

# THE REPRESENTATION OF THE FANTASY AND IDEAL BODY IMAGE: A STUDY OF FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN DISNEY MOVIES

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper is aimed at studying various aspects of female led, animated movies by Walt Disney Pictures. The researcher studies diverse aspects and intricacies that portray girls and women to its audiences. The paper also focuses on the body image portrayed to younger girls and its effects on its audiences, whether female characters are stereotyped in this genre of cinema and if it contributes to the storyline. It also aims at focussing on these aspects extensively and the researcher has picked three movies before the year 2000 and three after along with secondary sources of data, to identify the change in the representation of these characters over the years. The purpose of this study is to point out the progression of female characters over the years in the selected animated movies. The research was conducted using thematic analysis for the above-mentioned timeline where the movies were analysed closely. The researcher also brings attention to the importance given to an ideal body images in all of the movies to different female protagonists. Women are supposed to look and behave a certain way, this is highly influential on their audiences. The study indicates that the representation of female protagonists has drastically improved over the years along with the socio-cultural context. Through the varied forms of media, the representation of women has seen a new graph. These Walt Disney Pictures movies have definitely contributed to women empowerment and have begun to create a strong impact on young children and adults.*

**Keywords-** *Body Image, Female Protagonists, Materialistic World, Movies, Liberation, Stereotyping*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

For far too long, the general audience has been subjected to stereotypical portrayals of women's bodies and demeanour in animated movies. The younger generation is conditioned to think that all women are supposed to have perfect hour glass figures, perfect skin and the need for a man to save the day. Be it the prince kissing Sleeping Beauty or rescuing Rapunzel, animated movies have traditionally shown the male lead to be the most important character and have reduced the female protagonist to a helpless and treasured object. With increased awareness for the need of diverse representation in cinema, recent movies like Frozen (Lee & Buck, 2013), Zootopia (Howard & Moore, 2016) and *Moana* (Clements & Musker, 2016) are trying to break out of the shackles of conformity to showcase strong, independent and diverse women. In Frozen, the love between the sisters is what saves Anna and not the male protagonist (No, 2015). *Moana* portrays a protagonist belonging to an indigenous tribe to show that beauty need not be from a single form.

### 1.1 Walt Disney Pictures

Walt Disney Pictures is an American film studio and a subsidiary of Walt Disney Studios, owned by The Walt Disney Company. The subsidiary is the main producer of live-action feature films and animated movies for decades now. The Walt Disney Pictures company was founded in 1923 and is headquartered in Walk Disney Studios, California. Their studio happens to be one of the biggest studios in Hollywood and is termed as the “Big Six” film studio. As a company animated movie aren't the only focus, live action movies have been a huge grossing factor to the company. Pirates of the Caribbean is the studios most successful franchise so far. The animated movies that have reached created new milestones are – Toy Story 3 (2010), Frozen (2013), Zootopia (2016), Finding Dory (2016) and Incredibles 2 (2018) making them the top grossing animated movies. It is also important to note that four out of the five movies are female led movies. Walt Disney Pictures have been used for several research studies before, whether it is mental health, race and gender studies.

The researcher has selected Walt Disney Pictures movies as they have been the most critically and commercially acclaimed movies over the years. They also have a wide range of audiences and is not restricted to children only. Researchers have found that these movies are universal and hence anyone can relate to them. In Shrek, we learn what matters is what's inside. All Toy Story films teach us about letting go and about friendship. The Lion King teaches us about responsibility and facing your problems. These are all things we can all relate to (Ruiz, 2013).

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gender images in the popular culture always have been, and still are, heavily influenced by stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity i.e., the norms and expectations of how males and females should and should not behave. Traditional gender role portrayals in the mass media are part of our culture, and give insight into the role relationship between male and females (Fischer, 2010). This study extensively studied the roles of both male and female characters where male characters have a stronger representation in the storylines and have better representation. Male characters are represented as stronger and independent individuals who are heroes, leaders and career driven. These characters possess the masculine aspects like anger, strength and dominance.

Particularly children who spend a substantial amount of time watching animated films can be influenced by their images, stories and messages. Gender images and depictions can have a powerful impact on children's perceptions of males and females, influence the way boys and girls interact with each other and form their identities and personalities (Fischer, 2010). The researcher concludes the research with the hope of more gender-neutral roles in animated movies in the future.

Another major aspect is the representation of gender, race, age and sexual orientation and young children are introduced to these societal concepts. These movies play a very strong influence in framing a world view for them and hence it is extremely crucial to deliver the right messages in order to teach them certain things. Hence, the depiction of gender, race and sexual orientation should be strong and unbiased characters from different cultural backgrounds are also stereotyped and often offensive in nature.

Movies tend to negative representations of non-dominant cultures and often over exaggerated class stereotypes and most importantly characters coming from the same background often stay together. This teaches children these absurd values and often confuses them. Another important aspect is sexual presentation being represented in movies. Sexual orientation is an individual's choice and one cannot be judged for the same. However, sexual orientation has always been depicted very differently in these movies. Majority of the storylines focus on a heterosexual people falling in love. There almost never been a character showed who is homosexual. The messages are given very subtly to the audience through dialogues, costume and songs.

