical material	21
4.2.2 Summary of selected movies	23
4.2.3 Selected material.....	25
4.3 Limitations	25
5. Analysis and findings	27
5.1 Female representations of Disney heteronormative protagonists: gender performativity, stereotypes and social roles	27
5.1.1 The Little Mermaid (1989).....	27
5.1.2 Beauty and the Beast (1991).....	33
5.1.3 The Princess and the Frog (2009).....	37
5.1.4 Frozen (2013)	40
5.2 Evolution of Gender Representation in Disney Films: A Four-Decade Analysis.....	44
6. Discussion and conclusion	48
References	50
Appendices	54
Appendix 1: Selected Scenes	54
a. Sample 1: The Little Mermaid (1989).....	54
b. Sample 2: Beauty and the Beast (1991).....	56
c. Sample 3: The Princess and the Frog (2009).....	57
d. Sample 4: Frozen (2013)	59
Appendix 2: Freytag’s pyramid.....	61

1. Introduction

The portrayal of women in popular media has long been a topic of scrutiny, particularly in children's programming where early exposure to gender norms and stereotypes can significantly shape young audiences' perceptions (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Among the most influential contributors to this discourse is The Walt Disney Company, whose animated films have played a pivotal role in defining and perpetuating gender roles and romantic ideals for generations (Coyne et al., 2016). Disney's animated movies, especially those featuring the iconic Disney Princesses, offer a rich field for analysing how female protagonists are represented within the context of heterosexual romantic relationships and how these portrayals reflect, reinforce, or challenge gender stereotypes over time.

Disney films have been criticised by researchers for their representations of female characters (e.g. England et al., 2011; Hine et al., 2018a). The early Disney Princess films set a precedent for how women were depicted in animated media. These films often portrayed female protagonists in passive roles, awaiting rescue by a prince, and emphasising traditional ideals of beauty and domesticity (Hine et al., 2018a; Maity, 2014). This representation, while innovative in its time for creating central female characters, has also been critiqued for reinforcing outdated gender stereotypes and confining women to limited roles within romantic narratives (England et al., 2011; Hine et al., 2018a; Hefner et al., 2017).

1.1 Research problem

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) suggests that individuals learn behaviours by observing others. This means that media representations of gender-linked behaviour can have a great influence on the audience, especially on children, who are more likely to learn from media characters they identify with and perceive as similar to themselves. Accurate representation in media targeted at children is therefore particularly important (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). This is also true when shaping gender identity. The Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Identity and Differentiation, based on the principles of SCT, describes how societal influences and experiences work together to shape gender role beliefs. Children adopt normative ideals that align with their gender identity through observational learning, enactive learning and direct tuition (Aubrey & Roberts, 2020; Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

While SCT suggests people actively look to the media, according to Cultivation theory the effects of media messages may involve a more passive process (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Cultivation Theory was originally developed in the 1970s to examine how repeated exposure to violent images presented on television fostered perceptions of a dangerous society among viewers (Ribarsky, 2014). Television is one of the primary sources of socialisation and everyday information for a heterogeneous population. Through its repeated themes and images, television has the power to shape viewers' understanding of reality, including how they construct and enact romantic relationships and gender role norms (Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Ribarsky, 2014). Traditional Cultivation Theory suggests that it is the overall exposure to general media content that influences real-world perceptions. Genre-specific viewing has an especially potent influence on audiences. For instance, viewers exposed to a high level of romance media will come to cultivate beliefs and expectations of relationships consistent with those particular presentations over heavy viewers of media in general (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). In the same way, Disney movies, as frequent elements in young children's lives, are bound to have an impact on their upbringing. This has been confirmed by research and has been shown to be especially true for movies of the Disney Princess franchise, as they all fall into the same genre category of animated films specifically targeted at girls (Huang, 2023).

While this thesis does not directly analyse the implications of stereotyped media representation and its effect on society, it is important to remember what those implications are. This understanding is essential to recognise the need for research focused on the root of the phenomenon in order to raise awareness and, hopefully, reduce stereotypical content and its negative impact on viewers in the future.

1.2 Aim and research questions

This thesis aims to analyse the evolution of female protagonists in Disney's animated films, focusing on their representation in heterosexual romantic relationships. By examining how these portrayals reflect and perpetuate gender stereotypes, as well as how they have changed over four decades, the research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the impact of media representations on societal perceptions of gender roles.

The present research departs from the following questions:

RQ1: How are female protagonists represented in the narrative of heterosexual romantic relationships in popular animated Disney movies released between the 1980s and the 2010s? In what ways is this portrayal related to gender performativity, stereotypes and social roles?

RQ2: In what ways has this representation changed over the last four decades?

1.3 Structure

The structure of the thesis is designed to provide a comprehensive examination of this topic. The first section presents the aim and research questions, outlining the objectives of the study and the specific queries guiding the analysis. Following this, the research importance section discusses the significance of understanding media representations, highlighting their relevance in shaping children's perceptions and societal norms. The literature review provides an overview of existing research on gender roles and romantic ideals in Disney films, identifying key studies and gaps in the current knowledge. This is followed by the theoretical framework, which includes concepts such as gender performativity, gender stereotypes, power dynamics and social roles. These theories offer a lens through which to interpret the findings of the analysis. The methodology section details the approach used for analysing the films, specifically through Critical Discourse Analysis, and outlines the sample of movies selected for this study. Each film is introduced in the research material section, summarising its relevance and thematic content. Lastly, the analysis and findings section addresses the research questions by examining each movie in detail and analysing the evolution of female representation over time.

2. Literature review

This chapter provides a review of the existing literature on gender roles and romantic ideals in Disney movies, with a focus on how these narratives influence children's perceptions. The chapter is structured into two main sections. The first section summarises key studies that have examined gender representation and romantic themes in Disney films, highlighting the methodologies employed and the findings. This includes an emphasis on the progression of gender portrayals over time and the persistence of certain stereotypes. The second section identifies the limitations within the existing research, particularly the predominance of quantitative methods. It argues for the necessity of more qualitative approaches, setting the context for the methodological choices outlined in the subsequent chapters.

2.1 Previous studies

With the research problem in mind, the exploration of gender roles in Disney movies becomes significant when considering the profound impact they have on children's perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes (Hine et al., 2018a). With its international presence, Disney has managed to ensure its influence on children on a global scale (England et al., 2011), leaving a lasting impact on many children, especially young girls who often grow up with the Disney Princess brand deeply ingrained in their childhood memories (Coyne et al., 2016; Maity, 2014). For generations, the Disney Princess franchise has served as a beloved staple of childhood, inspiring young girls to live by the values embodied by these iconic characters (Coyne et al., 2016; Dundes & Streiff, 2016; Hefner et al., 2017).

The main issue lies in the fact that Disney Princess narratives often reinforce and perpetuate particular gender norms, depicting women as passive characters who are reliant on men for their happiness and fulfilment. These movies present a specific image of how a princess should look and maintain the idea that a woman's ultimate happiness lies in finding a soulmate and living happily ever after with a man (Hine et al., 2018a; Maity, 2014). Over the years, studies have analysed gender representation in Disney movies, often criticising these negative depictions of women, especially in earlier movies (England et al., 2011; Hine et al., 2018a). The critiques are usually directed at the movies' tendency to only feature female characters who conform to traditional gender norms and therefore exhibit passive behaviour while engaging in limited roles, such as the decorative and helpless damsel in distress, perpetuating a stereotypical image of women (Hine et al., 2018a; Maity, 2014). More recent analyses instead

suggest a shift in this representation, with later movies presenting a more positive portrayal of women overall (Hine et al., 2018a). However, while children recognise evolving gender representations in Disney characters, their perception of princesses remains largely anchored in traditional femininity (Hine et al., 2018b). Preadolescent girls keep having a standardised image of Disney princesses, associating them with typically feminine attributes such as beauty and kindness (Nastasia & Uppal, 2010). This suggests that exposure to modern princesses isn't sufficient to reshape children's entrenched notions of what constitutes a princess (Hine et al., 2018b).

The studies featured in this section were selected based on their relation to the present research questions and they focus on two areas of Disney movies: gender representation and romantic ideals.

Studies analysing gender roles in Disney movies have already been conducted using different research methods. For instance, Towbin et al. (2004) conducted a thematic analysis of multiple aspects of Disney animated movies, including gender portrayal. It was observed that male characters were often portrayed as strong and heroic, acting as rescuers, while female characters were portrayed as helpless and in need of protection, relying on male characters for support. While male characters usually weren't involved in domestic jobs, female characters were frequently portrayed in domestic roles, often with marriage as their ultimate goal. Another theme that emerged was that, in more than half of the movies analysed, a woman's worth was determined by her appearance rather than her abilities or intelligence (Towbin et al., 2004).

A study conducted by England et al. (2011) confirms these findings but also suggests an improvement in gender role depictions over time. The study found that initially, traditional gender norms were starkly evident, with princesses exhibiting traits like affection and submission, while princes were portrayed as assertive and physically strong. However, recent Disney Princess movies have featured princesses who possess greater assertiveness, leadership skills, and independence, as well as princes who exhibit non-traditional traits, thereby challenging traditional gender roles (England et al., 2011). The results of a study by Hine et al. (2018a) are coherent with England et al.'s (2011) analysis, showing that princess characters in these movies display a more balanced, androgynous behaviour compared to their historical counterparts. Modern princesses exhibit independence and strength, deviating from the passive stereotypes of earlier ones. This shift reflects societal changes and provides more diverse role models for young girls. The study also found that both prince and princess characters

participated equally in rescue behaviours, challenging the notion of princesses as damsels in distress. Moreover, modern princesses were less likely to prioritise romantic outcomes, signalling a departure from traditional narratives (Hine et al., 2018a).

Both England et al. (2011) and Hine et al. (2018a) confirm that progress has been made towards more balanced gender representations. However, Hine et al. (2018a) revealed a few persisting contradictions. For instance, while some princesses challenge norms with assertiveness and athleticism, others still exhibit submissive behaviours. In addition, gendered messages in romantic resolutions remain strong and a heterosexual romance seems to remain inevitable and central to the storyline. Interestingly, while later princesses have become more active in final rescues, it's typically still the princes who perform the climactic rescues, reinforcing traditional gender roles. Although there has been a shift over time with princesses actively assisting princes, at the time of the study no princess had yet performed the final rescue without a prince's involvement. The resolutions of these movies also reward stereotypical actions and compliance with gender norms. Princesses are depicted as idealised feminine figures, showcasing traits like caretaking and conventional beauty that are rewarded within the narrative, further reinforcing the desirability of traditional gender conformity (Hine et al., 2018a).

Studies specifically focusing on the romantic theme in Disney movies, especially in the Disney Princess franchise, already exist. This is unsurprising as, according to research (e.g. England et al., 2011; Hine et al., 2018a; Hefner et al., 2017), the romance theme seems to be central in most movies belonging to this franchise.

A study by Junn (1997) on the portrayal of love, marriage and sexuality in Walt Disney animated films. This quantitative study found that women are not featured as extensively as men, both in terms of screen time or as lead characters, unless the film contains a central romantic plot. In romantic films, female characters occupy significantly more screen time than their male love interest, whereas in non-romantic films it is the other way around. Still, while most non-romantic films featured male leads, only half of the romantic films had female leads. In earlier movies, female characters generally engaged in more romantic-related behaviours than male characters, but this difference disappeared in more recent films. Interestingly, across all romantic and non-romantic films, male characters made more references to marriage and weddings than their female counterparts and were also significantly more likely to fall in love "at first sight" (Junn, 1997).

A more recent study by Hefner et al. (2017) focused instead on analysing romantic expressions in Disney princess movies, examining their prevalence and evolution over time through quantitative content analysis. The study reveals a shift from classic to modern films in terms of the portrayal of romantic ideals and challenges: modern films depicted fewer romantic ideals overall, suggesting a move towards more realistic portrayals of romance. Similarly, the prevalence of challenge expressions increases over time, with modern films presenting more complex narratives that challenge traditional romantic ideals. These changes reflect a departure from the simplistic "happily ever after" endings seen in classic films towards themes of independence and resilience in modern portrayals. According to this study, there are no significant differences between male and female characters in expressing romantic ideals and challenges, partially confirming Junn's (1997) findings, who instead argues this was only true for later movies. However, male characters are consistently depicted as the dominant pursuers in forming romantic relationships, aligning with traditional gender roles seen in earlier Disney films. Reactions to romantic expressions vary, with idealistic statements typically met with positive reinforcement and challenging statements often receiving negative reactions. This reinforces the notion that Disney films tend to reward idealised portrayals of romance while portraying challenges in a more punitive light (Hefner et al., 2017).

