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**Disney Princesses:  
the evolution of the role of women within society**

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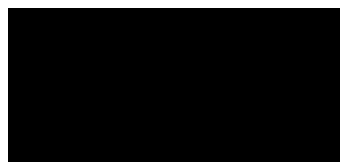


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## **Abstract**

Disney's portrayal of female characters have evolved throughout time due to the constant fight of women to provoke a change in society. The 20th century supposed a great time for feminist activism and claiming women's rights in the USA. Such progress in society about women's situation can be perceived and observed in some artworks like Disney films. This paper has taken the most significant female characters of the franchise, the Disney Princesses, and has analyzed the evolution of some aspects of their representation in the films: their hairstyles, their relationship with positions of power and their relationship with the princes. These movies work perfectly on the analysis of the evolution of the representation of female characters because Disney has been able to translate the necessities of society in their films throughout time. From depicting perfect maidens to present strong characters, the Disney Princesses represent the expectations of the society they were created in and their personalities, characteristics and aspirations ended up being more realistic.

**Keywords:** Disney Princesses - feminism - hair - power - love

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## **Resumen**

La representación de los personajes femeninos de Disney ha evolucionado con el tiempo gracias a la constante lucha de las mujeres para provocar un cambio en la sociedad. El siglo XX ha supuesto una gran época para el activismo feminista y para reivindicar los derechos de las mujeres en los EEUU. Este progreso en la situación de la mujer se puede observar perfectamente en obras de arte como las películas de Disney. Este proyecto ha escogido los personajes más relevantes de la industria de Disney, las Princesas Disney, y ha analizado la evolución de algunos aspectos de sus representaciones en las películas: el pelo, su relación con posiciones de poder y su relación amorosa con los príncipes. Estas películas sirven perfectamente para analizar la evolución de la representación de personajes femeninos ya que Disney ha sido capaz de plasmar las necesidades de la sociedad en sus películas a lo largo de los años. Desde interpretar a la perfecta ama de casa hasta presentar mujeres fuertes e independientes, las Princesas Disney representan las expectativas de la sociedad en la que fueron creadas y sus personalidades, sus características y sus aspiraciones han acabado siendo más realistas.

**Palabras clave:** Princesas Disney - feminismo - pelo - poder - amor



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## **1. Introduction**

In his book *Literature, Politics and Culture in Postwar Britain*, British theorist Alan Sinfield writes that, “Writing is constructed socially but, also, writing is one of the constructing agencies: it influences discursive processes as well as being influenced by them.” (p. 40) According to him, then, though artists often envision their work in trying to convey what happens in society and capture it in their pieces, art can go further and is able to intervene in society, influence it, and even challenge some of its views, make statements. Thus, a good way to observe and analyze the changes society has undergone over time and the influence of art in these changes is through those works of art that reflect the expectations of the society where they were created. In that way, one of the greatest transformations western society has experienced, particularly throughout the twentieth century, has to do with the vision it has of women. In fact, western society has passed from accepting that women be mistreated, subjected and undervalued by men to defending, fighting and claiming for women’s rights and position in the world. Women themselves have left their submissive roles and started to see themselves as equal to men and they have actively started to defend that idea. Artists have captured this process in most of their works accompanying women in their fight: paintings, essays, books and films which show strong female characters fighting against stereotypes and trying to become the persons they want to be. Yet, despite having accomplished some improvements, there is much more to meliorate about the situation of women. Therefore, in this project, we will take a look at the evolution of the depiction of the role of the female figure within society through some artworks, in particular, movies from the Disney franchise.

Disney serves as an excellent example when trying to observe some of the changes that have taken place in society throughout the twentieth century and the turn of the millennium. The Walt Disney Company was founded in 1923 and, with nearly 100 years of history, its films perfectly display the variations in the representation of the female character. From Snow White to Elsa, passing through Alice, Mary Poppins, Lady Marian, Ursula, Nala or Helen Parr, to name but a few, the female character has been completely reshaped. As the scope is extremely broad when talking about all the Disney movies, this project will focus on the Disney princesses who are the central characters in probably the most influential movies from the company. On that note, I will take into account the movies which contain a princess considered by the franchise as a representative of the brand “The Disney Princesses.” For that reason, some examples of princesses in Disney history such



as Princess Atta from *A Bug's Life*, Giselle from *Enchanted*, or Vanellope from *Wreck-It Ralph*, to name a few, will not be considered in this analysis. Thus, I will discuss here the original productions and live-actions of the 14 considered Disney Princesses: Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana, Merida, Rapunzel, Elsa, Anna and Moana. The live-action films of Cinderella, Aurora (*Maleficent*), Belle and Jasmine will also be taken into account because they are excellent examples to observe changes in the portrayal of female characters: with only a few years of difference, Disney has completely transformed these characters, even with subtle details, in different films with practically the same story. The live-action version of *Mulan* that was going to be released this 2020 will not be considered in this paper because the Covid-19 situation has not allowed me to see the film. Likewise, I will not consider second parts of the princess movies except for *Frozen 2* and *Maleficent: Mistress of Evil*, because only these two films out of the second-part movies provide points of interest in the development of their characters and related to the analysis of this project.

When addressing this paper, the project needed a framework from which the analysis of the princesses will head out. Thence, the project departs from an initial theoretical part on feminism and the evolution of the female figure. This part takes a look at the feminist movement and its predecessors, the situation in the United States at the beginning of the century, and the way it has progressed throughout the century until the present day. This general overview of feminism will help to examine the Disney Princesses: I will explore how their movies change at the same time that feminism evolves and observe how they meddle in this evolution. I will observe how, from the movies of the 60s onwards, the figure of the princesses experiences a drastic change due to the rise and development of feminism, with the films depicting new representations of the female figure as society's conception of women also evolves and it starts to conceive new roles for women.

Furthermore, this paper will take a look at specific aspects that have been renovated in the different movies. In the first place, I will analyze the evolution of the depiction of the princesses through a visual element which is their hair. This works as an introduction to the discussion part of the project. I thought it would be appropriate to take a look at a visual and clear element to understand the whole evolution in the depiction of these princesses. These haircuts have evolved from being completely fixed and plain in the first movies to show more realistic states of the hair. Apart from that, haircuts can perfectly depict when a princess is part of the royalty and when not.



Moreover, in many cases, especially with the recent princesses, their hair becomes a symbol of the social oppression these princesses suffer.

Secondly, I will describe the relationship of the princesses with power as well as their place within the royalty and their relationship with the citizenship. Firstly, these princesses are depicted as elements which perfectly fit in with the social structure and who display a distant relationship with their community. However, with the apparition of Ariel, the princesses started to be portrayed as against the standards of the community only in terms of love until reaching a point of total rejection of the community, which I will explore in the case of Elsa, in *Frozen*. Later on, I will explore Disney's tendency to place new princesses, and the revision of the older princesses in the live-action films, at the top of their community with examples like Anna, Moana, or the live-action version of Jasmine.

Lastly, I will discuss the evolution of the relationship of the princesses with their respective princes. Princesses have passed from being totally dependent on their love affairs to present certain reservations about them and even reject a romantic relationship with them. The earlier princesses show a total devotion to the prince, completely idealizing their figure, and they are corresponded with the same devotion by the princes. At the end of the century, we start to see how the relationship of the princess and the prince actually progresses from a point of discontent with one another in some cases and on the princesses' part in others, until the emergence of a love connection between the two parts. Later on, Disney has presented examples of princesses with Moana, Merida, or Elsa, who reject the idea of getting married to a man, expressing their desire to stand on their own, or even discarding the love storyline in the movies.

All in all, I will analyze certain aspects that have changed greatly in the depiction of the Disney Princesses. Thus, my paper aims to show how the evolution of feminism has had a huge effect on media representations of women and so in Disney as well. Furthermore, the paper will also highlight how Disney and its princesses also participate in the exploration of new traits of society, of new conceptions of certain topics like love or family, and actually creates stories that give power to these visions. Ultimately, the paper will show how Disney adapts its stories to fit the necessities of society as it progresses and how it reinvents itself by reworking some ideas which had already been presented in different and innovative ways.



## **2. Princesses and feminism**

Claire Goldberg Moses, in her essay “‘What’s in a Name?’ On Writing the History of Feminism” quotes Marya Cheliga, an influential Polish feminist activist and writer in France at the end of the 19th century: “Cheliga, for example, insisted that ‘the feminist movement, without being designated by that title, is evident across all epochs... The program of Proxagora, repeated by Aristophanes, in ancient Greece, differs in no way from that of today’s militants.’” (p. 763) It is clear that women, some way or another, have always stood for their rights and for being treated as equal to men. They had to find their way in a patriarchal society that had always excluded them from important affairs, undervaluing everything they did and reducing their position and importance. The evolution of their role within society has been slow but they have accomplished great changes. Nowadays, it is inconceivable not to relate any representation of a woman with the feminist movement and the evolution of this role in society. However, and because the scope is too broad, I will concentrate on depicting this progress, in general terms, in relation to the films I will be analyzing. Consequently, I will provide a general vision of the feminist movement and the change in the role of women in society from the 1930s (since the earliest movie analyzed is *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* from 1937) until the present day (the most recent film is *Frozen 2* from 2019).