Studies have shown, media representations of women are predominantly prone to objectify women, stereotype them, and put them in arranged roles which leave little room for character development or distinct personalities other than those defined by gender (Furnham & Bitar, 1993). there has been a recent increase in the construction of alternative female portrayals that incorporate stereotypical male character traits such as independence, dominance, strength and sometimes even violence within female characters (Ferguson, 2012). The portrayal of women along conventional gender norms thus started to make way for a depiction of women in more alternative settings. This type of portrayal can be labelled as an alternative way of depicting women and breaking through the gender stereotypes associated with womanhood.

Hence, what has to be noted about these alternative female portrayals is that they deviate from the formerly established norms of female representation. It could even be stated that they are completely oppositional from these more dominant female portrayals within media, in the sense that they show strength, non-passivity and sometimes even exercise physical dominance over men (Hains, 2009)(Ferguson, 2012). Alternative femininity can thus generally be defined through strategies of resistance and non-compliance, especially towards men(Charlebois, J., 2010). Most traits associated with alternative female portrayals seem to mirror those that have been located within stereotypical content and as a result tend to show more similarities to stereotypical masculine traits than feminine ones(Gill R. , 2007). An extreme example of this phenomenon is the portrayal of women as aggressive, violent or even sexually aggressive(Ferguson, 2012). These are originally traits that have been associated with negative male stereotypes; however, when associated with female characters, these traits become empowering and serve as an indication of strength, authority and independence(Ferguson, 2012)(Hains, 2009)(Gill R. , 2007).

Disney has made powerful movies over the years and has always impacted children very strongly. In the same way, these movies also effect children's behaviour. As these movies create the bases of the world for them. In this study, the researcher aims to focus on children's behavioural patterns based on watching Disney movies. After the dawn of positive psychology, media psychologists started to devote increased attention to examining how media content, particularly movies, can be meaningful and help humans flourish (Oliver, Hartmann, & Woolley, 2012). Evidence has revealed that prosocial behaviour in children can also be enhanced by watching television (Mares & Woodard, 2005). As television still dominates children's media lives this might be a promising way to contribute to their well-being. In the current study, it was examined whether Disney movies can encourage children to help others, which is important because (I) Disney movies are extremely popular and (II) contain a vast number of prosocial messages (Padilla-Walker, M, Coyne, Fraser, & Stockdale, 2013).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The current study, titled "The Representation of the Fantasy and Ideal Body Image: A Study of Female Protagonists in Disney Movies", uses more of a qualitative method of research.

#### 3.2 Research Objectives

Objectives of the study include:

- 3.2.1 The study of the portrayal of the ideal body image in the selected movies
- 3.2.2 To explore the various female characters and their representation
- 3.2.3 To decode the transformation in the representation of women over the years.
- 3.2.4 To understand the role of the portrayal of the materialistic world in these Disney animated movies
- 3.2.5 To understand the effects of the stereotypical characters on its audiences

Therefore, the intention of this thesis is quite clear in objectives and research questions that it seeks to answer.

#### 3.3 Instruments of Data Collection:

##### 3.3.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) suggest that it is the first qualitative method that should be learned as 'it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis'. A further advantage, particularly from the perspective of learning and teaching, is that it is a method rather than a methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This means that, unlike many qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective. This makes it a very flexible method, a considerable advantage given the diversity of work in learning and teaching (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). In this case, it helps study the representation of the female protagonist, body image and the materialistic world in ways that scientific methods cannot. Thematic analysis in the form of six films analyses movies such as *Cinderella* (1950), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Brave* (2012), *Moana* (2016). Three movies selected before the year 2000 and three after.

##### 3.4 Sampling Technique

The movies, which are samples in this study, are selected based on its characteristics and the objectives of the study. The samples here are selected based on the popularity, box office performance and time intervals of one

year between each movie. The above films have also been selected due to their release dates. These movies released with a gap of a year between each consecutive movie. Therefore, helping with understanding any trends of the social narratives as years go by in the animated industry. The sample type is purposive sampling.

### 3.5 Sampling

The methodology that this study shall employ is thematic analysis in the form of ten films of ten of Walt Disney Pictures' movies which have released before the year 2000 and after the same such as:

Pre 2000		Post 2000	
1.	Cinderella - 1950	1.	Brave - 2012
2.	Beauty and the Beast - 1991	2.	Moana – 2016

### 3.6 Theoretical Framework

The current study, “The Representation of the Fantasy and Ideal Body Image: A Study of female Protagonists in Disney Movies”, aims to critically analyse the movies in terms of the materialistic world and the ideal body image of the female protagonists. It does not just point out just point out the flawed importance of the materialistic world and body image but it also aims to study the progression of the female protagonists.