2.2 Research gap

Although there are many studies available on this topic that offer interesting insights and usually coherent findings, the majority do so using quantitative methods, with most of them opting for content analysis (e.g. England et al., 2011; Hine et al., 2018a; Hefner et al., 2017). While content analysis is an efficient method that allows for the analysis of large datasets, it has limitations (Hansen & Machin, 2019), that some of the authors themselves acknowledged. For instance, England et al. (2011) admit that they had to omit certain actions and behaviours from their analysis because they required more subjective interpretation. This left more nuanced gendered behaviours unexplored. Additionally, quantitative analysis does not take into account broader societal contexts, as highlighted by Hine et al. (2018a), which is an important aspect for a deeper understanding of character behaviours. Further research could therefore benefit from a qualitative approach to enrich the current knowledge of this topic. For this reason, I opted for a qualitative research method for the present analysis, which I will further elaborate on in the methodology section (chapter 4).

A notable limitation of the current literature is the 6-year gap since the most recent studies, which could impact the study's contribution and clarity within existing research. However, this gap might not be considered a significant limitation. Core themes and patterns of gender representation and romantic ideals in Disney movies have shown stability in the literature review, with fundamental issues related to traditional gender roles and romantic ideals changing incrementally rather than dramatically over a short period. Thus, insights from studies conducted within the last 6 years remain relevant, as they capture the trajectory of these changes. Additionally, even the earliest Disney movies continue to be widely known and consumed. Children born shortly before 2018 likely watched—and still watch—movies released in that period. Thus, the representation of gender in these films remains relevant and modern, as the youngest generation still engages with them. This ongoing consumption reinforces the pertinence of earlier portrayals and underscores the continued relevance of findings from studies that might seem dated.

3. Theoretical framework

In examining the evolution of gender representation in Disney animated films, it is essential to ground the analysis in theoretical frameworks that elucidate the ways in which gender is constructed, represented, and perceived. This chapter outlines three key theories — gender performativity, stereotypes and power dynamics, and social roles — that provide a comprehensive framework that will be used to address the research questions.

3.1 Performing gender

To start, it is crucial to lay out what it is intended when referring to the concept of “gender”. In contemporary society, gender is considered a fundamental aspect of social structures and cultural significance (Acker, 1992). It is important to distinguish it from sex, which is determined by socially agreed-upon biological criteria for classifying people into female or male categories (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender is instead a social construct, defined by West and Zimmerman (1987) as a reflection of societal expectations and norms related to masculinity and femininity. People “do gender” through their actions and displays, and even speaking manners, actively performing gender roles in accordance with societal norms (West & Zimmerman, 1987) that dictate which specific characteristic is correlated to a specific gender (Kachel et al., 2016). Gender is not inherent or predetermined but is instead constructed and enacted through social interactions. These performances contribute to the maintenance and reinforcement of gender norms and expectations within society (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Similarly to West and Zimmerman’s (1987) “Doing gender” theory, Judith Butler (1990/1999) developed the concept of gender performativity. Gender performativity refers to the idea that gender is not something one is, but something one does. It is the repeated performance of behaviours and expressions that create the illusion of an essential gender identity (Butler, 1990/1999, p.171-180; Lorber, 2007). Butler (1990/1999) suggests that, in everyday life, people perform gender through various actions such as body language (p.173), clothing choices (p.23) and speech patterns (p.149). For instance, women may use more polite language or hedge their statements, which can be perceived as less assertive compared to men's speech patterns (Lakoff, 1973, p.43-51).

These constructs are usually measured using two terms: "masculine" and "feminine" (Kachel et al., 2016). People define "traditional masculinity" and "traditional femininity" as enduring

traits, appearances, interests, and behaviours historically associated with men and women. For instance, traits such as competitiveness and dominance were associated with masculinity, while traits like affection and gentleness were linked to femininity. Physical attributes play a significant role in how one's gender is perceived; some characteristics are traditionally correlated with femininity, such as having a soft voice and graceful movements, and some with masculinity, such as being tall and broad-shouldered (Kachel et al., 2016). Furthermore, gender structures social life by maintaining clear distinctions between "man" and "woman," despite the diverse talents and behaviours individuals may exhibit. In Western cultures, even when men and women perform the same tasks, society emphasises their differences through spatial separation, job titles, or specific rules (such as wearing a skirt or wearing makeup) (Lorber, 2007).

With this definition of gender, we can see how gender can be conveyed in movies through active narrative and acting choices, or in the case of animated Disney movies, animation choices. These deliberate choices should not be overlooked as, together, they shape how a character is perceived and identified by the audience.

3.2 Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are widely shared generalisations about the characteristics, behaviours and roles deemed appropriate for men and women in a given culture (Hentschel et al., 2019; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). These stereotypes encompass various aspects of people's traits, such as physical appearance, personality, behaviours, social roles and occupations (Santoniccolo et al., 2023). According to social role theory, these stereotypes stem from the differing roles men and women have historically held, both at home and in the workplace (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Traditionally, women have been responsible for most domestic work and caregiving, while men have been associated with competitive occupations. This division has led to stereotypes that characterise men as more agentic—assertive and in control—and women as more communal—focused on relationships and attuned to others. These contrasting roles keep contributing to the development of gender stereotypical conceptions (Eagly and Steffen, 1984).

Stereotypical beliefs about gender can be descriptive (how one perceives a person of a certain gender to be), prescriptive (how one perceives a person of a certain gender should behave), or proscriptive (how one perceives a person of a certain gender should not behave). While the

content of these stereotypes can vary depending on the individual's culture, common themes have been identified in Western culture, particularly those revolving around communion, agency, and competence. Women are typically associated with traits related to communion, such as supportiveness, compassion and warmth, while men are more often associated with agency, including ambition, assertiveness, and competitiveness, or with competence, such as skill and intelligence (Eagly et al., 2020; Fiske et al., 2007). These stereotypes, which categorise agency as "masculine" and communality as "feminine," are fundamental to how gender is perceived (Fiske et al., 2007).

Gender stereotypes are adaptable and reflect changes in social contexts, such as increased female participation in the workforce and education. Over time, perceptions of women's competence and intelligence have improved, surpassing those of men, while the communal traits attributed to women have become more pronounced (Hentschel et al., 2019). Despite these shifts, media representation remains skewed towards men, with women often underrepresented or objectified. Women are often depicted as mere aesthetic objects or prizes, with less focus on their abilities or contributions. Objectification and sexualisation of women in media also correlate with increased support for sexist beliefs (Santoniccolo et al., 2023).

Sexism is often seen as solely characterised by hostility towards women, but Glick and Fiske's (1996) Ambivalent Sexism Theory reveals a more complex picture. Their theory distinguishes between hostile sexism, which includes overt negative attitudes and discrimination, and benevolent sexism, which presents as seemingly positive but still reinforces traditional gender roles and male dominance. Hostile sexism manifests in personal relationships through reinforcement of male dominance and justification of coercive behaviour. Conversely, benevolent sexism, though supportive, undermines women's roles and professional credibility by promoting traditional gender stereotypes (Glick & Fiske, 1996). For instance, benevolent sexism can influence romantic ideals by presenting women in a lesser-status, yet positive light, thus perpetuating gender inequality. This dual nature of sexism affects various areas, including romantic relationships and professional settings, particularly in cultures that value romantic love, such as Western societies (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Lee et al., 2010).

3.2.1 Power dynamics and social norms

Traditional gender-role norms significantly impact marital dynamics, with men often seen as dominant and women as submissive. This power imbalance in marriages, known as "marital

power," reflects broader societal structures. Two key theories help explain these dynamics: resource theory and patriarchal culture theory. Resource theory posits that marital power is linked to the resources each partner contributes, typically giving men, who are often the primary breadwinners, more decision-making authority. In contrast, patriarchal culture theory emphasizes the role of cultural norms, suggesting that in patriarchal societies, marriages are predominantly husband-dominated, regardless of individual resources (Chen et al., 2009).

These ideologies influence various aspects of romantic relationships, from partner selection to role expectations. Men are often expected to possess dominant traits like high status and economic success, while women are valued for attractiveness, submissiveness, and obedience. These expectations extend to relationship dynamics, with men being seen as independent decision-makers and women as submissive supporters. Consequently, women are frequently expected to prioritize their husband's careers over their own and take on the majority of domestic responsibilities (Chen et al., 2009).

Even language serves as a powerful tool in shaping and perpetuating gender power imbalances by reinforcing traditional gender roles, influencing perceptions, and dictating social acceptance based on linguistic conformity. Predominantly shaped by men throughout history, language has adopted an androcentric view where male-associated terms are the standard and female-associated terms are seen as deviations. This is evident in the use of gender-specific terms and the prevalence of derogatory terms for women (Simpson et al., 2019, pp.43-45).

Societal beauty standards are heavily influenced by patriarchal structures, gendered identities, and the power dynamics between men and women. From this perspective, beauty ideals are partially rooted in oppressive beliefs and attitudes toward women (Swami et al., 2010). Bartky (1990) argues that these standards have evolved due to the pressures exerted on women in male-dominated societies, suggesting that beauty standards objectify women. This compels women to engage in practices that leave them feeling inauthentic if they do not conform to these idealised images of femininity. As a result, women in patriarchal societies are perceived as lacking genuine control over their bodies, which are often sites of oppression. Beauty ideals and practices are thus viewed as tools of oppression, functioning as mechanisms through which a male-dominated society undermines women's liberation and gender equality. Beyond being time-consuming, costly, and often painful, beauty practices are also detrimental to women's bodies and mental well-being (Swami et al., 2010). On top of signalling women's difference

from men, these beauty ideals and practices also shift social awareness from women's competencies to superficial aspects of their appearance (Forbes et al., 2007).

Scott (1997) identified four key themes central to the objectification of beauty ideals:

1. Beauty is fundamentally feminine, meaning it is a gendered trait uniquely associated with women and essential to femininity.
2. Beauty is imperative for women, indicating that women are expected to be beautiful, often regardless of the consequences or costs involved.
3. Beauty is paramount among women's qualities, reflecting the belief that beauty is the most important attribute a woman can possess.
4. Beauty requires substantial modification of the natural appearance, suggesting that the female body is not inherently beautiful and that achieving beauty necessitates altering, shaping, colouring, shaving, or otherwise modifying the natural appearance.

3.3 Social roles

As seen in the previous paragraphs, sexism does not only stem from individual ideals but is usually the result of society's patriarchal values and expectations (Chen et al., 2009). Social role theory draws on this concept, suggesting that gender role beliefs stem from observations of gendered behaviour and are reinforced by societal structures and cultural norms (Eagly & Wood, 2011; Koenig & Eagly, 2014). Individuals are socialised to embody traits and skills that facilitate their expected gender roles, thereby solidifying perceived differences between men and women (Eagly & Wood, 2011).

Social role theory acknowledges the dynamic nature of gender roles, shaped by cultural norms, social structures, and individual experiences. The theory offers a comprehensive framework to understand gender similarities and differences by combining biological, psychological, and sociological perspectives. Biologically, sex differences are based on physiological factors, with physical attributes historically influencing the division of labour and, therefore, societal roles (Eagly & Wood, 2011). Sociologically, gender disparities are perceived through social hierarchies and roles, where economic factors typically play a significant role. For instance, women often occupy caretaking roles, while men tend to dominate authority positions. These roles reflect societal structures that shape perceptions of appropriate behaviour for each gender (Eagly & Wood, 2011; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Psychologically, gender roles are

internalised through socialisation processes and are further reinforced by widely accepted beliefs about gender stereotypes. This reinforcement makes these roles seem natural and inevitable, leading to individuals regulating their behaviour according to these internalised standards (Eagly & Wood, 2011).

These socially constructed gender roles are embedded in language that reinforces traditional power hierarchies, such as labelling women by their social roles and emphasising their appearance. Dominance theories suggest that men use language to maintain control and marginalise women (Simpson et al., 2019, pp.45-49), with women being socialised to use language that reflects submissiveness, while men may use language that asserts dominance or authority (Lakoff, 1973, p.54). Lakoff (1973, p.57) suggests that the language used by men and women reflects and reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations. Conforming to these norms affects social perceptions, pressuring women to adhere to linguistic norms associated with femininity to be socially accepted. Failure to conform to these norms can result in social ostracism and reinforce gender stereotypes (p.61), marginalising women in intellectual and professional contexts. (Lakoff, 1973, p.7-8).

4. Method and material

As the literature review research has shown a majority of quantitative research on gender representation in Disney movies, the present study is going to be a qualitative one. A qualitative method allows considering every aspect of the movie during the analysis, from its narrative and content to its role within broader societal discourses. This is crucial for film analysis, as each choice in a movie is made to convey a specific message to the viewer (Mikos, 2014, pp.409-413).

This chapter details the qualitative approach used to analyse gender representation in Disney movies, contrasting with the prevalent quantitative studies. It employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how language and visuals reflect and shape societal norms and power dynamics. A multimodal approach to CDA will be applied, considering both verbal and visual elements in the films.

Fairclough's three-dimensional model guides the analysis, examining texts, interpretive processes, and the broader sociocultural context to understand gender representation over time. The study uses purposive sampling to select four Disney movies from different decades, ensuring relevance to the research focus. The selected films are *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Frozen* (2013). The chapter summarises these films and outlines the criteria for selecting specific scenes for detailed analysis, focusing on how these scenes contribute to the research questions about gender representation and romantic narratives.