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was Disney’s first full-length production in 1937 and gained recognition in America for being the first featured animated film. The film is considered one of the most famous films of Disney for the success it had at the time and for the innovating techniques used in the making of animated content. In terms of female representation, it is also the first introduction of a Disney princess and a clear direct model for children. Snow White stands for the figure of the perfect woman: innocent, kind, gentle, quiet, vulnerable and in good care of the housework and men. The creation of the character of Snow White is set in a society in which women are beginning to be taken more seriously in what we call the First Wave of Feminism. In 1920, just three years before the foundation of the Walt Disney Company, the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was approved allowing every woman of the nation to vote. The Woman Suffrage Movement was a huge activist movement that started a few years before the Civil War in America and extended to other nations like the UK and claimed for women’s right to vote. “Many American women were beginning to chafe against what historians called the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’: that



is, the idea that the only ‘true’ woman was a pious, submissive wife and mother concerned exclusively with home and family.” (*History*) Apart from that, women were encouraged to participate in other activist movements, and they were highly influenced by the ideas that surrounded those movements even if their male allies were opposed to the emancipation of women. “This seems to have been the experience of the earliest advocates of voting rights for women who had come to political consciousness first in the antislavery movement, only to discover that their efforts were disparaged simply because they were women.” (Goldberg, p. 758) That was a huge step for women’s emancipation, to get the freedom to decide the rulers of their country and to deviate themselves from the house affairs. However, the initiative took nearly 100 years to be fully accomplished in both the USA and the UK (in 1920 in the USA and 1929 in the UK). That may have been caused by the First World War, which slowed down the process, but it can also show how patriarchal society was reluctant to give certain improvements to women and how it constantly hinders them. In fact, Snow White perfectly embodies the “Cult of True Womanhood”: she surrenders to the power of men (the seven dwarfs) and she becomes the perfect housewife, who knows how to cook and how clean. Despite all the progress women had accomplished socially, the media were still reluctant, even after 17 years of the 19th Amendment, to depict that in their products and stuck to the figure of the perfect woman at home.

However, not every woman was supporting these emancipatory movements: some groups of women also organized themselves to defend the patriarchal structure of society, the male-dominant families, the role of women as merely housewives, the supremacy of white people, etc. “Women’s organizing facilitated Ku Klux Klan activities in the 1920s and 1930s as well as Nazism in Germany in the 1930s and early 1940s.” (Goldberg, p. 759) Some groups of women separated themselves from emancipatory movements and took a stance in favour of the model of society of those times in order to maintain their stability and their money. Prejudices also helped in that matter when fearing black people, Jewish people or even prostitutes (there was a movement against prostitutes in the nineteenth century without considering the poor situation of those women). Alan Sinfield, for example, states that “Feminism led an underground or Sleeping Beauty existence in a society which claimed to have wiped out that oppression.” (p. 231) It is curious how he uses an example of a real Disney Princess (the most plain and submissive of the whole group) to describe the oppression of women. Feminism, or rather the beginnings of the emancipation of women, struggled with progressing because society itself would not allow them to. Even some women



would not allow this progress to advance because, in their way, society was not oppressing them, in fact, they were comfortable in their situation and did not consider other women's circumstances: "Those with material power will control the institutions that deal with ideals, and that is why people are persuaded to believe things that are neither just and human, nor to their advantage." (Sinfield, p. 34)

In fact, after the suffrage movement, feminist activity did not stand out until the 1960s: between the 1920s (the suffrage) and the 1960s, there were very few people that called themselves feminists. "The 1950s produced few feminists, therefore, but gender relations were by no means untroubled and the ideology of domesticity was a response to anxiety and uncertainty." (Sinfield, p. 236) Those who called themselves feminists in the USA defended the necessity to equalize the labour situation of men and women, the necessity to create a movement focused only on the emancipation of women and introduced the idea that the concepts of the female and masculine gender were socially constructed (we will discuss this last aspect later with Judith Butler's theory). They were a little group of people amongst others who also wanted certain liberties for women but did not shared the same ideologies as the "feminists" and now, Claire Goldberg states, "we would consider, at the very least, advocates for women's development." (p. 763), without being designated as "feminists." Despite the fact that already in the 18th century there had been a discussion in France of what the term "feminism" meant and that it was then stipulated that it meant the defense of the cause of women in order to achieve equality between the sexes, there was a great division in the USA in the understanding of the term. It was not until the 1970s that the word "feminist" was more popularly used in describing activities related to women's emancipation.

And it is during this period, between the 1920s and the 1960s, when Disney released two movies portraying a Disney Princess: *Cinderella* in 1950 and *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959. Regardless of all the discussion about the feminist fight and women's emancipation that was happening in the USA, Disney depicted the same feminine archetype as in *Snow White*. These three princesses are the perfect representation of a housewife and they presented practically the same personality. What Disney included in these two new films was a particular desire of the princesses for a better life, especially in Cinderella's case. She is described as a weak innocent character whose kindness leads her to be totally submitted to her stepmother and to not complain about that, nevertheless, contrary to Snow White, she aims for escaping from the influence of Lady Tremaine and be with the prince. Aurora, in her part, is presented as a common girl who lives with her "aunties" in the forest and who



suddenly wants to be with a boy she has met in the forest. Both Cinderella and Aurora wish for a change in their lives but do not take action to get away from there and achieve what they want: Disney shows two characters who desire another life but who at the same time are granted with a good life. Aurora suddenly discovers she is part of the royalty and, when she is awakened from Maleficent's curse, she is provided with her dream of being with the boy in the forest; Cinderella is secure under the dominance of her step-mother and her Fairy Godmother allows her the possibility of being with the prince without doing practically anything. This might reflect the situation in Britain, for example, described by Alan Sinfield: "Looking back, the 1950s were a good time for many children in Britain: they were treated more kindly, as by and large they are now, but had the advantage of expecting a relatively secure future." (p. 232) However, Disney decided to not challenge the view of the majority of the society providing their audience with characters they could feel more related to but still presenting the same characteristics of an ideal woman.

After *Sleeping Beauty*, we reach the 1960s, a highly radical period in the USA history when some activist movements appeared such as movements for equal rights for black people, the movement against the Vietnamese War and the Second Wave of Feminism. "Like nineteenth-century voting-rights advocate, they came to an awareness of women's oppression both because the emancipatory rhetoric of these other movements, but also because they found themselves disparaged [...] simply because they were women." (Goldberg, p. 766) The progressive democrat John Kennedy won the elections in 1960 and his agenda included several issues concerning women's situation in society and how to improve it. The fact that the government supported the idea of improving women's situation extremely helped on the fighting to achieve that. Contrary to the First Wave of Feminism at the beginning of the twentieth century, this Second Wave focused its activism not only on mending the state of women before the law, but also on spreading awareness of women's factual situation in more private environments. "'The personal is political' was the slogan that best summed up their politics: Their goal was to point out that the questions that Western governments traditionally refused to address - questions, according to these governments, that were 'private' matters (such as violence against women in families) - were the very basis of male power." (Goldberg, p. 766) These activists were not content with a labour reformation that would guarantee, in theory, the equal treatment of men and women in labour opportunities or the payment. They searched for the origin of women's oppression in society and worked to demolish it and to reshape society's way of thinking about women. This Women's Liberation Movement took strength at the



same time that the Civil Rights Movement and both discussed issues about discrimination, equality and gender. Furthermore, these activists began to identify themselves and their politics with the term “feminist” as we understand it nowadays in an attempt to internationalize their movement with other similar campaigns that were taking place in other parts of the world (for instance, the Chinese Cultural Revolution).

Towards the 1970s, the movement gained a lot of influence in the USA and the word "feminist" was widely spread in society identifying it with the equality of men and women and no longer with highly radical movements. Additionally, many legislative actions were taken by creating new laws that would protect women and would guarantee their equality with men. For instance, rape was classified as a crime committed by a man against a woman, no longer attributing the fault of the act to the woman. In the academic field, “Women writers, women’s experiences in history, and women’s social issues became respected topics for academic research.” (Goldberg, p. 768) Moreover, there was a more extended and more complex discussion about the movements, its aims, its origins and the true significance of the term “feminism”:

Unlike the first wave, second-wave feminism provoked extensive theoretical discussion about the origins of women’s oppression, the nature of gender, and the role of the family. [...] Any attempt to create a coherent, all-encompassing feminist ideology was doomed. While most could agree on the questions that needed to be asked about the origins of gender distinctions, the nature of power, or the roots of sexual violence, the answers to those questions were bogged down by ideological hairsplitting, name-calling, and mutual recrimination. Even the term liberation could mean different things to different people. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)

As a consequence of these discussions, three major branches of feminism appeared. Liberal feminism focused its fight on the governmental level encouraging women to introduce themselves in the structures of power by occupying important job positions traditionally dominated by men. Conversely, radical feminism sustained the need to reshape the patriarchal structure of society and its institutions. “Radicals argued that women’s subservient role in society was too closely woven into social fabric to be unraveled without a revolutionary revamping of society itself.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*) Radical feminism built the basis of modern feminism which also seeks the reshaping of society trying to abolish patriarchy and develop a non-hierarchical approach to politics. Lastly, cultural feminism critiqued highly liberal feminism and defended the idea of highlighting the qualities associated with women rather than equalizing men and women.