**Social Learning Theory** – The current study, does not just point out the flawed representation of women in animated movies but it aims to explain any sort of effect that these movies have on its audiences. Therefore, Bandura’s Social Learning theory is apt and shall support the study.

Bandura states that children observe and learn behaviours from the people around them behaving in certain ways. This is illustrated during the famous Bobo Doll experiment (Bandura, 1961). Individuals that are observed and learnt from, are called models. In society, children are surrounded by many influential models, such as parents within the family, characters on TV, friends within their peer group, characters in videogames, protagonists and antagonists in films and teachers in school(McLeod, 2016). These models provide examples of behaviour to observe and imitate e.g., strong, independent women rather than helpless, dependent women. Therefore, the characters of female protagonists in the selected movies for analysis is the model for their representation and impact of body image and the materialistic world(Bandura, 1961).

**Feminist Theory** – Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical or philosophical discourse. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality(Brabeck & Brown, 1997). It examines women's social roles, experience, interests, and feminist politics in a variety of fields, such as anthropology and sociology, communication, psychoanalysis, economics, literature, education, and philosophy. While generally providing a critique of social relations, much of feminist theory also focuses on analysing gender inequality and the promotion of women's interests.

This study focuses on the progress of the female protagonist in the selected movies and feminist theory helps in co-relating them in terms of the different waves of feminism. A movie like Brave definitely breaks several barriers and brings out a strong, independent and fearless character. A theory like the Feminist Theory, helps in analysing the intricacies of the female character and their role in the story line of the movie.

## 4. DATA ANALYSIS

### 4.1. Thematic Analysis

#### 4.1.1 Cinderella(1950)

The opening scene of the movie is *Cinderella* waking up from sleep and singing and all the birds gathering around and is woken up by the birds. She wakes up perfectly from bed, clean and tidy. After the unfortunate death of her father, *Cinderella* is forced to work for her step mother and sisters, *Anastasia* and *Drizella*. Her step mother's true nature was revealed, when out of cruelty and jealousy of *Cinderella's* charm and beauty, forces her to do all the household work. *Cinderella's* character is portrayed typically like a good woman who does not show any resistance to being treated in a wrong way by her step mother. *Cinderella* seems to be like an animal whisperer, all the animals communicate with her and do everything for her.

Women are often shown “doing ‘women’s work’ such as sewing and cooking” and often feature as “victims or prizes” rather than having an active role in the narrative. Another trope that is considered is that women are often associated with small animals to suggest their cuteness and defencelessness. The heroine in this film conforms to these ideas of what constitutes a good woman. Cute animals like birds and mice are her friends (Benshoff, Harry, & Griffin, 2009). *Cinderella* is at the beck and call of her step mother and sisters, they do not have any pity or consideration for her. Even after *Anastasia* and *Drizella* speak to her inappropriately, she is polite and poised to all of them. Most of the movie, you feel bad for *Cinderella* and empathise with her and how helpless she is. With her kindness towards them, we see her being the victim and suffering through all the torture.

In terms of body image, even after being treated like a servant and doing domestic work all the time, *Cinderella* looks flawless all the time. She has blonde hair, a fair complexion and the ideal body, hour glass figure. We also notice how thin and tender her hands are. Even while cleaning the house or waking up in the morning, she always looks fresh and most of the times, better than her step sisters. The female heroine is then often placed in a situation, in which they participate but which does not come to exist through their own doing, that provides their rescue. In their passivity, their circumstances happen to be altered but their characters remain the same (Murphy & Patrick, 1995 ).

The step mother is shown in dark shadows and usually high angles of the camera and is placed in dim lighting indicating her negative characteristics and cruelty (22:25 seconds). She is also seen training her daughters in music while they have no talent and are only making a fool of themselves. On the other hand, *Cinderella* is naturally talented but is never given a chance. When the announcement of the ball is made, *Cinderella* decides to go too but is given a burden of work by her step mother, making it impossible for her to stitch her clothes and go. However, the mice and birds decide to stitch a dress for her. And this is when the female mice say, leave the sewing to the women (38:28seconds), even animals are gender stereotyped in the movie. *Cinderella* has no friends or real family; the animals are all she had and they were the only ones who understood her and would do anything for her.

The only time *Cinderella* is seen voicing her opinion is, when she says she wants to go to the ball other than that, she only agrees to what has been said of her. Her opinions have no weightage in front of her step mother, nobody cares about her. Another important role by a female character is the fairy god mother that arrives at one



of the lowest points for *Cinderella*. The fairy god mother says, “Miracles take a little time” (43:30 seconds), and introduces *Cinderella* to magic and changes the creatures around her to take her to the ball. For instance, pumpkin – carriage; mice – horses; horse – coachman, etc. and completes her dress with glass shoes. The only condition she puts forth is to return back before midnight. Fairy god mother is the only character seen empowering and supporting *Cinderella* other than the animals. *Cinderella* leaves for the ball.