4.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

This study will apply Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). CDA is a qualitative method that looks closely at texts to uncover the hidden beliefs, power structures, and social values they reflect. CDA pays attention to how language choices are made to shape meaning and influence how we see the world. According to CDA, language is not just a neutral means of communication but a powerful tool for social construction, shaping and being shaped by societal structures, institutions, and situations (Hansen & Machin, pp.163-165). Fairclough (2010) suggests that language constructs us as subjects, influencing our thinking and practices. Since language shapes our dispositions and identities, ideology is central to CDA, as it helps

reveal how texts convey broader societal ideas and interests (Hansen & Machin, 2019). Ideology is a crucial aspect of this framework, as it captures the shared ideas and values that reflect particular interests and sustain power relations. Through language, ideologies become accepted as common sense, obscuring the inequalities they perpetuate and limiting societal vision (Hansen & Machin, pp.168-169). While CDA has its focus on language, it is important to recognise that meaning isn't solely conveyed through words but also through other methods, such as images. This is especially true for media such as movies, the very focus of this research (Machin & Mayr, 2012, pp.6-10). Therefore, it was decided to use a multimodal approach of CDA for this study, which will consider other modes of communication, such as visual communication.

These dimensions will be explored within the three main areas of the theoretical framework – gender performativity, power dynamics, and social norms – to determine their change over time. These tools were chosen because they provide a comprehensive understanding of the topics the research questions aim to address, allowing for a thorough analysis of the evolution of gender representation in the chosen movies.

A tool that will be taken into consideration when conducting the analysis is visual representation. Semiotics offers a framework for analysing images by examining both what they depict (denotation) and the ideas and values they convey (connotation). This approach helps understand how sequences of the film communicate meaning beyond its literal content (Hansen & Machin, 2019, pp.230-233). Denotation involves identifying what an image literally depicts without interpretation. This can be surprisingly difficult as our interpretations often come naturally (Hansen & Machin, 2019, pp.231-232). Connotation refers to the ideas and values suggested by the way an image is represented; attributes and poses are, for instance, key carriers of connotation that will be used as analytical tools. The characters can be categorised visually in two main ways: cultural and biological. Cultural categorisation is based on attributes such as clothing and hairstyle. Biological categorisation relies on stereotyped physical traits and can convey both positive and negative connotations. For instance, images may depict women according to unrealistic beauty standards. These categorisations help to shape the viewer's perception and understanding of the characters involved in the film (Hansen & Machin, 2019, pp.232-238).

In order to understand the characters' agency and power dynamics, the analysis will involve examining the actions and behaviours depicted in the movies. Halliday's (2014, p.214) six

“process types group categories of verbs” will be taken into account as they can be applied to both visual and textual analysis:

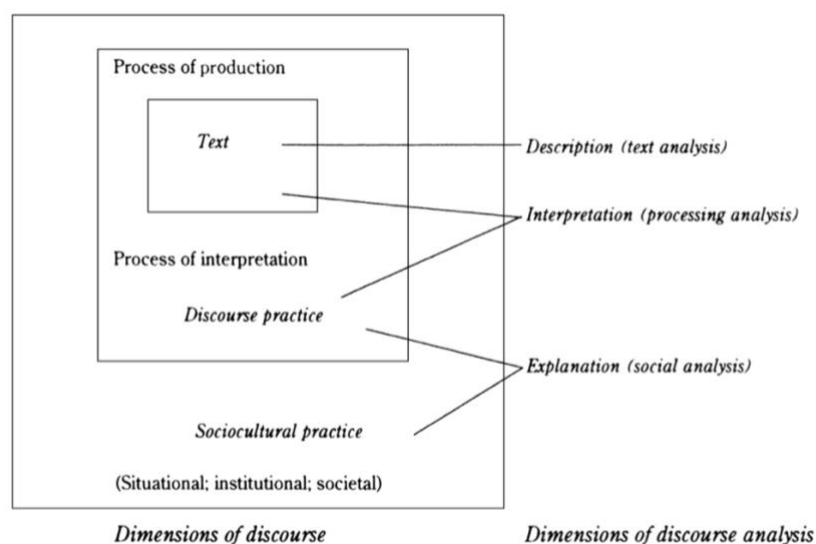
- Material: Actions with tangible outcomes.
- Behavioural: Actions without tangible outcomes.
- Mental: Involving thoughts, evaluations, or senses.
- Verbal: Simply speaking.
- Relational: Describing relationships or comparisons.
- Existential: Depicting existence or appearance.

Analysing these processes will help uncover different levels of agency and power, or their absence, in the selected material. Sometimes, a character may appear to be active but achieve very little. For example, a character may be depicted as engaging in various activities, such as carrying out existential, mental, and behavioural actions. However, these actions may not have any real impact on the world, indicating a lack of true agency or power (Hansen & Machin, 2019, pp.184-186).

4.1.1 Fairclough’s three-dimensional model

To conduct the analysis I am going to apply Fairclough’s (2010) CDA model, which suits this research as it provides a comprehensive framework for analysing discourse in relation to social practices, power dynamics, and broader societal contexts. Fairclough’s (2010) model consists of three interconnected dimensions: text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice.

The first dimension is called description, or text analysis, and examines how language and images convey meaning and power relations. This includes linguistic and semiotic analysis to understand how these aspects shape and reflect social practices. The discourse practice, or interpretation dimension, involves analysing how the discourse is interpreted. This stage looks at the social practices and processes involved. It therefore analyses the text within the context. Lastly, sociocultural practice, also referred to as explanation, connects the text’s features with the broader social context of discourse. It considers social structures, power relations, ideologies, and cultural norms that influence and are influenced by discourse, reflecting and shaping social practices, identities, and relationships (Fairclough, 2010, pp.131-137).



(Fairclough, 2010, p.133)

4.2 Empirical material

4.2.1 Sampling process

The research sample was chosen through purposive sampling and includes four Disney movies released between 1980 and 2019, with one movie for each decade.

Purposive is a nonprobability sampling method that allows researchers to select cases quickly and cost-effectively based on specific characteristics or criteria relevant to the study. The reason I chose purposive sampling is that it targets items that have relevant attributes (Biggsby, 2017). For instance, in this study, this means being able to focus on films that are central to understanding gender representation for female protagonists instead of the entire Disney movie catalogue, ensuring that the sample is directly aligned with the research objectives.

This careful selection of relevant films also helps enhance the validity of the research's findings, as it ensures that the collected data is directly applicable to the study's aims, reducing the risk of including irrelevant material. Because purposive sampling involves selecting specific examples that are particularly informative, it also allows for a deeper analysis of each chosen film, which is particularly useful, especially in qualitative analysis. Additionally, since one of my research questions aims to analyse the evolution of gender representation over different decades, this sampling method is particularly suitable, as it allows me to purposively select films from different periods.

To collect the sample, four separate IMDb (Internet Movie Database; imdb.com) advanced title searches were conducted. The searches aimed to find popular animated movies by Disney released in each decade from 1980 to 2019. The table below lays out how the four searches were conducted and which filters were applied to the search engine.

Filters	1.	2.	3.	4.
<i>Genre</i>	Animation			
<i>Title type</i>	Movie			
<i>Release date</i>	Jan 1, 1980 to Dec 31, 1989	Jan 1, 1990 to Dec 31, 1999	Jan 1, 2000 to Dec 31, 2009	Jan 1, 2010 to Dec 31, 2019
<i>Rating count</i>	100k or above			
<i>Companies</i>	Walt Disney (US)			

Additional inclusion criteria were:

- The movie must have a female protagonist and a male love interest.
- The main characters must show psychological human-like features.
- The movie must be mostly animated.

Based on the filters and the additional criteria, the searches showed the following results:

Decade	Movies
1980-1989	The Little Mermaid (1989)
1990-1999	Beauty and the Beast (1991)
	Mulan (1998)
	Pocahontas (1995)
2000-2009	The Princess and the Frog (2009)
2010-2019	Tangled (2010)
	Frozen (2013)

For the decades where more than one movie met the criteria, the highest-grossing worldwide (and therefore more popular) movie was selected:

Decade	Movies	Box office
1990-1999	Beauty and the Beast (1991)	\$424,967,620
	Mulan (1998)	\$304,320,254
	Pocahontas (1995)	\$346,079,773

2010-2019	Tangled (2010)	\$592,472,813
	Frozen (2013)	\$1,397,045,694

Box Office Mojo (boxofficemojo.com), 2024

As a result of this selection process, the four movies that I am going to analyse are:

- The Little Mermaid (1989)
- Beauty and the Beast (1991)
- The Princess and the Frog (2009)
- Frozen (2013)

4.2.2 Summary of selected movies

To help the understanding of the analysis, the plots of the four movies are summarised below.

The Little Mermaid (1989)	
Protagonist	Love Interest
Princess Ariel	Prince Eric
Summary	
<p><i>The Little Mermaid</i> tells the story of Ariel, a mermaid princess who dreams of living on land among humans. Despite her father King Triton's strict rules against contact with humans, Ariel becomes infatuated with Prince Eric, a human prince. Ariel strikes a deal with the sea witch Ursula: in exchange for her voice, Ursula will grant Ariel legs. However, Ariel must receive a kiss from Prince Eric within three days to remain human. Despite initial difficulties, Ariel and Eric grow close, but a disguised Ursula tries to sabotage their relationship. When Ariel gets her voice back and Ursula is finally defeated, King Triton transforms Ariel into a human permanently. Ariel and Eric are reunited and get married.</p>	

Beauty and the Beast (1991)	
Protagonist	Love Interest
Belle	Beast/Prince Adam
Summary	

The film follows the story of Belle, a young woman living in a small village, who becomes imprisoned in a castle by a cursed prince who has been transformed into a beast. Despite her initial fear of the Beast, Belle befriends the enchanted objects in the castle and eventually the Beast himself. However, their budding romance is threatened by the village's arrogant and vengeful hunter, Gaston, who seeks to win Belle's affection and destroy the Beast. Ultimately, Belle's love breaks the curse, transforming the Beast back into a prince and restoring the castle and its inhabitants.

The Princess and the Frog (2009)	
Protagonist	Love Interest
Tiana	Prince Naveen
Summary	
<p>The story follows Tiana, a hardworking waitress with the dream of owning her own restaurant. When Prince Naveen of Maldonia arrives in town, he is turned into a frog by the villainous Dr. Facilier. Mistakenly believing that Tiana is a princess, Naveen convinces Tiana to kiss him to break the spell. However, Tiana is transformed into a frog herself. The two embark on a journey in search of a way to break the enchantment. Eventually, they confront and defeat Dr. Facilier but remain frogs. Having realised their love for each other, they get married, which turns them back into humans since Tiana has become a princess. Tiana then fulfills her dream by opening her own restaurant.</p>	

Frozen (2013)	
Protagonist	Love Interest
Princess Anna	Kristoff
Summary	
<p><i>Frozen</i> follows the story of two royal sisters, Queen Elsa and Princess Anna, in the fictional kingdom of Arendelle. Elsa possesses magical ice powers, which she struggles to control and has therefore kept secret. After hearing of Anna's intentions to marry Hans, a prince she has just met, an upset Elsa accidentally reveals her abilities to the public and flees to the mountains, inadvertently plunging Arendelle into eternal winter. Anna sets off after her, determined to bring her sister back and save the kingdom, with the help of ice harvester Kristoff, whom she meets on the way. Having accidentally being struck by Elsa's magic,</p>	

Anna freezes solid as she sacrifices herself to save her sister from Hans' evil plans. This act of true love thaws Anna's frozen heart, and Elsa learns to control her powers, bringing back summer to Arendelle.

4.2.3 Selected material

The research material will not consist of the entire movie, only of scenes that were selected based on the research question. The movies have been thoroughly watched to select the most relevant scenes in relation to the topic of the analysis; in order to be selected, the scenes had to feature the main character.

The movies have a number of selected scenes ranging from 15 to 19, providing a balanced representation of each of the analysed protagonists. Most scenes have a length of a few minutes, with the majority not surpassing five minutes, but all staying under seven minutes. Only two scenes exceed this length, both from the movie *Frozen*, with the longest one reaching 11 minutes and 36 seconds. As this is a qualitative study, the variation in scene lengths is not considered significant, as all the scenes still offer sufficient relevant material for analysis. Furthermore, *Frozen*, while having the two longest scenes, is also the film with the lowest number of scenes selected for analysis. The length of the scenes therefore compensates for their lower number.

The selected scenes for each movie are listed in appendix 1, organised according to Freytag's pyramid of plot stages (see appendix 2) for easier reading. The division into plot stages also helps us understand to what extent the films' most relevant scenes revolve around a romantic narrative.

4.3 Limitations

The subjective nature of qualitative analysis, such as CDA, can introduce interpretive bias, as different analysts might reach varied conclusions from the same data. However, this study employed Fairclough's (2010) three-dimensional model to help mitigate these biases by providing a systematic framework. Structural models such as Fairclough's (2010) encompass text analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural context, aiming to ensure a thorough and balanced examination of the data and to reduce individual interpretive bias.