“This was seen as denigrating women’s natural inclinations by attempting to make women more like men.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*)

Reaching the 1980s and the 1990s, feminism continued splitting into many different variations and branches according to all the different beliefs and goals of people with the movement. Moreover, there was a general feeling in the USA that the main goals of women’s rights movement were accomplished, thus, some organizations lost some of their influence. Not only that but the opposition to feminism also grew: there was a great part of society, some women included, that positioned themselves completely against women’s progress and defended the ideals of the patriarchal society and that the role of women should only be restricted to the home. In relation to that, the media started to depict some representations of this model of a strong woman, and many viewers were discouraged by these representations and misunderstood the true meaning of feminism. Professor Claire Goldberg Moses writes this about some of her students in the 1990s.:

Rather they reject the distorted version of feminism that has grown increasingly common on television shows and in movies. In these depictions, feminists - or oftentimes simply strong and proud women - are more and more represented as evil (sometimes even murderers), unfeeling, or “losers” who are never able to find personal happiness. Rarely are feminists presented as just ordinary women, as ordinary as I am, for example. Many of my students are convinced by media representations of what feminism is and have actually come to believe that the caricature is true. Who then can blame them for their desire to distance themselves from these portrayals of mean, crazy, or ridiculous women? Unfortunately, feminists do not control the major corporations who, in turn, control the media. (p. 770)

And in the mid-1990s, we reach the Third Wave of Feminism when women born and raised with the new laws, and the advances of the First and Second Waves matured their political discourse and developed new requests. “These women and others like them grew up with the expectation of achievement and examples of female success as well as an awareness of the barriers presented by sexism, racism, and classism. [...] Rather than becoming part of the ‘machine,’ third wavers began both sabotaging and rebuilding the machine itself.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*) Third wavers expressed their concerns through demonstrations, constantly using irony and sexist imagery in an attempt to provoke those people who occupied positions of power. Following the ideology of radical feminism, they challenged the structure of the patriarchal society and the models about gender, sexuality, race, femininity, and other aspects. Remarkable is the contribution of Judith



Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990) where she discussed the social conventions about gender and sexuality as well as the new approaches that feminism must consider when dealing with the term “woman”:

The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. [...] there is very little agreement after all on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women. [...] If a stable notion of gender no longer proves to be the foundational premise of feminist politics, perhaps a new sort of feminist politics is now desirable to contest the very reifications of gender and identify [...]. (pp. 2-7)

In this book, the issue of the distinction between gender and sex is clearly discussed claiming that “gender is culturally constructed: hence, gender is neither the causal result of sex nor as seemingly fixed by sex.” (p. 8) Therefore, any association with the models of womanhood and manhood is completely arbitrary and fixed by society, and feminism has to take conscience of that and applied it in the defense of the rights of all women. Feminism has to become aware that not every person that has feminine sex is a woman or every person that has masculine sex is a man; that some people might identify themselves as a woman or as a man or as both regardless of their sex; or that some people might find comfort with the sex they are provided with but not feel identified with all the conceptions society has imposed on that gender. Awareness of the whole complexity of gender identities has been spread and both society and feminism are processing that information.

And how all of this progress from the 1960s onwards affected Disney films? The next princess to appear, after Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty* in 1959, is Ariel in the animated film *The Little Mermaid* released in 1989. The Walt Disney Company suffered a great crisis when in 1966 its founder Walt Disney died and his brother took the leadership of the company. The studio continued making live-action content and abandoned animated movies until the 1980s and the creation of *The Little Mermaid*. Disney took 30 years to create a new Disney princess and she entailed a total break with the previous representations of a female character. In fact, she is considered the first film of the so-called by *The New York Times* as the “Disney Renaissance,” a series of successful films that Disney released during the 1990s, in which actually we can find five Disney Princesses: Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan. Because of the 30-years gap between *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Little Mermaid*, we cannot see the influence of the Second Wave of Feminism directly on the films. However, there is a huge difference between Ariel and all the following princesses and the previous ones (Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora): “The princess in the fourth movie, *The Little*



*Mermaid*, was the first to begin to challenge traditional gender roles. [...] For examples, the princess promoted the idea of wanting to explore, and was portrayed as independent and assertive.” (England et al., p. 564) Furthermore, Claire Goldberg affirms that in the 1970s “It was no longer considered appropriate to represent women as stupid or clumsy or as existing solely to satisfy men’s sexual needs on television and in other forms of media.” (p. 768) and that is clearly seen in these princesses. Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan are portrayed as strong female characters who are no longer depicted as stupid or as perfect housewives but rather as normal people with aspirations in their life and with clear plans for their future. Most of the times, these plans clash with the plans their respective parents have kept for them, especially in relation to their marriage, and such confidence is viewed as madness by the rest of the community. For example, in the 1992 version of *Aladdin*, Jasmine is perceived as a crazy girl for having the conviction of deciding who she wants to marry. Otherwise, Belle, in the 1991 *Beauty and the Beast*, also has this very same conviction of not marrying Gaston but she has the support of his father; yet, society condemns her for not surrendering totally to Gaston. However, this vision of society is completely criticized by the film and transmits the idea that society is wrong and Belle can think whatever she wants to think.

Furthermore, in this Disney Renaissance and during the Third Wave, Disney tried to present more diversity in their characters who were white women and started to present princesses of other ethnicities. That is how princesses like Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana, or Moana were created. Excepting Tiana and Moana (whose films are from the 21st century), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Mulan* (1998) answer the increasing concern of white young American feminists from the 1990s who saw that women from other parts of the world were in worse circumstances than theirs or, rather, thought that the circumstances of these women were worse than theirs. These white American feminist attempted to unify the movement and to make these women aware of their possibilities and their apparent oppression. “The call by white feminists for unity and solidarity was based on their assumption that women constituted a gender-based class or state that was unified by common oppression.” (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*). However, women from undeveloped countries highly criticized the approach of this unity since their real necessities were being ignored by those white American women. Nevertheless, Disney tried to give more visibility to some of these undervalued and non-popular communities and created beautiful stories like Jasmine's, Pocahontas' or Mulan's, while trying to respect cultural references as much as they could.



Regarding the third wavers' concern with gender identities and gender roles, there is a tendency in Disney with every film to depict their characters more androgynously. Doctors Dawn Elizabeth England, Lara Descartes, and Melissa A. Collier-Meek have produced a paper analyzing the behaviors generally attributed to men and women in the Disney Princesses films until *Tiana and The Princess and the Frog* (2009). Once classified what would be considered as traditionally considered female behaviors and traditionally considered masculine behaviors, they observed that “Both the male and female roles changed over time, but overall the male characters evinced less change than the female characters and were more androgynous throughout. The princess role retained its femininity over time, and was rewarded for that, but also expanded to incorporate some traditionally masculine characteristics.” (p. 566) It is true that in the first films, both the princesses and princes showed their respective traditional gender behaviors but Disney became aware of the need to change that, thus, Disney Princesses began to present more traditionally male attributes. For instance, the most clear example of that is *Mulan* who deliberately disguises herself as a man, acting like a man and showing male behaviors. Not only that but we get to understand that it is not acting but it is the way she wants to behave: she finds comfort with male behaviors and rejects completely traditional female attributes. Following Judith Butler’s thought, this film rejects completely gender roles, defends the idea that society has imposed certain behaviors upon gender and opens the chance of subverting these behaviors.

Finally, new times require new portrayals of female characters and, nowadays, society demands from Disney even stronger characters than the ones it has already presented and with different storylines. 21st century Disney Princesses are even stronger both physically and morally than their predecessors and present more diversity with their storylines: we encounter the first appearance of an Afro-American princess with Tiana in *The Princess and the Frog* from 2009; we experience more complex love relationships between the princess and the prince, for example, the one with Rapunzel and Flynn in *Tangled* from 2010, or even some other cases where the love storyline is completely eliminated from the narrative, like in Elsa or Moana; we continue enjoying different cultures in *Brave* (2012), *Frozen* (2013) or *Moana* (2016); we are presented with absolute heroines like Elsa, Moana or Merida who are true fighters and who are responsible for saving the world. The Disney Princesses franchise has become extremely complex and varied that even Disney has bet to revise some of the original princesses' stories and has produced some live-action films of these princesses. Consequently, Disney has made non-animated films of Aurora, Cinderella, Belle,



Jasmine, and Mulan: with the exception of Mulan whose film I was not able to watch, every single live-action version of these princesses changes some aspects of their stories that suit them better in modern conceptions of female characters. Some of these aspects will be analyzed later in the paper but, in general, these characters grew stronger in character, have higher aspirations in their lives, and are given more depth in their personalities and their stories.

In conclusion, nowadays, we found ourselves in a society that is more empathic with women's situation and feminists have been established as people who defend the firm idea that men and women should be treated equally in all terms of society. "More generally, and especially in the West, feminism had influenced every aspect of contemporary life, communication, and debate, from the heightened concern over sexist language to the rise of academic fields such as women's studies and ecofeminism." (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*) Lately, it seems like feminism has found another aspect to focus its attention on which is the constant abuse of men towards women. Thousands of women are being raped, abused, and killed by men or even by their own partners yearly and people are constantly reporting this kind of behaviors via social media and constantly demonstrating for a change in society. Media has also taken a huge part in that, constantly representing strong independent women in the better sense of it and informative media are also increasingly relating these episodes on the news in order to raise awareness of the situation trying to lessen these kinds of activities.

Likewise, Disney has helped greatly on this progress towards equality by representing strong independent princesses who are conceived the same way as male characters. "It is through such stories, or representations, that we develop understandings of the world and how to live in it. The contest between rival stories produces our notions of reality, and hence our beliefs about what we can and cannot do." (Sinfield, pp. 26-27). Sinfield also writes that "The wish of women for power over their loves cannot be expressed plausibly within dominant discourse, only as a fantasy. Stories, then, transmit power: they are structured into the social order and criteria of plausibility define, or seem to define, the scope of feasible political change." (p. 29). However, this view on the situation of women has changed drastically. It is true that we still live in a patriarchal society that constantly tries to silence voices of women but women in power are no longer a fantasy. It is true that "stories transmit power" and, precisely because they do so, the audience can take this power and apply it to their real lives. The stories of Jasmine and how she finds her voice in the 2019 version of *Aladdin*, or how Elsa embraces her powers in *Frozen* and *Frozen 2* or how Cinderella is



rewarded with what she wants with just acting kindly in life can serve as inspiration for real-life women and girls who could feel empowered by such stories and challenge those forces that would try to bring them down.