As she arrives at the palace, the Prince’s attention is immediately caught by her and they waltz through the night. It was love at first sight. *Cinderella* wonders if this is love, it’s a miracle she’s been waiting for, she felt like her heart had wings and she could fly. Ironically, they fall in love just in a couple of minutes and fall in love without really talking or getting to know each other. This is shown very unrealistically. The superficiality of their relationship shows how women’s beauty is considered their most valuable trait, as the prince knows nothing about *Cinderella* apart from what she looks like. Thus, *Cinderella*’s femininity is what eventually helps her find ‘happiness’ as her traditionally feminine qualities of beauty, helplessness, and passivity are rewarded with marriage (Belle & Elizabeth, 1995) . Here, the film links *Cinderella*’s dreams of happiness to marriage, thereby confirming the idea that marriage brings happiness and is the ultimate goal in women’s lives. Thereby, the film also establishes the prince as the hero/rescuer and the female as domestic and passive as is traditionally done (Murphy & Patrick, 1995) .

*Cinderella*’s stepsisters are important in conveying gender structures as well, but at the same time it can be argued that they attract attention to the constructed nature of the concept of gender. The stark contrast between *Cinderella*’s elegant movements and beauty and her sister’s supposedly unfeminine movements and ugliness highlights *Cinderella*’s successful gender performativity and citationality of the established laws of gender (Houwens, The Representation of Gender in Disney’s *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast* , 2017). *Cinderella* leaves her shoe behind at the ball and the Prince says, he will only marry that girl. In search of the girl, the people from the palace come to everyone’s house. The step mother understands *Cinderella*’s excitement and decides to lock her up (1:02:49- 1:02:59 seconds), shot in the same dark lighting showing her negative traits. The mice genuinely care for *Cinderella* and risk their lives for the keys. And when finally, *Cinderella* finds the shoe and it fits her, she marries the Prince, making it a ‘happily ever after’. In this scenario, the only ones happy for *Cinderella* were, the mice, birds, dog and horse.

The movie has several female characters and a female protagonist but none of the characters are shown as strong and independent women. They all need a man in their life to give them that happiness. All the women in the movie, want to find their one true love, anyhow. Education and occupations are given no importance or not even mentioned once in the movie. On the other hand, the materialistic world plays a very important role in the movie. All the girls, including the step mother want to find their prince and get married and live happily ever after. They don’t see a world beyond this, especially the step sisters, want to live in comfort and luxury without having to do anything. Even the female protagonist of the movie isn’t a strong character, she is known as the helpless character and all the audience can do is sympathise with her.

Ultimately, the message the movie gives to the audiences is that, the only way to find happiness is by falling in love with a rich man and marrying him. And it is extremely important to be beautiful. Being independent isn’t as important as being beautiful is.

#### 4.1.2 Beauty and the Beast (1991)

The female protagonist, *Belle* is introduced. *Belle* is from a traditional small town set up and her character is a domesticated woman, who also loves reading. When the character is introduced to the audience, she is seen leaving her house and in a traditional sense of fashion. The body image of *Belle* is the 'ideal body type' with an hour glass figure, a fair complexion and her hair is tied up perfectly throughout the movie. In terms of her clothes, she is always wearing dresses, in the town, at home while doing her chores and even in the castle. While the very first part of the film expresses the message that "beauty is found within" (00.01.57 seconds), the emphasis on outer beauty is paradoxically enhanced through the fact that *Belle's* name means beauty and the title of the film contrasts beauty with ugliness in referring to *Belle* as the beauty and Adam as the beast. Despite these traditional 'feminine' elements and female representations, audience soon learns that *Belle* is different from the other women in town (Houwens, Linda, 2017).

The first song plays a very important role in not just unveiling the character of *Belle* but also introduces the town and the people of it. The song begins and tells us not only about *Belle* but also the community she lives in where people live a monotonous life. People call her 'un-feminine', dazed, distracted and strange. In this song, the audience also witnesses the different occupations in the town like the baker, librarian are male characters and however, women are either shown doing domestic work and gossiping around the corner – there is an extreme type of gender stereotyping in the movie. Moreover, they find her odd as she doesn't do things like the other women, one of the reasons being that she reads and is often made to feel like a misfit in the town. While other girls her age, are looking and appreciating the men in town like Gaston. She seems to seek more in life than the same monotony. There is severe case of stereotyping in case of gender and occupations, like in the case of baker, where he meets *Belle* and makes small talk with her but stops listening the moment, she says bookstore (4:20 – 4:28 seconds), this shows a clear attitude of men in town where if women study, they do not encourage them or listen to them. Even in terms of the job of a librarian, why can't women be educated and independent too? Is being educated a bad thing? Women are only stereotyped towards household chores and gossiping, giving least importance to women in the society. The sense of feminism is negative in this angle, why are women being restricted to their homes even after the Feminist Movement where they have been fighting for their rights for decades now. This definitely creates a negative impact on the audiences, especially young children, who are forced to believe that, that is the life of a girl without any occupation, hobbies or opinions.