This subjectivity issue also applies to the selection of scenes, which were chosen based on their relevance, potentially overlooking broader contextual nuances. The scenes selected for this study were, however, specifically chosen for their relevance to the research questions, allowing for a focused analysis of crucial moments.

The limited sample size of just four Disney movies constrains the generalisability of the findings. This narrow focus may not fully capture the diversity of gender representations across Disney's extensive filmography. Moreover, the study's temporal scope, spanning movies from 1980 to 2019, may not account for shifts in gender representation beyond this period. Despite these limitations, the selected films were purposefully chosen to ensure a certain level of relevance and depth in analysing gender portrayal.

5. Analysis and findings

This chapter presents the analysis and findings regarding gender representation in Disney films through a detailed analysis of four key movies: *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Frozen* (2013).

The chapter is structured to first address Research Question 1, exploring the ways in which each film individually portrays gender. Each film is analysed for its depiction of gender performativity, stereotypes and social roles. It was found that the first two movies – *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* – highlight traditional femininity and romantic ideals, while *The Princess and the Frog* introduces a more independent and career-focused protagonist. *Frozen* further advances gender representation with a protagonist who embodies both traditional and progressive traits.

Subsequently, the chapter addresses Research Question 2 by comparing these films collectively to trace the evolution of gender representation over four decades. This analysis reveals a clear shift from the romantic and traditional portrayals of the late 1980s and early 1990s to more nuanced and empowered depictions in the 21st century. This evolution reflects broader societal changes, with Disney adapting its gender portrayals to align with contemporary values of female agency and multifaceted identity.

5.1 Female representations of Disney heteronormative protagonists: gender performativity, stereotypes and social roles

RQ1: How are female protagonists represented in the narrative of heterosexual romantic relationships in popular animated Disney movies released between the 1980s and the 2010s? In what ways is this portrayal related to gender performativity, stereotypes and social roles?

5.1.1 The Little Mermaid (1989)

i. Performing Gender

In Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel's gender performativity mostly conforms to traditional expectations of femininity, with her adherence to conventional beauty standards and her role

as a romantic heroine. Ariel's physical appearance reinforces traditional ideals of feminine beauty with her unrealistic body proportions and conventional beauty, further emphasised by the contrast with the male characters' larger appearance. Ariel's clumsiness, depicted as endearing, serves to enhance her performative femininity by making her appear more vulnerable and in need of protection. Scenes where Ariel exhibits clumsiness, such as her initial interactions with objects as a human, do not have significant consequences and instead highlight her naivety and dependence.

In the opening scenes, Ariel is portrayed as a very curious, albeit naive, girl. For instance, in scene 1 she disregards Flounder's warnings about exploring the shipwreck, but shortly after assuring him that nothing will happen, they are attacked by a shark, indicating her naivety. However, her defiance against her father's warnings and her repeated ventures to the surface demonstrate a rebellious streak, asserting her desire for autonomy and self-exploration. For example, her determination to explore the human world despite Triton's prohibitions underscores her active pursuit of knowledge and experience, traditionally masculine traits. This is also noticeable in Scene 4 as Ariel, intrigued, by lights and sounds coming from a ship, swims to the surface. Here, again, her curiosity and determination get the best of her and lead her to ignore her father's warning and act carelessly: she gets so close to the ship that she is discovered by Eric's dog while spying on the crew.

ii. Gender stereotypes, power dynamics and social norms

Conventional Beauty

Ariel's character in *The Little Mermaid* perpetuates and subverts various gender stereotypes. For starters, the film's emphasis on Ariel's conventional beauty and unrealistic body proportions reinforces the stereotype that female worth is tied to physical attractiveness (Scott, 1997). Ariel's slender frame and delicate features are consistently highlighted through her poses and clothing, creating a visual representation that aligns with societal expectations of female beauty.

Eric is not very interested in Ariel at first, as he is set on finding the girl with "the most beautiful voice" (26:16) who saved him from drowning. Ariel's lack of a voice leads Eric to dismiss her as a potential romantic partner because she no longer fits his ideal of the mysterious saviour.

His initial acts of helping Ariel are portrayed more as acts of pity and selflessness, in addition to his duty as a prince, rather than genuine interest in Ariel as a person. His interest in her only seems to grow when he sees her dressed up in her new gown, indicating that he feels her appearance is the primary reason she is worth spending time with. This shift in Eric's perception suggests that Ariel's worth is tied directly to her physical appearance, reinforcing the stereotype that a woman's value is primarily based on her looks (Scott, 1997). In this context, the character of Grimsby also perpetuates these stereotypes. He freely comments on Ariel's appearance, calling her "a vision" (51:22). While this may seem like a compliment, it reflects a form of benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996) where the female body is objectified under the guise of admiration.

Furthermore, the film continues to emphasise the importance of Ariel's appearance in subsequent scenes. In scene 11, Sebastian, who acts as a mentor and guide for Ariel, advises her to look her best when meeting Prince Eric. This advice suggests that the only way for Ariel to make Eric interested in her is through her looks, thereby perpetuating the notion that women must rely on their physical attractiveness to gain and maintain male attention (Chen et al., 2009). This is also first suggested by Ursula during the deal in scene 8. When Ariel questions being able to win Eric over without her voice, Ursula reminds her "You'll have your looks, your pretty face" (43:14).

This emphasis on beauty is further contrasted with Ursula's portrayal. Ursula's larger, more menacing form and her role as the antagonist reinforce the stereotype that associates physical unattractiveness with moral corruption. The dichotomy between Ariel's thin, beautiful form and Ursula's larger, more villainous appearance perpetuates harmful stereotypes linking physical appearance with inherent goodness or evil.

Agency

Most of Ariel's actions are relational, existential, and behavioural, which, following Halliday's (2014, p.214) process types, means she is usually seen simply existing or carrying out actions with no tangible outcomes. She lacks instead material and verbal actions, which are significant in shaping her character's agency and voice. Material actions involve physical, goal-oriented activities with tangible results, and their scarcity in Ariel's portrayal emphasises her passive role in the narrative. She is often seen reacting to events rather than actively shaping them, such

as when she waits for Prince Eric to rescue her or when she relies on others to achieve her goals.

Because of the plot, verbal actions, or the ability to speak and express oneself, are absent for a significant portion of the film. Ariel's sacrifice of her voice underscores a critical loss of agency, as she cannot verbally communicate or advocate for herself. This lack of verbal action further entrenches her dependence on others, particularly male characters, to achieve her desires. This is evident when Eric does not attempt alternative forms of communication, such as writing, and Ariel herself does not seek other ways to express her thoughts and desires. Even once Ariel regains her voice in the last ten minutes of the movie, she only speaks a total of six (and not particularly significant) lines to Eric – and three of those are just his name:

- "Eric." (01:09:59)
- "Eric, I wanted to tell you." (01:10:08)
- "Eric! Eric, look out!" (01:12:17)
- "Eric, you've gotta get away from here." (01:12:58)
- "Eric!" (01:13:36)
- "Eric!" (01:14:05)

Passivity and Dependence

While the film reinforces several traditional gender norms, it also subtly challenges some through Ariel's character. Ariel's initial acts of rebellion and her determination to explore the human world reflect a desire for independence and autonomy that challenges traditional expectations of female behaviour. Her vast collection of human objects and her dream of living among humans highlight a deeper longing for freedom and self-determination.

However, throughout the whole movie, Ariel's autonomy is fleeting. Although she makes rebellious attempts to live on her own terms in the first part of the movie through her exploration and collection of human objects, her father still exerts control over her life. There is a brief moment where Ariel seizes her freedom by seeking out Ursula, but this freedom is quickly taken away following the deal, leaving Ariel's fate largely in Eric's hands. This dynamic reflects broader societal tensions between the desire for female independence and the persistent constraints of patriarchal norms (Chen et al., 2009). Even at the end of the movie, instead of defeating the villain herself, Ariel is rescued by Eric, who ultimately defeats Ursula. This happens despite the final confrontation taking place in the sea, where, as a mermaid, Ariel

would have been better equipped for the job. This insistence on perpetuating the damsel-in-distress narrative further undermines Ariel's passivity and lack of independence.

Ariel's narrative arc reinforces traditional gender stereotypes related to female passivity and dependence on male figures (Chen et al., 2009). Despite her initial rebelliousness, Ariel's autonomy diminishes as the story progresses. Her decision to make a deal with Ursula, sacrificing her voice for a chance to be with Eric, reflects a willingness to give up personal agency for romantic fulfilment. This reinforces a narrative where female characters must rely on male figures to achieve their goals.

Ariel's passivity is particularly evident in her interactions with Eric. Despite needing to kiss Eric to save her life, Ariel does not take the initiative. Instead, she relies on Eric and her animal friends to lead the interactions. Ariel's passivity is highlighted by word choice as well. For instance, Flounder asks Sebastian "Has he kissed her yet?" (57:44), implying that Eric is the one that has to take the initiative. The song "Kiss the Girl" further reinforces this dynamic, encouraging Eric to make the first move without seeking Ariel's consent:

“Possible she want you too
There is one way to ask her
It don't take a word
Not a single word
Go on and kiss the girl” (01:00:18-01:00:30)

Even the way Ursula phrases the deal, making Eric the active subject, underlines Ariel's passivity and lack of control in the relationship: “[...] he's got to kiss you” (41:57). Another instance where Ariel's lack of autonomy is visible is in Scene 16. When she finds out that Eric is getting married to another girl, Ariel is heartbroken but seems to give up rather quickly. Instead of confronting Eric, she simply accepts her fate, once again relinquishing control of her life to a man.

The film also portrays independence and disobedience as negative traits for Ariel. Her ventures to the surface and disobedience of her father's warnings lead to negative outcomes, such as the shark attack and her entanglement with Ursula. This narrative pattern suggests that female autonomy and disobedience to patriarchal authority result in danger.

Patriarchal Authority and Female Submission

The Little Mermaid operates within a societal context that reinforces traditional gender norms through its characters and narrative, providing a perfect example of patriarchal culture theory (Chen et al., 2009). In particular, Ariel's relationship with her father, King Triton, highlights the patriarchal authority that governs her life. Triton's dominance over Ariel, his towering presence, and his frequent interruptions of her speech mirror the norms of society that restrict female autonomy (Chen et al., 2009).

Romantic Fulfillment as Female Achievement

A significant societal norm perpetuated by *The Little Mermaid* is the idea that romantic fulfilment is the ultimate achievement for women. Ariel's journey, initially driven by her curiosity and desire to explore the human world, becomes increasingly centred around her romantic interest in Eric. The film's climax and resolution emphasise Ariel's romantic union with Eric as the culmination of her journey, suggesting that her happiness and fulfilment are tied to her relationship with a man. This perpetuates the Disney Princess narrative found in previous studies (Hine et al., 2018a; Maity, 2014.) that women should prioritize romantic relationships and view marriage as their ultimate goal.

The abrupt transition from Ariel and Eric's reunion to their wedding underscores this choice, suggesting that marriage is the definitive marker of female happiness and success. The insistence on depicting the wedding scene, even though Ariel has already achieved her dream of becoming human, implies that viewers need the assurance of a romantic resolution to feel satisfied with Ariel's story, reflecting a societal emphasis on marriage as the ultimate female aspiration. Additionally, Ariel is only sixteen years old. The film appears to be set between the 18th and 19th centuries; this is suggested by many details, from clothing style to the absence of technology, and the horse-drawn carriage as the chosen means of transport. However, time and place are not specified in the movie, so cultural and historical accuracy are not valid enough reasons on their own to have Ariel marry at such a young age.

5.1.2 Beauty and the Beast (1991)

i. Performing gender

Belle's character design embodies Disney's beauty ideals with her delicate frame, long hair, large eyes, fair complexion, and small waist. These features consistently reinforce her identity as a Disney princess by traditional standards. Additionally, Belle is always very elegant in her actions. Even in chaotic situations, such as the opening song "Belle" (Scene 1), she moves gracefully through the town while reading a book, demonstrating her composure and sophistication, which are traditional feminine attributes (Kachel et al., 2016). Belle's performative femininity extends to her language and interactions. She consistently uses courteous language, often pausing or leaving sentences unfinished, which conveys politeness and deference (Butler, 1990/1999; Lakoff, 1973, p.43-51). Even when faced with Gaston's rudeness and unwanted advances, such as in scenes 1 and 3, Belle responds with politeness. Although the film communicates that Gaston is in the wrong, Belle's respectful demeanour reinforces the expectation for women to remain composed and courteous, even in uncomfortable situations (Kachel et al., 2016).

ii. Gender stereotypes, power dynamics and social norms

Actions and agency

It's essential to note that the film uses body language to convey gender stereotypes, making it a crucial element to analyse. Throughout the story, Disney contrasts Belle's petite, feminine physique with the larger, more imposing figures of her male counterparts, such as the Beast and Gaston. This visual contrast emphasises traditional gender roles, with Belle embodying vulnerability and the men representing strength and dominance (Eagly & Wood, 2011).