### **3. Introduction to the analysis: princesses and hair**

In the previous section, we have taken a general overview of the evolution of feminism in the United States throughout the twentieth century and we have observed how the Disney films have been influenced by this evolution of feminism as well as taking part in it. It is clear that the several representations Disney has made of princesses have changed in time, being extremely influenced by the changes in the mentality of society about women. In relation to that, we can first see how social relations have changed in relation to the princesses through a visual element: their hair. Therefore, I will start by discussing in what ways the princesses' hair has changed with every film before analyzing, in the following sections, some aspects of the relationship of these princesses with society, specifically their role as part of the monarchy and their relationship with the princes.

In the first place, princesses' hairstyles have evolved with every film: from presenting the stiff hairstyle of Snow White which does not suffer any change in the whole movie to giving a more realistic approach to Moana's hair which gets wet, gets dirty with sand, which bothers her sometimes and makes a bun with it. In fact, many times their hairstyles can reflect their place in society as well as representing social oppression. Hair is quite important when identifying the princesses as part of the royalty or not. For example, we see how Snow White, Aurora, Ariel, Jasmine or Pocahontas do not quite change their hairstyle since they hold the title of princess throughout



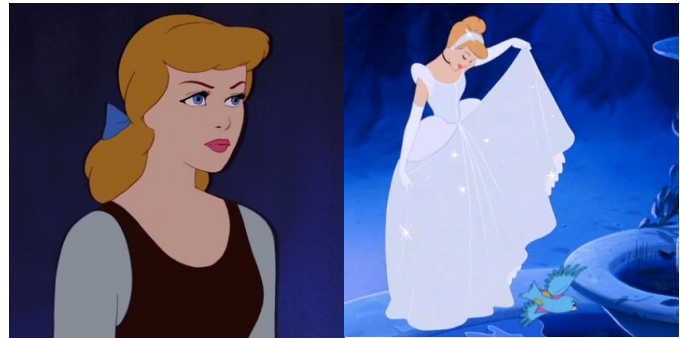
*From Moana (2016)*



*From Sleeping Beauty (1959)*

the whole film. Even Aurora and Ariel do not change their hairstyles when they change environments (when Aurora accepts her position as a princess; when Ariel spends three days with Eric in the human world) because, despite being in different places, they remain princesses during the whole film. Jasmine, on her part, only changes her hairstyle when she becomes Jafar's slave; during the rest of the film, she sticks to the same hairstyle. With Jasmine, we get to see how

important hairstyle is, because when she is in the market, she hides her hair and, until she unveils it, the characters do not realize she is the princess. On the contrary, the most recent princesses and those princesses who become so by the end of their movies present more variations in their hairstyles. For example, Cinderella presents two different hairstyles: when she is under the influence of Lady Tremaine and when she arrives at the ball and later marries the prince. She has to change her hairstyle when she is in a more polished environment and she keeps that hairstyle even when the prince discovers her true



*From Cinderella (1950)*



*From The Princess and the Frog (2009)*

identity. Tiana, on the other hand, presents several hairstyles throughout the film –indeed she is maybe the princess with the most hair changes. However, it is pretty noticeable how, similarly to Cinderella, when she is in a formal environment, she is portrayed with similar haircuts. Even when she dresses up as a princess in Charlotte’s party, she exhibits the same haircut as when getting married to Naveen twice.

On the other hand, apart from displaying their social status, hairstyles can also work as a symbol of the social oppression some of these princesses suffer. Firstly, the princesses that struggle with social pressure find their hairstyle tied up. In general terms, all the princesses when they hold their position of power in the monarchy



*From Brave (2010)*

are shown with a tie that holds their hair one way or another. Eventually, some princesses (Merida, Mulan, Rapunzel, and Elsa) are able to break with these bondages. For instance, Merida is forced to wear a fancy blue dress when she has to receive the leaders of the other clans and has to cover up her entire hair with a fabric piece. We perfectly see not only how uncomfortable she feels in that

dress but also how she is willing to liberate her hair from that piece that she lets a lock of her hair out of it: “In many ways this ‘rebellious’ string of hair is a representation of Merida’s personality as she on numerous occasions refuses to do as she is told.” (Salden, p. 40). Eventually, she breaks the dress and takes off the piece that blocks her hair when she fights for her own hand. Another interesting case is Mulan’s. Mulan’s example is more related to social conventions since she finds more comfort in traditionally associated male attributes and behaviors than with female ones. Mulan performs one of the most significant acts in the story of Disney, which is the cutting of her hair. In order to save her father, she decides to go to the recruitment basement in his place, where she will learn to fight against the Huns. In order to disguise herself as a man, she cuts her hair to simulate a man’s. However, by cutting her hair, not only does she try to mask herself as a man but she is making a clear statement: that she does not agree with the established characteristics that have traditionally represented women and men, in fact, that she does not feel represented by the traditionally female characteristics but with the masculine ones. “When she thus cuts off that long shiny hair, she sends



*From Mulan (1998)*

out the message that she does not want to be valued for her appearance; that she does not care for those ancient traditions.” (Salden, p. 34). At the end of the film, she wears her new short hair as herself, as a woman, without being disguised as a man, challenging these gender roles socially established.

Another example of social pressure represented in a princess’ hair is Rapunzel. The social pressure Rapunzel experiences is directly translated in her hair, which possess healing magical powers. She is constantly reminded by the villain Mother Gothel that society is cruel and is willing to take advantage of her powers, thus, she puts that pressure on Rapunzel. Moreover, she cannot escape from that situation since, by cutting off her hair, all her powers will be lost and she is forced, by Gothel and by herself to preserve her gift. It is interesting to notice, also, how the whole movie circles around the motives of light and darkness: Rapunzel stands for the light as she is good and kind while Gothel, as the evil of the film, represents darkness, always is surrounded by darkness and practically never is seen fully in the light. This can also be translated in their hairs, since

Gothel's is pure dark and Rapunzel is blonde, apart from the fact that when Rapunzel's powers are taking action, her hair shines brightly. However, when we reach the end of the movie, we experience the liberation of Rapunzel from her hair: contrary to the original tale in which Gothel cuts Rapunzel's hair as punishment, in *Tangled* it is Flynn who cuts her hair in a more liberating moment. Rather than being a punishment or a prohibition to enjoy her hair, Flynn liberates her from all the pressure Rapunzel holds because of the power in her hair. This act also emphasizes the relationship



*From Tangled (2010)*

between Rapunzel and Flynn already well established. Furthermore, with the cutting of the hair, power is taken from her hair, therefore, her hair will not shine any longer and turns brown; not completely black, like Gothel's, but brown as a sign of the loss of her powers but still showing she is not evil.

In *Frozen* and *Frozen 2* we also experience another princess that deliberately changes her haircut to subvert the social order. Elsa changes her hair twice (one per film) as a symbol of her process of self-esteem and self-acceptance. Elsa's hair, a part of representing



*From Frozen (2013) and Frozen II (2019)*

her social pressure, also stands for her magic powers: most like Rapunzel, the social pressure she experiences is because of her powers and the fear her society has of them. In these movies, we see once more how some hairstyles show the princesses' status as part of the monarchy: Elsa, Anna, and Iduna (Elsa's and Anna's mother) exhibit exactly the same haircut when they occupy the throne of Arendelle. Likewise, in the first film, when Elsa is rejected by her community, she gets rid of the monarchic haircut during the song "Let It Go" and transforms it into a braid as a symbol of the bursting of her powers. She again changes her hair in *Frozen*



*From Frozen (2013) and Frozen II (2019)*

2 in the scene of “Show Yourself,” the epiphanic moment in which Elsa understands her true nature. Even before starting the whole scene, Elsa already liberates herself from any ties in her hair as a proof of her final revelation moment: only when she understands she has to be totally free from any bound with Arendelle is when she also liberates her hair from that and wears it completely free. In this revelation moment, we discover that Elsa is naturally more related to nature since she is the Fifth Spirit and we associate this freedom with nature. In fact, other princesses that are related more with nature, like Pocahontas, Ariel, Merida, and Moana, present free hairstyles, without ties, helping on the association of freedom (represented by the hair with no ties) with nature. As proof of that, if we observe the case of Ariel, we see how in her kingdom, she wears her hair freely while in the upper world with Eric, we observe her with a bow tiding her hair. Even Moana, when she gets a crown symbolizing she has reached the top position in her society, her hair remains without any tie, apart from the fact that her crown is made of plants and flowers, nature motifs.



*From Pocahontas (1995)*



*From The Little Mermaid (1989)*



#### **4. Princesses and power**

Another aspect that has changed about princesses is their relationship with positions of power and their role as part of the monarchy. Disney goes from representing princesses who completely fit in the community they belong to showing complete underdogs who struggle with identifying themselves with the rest of the community or even rejecting it completely. While the first princesses show no struggle with society, the most recent representation of these princesses provide a more realistic approach to social relations.

The role of the early 20th century princesses is reduced to merely being depicted in their royal position and being totally submitted to other major forces, mainly villains. In this position, we can find early princesses, such as Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora or Ariel. These princesses completely accept and are accepted by the community as a whole and the only apparent motive they are driven by is their love for the prince. It is important for these princesses to be depicted as part of the royal system and to be questioned only by the bad characters: the Evil Queen, Maleficent, Lady Tremaine and her daughters and Ursula. Apart from that, the other resistance they face is related to their love affairs: “The princess was rarely, if ever, seen asserting herself with the prince. The women did tend to be assertive about their fathers’ attempts at controlling them.” (England et al., p. 563) In the cases of Ariel and Aurora, for instance, their love interest is not accepted by the superior entities (King Triton and the Three Good Fairies), which becomes the central issue of their narratives. For this reason, Ariel asks Ursula for help, exchanging her voice for legs in order to see her beloved Eric and Aurora cannot feel completely relieved when she is freed from her captivity because she has been forbidden to see Philip again.