Another important character of the story, *Monsieur Gaston* is introduced. *Gaston* wants to marry *Belle* at any cost and one of the main reasons being, how beautiful she is. *Gaston* however is a gender stereotyping primeval man and in the songs says the same to *Belle*, 'it time you get your head out of the books, pay more attention to important things like me' (Trousdale & Wise, 1991) and further goes to say, 'It's not right for a women to read, soon she starts giving ideas and starts thinking' (Trousdale & Wise, 1991). These words say a lot about the character and the timeline of the story. Women in the movie are stereotyped at several occasions, right from position in the society, looking after children, being in the kitchen, etc. Majority of the women are domesticated just like *Belle*. Even though she is well read and educated, she is only seen doing household chores. *Belle's* character does not have any other responsibility than looking after her father. As an independent character, we do not see more to the female protagonist.



In several scenes in the movie, three stereotypical images of uneducated, blonde, emotional, ‘hyperfeminine’ female characters are added into the frame. The girls are swooning over *Gaston*, and they do not understand *Belle*’s disinterest towards him. They represent traditional femininity and superficial beauty with the ultimate goal of marriage(Houwens, Linda, 2017).In terms of body image, the ‘ideal body image’, is portrayed through this movie. *Belle* has a perfect hour glass figure and a fair complexion and perfectly tied brown hair. Independence, bravery and an active attitude are highlighted in *Belle* on several occasions. She goes into the woods by herself to rescue her father and sacrifices her freedom for her father’s freedom. This sacrifice, however, can also be interpreted as typically ‘feminine’ behaviour rather than bravery, again portraying some ambiguity in the progressive versus traditional nature of *Belle*’s character(Houwens, Linda, 2017).

Furthermore, a sense of courage and curiosity is also seen in her character as she independently goes out to explore the west wing of the palace. There is again a certain ambiguity in the representation of *Belle*, however, as she also adheres to some traditional notions of femininity that undermine her bravery in ways. An example is when she flees the castle after the beast has scared her. She is attacked by wolves and, while initially being quite inventive and trying to fight back, she ends up needing to be saved by the beast. Right after that, she has the option of leaving but her seemingly feminine instinct to care and nurture takes over as she helps the beast. Rather than positioning only the woman as a victim at times, however, the beast is victimized in this story as well. He is saved by *Belle* in small ways, such as through her teachings and her care after he is wounded, and in the outcome of the movie in that she is able to break the curse. Here, the man is presented as being as incomplete without and depending on the woman as in the other way around, if not more(Houwens, Linda, 2017).

The man waits for a woman to come around and fall in love with her and vice versa. The *Beast* is portrayed as a muscular, big and strong character however, he is extremely petrified and needy in this scenario. Another important factor to be noted is the personification of objects and at the same are even stereotyped. For instance, tea pot is a female character and is the mother of cups, candle and clock are male characters. *Belle* is however, later treated like a princess in the palace but by all the objects. The tea pot being a mother sympathises with her immensely. When the *Beast* saves her from the wolves and gets hurt in turn, *Belle* looks after him and thanks him for saving her life. *Belle* and *Beast* become friendly and instead of being dominating, sobers down and shows her the library, this blooms a friendship between them. We also see a great amount of empathy that *Belle* portrays for instance, she eats like the *Beast* from a bowl when he cannot eat from a spoon.

*Belle* is the only female character shown in the whole film for beyond thirty seconds. Only men are shown through the story. Almost like there are no women in the story. Even though it is a female centric movie with a female protagonist, a lot of attention and importance is given to men in the story like *Gaston*, the *Beast* and her father. Most important dialogues are said by the male characters in comparison to *Belle*. The two central themes seen in the movie are, hope and love. Hope, the *Beast* and the objects live by the hope that someday the *Beast* will find true love, a girl will save him and life will be restored. From the moment *Belle* walks through the doors, they hope she is the one. Other theme being, love or rather finding love in unexpected places, when the *Beast* waits for love and the love between *Belle* and her father.

The movie however, ends with a cliched ‘happily ever after’, showing the audiences that everything ends well always, which may not be true in every case. It also shows how perfect the female protagonist can look in every scene right from being in the prison, out in the cold, while doing household chores and in the rain. And in every case, she gets the perfect clothes and is dressed appropriately. The materialistic world has a very different role in the Beauty and the Beast, materialistic objects frame the story in the palace, where objects support and help Belle. Belle comes from a small village to the palace where she’s living in the palace among materialistic things when compare to her usual life. The palace provides her the comforts outside her usual life.

#### 4.1.3 Brave (2012)

The story is about the female protagonist *Merida*, the princess of the clan *Dun Broch*, the daughter of the *Queen Elinor* and *King Fergus*. The queen demands that her daughter acts a certain way and behaves like a princess right from being lady like, eating a certain manner, being compassionate, waking up early, dressing accordingly and most importantly she must strive for perfection. Her constant nagging and expectations from her daughter, annoys *Merida*. A girl who lives with her heart on her sleeve and her bow and arrow become her world in a small way. There is only once in a blue when *Merida* feels liberated is when she is out in the woods along with her horse Angus and she spends the day doing what she loves, archery. It’s the only time she can be herself, where there are no duties, lessons or responsibilities of being a princess.