Belle's femininity also highlights her susceptibility to mistreatment. She rarely shows confidence in her body language. For instance, when sacrificing her freedom for her father's in scene 7, Belle collapses onto the floor, in a posture of submission, as if her intense emotional state has left her unable to stand or argue with her captor. In another scene, while tending to the Beast's wounds, she kneels at his feet while he sits above her in a grand chair (scene 14). These scenes reinforce traditional gender roles, with Belle's submissiveness and nurturing

behaviour highlighting her femininity (Eagly and Steffen, 1984; Eagly & Wood, 2011; Fiske et al., 2007).

In stark contrast, the body language of the Beast and Gaston embodies hyper-masculinity. Their imposing stature and aggressive behaviour emphasise their masculinity and dominance and reinforce their positions of power and control (Chen et al., 2009). This kind of power dynamic is clearly visible in Belle's and Gaston's interactions. Despite Belle being more educated than Gaston – in scene 1 Gaston is baffled at Belle's ability to read a book that doesn't contain pictures and thinks she is complimenting him by calling him "primeval" (8:54) – she is the one showing respect to him, not the other way around. This is also true for the townspeople, who promptly believe everything Gaston has to say while disregarding Belle, further reinforcing the patriarchal view that women's voices and intellect are less valued than men's, regardless of their level of education (Chen et al., 2009; Eagly et al., 2020; Fiske et al., 2007).

Belle often appears to lack agency as her actions do not lead to tangible results relevant to the plot. Most of her actions are passive, and even when she attempts to take material action (Halliday, 2014, p.214), she doesn't complete it. For example, when she encounters wolves in the woods, she initially strikes one with a stick, but it is the Beast who ultimately rescues her. This pattern of initiating action but relying on male intervention reinforces her passive role and dependence on male characters.

Her interactions with Gaston further illustrate this dynamic. Belle usually retreats or subtly avoids his advances rather than directly confronting him, displaying submissive body language. When Gaston invades her personal space, she moves aside instead of standing her ground, reinforcing her traditional feminine role (Eagly et al., 2020; Fiske et al., 2007).

Intellectual Interests and Romantic Expectations

Belle's love for reading, an intellectual activity, initially challenges traditional gender norms. However, this positive attribute is undermined by the fact that the townspeople consider her interest in reading abnormal. The film presents Belle's intellectual pursuits as an anomaly rather than a norm, reinforcing the stereotype that women should conform to societal expectations rather than pursue intellectual interests.

The film's setting is a provincial town in 18th-century France, which can explain the villagers' narrow-minded and traditional views. The townspeople's song about Belle that criticises her love of reading and their belief that it's "not right for a woman to read" (8:47) reflect the rigid gender norms of the time. One could argue that Belle's character does attempt to challenge traditional gender norms, at least in the opening scenes of the movie: she is portrayed as a nerdy, solitary girl with a love for knowledge, who rejects the most eligible bachelor in town. Despite being labelled as "strange" (04:34), "peculiar" (05:35) and "odd" (06:28) for this, she doesn't give it up, which could aim to convey a positive message about women embracing intellectual interests.

However, the film suggests that Belle's intellectual pursuits are secondary to her beauty. Her name, Belle, literally translates to "beauty," and this attribute is emphasised throughout the movie, starting with the movie's title. The song "Belle" highlights her beauty as her defining feature, with the townspeople singing in a chorus about how Belle's good looks are wasted on her if she keeps on pursuing unwomanly hobbies instead of playing her traditional and expected role as a woman in society:

"It's a pity and a sin
She doesn't quite fit in
'Cause she really is a funny girl
A beauty but a funny girl
She really is a funny girl
That Belle" (08:04-08:20)

Belle's beauty is also the main reason why Gaston pursues her. Even though the film doesn't portray Gaston in a favourable way, in the story he is seen as the most eligible bachelor in town, thus reinforcing the stereotype that a woman's primary value lies in her appearance (Chen et al., 2009; Forbes et al., 2007; Scott, 1997).

Power Dynamics and Emotional Labor

The film also explores power dynamics and emotional labour in relationships (Chen et al., 2009). The Beast's initial behaviour towards Belle is controlling and domineering, reflecting the dynamics of domestic violence. The Beast blames Belle for his actions, mirroring the tendency of abusers to shift responsibility onto their victims. An example occurs in scene 10 when Belle refuses to join the Beast for dinner, which is completely reasonable considering he is holding her prisoner. The Beast, pointing to Belle's door, looks at the servants as if to say,

"She is the one being unreasonable, she brought this upon herself," thereby blaming her for his own actions. Despite this, Belle remains patient and nurturing, enduring the Beast's behaviour without complaint and working to change him. This dynamic sends the message that women should endure and fix problematic male behaviour, reinforcing the stereotype of women as emotional caretakers (Eagly & Wood, 2011).

iii. Social roles

Marriage and Domesticity

Belle's life revolves around the men in her life: her father, the Beast, and Gaston. This dynamic highlights the gender norm that women's lives and identities are defined by their relationships with men. The film portrays Belle as a caregiver, consistently looking after her father and the Beast. The fact that Belle adapts this behaviour and never puts herself first is rewarded in the movie's plot and makes the audience perceive her as kind and altruistic, both indispensable characteristics of a Disney princess. For instance, when the Beast is injured by the wolves, Belle gives up her chance at freedom to help him and go back to the castle, where she tends to his wounds. This nurturing behaviour aligns with the traditional gender role of women as caregivers and homemakers (Eagly & Wood, 2011).

The film emphasises the importance of marriage and domesticity for women. Despite Belle's lack of interest in marriage, the townspeople and her father continually pressure her to settle down with Gaston, reflecting the societal expectation that women should marry young.

The movie does not specify Belle's age but it wants to emphasise how young she is. This is shown, for example, when Mrs. Potts calls her "child" (38:22), implying that she is not yet of age. Additionally, while neither of the men pursuing her has a parental figure, Belle lives with her father, which again highlights her not being an adult yet.

An example of romance being imposed on Belle is when she tells her father about not having anyone to talk to in town, to which he suggests Gaston, pointing out that "he's a handsome fella" (10:33). Although Belle does not explicitly indicate a romantic intention in her first statement, her father assumes it, and Belle does not correct him. With this scene, the movie seems to imply that a woman would only seek conversation with someone for romantic reasons.

Belle's ultimate fate reinforces the notion that marriage is a woman's ultimate achievement. Belle herself never expresses interest in marriage. In Scene 4, when Gaston declares his plan to marry her, she reacts with disgust and sings about wanting "so much more than they've got planned" (20:47), referring to the town's expectations for her to marry a man like Gaston and live an ordinary provincial life. She also sings about dreaming of adventure in the same song, adding to her character coming across as modern and independent. However, at the end of the movie, she ends up with what she didn't want – marriage – and never achieves her true dream. Despite this, the movie portrays her as content and implies that she has indeed gotten her happy ending when it is instead Prince Adam's dream that has been fulfilled. Although there is no direct wedding scene, it is implied at the end. A stained glass window shows Belle and Adam dancing, both wearing crowns, indicating that Belle became a princess and by marrying Prince Adam.

5.1.3 The Princess and the Frog (2009)

i. Performing gender

Tiana's character design in *The Princess and the Frog* adheres to traditional beauty standards, depicting her as a slim, graceful young woman with large round eyes, a small nose, and full lips, aligning with the archetypal Disney princess. Even when transformed into a frog, Tiana maintains feminine attributes such as long lashes, large eyes, and a petite figure. These elements reinforce her gender identity through conventional markers of femininity. As a human, Tiana wears dresses that emphasise her feminine figure. However, her practicality is evident in her consistently tied-back hair, contrasting with the typical flowing hair of other Disney princesses. This choice emphasises her serious, grounded personality and her focus on work, subtly challenging the expectation of always prioritising beauty over functionality (Scott, 1997).

Tiana's demeanour is characterised by politeness, diligence, and a caring attitude towards others, which are traditionally feminine traits (Fiske et al., 2007). Her speech patterns are courteous and respectful, further reinforcing her femininity, as shown by Lakoff's (1973, pp.43-51) research on language and gender. However, Tiana's use of short, direct language, especially in her interactions with Naveen, illustrates her refusal to conform to these linguistic expectations fully:

“Not a stick in the mud? Say it. Say it.” (54:57)

“Mince the mushrooms! Hop to it!” (55:53)

This resistance to linguistic norms, particularly in moments of conflict, signifies her independence and agency. Tiana embodies both traditional and non-traditional traits, demonstrating that femininity is not a fixed set of characteristics but can encompass a range of behaviours, including assertiveness and leadership.

ii. Gender stereotypes, power dynamics and social norms

Tiana’s narrative arc centres around her ambition to open a restaurant, a dream inspired by her father. Her independence and strong work ethic are traditionally masculine traits (Eagly et al., 2020; Fiske et al., 2007), setting her apart from other Disney princesses whose stories often revolve around romance. The film contrasts Tiana’s character with Charlotte, a secondary character who embodies exaggerated feminine stereotypes. This evident contrast between the two characters further highlights Tiana’s practical and responsible nature and her focus on her career.

Tiana transforms from a hardworking girl to a frog and ultimately becomes a princess and restaurant owner. However, it seems that Tiana becomes a princess in name only. The movie's conclusion does not portray Tiana and Prince Naveen enjoying a royal life. Instead, they are shown serving people at Tiana's restaurant, with no mention of royal status. This ending does not align with typical princess fantasies, but neither does Tiana’s character. Tiana’s personality does not conform to the stereotypical Disney princess. She is an independent young woman, determined to fight for her dreams. She also shows to be uninterested in relationships and parties, as they may potentially distract her from her professional ambitions.

Additionally, Tiana’s journey as an entrepreneur and her role as the primary breadwinner in her relationship with Prince Naveen challenge the conventional power dynamics in heterosexual relationships laid out by Chen et al. (2009). Naveen’s supportive role and the lack of emphasis on his achievements further highlight the reversal of traditional gender roles.

Tiana’s rescue behaviour further challenges traditional gender roles. Unlike many Disney princesses who are often passive and in need of rescue (Hine et al., 2018a; Maity, 2014; Towbin et al., 2004), Tiana plays an active role in her own story. While she does need to be rescued by

Naveen from the hunters in scene 9, she is the one ultimately defeating the villain, Dr. Facilier. This shift in rescue dynamics highlights Tiana's agency and competence, positioning her as a proactive heroine rather than a passive damsel.

iii. Social roles

Societal Expectations and Family Influence

The film reflects societal expectations of gender roles through Tiana's interactions with her family and the broader community. Tiana's father emphasises not prioritising her career over love, suggesting that the latter is “what's really important” (5:48), thus undermining her lifelong dream. This happens again in Scene 5, as Tiana's mother insists on her finding her “Prince Charming” (13:33), and emphasises how that's more important than her restaurant: “Your daddy may not have gotten the place he always wanted, but he had something better. He had love.” (13:21). And, towards the end of the movie, Tiana actually *is* prepared to sacrifice her career for Naveen, despite working hard for it and dreaming about it her whole life, and even though she has only known Naveen for a few days. This narrative choice reflects the persistent norm that women should be willing to compromise their careers for the sake of their partners (Chen et al., 2009).

It is also interesting to note that Tiana's dream was never truly her own. She consistently mentions that owning a restaurant was her father's dream and often refers to achieving it in the plural form – for example: “We'll be there soon” (7:04) – despite her being the one putting in the hard work. This diminishes Tiana's personal success, as it divides the responsibility for this achievement between her and her father, implying that she couldn't have accomplished it on her own.

Narrative and Ideological Implications

The narrative arc of *The Princess and the Frog* ultimately reinforces some traditional gender roles while challenging others. Tiana's journey from waitress to restaurant owner embodies the American Dream, emphasising hard work and perseverance. However, in the resolution of her story, she continues to serve others in her restaurant even after becoming a princess. This suggests that, regardless of her social status, Tiana cannot escape her traditional role as a

woman and, therefore, the responsibility of being a caretaker (Eagly & Wood, 2011). This is further emphasised during the first wedding ceremony. Despite both spending roughly the same screen time as frogs, Mama Odie, who officiates the wedding, says "I now pronounce y'all frog and wife" (1:27:14), highlighting Tiana's role as a wife but not Naveen's as a husband.

Additionally, Tiana's passion for cooking, while empowering, is still linked to traditional female roles in society (Eagly & Wood, 2011). Furthermore, despite her independence, Tiana's story arc includes a romantic subplot with Prince Naveen, suggesting that romantic fulfilment remains an essential component of a woman's happiness .

5.1.4 Frozen (2013)

i. Performing gender

Anna's gender performativity is characterised by a blend of traditionally feminine and masculine traits, which challenges the rigid binaries of gender. Anna's character design adheres to conventional Disney princess aesthetics. She possesses a slender figure, large expressive eyes, a small nose and fair skin. Her auburn hair, often styled in braids, fits the archetypal Disney princess look, emphasising youthful innocence and approachability. Anna's clothing is typically feminine, with flowing dresses and fitted bodices that accentuate her figure. These visual elements reinforce traditional notions of femininity and beauty, aligning Anna with the broader image of Disney princesses.