On the other hand, Disney does not explore with these characters their factual role as princesses, as a piece of the royalty. In several examples, like Cinderella or a few of the later princesses (Rapunzel, Belle, Mulan or Tiana), they do not get the chance to show their skills as governors (or sub-governors since they are positioned under the king or queen of the kingdom) because the framework of the movies ends up once they accomplish the marriage with the prince. However, in the case of Snow White, Aurora and Ariel, the relationship between them and their people is not really shown as close. It is true that Aurora is kept from her parents and the rest of the kingdom because of Maleficent’s spell, but once she is liberated and returned to the kingdom, she is not shown as close to her people as in other cases. When we observe these princesses in the



presence of their subjects, they always have a distant relationship based on respect. We don't see them interact with their people, only with those who are constantly in their environment. This can be seen in Ariel's case: she only keeps the company of her sisters and her father. Outside the family circle, her only friends are sea-animals (Flounder, Sebastian and Scuttle) but they are not quite perceived as members of the kingdom but as sidekicks. In the case of Snow White, she is more often perceived as a maiden than as a princess. She is kept in that position by the Evil Queen (an evil force) to lessen her position in her own favour. However, even when she is out of her influence in the house of the dwarfs, they keep a certain distance as a consequence of her royal position but rather than being an authoritative presence, she acts as the maiden of the house. Instead of exerting her power as the governor of the kingdom, she only obliges the dwarfs to keep their hands clean and to eat properly and keeps the housework for herself:

*In Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* it was clear that men were not expected to do domestic work, nor did they have the ability to do so. When the princess cleaned the dwarves' house she stated "you'd think their mother would" and then she realized that they probably did not have a mother *because* the house was dirty. Snow White rescued the dwarves in a traditionally feminine way, by cooking and cleaning and acting as their surrogate mother in order to stay with them. The princess used domestic work variously as an expression of servitude and a way to gain love. (England et al., p. 563)

On the other hand, as the century progressed, Disney bet on representing some princesses as misfits who do not necessarily share the traits of their community, reaching the point of completely rejecting their community of origin on some occasions. Some of the new princesses, like Jasmine (the 1992 version), Pocahontas or Merida, resemble the case of Ariel, in that they are placed in community but find resistance in terms of love. On the one hand, they are completely accepted into their communities, however, because of certain disputes with their family, they can be perceived as elements who do not fit in their society. Their only and main preoccupation is related to who should they love, following the pattern described by England et al., in which "In contrast to the earlier films, the middle and most current films had princesses who were more assertive than in earlier films, and these princesses were assertive towards both people and animals." (p. 563) All three princesses reclaim their right to choose whoever they want to fall in love with, whereas their parents are fixed with the idea of getting their daughters married to an important figure of the community (a



prince in Jasmine's case, a warrior of Pocahontas' village or one of the sons of the main allied clans of Merida's father).

In addition to this group of princesses, there are other samples that need further explanation about their alienation from society: Mulan, Elsa, Belle and Tiana. In the first place, Mulan can come across as the main misfit of the group of the Disney Princesses, beginning with the fact that technically she is not even a princess despite holding the title. Besides that, Mulan feels completely out of place in the community she has to live in. She is brought to a matchmaker in order to find a husband for her and her whole family has great expectations of her to accomplish that: "For women it is an important task to find a man who can take care of them financially, and only once they have found a suitable man, the girl brings honor to the family for doing so well." (Salden, p. 32) However, she does not feel represented by those female standards conceived by her society: she does not believe in the attributes the ideal woman should have nor the way of dressing or behaving. As a matter of fact, in her solo song "Reflection," she expresses that her external appearance does not translate her true identity which can only be perceived by means of her reflection. This can be interpreted in two ways: that she does not feel represented by the external ideals of a beautiful woman or that she does not feel represented by femininity at all. There is a theory that defends that Mulan is a transgender man: as the film advances, we see how she finds comfort in masculine attributes while she is training for the battlefield with the rest of Chinese recruits. However, and because this subject is extremely complex, I will not develop on this further, as it goes beyond the scope of this paper and would require further research and certainly more space and time. Despite feeling more comfortable with masculine traits, Mulan is forced not to feel identified with them: as a woman, society does not allow her to relate to war and fighting, fields that are traditionally associated with men and where women are completely forbidden to participate. This is why she has to disguise herself as a man in the training camp, but when her colleagues find out the truth, they completely reject her for the mere fact of being a woman. It is not until she proves her abilities, her "man-like" abilities, and saves the whole empire and the Emperor that she is recognized by her skills and her actions and as a female fighter as well as bringing honor to her family "in an entirely different manner; by going to war." (Salden, p. 35) At the end of the movie, she is restored to her initial state as a woman bringing stability to her family and the whole community: "Whereas in earlier texts a cross-dressed woman might represent something evil or demonic, by the late



seventeenth century a woman dressed as a man, for war or for school, was admirable, even ‘heroic,’ as long as she returned her original female state in the end (Zeitlin 1993; 118-119)” (Mann, p. 115).

With Elsa, we find the only princess in the group that completely rejects the society she lives in and we can see it with the revision Disney has made of the character in *Frozen 2*. Already in the first film, she suffers from the refusal of her community considering that everyone feared Elsa's icy powers. Yet, the film ends with the reconciliation of Elsa and Anna and the whole kingdom once all embrace her powers as a good trait, Elsa included. However, Disney switches things up in the 2019 film: they create this whole new world of the Enchanted Forest and the Four Spirits and connect them with Elsa transforming her into the Fifth Spirit. Just at the beginning of the film, the filmmakers give us a clue of the upcoming detachment of Elsa with her people in the second song “Some Things Never Change.” The song introduces the whole plot as the audience travels through Arendelle and sees the motivations and worries of the character in the new film. Towards the end of the song, all the characters meet to sing together, and Elsa sings the following lines: “And I promise you the flag of Arendelle will always fly,” to which Anna and the whole ensemble answers: “Our flag will always fly.” This introduces the storyline of Elsa feeling alienated from society she is living in: instead of identifying herself with the rest of Arendelle, she decides to sing that phrase, completely detaching herself from the community. In contrast with the other alienated princesses, Elsa's displacement from society is not motivated by any entity in particular but by an inner feeling from Elsa herself. Later on, she repeats this idea in the song “Into The Unknown” where she sings this in response to a mysterious voice she is hearing: “Or are you someone out there who's a little bit like me? Who knows deep down I'm not where I'm meant to be?” In fact, this voice plays a central role in the narrative of the movie and in Elsa's self-discovery. This voice can be interpreted as the call of nature, a call that only Elsa can hear and seems to come from the Enchanted Forest. This voice has a certain melody that is repeated throughout the movie and in some songs like the mentioned “Into the Unknown” and “Show Yourself.” Somehow, Elsa feels strongly connected with this voice and she eventually embraces this voice, singing its melody and performing a singing duo with it. This act of embracing the voice is the way Elsa finds of identifying herself with the voice: by singing the melody of the voice, she becomes the voice itself. Therefore, without knowing it, Elsa becomes the Fifth Spirit when she sings the melody. The Northuldra, the people living in the Enchanted Forest, say that when the Forest fell, they could hear the Fifth Spirit calling out and what they heard was the exact same melody Elsa is singing. So, after the scene of “Show Yourself,” Elsa



finally and completely becomes the Fifth Spirit of nature, a bridge between the Northuldra and nature, a bridge born between the communities of the Northuldra and Arendelle, between Iduna and Agnarr (Elsa's parents) who gave birth to Elsa and Anna: one representing the Fifth Spirit and more connected to nature and the Northuldra (Elsa) and the other destined to rule Arendelle people (Anna). That is why Elsa cannot feel connected with Arendelle's community: she is a free being, a part of nature itself and destined to feel more connected with the Northuldra community, a community more closely related to nature and magic, which is what Elsa represents. Therefore, at the end of the movie, she is the first of the princesses who decides to give up her throne and stay with the Northuldra, where she truly belongs, amongst nature.

We can also find Belle in this group as a representation of a non-princess (at the beginning of the film) who feels disconnected from the rest of the society because of her personality. She is a cultured bookworm who would rather spend time reading books than being accompanied and people also despise her: in the first musical number of the film, "Belle," the whole village mocks her for being different, for reading books and be cultured and intelligent. "This princess was the first to show very high rates of intellectual activity as she read books frequently, though this was used in the film to characterize Belle as strange and served to separate her from the other villagers." (England et al., p. 564) This feeling of disunion is reinforced in the 2017 version of the story in which we can see how Belle actually uses her intelligence and is completely condemned for trying to advance her community technologically and culturally. For instance, she constructs a system by which she can wash clothes effortlessly or she tries to teach how to read to a little girl who did not have access to education. We can assume that the society she has to live in is quite conservative and not wanting to progress if that implies change, so that it repudiates this progressive character that they feel is threatening their status quo. Some of them can only get to accept her once she gets married to the Beast and becomes part of the royalty and gains a position of complete power. We can also see a princess who is not only discriminated by the community but also wants to get away from it. She acknowledges that her way of thinking and her community's differ drastically, thus, places herself way out of them and what they represent. Similar to this issue, we can relate Belle with Ariel, who also rejects her community. However, contrary to Belle, Ariel is fully accepted and embraced in the under-water society but she chooses to change communities and go with Eric due to her fascination for the human world and her love for Eric.