One of the most important factors of the movie is, the pro-feminist that *King Fergus* is when it comes to his daughter. He supports her when it comes to archery and makes a very important statement in the movie, “Princess or not, learning to fight is essential”. On the contrary the Queen believes that princesses should not have weapons altogether. *Queen Elinor* even though being a female character shows the importance of patriarchy for instance, the princes can get away with everything but *Merida* can’t get away with anything.

*Merida* however, demands to live her life the way she wants and the most pivotal part of the story is, she doesn’t want a romantic relationship unlike other Disney movies. When her parents invite suitors, she takes the decision in her hands and challenges them to what she knows best and beats them to it. Unfortunately, *Queen Elinor* doesn’t change her opinion about marriage which hence, forces *Merida* to follow the wisps which lead her to a witch in the woods who makes her a pie for her mother and states that her mother will change. This pie is then eaten by *Queen Elinor* and she changes into a bear. *Merida* and *Elinor* escape from the castle and live in the woods where *Merida* uses her archery skills to find food for the bear. They learn that the cure for the curse is to “heal the bond torn by pride,” which they believe is the tapestry, so they return to the castle, where *Merida* must give a speech and command the crowd of lords and their clans in order to sneak Elinor past everyone into the castle. During *Merida*’s speech, she and her mother share a moment where Elinor communicates that she no longer wants to force *Merida* into marriage and she wants her to be “free to write her own story.” Before *Elinor* and *Merida* are able to fix the tapestry, *King Fergus* finds them and attacks Elinor, believing she is a vicious bear, and chases her into the forest. *Merida* follows on Angus while sewing the tapestry, and gets there in time to stop her father from slaying her mother, declaring “I’ll not let you kill my mother” as she grabs a sword and fights back her father. A demon bear named *Mor’du* appears and attacks *Merida*, but Elinor saves her and kills *Mor’du*. *Merida* throws her arms around her mother, and Elinor changes back to human form (Morrison, 2014). The film ends by showing *Merida* and Elinor riding horses together as *Merida* states, “There are those who say

fate is something beyond our command, that destiny is not our own. But I know better. Our fate lives within us. You only have to be brave enough to see it.” Which turns out to be revolutionary for *Merida*.

There are several aspects of body image which are highlighted in *Brave*. The most important scene where Queen Elinor expects *Merida* to look a certain way when the suitors arrive. However, it is necessary to note that unlike other flawless Disney princesses, *Merida* is a flawed princess. She has messy hair which can't be tamed, red hair, freckles on her face and wears clothes she is comfortable in. While still slender, she has more realistic body proportions than past princesses, with a slightly protruding belly and wider hips, and overall is not hyper-sexualized (Morrison, 2014).

Overall, *Merida* is a strong-willed girl who goes against the patriarchal ways, she isn't submissive in nature. When her mother forces her to dress like a girl in a tight dress with her hair covered, she hates the idea as she can't, breathe or move and is too tight. This highlights how important body image is to people where they only idea is to be fantasized by men. She is a strong and confident girl, who isn't afraid to take her own decision whether they work in her favour or not.

*Brave* is a new kind of artefact. It takes a genre often plagued by patriarchy, the fairy-tale, and uses it to fight patriarchy by presenting a lead character who embodies the feminist values of immanent worth and self-determination, and by creating a plot that does not involve a romantic love interest (Morrison, 2014). Each character contributes to the story immensely. The character of *Ferguson*, the king of *Dun Broch* is a strong character who is a feminist at heart and is always by his daughters' side but tries to stay in the good books of the queen too. The perfect example of *King Ferguson* being a feminist is, at 10:18 seconds in the movie, “*Princess or not, learning to fight is essential*” and another instance is, at 10:30 seconds, “*They say only the ancient kinds were brave enough to drink from the fire*”. This shows how *Merida's* character broke the stereotype of women only being poised and gentle to being able to drink the fire from the *Crone's Tooth*. We also see how encouraging *Ferguson* as a father was and supports his daughter in every way, this is a refreshing factor in a Walt Disney Pictures' film *Queen Elinor's* character sends out strong messages of a patriarchal society and shows its prevalence. Throughout the first half of the movie, we see the father being more liberal with his daughter and the mother obsessing over the patriarchal norms of the family. The only thing can made *Queen Elinor* happy was when the suitors agree to come for *Merida's* betrothal. She believes that the only thing that matters the most is marriage. Marriage is the ultimate goal of a girl's life and this becomes very obvious in the movie, in the scene at 12:35 seconds, “*Merida, this is what you've been preparing for your whole life*”.