From the beginning of the film, Anna displays a sense of optimism and excitement in her speech and body language typically associated with traditional femininity. Her longing for companionship is evident in the song "For the First Time in Forever", where she dreams of changing her lonely world and finding true love. This aligns with the classic Disney trope of the princess seeking romance, embodying traditional feminine desires. However, Anna's mannerisms and behaviours often contrast sharply with this image. She is awkward, clumsy, and unafraid to express herself in ways that are not conventionally feminine. For instance, when she wakes up with messy hair and a strand stuck in her mouth (scene 3), or when she eagerly consumes chocolate (scene 4), showing that princesses don't necessarily have to constantly maintain a delicate or graceful appearance.

Anna's journey to find Elsa on the North Mountain is a pivotal moment in her performativity. Her determination and bravery in facing extreme conditions and dangerous obstacles reflect a performative shift towards masculinity. Anna attempts to display assertiveness in scene 9 by commanding Kristoff to help her, which further confirms her departure from passive femininity. As a princess, Anna has authority over Kristoff, however, it is clear it is not in her nature to order people around, and she can't help but add a "please" (39:44) at the end of her request. This combination of traditional and modern traits aims to make her both strong and likeable, adhering to the stereotype that women must balance assertiveness with agreeableness.

- ii. Gender stereotypes, power dynamics and social norms

Romantic Relationships

Despite the progressive elements in Anna's portrayal, certain gender stereotypes persist in her characterisation. One prominent stereotype is the trope of love at first sight, which manifests in Anna's initial infatuation with Prince Hans. Anna's naivety and impulsiveness in agreeing to marry Hans after a brief acquaintance reflects the traditional narrative where a princess's happiness is tied to finding a prince. However, *Frozen* subverts this stereotype by revealing Hans as the villain, challenging the notion that romantic love is always pure and immediate.

Anna's journey towards self-reliance and her evolving understanding of love critique the unrealistic and patriarchal fairy tale trope of love at first sight. The film portrays love as something that develops over time through mutual effort and understanding, challenging the societal norm that equates immediate romantic attraction with true love. This message is particularly important for young audiences, as it promotes a more realistic and healthy understanding of relationships.

Heroism and Sacrifice

Anna's character does defy stereotypes by showing both physical and emotional strength. She fights off wolves, climbs mountains, and stands up to Hans, punching him after his betrayal. These actions challenge the stereotype of women as weak and submissive, presenting Anna as

a multi-dimensional character who embodies both traditionally masculine and feminine qualities.

However, Anna is still portrayed as the damsel in distress at various points in the film. Despite her bravery and resourcefulness, she often finds herself in situations where she needs to be rescued, reinforcing the idea that women need men to save them. For example, Kristoff saves Anna from wolves, helps her escape from the snow monster, and takes her to his troll family for healing after Elsa strikes her with ice. While it is Anna who saves her sister and their kingdom in the end, many scenes make it clear that she couldn't have done it without the help of male characters, such as Kristoff and Olaf. These moments can be seen as undermining Anna's independence and reinforcing the traditional gender dynamic where men are the protectors and women the protected (Chen et al., 2009).

Femininity

Frozen is set in the fictional kingdom of Arendelle, which draws heavily from 19th-century Norway. This historical and cultural backdrop justifies some of the traditional and stereotypical choices seen in Anna's representation. For instance, Anna is always shown wearing dresses, even when exploring a snowy mountain to save her sister. While this seems impractical by modern standards, it aligns with the historical context of the setting, where women of her status would customarily wear dresses, also highlighting how traditional attire can reinforce gender norms, as it restricts physical movement and reinforces feminine stereotypes (Scott, 1997; Swami et al., 2010). However, one could argue that historical accuracy could have been overlooked, considering that the film presents elements that greatly distance themselves from reality, such as magic and mythical creatures.

While the historical context provides some justification for traditional and stereotypical choices, the film's modern sensibilities often challenge these norms. For example, Anna's active role in her quest and her emotional expressiveness contrast sharply with the passive and restrained femininity expected of women in 19th-century society. This blend of historical authenticity and contemporary values allows *Frozen* to appeal to modern audiences while acknowledging its historical setting.

Anna's character consistently subverts traditional gender roles throughout the film. Her clumsiness and spontaneity contrast sharply with the poised and composed image of traditional princesses. Her active participation in physical challenges and her role as the saviour further dismantle the notion of women as passive and dependent. By positioning Anna as both a capable leader and a devoted sister, *Frozen* presents a multifaceted and progressive portrayal of femininity.

iii. Social roles

Sisterhood and Female Solidarity

Anna's character arc challenges traditional norms by emphasising the importance of sisterhood and personal growth over romantic fulfilment. The film's central relationship is between Anna and Elsa, highlighting the significance of familial love and support. Anna's determination to save Elsa and mend their relationship reflects a shift away from the idea that a woman's primary goal should be to find a husband. This narrative aligns with contemporary feminist ideals that value women's independence, agency, and the importance of female solidarity.

Emotional Expression and Vulnerability

Anna's character is notable for her emotional expressiveness and vulnerability. She openly displays a wide range of emotions, from joy and excitement to fear and sadness. This emotional transparency challenges the societal expectation that women should maintain composure and restraint. Anna's willingness to express her feelings openly and honestly presents a more nuanced and human portrayal of femininity, advocating for emotional authenticity and resilience.

Responsibility and Leadership

Despite her youthful exuberance, Anna demonstrates a strong sense of responsibility and leadership. Her determination to find Elsa and restore peace to Arendelle showcases her commitment to her familial and societal duties. This portrayal challenges traditional gender

norms that often depict women as secondary to male leaders. Anna's proactive approach to problem-solving and her willingness to take on leadership roles position her as a capable and effective leader, reflecting a more modern and egalitarian view of gender roles.

5.2 Evolution of Gender Representation in Disney Films: A Four-Decade Analysis

RQ2: In what ways has this representation changed over the last four decades?

To start addressing this research question, it is important to acknowledge that the first two movies – *The Little Mermaid* (1989) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) – were released just two years apart, despite being from different decades. The third movie – *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) – was instead released 18 years after *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). This longer gap increases the likelihood of differences in gender representation between the two movies. As with the first two movies, there is also a higher probability of fewer differences between *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) and *Frozen* (2013), since they merely have four years between them. The release dates of the movies are crucial for their analysis since CDA takes into account the sociocultural context in which the films are produced, circulated, and consumed (Fairclough, 2010, p.132).

Despite it not being a selection requirement, three out of the four movies – *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Princess and the Frog* – belong to the Disney Princess franchise. This reflects previous research's findings that romance is especially central to the plot in Disney movies where the protagonist is a female character (England et al., 2011; Hine et al., 2018a; Hefner et al., 2017). However, only two of the four protagonists – Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* and Anna from *Frozen* – have a royal title at the start of the movie instead of gaining it through marriage. Interestingly, one of them, Anna, is also the only one out of the four who is not classified as a Disney Princess (according to the official website, disney.princess.com) and whose film only relegates romance to a subplot.

The early Disney princesses, such as Ariel and Belle, epitomise traditional femininity. Ariel's design aligns with classic beauty standards—slender, with flowing hair and expressive eyes. Ariel's physical transformation to human form and the relinquishment of her voice for Prince Eric underscores the era's ideal of women as willing to sacrifice their individuality for romantic success. Similarly, Belle embodies traditional beauty with a delicate figure and elegant attire.

Despite her intellectual curiosity, which marks a slight departure from conventional femininity, her validation ultimately hinges on her relationship with the Beast, reinforcing the romantic ideal prevalent at the time.

In contrast, Tiana and Anna represent more nuanced portrayals of gender performativity. Tiana's character, while adhering to some traditional beauty standards, also emphasises practicality and independence. Her career-focused narrative and role as a primary breadwinner in her relationship with Prince Naveen challenge the traditional depiction of women in Disney films (Chen et al., 2009). Her transformation into a frog, while still retaining feminine attributes, symbolically represents her transition from a romantic focus to a more self-reliant and ambitious persona.

Anna's character in *Frozen* further advances this evolution. Her portrayal blends traditional femininity with progressive traits. Though she maintains Disney's aesthetic beauty with her graceful yet relatable design, her character displays clumsiness and emotional expressiveness that diverge from the polished, composed image of earlier princesses. Anna's active role in saving her sister and her kingdom reflects a shift toward a modern understanding of femininity where assertiveness and bravery are integrated into the female character's identity.

Over the past four decades, the agency of Disney protagonists has evolved significantly, reflecting broader societal shifts in gender norms and expectations. In *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel's agency is limited; her primary goal revolves around transforming herself to gain the affection of Prince Eric, symbolising the era's emphasis on romantic fulfilment as a woman's ultimate achievement. Belle, in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), demonstrates slightly more agency through her intellectual curiosity and defiance of societal expectations, yet her narrative still culminates in romantic love as a form of validation. *The Princess and the Frog* marks a notable shift, with Tiana's agency rooted in her career aspirations and independence. Her journey prioritises professional success and personal growth over romance, reflecting a modern understanding of women's empowerment. Finally, *Frozen* further expands this trend by focusing on Anna's quest to mend her familial bonds rather than pursuing a romantic relationship. Anna's narrative emphasises bravery, emotional expressiveness, and self-reliance, showcasing a significant departure from traditional gender roles.

The evolution is especially noticeable when comparing the first and the last movies of the sample. The departure from Ariel's romantic-driven agency to Anna's multifaceted

independence illustrates Disney's progressive adaptation to contemporary gender discourse, offering more diverse and empowered representations of female protagonists.

An analysis of the first two characters, Ariel and Belle, shows that they both reinforce romantic stereotypes in female representation. Ariel's sacrifice for Prince Eric exemplifies the classic Disney trope where a woman's worth and success are tied to her romantic relationship. Similarly, Belle's story, despite showcasing her intellectual and adventurous spirit, culminates in her romantic relationship with Prince Adam, reinforcing the notion that ultimate validation for women is found in romantic fulfilment.

The contrast becomes more pronounced with Tiana and Anna. Tiana's story is less focused on romance and more on personal ambition and career success. Her role as a hardworking entrepreneur and the primary breadwinner deviates from traditional power dynamics that emphasise women's roles as passive romantic interests (Chen et al., 2009). This shift is significant, as it positions Tiana not just as a princess, but as an independent and successful businesswoman.

Anna's narrative in *Frozen* further complicates traditional stereotypes. While she initially exhibits the trope of love at first sight with Prince Hans, the film critiques this narrative by revealing Hans as the antagonist. This subversion challenges the stereotype of immediate romantic attraction being equated with true love. Anna's physical bravery and emotional strength present her as a multidimensional character who defies the typical portrayal of women as mere romantic figures or passive recipients of male actions.

The representation of gender norms in these films mirrors broader societal changes. Ariel and Belle's stories reflect the late 1980s and early 1990s norms in which the films were released, where traditional femininity and romantic aspirations were still predominant. Ariel's transformation and sacrifice, and Belle's validation through romance, illustrate the era's view of women as primarily concerned with securing romantic relationships and fulfilling domestic roles (Eagly & Wood, 2011).

In *The Princess and the Frog*, Tiana becomes the first of our protagonists to achieve her non-romantic goals by the end of the movie. While her relationship with Naveen is part of her happy ending, it is not the only factor. Tiana's dream of opening a restaurant is also realised, showing a balance between romantic and professional fulfilment and representing a shift towards modern gender norms. Tiana's ambition and independence reflect evolving societal values that

recognise women's roles beyond traditional domestic and romantic spheres. The movie aligns with 21st-century society's ideals, where women are encouraged to pursue career-related dreams but are still expected to find a balance between their professional and personal lives.

Anna's portrayal in *Frozen* takes a step further in this evolution. The film keeps aspects of its historical context, the 19th century, but integrates contemporary values of female agency and independence, emphasising the importance of personal growth and familial love over romantic relationships. Anna's character, while still engaging in romantic subplots, is portrayed as a capable leader and a proactive individual. This reflects the shift of 2010s society towards recognising women's multifaceted roles and celebrating their capacity for both emotional expression and leadership.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This thesis has explored the evolving representation of gender in Disney animated films, specifically examining *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Frozen* (2013) using tools of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). By analysing these films, we have traced the development of gender norms, stereotypes, and performativity from the late 1980s to the early 2010s, shedding light on how these representations reflect and challenge societal expectations.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Disney films like *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast* largely reinforced traditional gender roles and romantic ideals. Ariel's transformation and sacrifice for Prince Eric, and Belle's validation through her romantic relationship with the Beast, epitomise the era's focus on romantic fulfilment as a key marker of female success, confirming previous studies' findings (Hine et al., 2018a; Maity, 2014). These characters, while breaking from some conventional moulds, still adhered to a romantic narrative where a woman's ultimate worth was closely tied to her relationship with a male partner. Additionally, like previous research (Towbin et al., 2004), the analysis found that both Ariel's and Belle's looks were strongly highlighted during the movies and valued over their other characteristics.