Finally, Tiana experiences a situation similar to Belle's but hers is more related to gender roles: "The princess was career-oriented, which initially prevented from socializing and pursuing romantic opportunities. This was presented as a somewhat worrisome trait, in keeping with a society that might still be somewhat cautious of women's greater role in the workplace and what that means for family life." (England et al., p. 563) Set in the 1920s, *The Princess and the Frog* presents us Tiana, the first Afro-American princess whose dream is to open her own restaurant. However, instead of being praised by her hard work and her commitment, she is constantly criticized by her friends, her work colleagues, her mother and Naveen when they get the chance to know each other. The only one who seems to support her is her friend Charlotte, who continually brings her father to where she works and eventually gives her the money to open her restaurant; curiously enough, Charlotte and her father are the only representations of white individuals in the film and they are the only ones that support Tiana in her dream: all her friends and those who question Tiana are non-white people. However, Tiana's dreams are crashed when the two people who own the place she wants to buy tell her the following: "Which is why a little woman of your background would have had a hands full trying to run a big business like that." Apart from the racial factor, she is considered incapable of running a restaurant for the mere fact of being a woman and people agree with that, so that she is encouraged to focus on other things and not only on her job. Nevertheless, the film completely condemns this view of Tiana's life because, at the end of the movie, not only is she able to succeed in love by marrying Naveen but she also gets her restaurant and is able to balance both roles.

In other cases, especially with the revision of the characters made by the live-action films, the role of the princesses, rather than being placed way out of the community, is reviewed and reimagined, placing the princesses at the top of their society. In the case of Aurora, in *Maleficent*, she is crowned queen of the Moors: the film moves towards ascending Aurora since she could not become queen of her father's kingdom because she had lost total connection with him. The film makes her queen of the place where she grew in, serving as a bond between this place and the human world and bringing peace to both kingdoms. Apart from Aurora, there are more interesting cases. To begin with, Moana is the newest incorporation in the group of the Princesses, if the live-action films and *Frozen 2* are not taken into account: in other words, it is the most recent original princess added to the franchise. Moana is the perfect representative of a later tendency in Disney's portrayal of the Princesses as more closely attached to the citizenship: she is clearly shown as the



leader of her community and really implied with her village. As opposed to, for instance, Ariel –one of the Princesses that from the very beginning is supposed to exercise her role as governor– Moana is presented as a strong female leader who cares about her community and actually helps them solve certain problems that they encounter. We see Moana connected with her people, a trait that is never seen in the early princesses, who always keep at a certain distance from their subjects. Furthermore, with Moana we experience for the first time the process that involves being a leader (not even a princess, she prefers to be called “chief”); the way she should behave; the things she has to take into account; the traditions she has to respect; some new traits she has to bring; or the whole complexity that entails being at the top of a community, an aspect we have not quite seen before in other Princesses. Moreover, Moana also serves as an example of the explorer princess: just like Rapunzel, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine and the *Frozen 2* Elsa, Moana is in need of exploring the world, of going beyond her community and exploring “the unknown”, as Elsa sings. These are a bunch of princesses that desire more than what they own, who want to see more than the walls of their palaces (or villages in some cases) and discover new worlds. That is a huge step for princesses who stick to their position, to have a representation of young girls with higher expectations of life and who desire to explore the world. Moreover, what is also interesting in Moana’s case is the central role she performs in saving the world: throughout the movie, the audience is made to believe that Moana is the chosen one by the ocean to help Maui to defeat Te Kā. However, we are later discovered that it is the other way around, that Maui is chosen to help Moana to save the world and restore the peace disrupted before by the same Maui. This is also a huge step on presenting female characters who are destined to save the world and do not accompany a man to do so.

More related to Moana’s place as chief of the village, the 2019 Jasmine plays an important part in representing women at the top of their community. In the 1992 film of *Aladdin*, we already witnessed a pretty tenacious Jasmine who fought for her right to marry whoever she wanted and not be subjected to the power of men –Jafar and her father. However, in the 2019 live-action film, Jasmine is taken beyond that trait and she is given the ambition to rule the sultanate of Agrabah. Jasmine is one of those examples of princesses who feel strongly related to her people and who are shown to be extremely close to them. Nevertheless, she does not get the chance to leave the palace and interact with them; that is why she escapes from the palace to visit the city, walk amongst her people and to feel more connected with them. That heightens her determination to become their sultanness and that idea relates to the person she has to decide to marry, as she is forced to marry a



prince who will become the head of state. She considers that she should rule Agrabah because not only is she a person that actually relates to the community and not an outsider, but she also states that she has been preparing to do so all her life apart from keeping the idea of the original movie in the sense of choosing whoever she wants to marry. On that note, the 2011 study by England et al. highlights that some of the least portrayed characteristics in princesses were “related to gaining positions of power” or “being a leader” (p. 563). However, with eight years of difference, Disney has changed that and it is perfectly seen in Jasmine: apart from being clearly depicted as a leader of her community, she is continually claiming her right to rule her kingdom and gain power. In relation to that, there is this whole issue of words and speaking: Jasmine is constantly reminded by Jafar that “Life will be kinder to you, princess, once you accept these traditions and understand that it is better for you to be seen and not heard.” Throughout the whole movie, she is reminded that law and tradition forbid her from becoming sultanness and that the role of a princess should be to present herself in public without addressing them. With this issue, Jasmine is given her own song “Speechless” (a song that she does not have in the 1992 version) where she expresses her determination not to remain silent and speak up her mind. The song comes at the climax of the film where Jafar has taken control of the lamp and owns the kingdom. The scene, though, is quite contradictory. “Speechless” is an empowering song about Jasmine being empowered by words while we see her getting rid of every man in the room. Nevertheless, the whole song happens in her imagination and people from the outside never get the chance to hear her song, to hear what she has to say about her reclusion. Yet, this is compensated when Jasmine, after ending her song in her mind, actually performs a speech convincing all the guards and everyone present in the room to position themselves against Jafar and in favour of her and her father. That is the key moment, after empowering herself with “Speechless” in her mind, where Jasmine finally does not keep quiet and speaks up and demonstrates right in front of her father that she deserves to be the sultanness and has what it takes to be so. Even after that moment of revelation, she speaks out of what she desires to: she calls out on Jafar to seek the destruction of Agrabah, she tricks Jafar making him think she wants to marry him but at the moment of doing so she actually says “I will not marry you” and steals the lamp from him and runs away with Aladdin. At the end, once Jafar is defeated, everything is restored and after Jasmine demonstrates her capacities, the Sultan is convinced and ascends Jasmine to the position of sultanness. Moreover, Jasmine, through her position as sultanness, is able to



change the law to enable her to marry Aladdin, differing from the 1992 version of the film where the Sultan is the one that makes the marriage possible.

Following that line, another princess that has been placed at the top of the pyramid is Anna. In *Frozen* in 2013, we already encounter the first case of a princess ascending to be the queen of her society considering that Elsa is the queen of Arendelle, despite holding the title of “Princess” outside the film’s framework. Anna is the true princess of the film but with *Frozen 2* she replaces her sister’s position as queen of Arendelle when Elsa becomes the Fifth Spirit and has to give up the throne of Arendelle to be a free being amongst the Northuldra and nature where she feels she belongs. That leads us to the coronation of Anna as queen of Arendelle, a person who feels completely attached to her people, even more than Elsa, and who the audience sees throughout the whole film, more like Moana and Jasmine, her preparation for being the head of state. At several times of the film, she repeatedly brings up the motto of “doing the next right thing”, the idea of carrying on, no matter the circumstances, no matter how hard the situation is. This is a characteristic a leader should possess: to demonstrate his or her leadership skills and to be able to continue for the good of the community. Anna is found at a point in the narrative where she has lost everyone by her side: she thinks Elsa and Olaf are dead and Kristoff has left, she feels completely alone in a cave with no way out. However, it is admiring the quickness with which she moves on with the situation and is able to get out of the cave, solve the Forest situation and save nearly everyone, with just doing “the next right thing.” She demonstrates her leader capacities not only to the audience but to all the characters, so that she is finally rewarded with that position.

Finally, as an end note to this topic, all princesses share a particular trait which is their progression in society: Disney is really concerned with depicting a female character who progresses in life by overcoming her problems. Every single example of these princesses is presented with a problematic situation in her life that does not enable her to fully enjoy it. However, by the end of the movie this situation is solved and the princesses ascend in their position in society. Moreover, it seems as if Disney has become aware of the power that these princesses hold as actual members of the monarchy and has taken advantage of that by depicting princesses who are conscious of this power and actually use it for their benefit.



## **5. Princesses and love**

Apart from their place within the monarchy, another aspect that has evolved in the depiction of the Disney Princesses within society remains the whole issue of love. The relationship of the princesses with their respective princes gains such importance in relation with society because they will all become the heads of their kingdom. In addition, the relationship they both establish with each other is an excellent representation of the historical time these stories belong in. Disney passes from depicting princesses who express absolute devotion to their princes to present far more complex relationships in an attempt to show more contemporary conceptions of love and relationships.

To begin with, the position of the princesses from the early 20th century when dealing with love is often the same. All of them (Snow White, Aurora, Cinderella and even Ariel despite being from the late 20th century) show total and absolute devotion for the prince with different grades between them. What the four of them share is a full idealization of the prince based on a brief encounter between the two, though Disney still fails to demonstrate how the relationship between the princess and the prince develops with time: all of them are based on first-sight attraction which provokes mutual idealization. On that note, England et al. suggest that “In *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, the prince was rarely shown, leaving very little behavior to code. It was not clear how or why the princess fell in love with him; she seemed to be chosen by him and obligingly fell in love.” (p. 563) However, the princesses are the ones who deliberately show this devotion while the princes always avoid expressing their feelings: “For feminine characteristics, there was a significant difference between the princes and the princesses on the portrayal of affection [...]” (England et al., p. 560). On the one hand, we observe the princesses struggle, suffer and feel for the prince, whereas the princes show their love by saving the princesses from the villain. In that matter, in some examples, like in the movies of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Cinderella*, the story of the princess gains more importance than the prince per se. The prince in *Snow White* is only shown at the beginning and the end of the movie in a total of barely two minutes. Nonetheless, he performs a relatively significant role in the narrative considering that he inspires the jealousy of the Evil Queen and awakens Snow White from the sleeping curse. Otherwise, the roles change in *Sleeping Beauty* since it is Aurora who shares less time on-screen, an amount of 18 minutes as well as only 18 spoken lines in the whole movie. Even though the movie is based on the story of Aurora,



Philip receives the primary focus of the movie, the way he fights Maleficent and rescues Aurora at the end of the movie breaking the curse.