We also see how important *Merida* finds it to be heard at all times and is hence, against the idea of marriage. The character of *Merida* is portrayed of young and progressive character who believes she will lose her freedom if she gets married. However, the fact that three men are competing for a woman for her hand in marriage has not changed over the years, these traits of a patriarchal society are still shown in movies. In the movie at 26:13 seconds, can be one of the highlights of the movie and unlike any other movie where the female protagonist proves that she is self-sufficient. In this scene she decides to shoot for her own hand and shoots better than any of the suitors. This proves a point to everyone present at the event how talented *Merida* is and does not need a man to complete her life. *King Ferguson's* character is also subtly a feminist and hence, he does not find any

of the men capable enough for his daughter and in this scene is seen making fun of the suitors along with his daughter.

*Merida* is an outspoken girl and says what's on her mind without being afraid. In the scene at 27:40 seconds – 28:10 seconds where she is fighting with her mother, she refuses to be told what to do and what not to do. This shows how important her freedom and independence to her is. The character of *Merida* is portrayed fearless which can set an example to many young girls who watch the movie. She is fearless through every step of the movie and takes charge and responsibility in every situation. Although she seeks help from the male characters in the movie, she however, takes calls and responsibility of her own actions. After her mother turns into a bear and they are in the forest, 54:13 seconds in the movie, we see a glimpse of how independent *Merida* is when she catches food on her own and proves her mother wrong. This scene is also an eye opener of the character of *Queen Elinor*. Unlike other Walt Disney Pictures' movies where female characters are seen waiting for a prince/ male character to come help/ rescue them whenever they are in trouble.

The aspect of the materialistic world is approached very differently in this movie. On the contrary to the materialistic world, the story of *Brave* takes places away from it. The characters rediscover themselves away from the materialistic world, in the forest away from the pomp and show. The queen, sees who her daughter really is, in her natural habitat and where she is the most comfortable. The materialistic world is almost forgotten in this movie. Away from their regular life, the queen and the audience learn who *Merida* really is and how strong and independent as a character she is. Her intelligence and presence of mind are also contributing factors.

In the scene at 1:05:32 seconds – 1:06:43 seconds, stands for what is right and talks about her kingdom like any queen would. Everyone sees her true qualities of being a Queen. She was born a leader. The end of the movie is very progressive in nature, a take which is not very often seen in Walt Disney Pictures'. In the scene at 1:08:17 seconds, *Merida* says on behalf of the Queen, “*Might out young people decide for themselves who they will love*”. This is on the contrary to what the queen says in the beginning of the movie. This goes to show how her character had an eye-opening moment and has begun to accept this change. The line is not only of a progressive nature in the movie but also reaches out to a huge audience and this powerful message creates a strong impact on its audiences.

The last fighting sequences also proves what a powerful warrior a woman can be. She keeps in mind the strengths and weaknesses of the people around her and uses them at the right time. *Merida* was born a warrior, she doesn't let the fact that her father is in front of her bother her and fights for her mother and herself.

Another important pro-feminist feature of *Brave* is that there is no love interest throughout the film. *Merida's* three suitors play only minor roles in the film and are used primarily for comedic value. She has no romantic interests and she is perfectly happy with that. She has other ambitions beside love, and insists on finding love when she is ready, and at one-point mentions that she may never be ready. As she is practicing what she wants to say to her mother about marriage she states, “You can just tell the lords the princess is not ready for this. In fact, she might not ever be ready for this.” This sends an important feminist message that it is alright if love and marriage do not fit into women's current or future plans and that they are free to pursue the goals they choose, rather than be bound to the traditional roles of wife and mother (Morrison, 2014).

#### 4.1.4 Moana(2016)

The story is a very progressive movie by Disney. The opening scene of the movie, we see a curious young girl listening to stories about their land while the other children are petrified. The movie begins and the audience is at once introduced to the female characters leading the story. *Moana* is a female driven story, supported by the male characters. *Moana* as a young child is shown independent and free, she walks towards the ocean fearlessly and even helps animals by the ocean, at 5:00 – 7:10 seconds in the movie. The character representation of *Moana* is refreshing for Disney as we see a dark skin and rounded face protagonist, which is progressive in terms of characters. “You are the next great chief of our people”, these lines, help us understand how such a young child is going to be in charge of the people. *Moana*’s mother is shown a feminist as she encourages her daughter and doesn’t doubt her abilities to be a leader, seen at 7:37- 7:40 seconds.

Through the first song of the movie, we see *Moana* grow up into a young girl. In terms of body image, *Moana* is a dark-skinned girl who is going to be crowned the chief of the village. The body image representation here is completely new for Disney. This definitely breaks several stereotypes. Body image, in terms of her hair, usually princesses and queens are shown with the perfect hair style. However, *Moana* has frizzy hair which are all over the place and can resonant with the audiences. We also notice her eyes and eyebrows, eyes are larger than the usual princesses and eyebrows are thicker and black. The body image of *Moana* breaks several stereotypes of earlier princesses shown by Disney. This is extremely important for the younger audiences, for them to be able to understand different people and cultures. There is also a better understanding of the culture since every aspect of the Polynesian life is shown.