The analysis of *The Princess and the Frog* reveals a significant shift in gender representation. Tiana's character introduces a new dimension of female empowerment, emphasising career ambition and independence over romantic pursuit. Her role as a hardworking entrepreneur and primary breadwinner challenges traditional gender norms and illustrates the evolving expectations of women in the early 21st century (Chen et al., 2009). Although Tiana's narrative maintains some traditional elements, such as a romantic subplot, her focus on personal achievement marks a departure from the earlier romantic tropes.

Frozen represents a further evolution in gender representation, reflecting contemporary values of female agency and empowerment. Anna's character combines traditional femininity with modern traits, demonstrating emotional expressiveness and physical bravery. The film subverts the classic love-at-first-sight trope and centres on familial love and personal growth, emphasising that true happiness and fulfilment extend beyond romantic relationships, confirming modern princesses' departure from romance-focused narratives (Hine et al., 2018a). Anna's role as a proactive leader and her complex emotional landscape align with current societal views on gender equality and female empowerment.

Through the application of CDA, this thesis has highlighted how these films both reflect and shape cultural understandings of gender. The gradual shift from traditional romantic ideals to more nuanced portrayals of female independence and agency illustrates a broader cultural transformation. While Disney's portrayal of gender has evolved, it continues to navigate the tension between maintaining traditional elements and addressing contemporary values.

Overall, this study underscores the importance of critically examining media representations and their impact on societal norms. As Disney continues to influence global audiences, understanding these representations helps to illuminate the ongoing dialogue between media, culture, and gender.

Building on the findings of this thesis, future research could investigate how evolving gender representations in Disney animated films impact children's perceptions and behaviors regarding gender roles. A mixed-methods approach would be effective in this study. Quantitative measures, such as surveys, could assess children's views on gender roles and career aspirations related to Disney characters. This would help evaluate how children's attitudes correspond with the gender portrayals in Disney films. Additionally, controlled experiments involving exposure to various Disney films could measure any changes in children's gender role attitudes and behaviours. To complement this, qualitative methods such as focus groups with children could provide deeper insights into their interpretations of gender roles and characters in Disney films. Additionally, interviews with parents and educators could offer perspectives on how media consumption affects children's real-world understanding of gender. A longitudinal study could further track children over time to assess the long-term effects of Disney films on their gender perceptions.

Building on the findings of this thesis, future research could explore how evolving gender representations in the selected Disney animated films influence children's perceptions and behaviours regarding gender roles through a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative methods, such as surveys, could analyse children's views on gender roles and career aspirations in relation to Disney characters, helping to assess how their attitudes align with gender portrayals in the films. Qualitative methods could complement this by conducting focus groups with children to gain deeper insights into their interpretations of gender roles and characters. Interviews with parents and educators could provide further understanding of how media consumption impacts children's real-world perceptions of gender.

References

- Acker, J. (1992). From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions. *Contemporary Sociology* (Washington), 21(5), 565–569. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2075528>
- Aubrey, J. S., & Roberts, L. (2020). Effects of Media Use on Development of Gender Role Beliefs. In *The International Encyclopedia of Media Psychology*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119011071.iemp0081>
- Bartky, S. L. (1990). *Femininity and domination: studies in the phenomenology of oppression*. Routledge, Chapman & Hall.
- Biggsby, E. (2017). Sampling, nonprobability. In M. Allen (Ed.), *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (Vol. 4, pp. 1537-1538). SAGE Publications, Inc, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411>
- Bussey, K., & Bandura, A. (1999). Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Development and Differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106(4), 676–713. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.106.4.676>
- Butler, J. (1999). *Gender trouble : feminism and the subversion of identity* (2nd ed.). Routledge. (Original work published 1990)
- Coyne, S. M., Linder, J. R., Rasmussen, E. E., Nelson, D. A., & Birkbeck, V. (2016). Pretty as a Princess: Longitudinal Effects of Engagement With Disney Princesses on Gender Stereotypes, Body Esteem, and Prosocial Behavior in Children. *Child Development*, 87(6), 1909–1925. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12569>
- Dundes, L., & Streiff, M. (2016). Reel Royal Diversity? The Glass Ceiling in Disney’s Mulan and Princess and the Frog. *Societies*, 6(4), 35. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc6040035>
- Eagly, A. H., Nater, C., Miller, D. I., Kaufmann, M., & Sczesny, S. (2020). Gender stereotypes have changed: A cross-temporal meta-analysis of U.S. public opinion polls from 1946 to 2018. *American Psychologist*, 75(3), 301–315. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000494>
- Eagly, A. H., & Steffen, V. J. (1984). Gender stereotypes stem from the distribution of women and men into social roles. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46(4), 735–754. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.46.4.735>
- Eagly, A. H., & Wood, W. (2011). Social role theory. In P. A. M. van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories in social psychology* (Vol. 2, pp.458-476). SAGE Publications Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446249222>
- England, D. E., Descartes, L., & Collier-Meek, M. A. (2011). Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses. *Sex Roles*, 64(7–8), 555–567. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-011-9930-7>
- Fairclough, N. (2010). *Critical discourse analysis: the critical study of language* (2nd ed.). Longman.

- Fiske, S. T., Cuddy, A. J., & Glick, P. (2007). Universal dimensions of social cognition: warmth and competence. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11(2), 77–83. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2006.11.005>
- Forbes, G. B., Collinsworth, L. L., Jobe, R. L., Braun, K. D., & Wise, L. M. (2007). Sexism, Hostility toward Women, and Endorsement of Beauty Ideals and Practices: Are Beauty Ideals Associated with Oppressive Beliefs? *Sex Roles*, 56(5–6), 265–273. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9161-5>
- Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and Benevolent Sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 70(3), 491–512. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.70.3.491>
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th Rev. ed.). Routledge.
- Hansen, A. & Machin, D. (2019). *Media and communication research methods* (2nd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hefner, V., Firchau, R.-J., Norton, K., & Shevel, G. (2017). Happily Ever After? A Content Analysis of Romantic Ideals in Disney Princess Films. *Communication Studies*, 68(5), 511–532. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2017.1365092>
- Hentschel, T., Heilman, M. E., & Peus, C. V. (2019). The Multiple Dimensions of Gender Stereotypes: A current look at men's and women's characterizations of others and themselves. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00011>
- Hine, B., England, D., Lopreore, K., Horgan, E. S., & Hartwell, L. (2018a). The Rise of the Androgynous Princess: Examining Representations of Gender in Prince and Princess Characters of Disney Movies Released 2009–2016. *Social Sciences*, 7(12), 245. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7120245>
- Hine, B., Ivanovic, K., & England, D. (2018b). From the Sleeping Princess to the World-Saving Daughter of the Chief: Examining Young Children's Perceptions of 'Old' versus 'New' Disney Princess Characters. *Social Sciences*, 7(9), 161. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci7090161>
- Huang, X. (2023). The Impact of Disney Princess Animation on Contemporary Girls. *SHS Web of Conferences*, 180, 3007. <https://doi.org/10.1051/shsconf/202318003007>
- Jiang, X., Zhang, L., Rivero, D., & Torres, B. (2024). Meta-narrative review of gender portrayal in Disney movies for young children and its pedagogical implications. *Journal of Global Education and Research*, 8(2), 116–131. <https://doi.org/10.5038/2577-509X.8.2.1327>
- Johnson, K. R., & Holmes, B. M. (2009). Contradictory Messages: A Content Analysis of Hollywood-Produced Romantic Comedy Feature Films. *Communication Quarterly*, 57(3), 352–373. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370903113632>
- Junn, E. N. (1997). Media Portrayals of Love, Marriage & Sexuality for Child Audiences: A Select Content Analysis of Walt Disney Animated Family Films. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED407118>

- Kachel, S., Steffens, M. C., & Niedlich, C. (2016). Traditional Masculinity and Femininity: Validation of a new scale assessing Gender Roles. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00956>
- Koenig, A. M., & Eagly, A. H. (2014). Evidence for the Social Role Theory of Stereotype Content: Observations of Groups' Roles Shape Stereotypes. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 107(3), 371–392. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037215>
- Lakoff, R. (1973). Language and woman's place. *Language in Society*, 2(1), 45–79. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047404500000051>
- Lee, T. L., Fiske, S. T., Glick, P., & Chen, Z. (2010). Ambivalent Sexism in Close Relationships: (Hostile) Power and (Benevolent) Romance Shape Relationship Ideals. *Sex Roles*, 62(7–8), 583–601. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9770-x>
- Lorber, J. (2007). The social construction of gender. In D. Grusky & S. Szelenyi (Eds.), *The inequality reader: contemporary and foundational readings in race, class, and gender* (2nd ed., pp.305-311). Westview Press.
- Machin, D., & Mayr, A. (2012). *How to do critical discourse analysis a multimodal introduction*. SAGE.
- Maity, N. (2014). Damsels in Distress: A Textual Analysis of Gender Roles in Disney Princess Films. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 19(10), 28-31. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-191032831>
- Mikos, L. (2014). Analysis of film. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* (pp. 409-423). SAGE Publications Ltd, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243>
- Nastasia, D., & Uppal, C. (2010). TV princesses in the eyes of Western and non-Western girls: Learning about being a girl from the exotic Disney princesses. *Television*, (23), 34-37.
- Ohler, J. B. (2013). *Digital storytelling in the classroom: New media pathways to literacy, learning, and creativity*. Corwin Press.
- Ribarsky, E. (2014). The Frankenstein Project: Examining Media's Role in Constructing Romantic Relationship Ideals. *Communication Teacher*, 28(3), 160–164. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17404622.2014.911338>
- Santoniccolo, F., Trombetta, T., Paradiso, M. N., & Rollè, L. (2023). Gender and Media Representations: A review of the literature on gender stereotypes, objectification and sexualization. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 20(10), 5770. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20105770>
- Scott, B. A. (1997). Beauty myth beliefs: Theory, measurement, and the use of a new construct. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1997). Dissertation Abstracts International: Section B: The Sciences and Engineering, 58, 459.
- Simpson, P., & Mayr, A. (2010). *Language and power: a resource book for students*. Routledge.

- Swami, V., Coles, R., Wyrozumska, K., Wilson, E., Salem, N., & Furnham, A. (2010). Oppressive Beliefs at Play: Associations among Beauty Ideals and Practices and Individual Differences in Sexism, Objectification of Others, and Media Exposure. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *34*(3), 365–379. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2010.01582.x>
- Towbin, M. A., Haddock, S. A., Zimmerman, T. S., Lund, L. K., & Tanner, L. R. (2004). Images of Gender, Race, Age, and Sexual Orientation in Disney Feature-Length Animated Films. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, *15*(4), 19–44. https://doi.org/10.1300/J086v15n04_02
- West, C., & Zimmerman, D. H. (1987). Doing Gender. *Gender & Society*, *1*(2), 125–151. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002>

Appendices

Appendix 1: Selected Scenes

a. Sample 1: The Little Mermaid (1989)

1. Exposition
Scene 1: 5:55-10:46 Ariel is swimming to a shipwreck, where she looks for human-made objects and has to escape a shark. She brings the objects she has found to Scuttle to ask him what they are.
Scene 2: 12:51-13:27 King Triton learns that Ariel has gone to the surface and prohibits her from doing so ever again.
Scene 3: 15:08-18:06 Despite his father's warnings, Ariel still dreams of living among humans.
<i>Inciting Incident</i>
Scene 4: 19:01-21:03 Ariel swims to the surface, where she sees Eric for the first time.
2. Rising action
Scene 5: 25:15-26:28 After rescuing a passed-out Eric from the sinking ship, Ariel brings him to shore.
Scene 6: 27:50-29:15 Ariel wants to see Eric again. Triton and Ariel's sisters notice her singing and daydreaming.
Scene 7: 34:23-38:14 After Ariel confesses her love for Eric, Triton destroys her collection of human objects. Ursula's minions try to convince Ariel that she can solve her problems.
Scene 8: 39:17-45:38 Ariel visits Ursula, who offers her a deal: in exchange for her voice, Ursula will give Ariel legs. If Ariel manages to make Eric fall in love with her and kiss her, she will be allowed to stay human; otherwise, she will turn back and belong to Ursula. Ariel agrees to the deal.
Scene 9: 46:08-50:00 Ariel washes up on the shore where Eric finds her and offers to help her.
Scene 10: 50:57-52:22 Ariel, wearing a new dress and hairdo, joins Eric and Grimsby in the castle's dining hall.

Scene 11: 54:56-56:46

At dinner, Eric invites Ariel to join him for a kingdom tour the following day. Later, Ariel watches Eric from her window, then she goes to sleep.

Scene 12: 57:25-58:43

Ariel and Eric spend the day touring the kingdom on a carriage.