However, there is a distinct division between the stories of Snow White and Aurora, on the one part, and Cinderella and Ariel, on the other: these two princesses not only fall in love with the prince but with what he represents. On the one hand, Ariel is indeed charmed by Eric when she discovers him in his ship and saves him from getting drowned. Nevertheless, not only does she fall in love with him but with what he represents: he stands for the human world and all its values. She has a great fascination for the upper world and the first time she encounters a human being, she is indeed captivated by him, a representation of the human world which Ariel completely adores. Nonetheless, the fact that makes Ariel stand out from this group of princesses is that the relationship with the prince grows beyond a spontaneous meeting with him. They both get the chance to know each other better and fall in love with each other's personalities and not only with their external appearances. Much the same way, Cinderella does not precisely fall in love with the prince but rather with what he represents. In fact, Cinderella is already in love with the prince even before meeting him because she is fascinated with the idealistic representation of a prince, not the prince himself. She begins the film with higher ambitions in her life and with a great desire for the prince and the ideals he stands for, but it is not until the ball where she can share a dance with him and her expectations are fulfilled without engaging in a factual conversation. They feel attracted to each other mainly based on their external appearance and the physical magnetism that aroused between them, without the necessity of knowing each other.

Nevertheless, Disney progressed in the depiction of the relationship of the princesses with the princes by showing more than unconditional love grounded on physical attraction. Following Ariel's example, there are Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana and Rapunzel. "The romance in the two most recent films, *Mulan* and *The Princess and the Frog*, however, developed over time as the characters interacted with each other, often overcoming obstacles together and fostering a friendship as well. This suggests that the more recent Disney Princess movies show a more balanced portrayal of relationship formation." (England et al., p. 565) These princesses get to know the personality and the behaviour of the princes before consuming their love and getting married. They part from a first moment of physical attraction that leads to both characters sharing conversations, spending some time together and facing evil together. As a proof of that, the live-action films perfectly represent this change of thought within the Disney franchise: in all of the five



remakes (*Maleficent*, *Maleficent 2*, *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*) we follow a progression of the relationship between the princess and the prince. The case of Aurora in *Maleficent* is radically different and will be analyzed later on, but the rest depict this situation clearly, especially in *Cinderella* and *Maleficent 2*. The previous representation of these princesses, as discussed before, is merely grounded on the full and blind idealization for their princes, yet, in *Maleficent 2*, for example, we witness how the relationship between Aurora and Phillip has already grown and how they are being prepared to get married. This is the first time we follow the whole preparation for the wedding and how it affects one another, the doubts they have, the complications they have to face with Maleficent and Ingrid, and how they overcome them by trusting one another. Alternatively, the 2015 version of *Cinderella* delivers that first encounter between Cinderella and Prince Charming (now named Kit), contrarily to the original movie. In fact, when they explain the meeting to other people, they put emphasis on describing each other's personalities rather than their physical appearances: despite their brief encounter, they focalize more on the personality features of each other rather than highlighting external characteristics. Furthermore, the prince is not presented as so but as an apprentice who lives in the palace, not specifying his state as prince because he is concerned about knowing Cinderella just as a normal human being and not as "the prince." With this, Disney gets rid of the total idealization of the figure of the prince and makes Cinderella have feelings for an apparently normal man she has met in the woods who happens to be the prince.

Apart from these examples of the live-action films, the cases of Belle and Mulan in their original production are particularly interesting. In the first place, Belle serves as an example of a princess who does not instantly fall in love with the prince but completely rejects him. Just like Jasmine or Tiana who at the beginning have deep reservations about the male characters, Belle repudiates the Beast, not because of her "hideous" appearance (as put in the film) but because of his way of behaving. Indeed, she experiences a disdainful reaction when she distinguishes his face in the dark when they first meet, but she is more concerned about her father being imprisoned and her being kidnapped: that is what leads her to retain intense feelings against the Beast, not much for his aspect but for his actions. Jasmine is close to that idea, when she finds herself hesitant as Aladdin says "Do you trust me?" before jumping over a building. Who would rely on a man that she has met that very same day and barely knows without hesitation? But it is not Aladdin's fault. With time, it has become common sense not to fully trust a stranger and Disney also wants to display that in their movies; the fact that Jasmine is not 100% sure if she can trust Aladdin marks a significant step from



those princesses who fully idealized the male figure without a doubt. Furthermore, and going back to Belle, Disney also wants to separate from those early princesses who mainly feel attracted by external features and present a princess who falls in love with the inside. Belle personifies the improvement in these movies that knowing the personality of the prince is what awakens in Belle an appeal for the Beast and not his aesthetics. This is marked by the fact that the looks of the Beast are repudiated by other people, even Belle at the beginning of the story. Yet, Belle can go beyond that façade and see the true nature of the Beast. She is unconcerned about external features that constitute the basis of other relationships but the film instead concentrates in showing the Beast's personality and this is a significant step forward for Disney. Moreover, Belle is the first Princess who saves the prince, followed by others like Pocahontas, Tiana or Rapunzel: by acknowledging the genuine beauty of the Beast, which relies on the inside, and falling in love with him, Belle liberates him from the spell, turns him into a human figure and restores the castle into normality. This is equally a powerful statement and a thorough change of roles from presenting a princess who needs to be rescued by a prince to presenting a prince who is in need of being saved by a princess.

On the other hand, in *Mulan*, there is a particular case with Mulan and Shang. On a superficial level, one could not spot much of a difference between her and the rest of the princesses: once Mulan is revealed as a woman, Shang is captivated by her and starts a more romantic approach to their relationship. However, the film is ambiguous and opens the possibility that this attraction on Shang's part might have began before Mulan shows her real identity: this opens the possibility of Shang falling in love with Mulan as her masculine alter ego Ping during the recruitment process. Eventually, Shang may have ended up captivated as a consequence of all the events they go through in the film. In this way, the film opens the possibility that, before feeling some attraction for Mulan as a girl, Shang had already fell in love with Ping. Shang indeed manifests affection for Ping when instructing him, when he proves himself and demonstrates his men-like abilities, even getting extremely worried when Ping gets injured by the Huns in a way that he does not even care (or at least it is not shown in the film) about his other partners. Though it is certainly interesting to highlight that this might be Disney's first attempt to explore a non-heterosexual relationship as the central question of a movie, this opens a new and complex field of discussion, much like another which would be related to the possibility of Mulan's transsexuality. In both cases, both themes open fields of research that go beyond the scope of this dissertation and could well form the body of a new work.



As time went by, Disney wanted to deviate from showing the prototypical love story in their movies and bet on presenting completely different love narratives and depicting other types of love, not only the sentimental one. In this layer we can come across the stories of Moana, Elsa, Anna, Merida and Aurora in *Maleficent*. To begin with, the most remarkable example of this process of self-criticism is Anna in *Frozen*. Anna begins her experience in love, like those initial princesses, when she meets Hans at her sister's coronation: they get to know each other, strongly connect and she immediately falls madly in love with him and wants to wed him. It is Elsa who provides some perspective on the situation when she tells Anna "You can't marry a man you just met" completely demolishing the basis of the early Disney Princesses. Moreover, what a better way to demonstrate Elsa's statement than making Hans the villain of the movie proving one cannot rely on strangers because they may not be what they appear to be. Anna positively acquires this knowledge throughout the film spending more time with Kristoff and eventually realizing she truly loves him and not Hans. Furthermore, *Frozen* also lays emphasis on exhibiting other types of love apart from the romantic one, in this case, love between sisters. We reach a point in the movie where Elsa has frozen Anna's heart unwillingly and Anna is getting entirely frozen because of it. She is informed that "only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart," thus, Anna and Kristoff look desperately for Hans to give Anna a kiss of true love, following the tradition of Snow White or Aurora where the prince kisses the princess to break the curse. After revealing his dark intentions, Hans goes after Elsa to execute her and obtain the power over Arendelle. It is here when Anna places herself between Hans and Elsa, sacrificing herself and getting completely frozen to save her sister and it is precisely this act that unfreezes her heart: by putting Elsa's safety before her own, she performs an act of true love, love to her beloved sister with whom she has shared her whole life. Here, the movie absolutely positions itself in favour of the bond established between sisters against the romantic love Anna feels for a guy she has merely met (either Hans or Kristoff). Besides, we also encounter the first princess who does not require for the presence of a prince or a male figure to save her because she can do that herself.

Much like with Anna, *Maleficent* also tries to revise those first representations of affectionate relationships with Aurora and Philip. Their framework does not suffer many changes: they still meet in the forest, share a few moments and completely fall in love with each other. However, Disney revises this conception of true love with *Maleficent*: the movie itself reimagines the character of Maleficent providing her with a traumatic past that made her to not believe in true



romantic love, thus, believing Aurora's curse would not be broken by these means. The movie agrees with her because it is not Philip that awakens Aurora but Maleficent, someone who has been taking care of Aurora throughout her whole life and who stands for a motherly figure. The film questions the status of Philip's true love for Aurora because they both barely appreciate each other enough to firmly affirm that they love each other truly. The movie opts for Maleficent's love for Aurora as a representation of true love, rejecting superficial romantic love completely: the love a mother has for her daughter, or, rather, the love someone who has grown a child has for this child.