Another important aspect is *Moana*’s body type. Unlike previously shown female protagonists and princesses, *Moana* does not have the hour glass, perfect body shape. Instead, she has broader hips, a round face, big nose and thicker lips which has not been seen before. *Moana* has a small stature and is seen feeling very comfortable in her skin. As a character, the body type and body image of her does not come in way of the story.

One of the most influential people in *Moana*’s life is her grandmother, *Gramma Tala*. The character of *Gramma Tala* is shown as a feminist right from the start. She is the only one who believes in *Moana* and encourages her to leave her comfort zone and explore the world. Her grandmother plays a very important role in making *Moana* who she is. *Gramma Tala*, ensures *Moana* goes an extra mile and sees the potential in her. She helps her realise the importance of being the chief and treats her like an adult. Her constant encouragement is seen, at 9:43 - 10:13 seconds. *Moana* is distracted even during a ceremony because she wants to be with her Gramma. Since the character is different and aloof, the village people think she is crazy but *Moana* sees beyond her crazy. Gramma is the driving force of the story. She makes her realise that it is also important to listen to the voice that’s inside of you and follow your heart just than listening to your father. This is a very important lesson that *Moana* learns.

In several instances, *Moana*’s father *Tui* is also shown a feminist. The fact that *Moana* is the first female chief but not mentioned in the story is important. When he takes *Moana* to the scared places of the chiefs and tells her she will keep her stone her one day. She encourages her and makes her believe in herself. It is in this scene we see, how the becoming the chief of *Motunui*, breaks all bounds of patriarchy in this society and making *Moana*



the first female chief (10:28-11:05 seconds), this scene plays an important role in understand the progressive nature of Disney movies.

The female protagonist's character is shown, caring and carefree at the same time. However, she isn't afraid to be herself (12:05- 12:21 seconds) and voice her opinion out loud. We also see her compassion towards the people of her village and even the animals around her. Apart from her parents even the villagers look up to *Moana*. *Moana* is born a leader and uses her leadership skills at the right moments, especially in times of a crisis (13:26- 13:34) and (28:09- 28:22 seconds). As a leader she feels responsible for the people and attempts to go 'beyond the reef' and fails at the attempt. Gramma helps her realise who she is and going into the cave, makes *Moana* feel liberated as she feels that the water and ocean are her calling.

The bond between a grandmother and her granddaughter is shown beautifully through this movie. *Gramma Tala*, encourages *Moana* to follow her dreams even on her death bed. *Gramma Tala*'s words empower *Moana* and she decides to go on a journey, by herself. The independence of the character is seen through this aspect and the fact she has everything under control.

When *Moana* meets *Maui*, we also see her will to never give up and her presence of mind to understand people's weaknesses very quickly and takes advantage of the situation (50:00- 51:08 seconds). The representation of the character on *Maui*, is extremely different. A big built, muscular man is shown afraid and nervous, which is refreshing from the constant masculine look on men. The introduction of *Maui* in the story, makes *Moana* a stronger character and teaches her important lessons. *Moana* is not just mentally but also physically strong or rather stronger than *Maui* as she decides to fight the pirates on her own.

Through the journey, we see how determined *Moana* is and doesn't back down. There are scenes where she seems more fearless than *Maui*. *Maui* supports the female protagonist but does not take away the spotlight from the character. When *Maui* abandons *Moana* in the middle of the sea, she takes charge of the situation and is determined to fulfil her goal. *Moana* is the one in charge and saves their lives even with the crab. *Maui*, accepts *Moana*'s strengths, which is very unique (1:06:13- 1:06:29 seconds).

## 5. CONCLUSION

The main objective of the study is also to observe the progression of the female protagonists over the years. Walt Disney Pictures has definitely created stronger stories and movies which now leave a very strong impact on its audiences. The earlier movies, the female protagonist was more of an object in the movie and didn't contribute much to the story. movies were predictable and generic in nature. However, the stories now are powerful in terms of just the story and the female protagonists are liberal, independent, unrestrained, unfettered. The recent protagonists went from being victimised to become fearless, feminists. The recent movies have also broken all types of stereotypes which used build the old movies.

In all the themes of the movies have also shifted drastically over the years, the earlier themes in the movies were – relationships, love and different types of stereotypes. However, the themes spectrum has grown with several themes in the newer movies like feminism, independence, relationships (love in any form) and breaking stereotypes. The evolution of these characters is extremely important for the audiences, the audience need to be able to watch strong and independent characters. Watching female characters taking the leap and being fearless



and self-sufficient is very important for women to also see, this contributes a great deal to women empowerment also.

It is also important to note that the newer movies, have been able to emancipate patriarchy in the stories making the female protagonist, a protagonist in every sense. In the movie, Brave although there is a king, the queen is more authoritative and accepted by her people. She over powers the king in decision making and addressing their people. This is something extremely important for audiences to see and this will further impact their lives, which is extremely important for the society in general for women to be able to look past stereotypical notions of the society and break stereotypes and more over just to be able to be themselves.

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