Scene 13: 58:44-1:02:27

In the evening, Ariel and Eric take a rowboat out into the lagoon. Ariel's friends attempt to encourage Eric to kiss her, but their efforts are interrupted by Ursula's minions, causing them to fall into the water.

Scene 14: 1:04:20-1:06:29

Scuttle informs Ariel that Eric is getting married, mistakenly thinking it is to her. Ariel later discovers that Eric is marrying another girl. Crying, she watches the wedding ship sail away at sunset.

3. Climax**Scene 15:** 1:07:08-1:07:55

Scuttle tells Ariel that Eric is marrying Ursula in disguise. Ariel attempts to reach the ship.

Scene 16: 1:09:23-01:12:42

Ariel reaches the ship, where Ursula's pendant, containing Ariel's voice, shatters, returning her voice. Eric, no longer under Ursula's spell, realises that Ariel is the one who saved him. As they are about to kiss, the sun sets, transforming Ariel back into a mermaid.

4. Falling action**Scene 17:** 01:12:42-1:15:04

Ursula takes Ariel underwater, where Triton agrees to take Ariel's place and yields his trident. Eric reaches them and throws a spear at Ursula, who tries to kill him but is stopped by Ariel. Ursula, who now wields power over the ocean, tries to kill Ariel. Eric successfully steers a ship towards Ursula and impales her, finally defeating her.

*Resolution***Scene 18:** 1:15:30-1:16:39

Triton grants Ariel's wish to become human permanently. Ariel and Eric are reunited and share a kiss.

5. Denouement**Scene 19:** 1:16:40-1:18:17

Ariel and Eric get married.

b. Sample 2: Beauty and the Beast (1991)

1. Exposition	
Scene 1: 3:43-9:22	During the opening song “Belle”, Belle walks around the town; she then rejects Gaston’s advances.
Scene 2: 10:16-10:40	Belle talks to her father about having no one to talk to.
Scene 3: 18:08-19:20	Gaston shows up at Belle’s house, stating his intention to marry her.
Scene 4: 19:51-21:06	Reprise of song “Belle”. Her father’s horse comes back and Belle decides to go look for him.
<i>Inciting Incident</i>	
Scene 5: 21:06-24:55	Belle finds his father in the castle and agrees to take his place as the Beast’s prisoner.
2. Rising action	
Scene 6: 25:12-26:35	The Beast shows Belle around the castle and to her room and orders her to join him for dinner.
Scene 7: 34:58-36:32	The Beast tries to convince Belle to go to dinner but she refuses. He then spies on her on his magic mirror.
Scene 8: 37:51-38:40	Belle goes down to the kitchen to ask for some dinner, where she meets more of the castle’s servants.
Scene 9: 42:27-47:03	Belle asks to explore the castle. She sneaks away to the forbidden west wing, where she discovers’s the Beast’s portrait as Prince Adam and the enchanted rose. The Beast catches her snooping around and gets angry. Belle runs away from the castle.
Scene 10 47:03-49:21	While riding away, Belle is attacked by a pack of wolves. The Beast fends them off but is injured. Belle is torn between running away and helping him, but decides on the latter.
Scene 11: 49:21-50:18	

Belle tends to the Beast's injuries.
Scene 12: 51:58-56:19 Belle and the Beast spend time together and he shows her the castle's library.
3. Climax
Scene 13: 57:35-59:51 Belle and the Beast have dinner and dance to the song "Beauty and the Beast".
Scene 14: 1:00:09-1:02:05 The Beast lends Belle his enchanted mirror so that she can see her father. Seeing that Belle's father is in danger, the Beast sets Belle free and she leaves to help him.
4. Falling action
Scene 15: 1:03:24-1:07:48 When Belle brings her father home, Gaston threatens to send him to an asylum if she doesn't marry him. Belle confirms her father's claim of the Beast's existence by showing everyone the Beast through the mirror. Gaston convinces everyone that the Beast is dangerous and they should go to the castle to defeat him. Belle protests, but Gaston locks her and her father in their house.
Scene 16: 1:12:31-1:15:59 Belle reaches the castle, where Gaston is fighting the Beast. The Beast manages to defeat Gaston, but is wounded. As he's dying, Belle cries.
<i>Resolution</i>
Scene 17: 1:15:59-1:18:51 As the rose's last petal falls down, Belle tells the Beast she loves him. This breaks the curse, and he turns back into Prince Adam. They share a kiss, which transforms the castle and its inhabitants back to normal.
5. Denouement
Scene 18: 1:18:51-1:20:24 "Beauty and the Beast" song reprise. Belle and Prince Adam dance at a ball, with numerous guests in attendance.

c. Sample 3: The Princess and the Frog (2009)

1. Exposition
Scene 1: 1:15-2:36

In Charlotte's bedroom, young Tiana and Charlotte listen to Tiana's mother as she tells them a story.
Scene 2: 3:59-6:29 At home, little Tiana cooks for her family and neighbors. She talks to her parents about her and her father's dream of opening a restaurant.
Scene 3: 6:40-7:21 Tiana comes home from work and puts her tips aside, as she's saving money to open her restaurant. As soon as she lays in bed, her alarm goes off, and she gets ready for the second job.
Scene 4: 9:31-11:58 Tiana serves table at the café where she works. She declines her friend's invitations to go out that night, saying she has to work. After Charlotte pays her for a special beignets order, Tiana states she now has enough money to get her restaurant.
Scene 5: 12:05-15:49 Tiana and her mother visit the place she intends to buy and turn into her restaurant. During the song "Almost there", Tiana imagines how the place will look once renovated.
Scene 6: 24:00-26:33 At Charlotte's masquerade party, Tiana finds out that someone has outbid her on the building she wanted to buy. After Tiana accidentally knocks into the beignets table, ruining her costume, Charlotte lends her a princess gown.
<i>Inciting Incident</i>
Scene 67: 26:33-31:15 Prince Naveen appears on the balcony as a frog, scaring Tiana when he speaks. Mistaking her for a princess, he asks her to kiss him to turn him back into a human, promising her a reward. Tiana kisses Naveen and turns into a frog herself. Chased by Charlotte's dog, they escape the party.
2. Rising action
Scene 8: 32:53-38:51 Hanging onto a balloon, Tiana and Naveen end up in the bayou and have to escape alligators. They meet the alligator Louis, who offers to take them to someone who might be able to turn them human again.
Scene 9: 51:13-54:24

On their journey to Mama Odie, Tiana's and Naveen's personalities clash and they keep arguing. They are chased and trapped by a group of hunters but manage to escape.

Scene 10: 54:53-57:15

Cooking dinner, Tiana shows Naveen how to mince mushrooms. They have an honest talk and seem to start working out their differences.

3. Climax

Scene 11: 1:09:12-1:12:11

Tiana and Naveen have dinner on the boat, he wants to propose to her but doesn't get to.

Scene 12: 1:13:06-1:15:04

Tiana learns from Ray that Naveen loves her. However, when she goes to the Mardi Gras parade, she sees what she thinks is Naveen about to marry Charlotte.

Scene 13: 1:17:10-1:20:59

Ray brings Tiana the amulet, telling her about the misunderstanding. She decides not to give up on Naveen and destroys it, defeating Dr. Facilier.

4. Falling action

Scene 14: 1:22:34-1:24:22

Naveen tells Charlotte that if she kisses him to turn them human again, he'll marry her as long as she gives Tiana the money for her restaurant. Tiana interrupts them, telling Naveen that her dream wouldn't be complete without him. The clock strikes midnight, leaving them as frogs.

Resolution

Scene 15: 1:24:22-1:28:55

Naveen and Tiana get married in the bayou. As they kiss, since Tiana is now a princess, they turn back into humans. They then have a second wedding ceremony as humans.

5. Denouement

Scene 16: 1:28:55-1:30:21

Tiana and Naveen buy a place and renovate it to open Tiana's restaurant.

d. Sample 4: Frozen (2013)

1. Exposition

Inciting Incident

Scene 1: 3:35-5:17

When they are kids, Elsa accidentally hits Anna with her magic.

2. Rising action

Scene 2: 8:17-11:34

Anna and Elsa grow up isolated, with no interaction with the outer world. When their parents are die at sea, the rift between the two sisters grow even more.

Scene 3: 12:39-18:23

On her sister's coronation day, Anna is excited for the castle to finally open to the public. As she sings and dances around the streets, she meets Prince Hans of the Southern Isles.

Scene 4: 20:11-25:38

At the coronation ball, Elsa and Anna have an awkward conversation. After dancing, Anna and Hans spend some time together; he proposes and she accepts.

Scene 5: 25:38-29:31

Elsa doesn't give Anna and Hans her blessing for their marriage, which brings to an argument between the two sisters. This leads to Elsa lashing out and accidentally revealing her powers. Elsa runs away, leaving however Arendelle in a state of eternal winter.

Scene 6: 29:31-30:48

Anna decides to go look for Elsa, leaving Hans in command.

Scene 7: 34:48-38:39

Anna ventures through the the woods, looking for Elsa. She finds a trading post, where she stops to buy warm clothes and meets Kristoff.

Scene 8: 39:24-47:41

Anna asks kristoff to take her to the North mountain, where she suspects Elsa could be. He grudgingly accepts and they embark on their journey. They are soon attacked by wolves and have to sacrifice Kristoff's sleigh to escape them. They then meet Olaf, a talking snowman that joins them on their journey.

Scene 9: 50:51-1:02:34

The group continues their journey, finally reaching Elsa's ice castle. The sisters have an argument, with Anna trying to convince Elsa to go back to Arendell. Elsa accidentally strikes Anna with her magic and orders her and her companions to leave, sending a snow monster after them. Anna's hair starts to turn white from Elsa's magic.

Scene 10: 1:03:07-1:09:35

Kristoff brings Anna to the trolls, thinking they can help her. As she starts to grow weak, the trolls tell Anna that only an act of true love can save her from freeze completely.

Scene 11: 1:13:35-1:17:10

Kristoff rushes back to Arendelle so that Hans can give Anna true love's kiss. However, instead of kissing her, Hans reveals himself as the villain and leaves her to die.

Scene 12: 1:19:35-1:24:55

Olaf reaches Anna in the palace and they her escape, trying to reunite with Kristoff.

3. Climax

Scene 13: 1:25:49-1:26:49

As Hans is about to kill Elsa, Anna steps in front of her sister, saving her. She then freezes solid, having given up her chance to be healed to save her sister.

4. Falling action

Resolution

Scene 14: 1:26:49-1:29:38

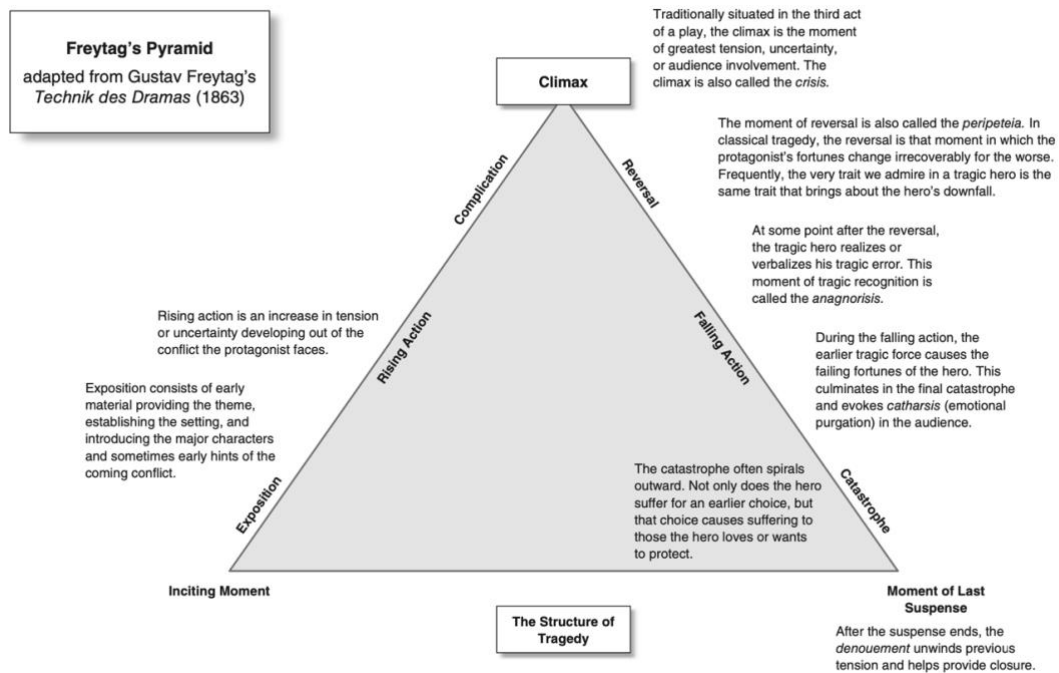
Anna thaws, as her sacrifice for Elsa was an act of true love. Realising that love is the key to controlling her powers, Elsa ends the winter.

5. Denouement

Scene 15: 1:30:17-1:31:07

Anna gifts kristoff a new sleigh and they share a kiss.

Appendix 2: Freytag's pyramid



(Ohler, 2013)