In relation to this motherly love, the 2012 film *Brave* offers another perspective on this type of love. The movie examines the relationship between a mother and a daughter that has been completely broken: the fundamental issue lies on the fact that Merida's mother is forcing her to marry a prince. To get rid of her obligation of wedding someone, Merida requests the help of a witch she finds in the woods, but the situation gets worse when Elinor is transformed into a bear. This transformation is what brings mother and daughter together since they are forced to devote more time to one another trying to solve the problem. This gets them the chance to know and understand each other better: Elinor learns to respect her daughter's desires, even if they go against their community's traditions, and Merida learns the true familiar values and the importance of the family in her life as well as understanding the importance of her role as part of the royalty. In that sense, Merida gets to completely comprehend why her mother tries to make her to do certain things even though she does not want to do them, to keep with certain traditions of the kingdom, and maintain its stability. Additionally, Merida introduces a new trait that has never been seen before in another princess. She decides she does not want to get married to anyone: she is the first princess who does not need a male figure in her life, who acknowledges it in public and who ultimately accomplishes that by convincing her mother. "Traditional female roles are thus challenged, as the focus is no longer on the importance of becoming someone's wife or mother, but on the values that a young woman herself thinks of as important." (Salden, p. 42)

Lastly, Disney steps a little bit further than Merida by presenting two princesses, Moana and Elsa, who maintain no relation with love at all. In the first place, Moana is this character indicated from the very beginning as the chief of her community and at no time is her leadership questioned by not having a man by her side: her society embraces this matriarchal structure completely and expresses no concern with a female figure conducting it. Likewise, Elsa is also positioned at the top of her community and never requested to be accompanied by a man to govern with her. This is



another example of a community that supports a matriarchal model not only with Elsa but also with Anna who at the end of *Frozen 2* ascends to the Arendelle throne. With Elsa, apart from representing an independent character who does not need a man in her life, Disney promotes self-love and self-acceptance against the wishes of Disney fans who requested a lesbian Elsa. Alternatively, through both films *Frozen* and *Frozen 2*, the story focuses on her process of acceptance of her personality and her powers and the discovery of where she truly belongs as opposed to a romantic story with another person.

In conclusion, Disney is able to portray most of the changes of society in terms of love and relationships. Disney initially presents total submissive princesses who devote all their love unconditionally to the princes. They transfer the expectations of society in which both parts of a relationship must show complete devotion to one another; the female figure must provide whatever the male needs and he must protect her and save her from all evil. As the twentieth century advances, society demands different representations of relationships and Disney begins to explore illustrating stronger women, who at first reject the prince and who later on begin to be able to fall in love with them for their personality and not their external appearance. Moreover, Disney bets on focusing their movies on other types of love or even eliminating it completely from the frameworks of the princesses in an attempt to show more independent and stronger women.



## **6. Conclusions**

“Societies have to reproduce themselves culturally as well as materially, and this is done in great part by putting into circulation stories of how the world goes. [...] It is through such stories that ideologies are reinforced - and contested, for subordinate groups struggle to make space for themselves, and attempts to legitimate the prevailing order have to negotiate resistant experience and traditions.” (Sinfield, pp. 2-3)

Throughout this paper, we have observed how some stories can reproduce the changes that society experiences at the same time as they participate in those changes and intervene in society. On that note, one of the most relevant transformations that has taken place in western societies in the twentieth century has certainly been the position of women in the structure of society. I have examined how women have fought throughout the 20th century to provoke a change in their situation in society. From the first suffragettes until today's demonstrations against gender violence, women have been able to reshape people's perception of them and overall have become more empowered. However, the current situation of women would not have been possible without the constant fight of activists during history, especially during the last century. This progress in women's status is clearly evident at a legal level: beginning with the 19th Amendment Act that enabled women to vote in 1920 and reaching the few laws approved to protect women against gender violation, women are now encouraged to feel more inclusive, respected and safe, at least in a juristic grade and in comparison with many years ago. Excepting these laws that have protected women, all these activist movements for the emancipation of women and the change in thought about women have also helped to empower women themselves: young women who grew in a society improved by their predecessors did not face all the injustices and the pejorative circumstances that these predecessors faced. All these women grew with all this progress made and, yet, they continued to claim for more progress. Feminism has never stopped claiming rights and more rights for women in a patriarchal society that is continually unwilling to give them the same amount of power than men. Furthermore, despite having legally gained a lot of progress and improvements, people have not always accepted this empowerment of women: women are still being raped and abused, criticized for being confident; paid less than men in job positions; undervalued in sports or in politics, etc. Despite all the progress that has been made in society, there is still much more to improve socially.



Regardless of all the activism that took place throughout the 20th century, feminism has also struggled with many people and entities that were extremely against the equalization of women; some women did not even support the idea of women in positions of power and chose to stick to the traditional and patriarchal structure of society. Feminists have also encountered difficulties in identifying themselves with the movement due to all people's multiple perspectives on the movement, its aims and its procedures. On that note, Claire Goldberg Moses draws the following conclusion about the differences in feminism:

I look back on feminism's history and women's history and find that the periods in which our gains were most striking were when we used the word "feminism" most broadly, imbuing it with multiple meanings, and thereby created the largest sense of belonging, a shared aspiration for women's empowerment. During the periods when the meaning and usage of feminism narrowed, we became suspicious of those who spoke for women's equality but argued for different strategies from ours. (p. 771)

Feminism has found a frame in which people from around the world from different social classes and different backgrounds may feel themselves related to and feel supported by people who may have suffered the same struggle. "Feminism must be inclusive, flexible, and willing to accept contradiction. [...] However our strategies, our priorities, our views might differ, we shall know that we are joined in support of each other, in support of women, and support of women's empowerment." (Goldberg, p. 773)

Nowadays, we observe how feminism has evolved and is more concerned with reshaping the thought of patriarchal society and its citizens: we witness women uniting together in demonstrations against rape or defending each other before cases of abuse, the image of a woman commanding a business is becoming more and more common, the media start to visualize women in sports, female singers promoting women's freedom and liberty to do whatever they want to do, etc. Women are coming across with more freedom and more equality with men, yet, there is much more to do.

And how has Disney helped in that matter? Alan Sinfield writes that "stories transmit power" (p. 29) and that "by making representations of plausible reality, literary texts intervene in the world." (p. 40) What Disney has accomplished with women is to give voice to certain minorities and depict types of characters others than the prototypical and traditional representation of women. Moreover, because Disney has been able to translate the necessities and expectations of the society of the time into their films, Disney functions as a perfect example to observe how changes in history



can be seen through artworks. With nearly 100 years since its creation, the Walt Disney Company has presented many stories to the public from around the whole world and the company has also evolved in their conception of the female character in their films. In this paper, the focus of analysis has relied on the representation of the Disney Princesses as some of the most clear, direct and recognizable characters of the company. The evolution in women's role in society is already noteworthy particularly when observing the earliest and latest characters in this group: Snow White (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*) represents the perfect portrayal of a housewife who is in care of the house and who needs the help of men to be rescued and saved, while Elsa (*Frozen 2*) or Moana (*Moana*) are the strong leaders of their communities who have to fight to save the world and who, rather than suffering for a romantic interest, put all their effort in understanding themselves to find their place in the world.

Following on from this line of argument, this paper has analyzed some aspects in the Disney Princesses movies to observe the evolution of the display of these characters about their society. As a direct and visual element, this project has examined the different haircuts the princesses have presented in their films as a symbol of their social status as well as their social oppression, in some cases. Hair is a good metaphorical visual element that allows us to see the evolution of the representation of these characters since the first princesses present more fixed hairstyles whereas the most recent princesses show more realistic hairstyles. Furthermore, hair lets us see the princesses' situation in society, especially with those princesses who start the movie from a humble environment and by the end of the movie ascend in their position as part of the royalty. These princesses experience a change in their hairstyles from their beginning as no-princess to be part of a noble environment. In general terms, all the princesses present tied hairstyles when they hold their title as a mark of the pressure and the responsibilities of being a sovereign. Some of these princesses are able to get rid of these ties that strain them either by cutting their hair (Mulan or Rapunzel) eliminating this pressure put on them, or simply by changing their hairstyle (Elsa) as they progress in their process of self-discovery. Moreover, Disney is extremely concerned with giving the princesses more liberty and freedom and that is also translated in their hair: the most recent princesses present more free hairstyles as a symbol of their liberty and freedom and also of their deep and strong connection with nature (Pocahontas, Merida, Moana, Elsa). Through hair, we may notice how Disney has taken conscience of the emancipation that these female characters need from



their society and from the pressure this society puts on them, so that hairstyles can reflect this freedom very adequately.

Subsequently, this paper has examined the position of the Disney Princesses in their societies and their relationship with the royalty in depth. Disney has passed from representing ideal maidens, even though holding a position of power, who appear submissive to bigger figures than them and who perfectly fit in the structure of their society to display more varied stories with stronger characters who claim for their rights, fight for their dreams and do not necessarily fit in their community. The whole Second Wave Feminism is remarkable in this aspect, since the princesses from the 1990s were shown as strong individuals who fought for their dreams and their needs even against their community and their parents. Furthermore, gender conscience and the deconstruction of gender roles play an essential role in these princesses, who are progressively depicted in a more androgynous manner, with more traditionally male attributes and stopping being completely submissive: "Gender expectations were less complex when the first Disney Princess movies were produced and with the rise of feminism in the 1970s through current times they have become more complicated." (England et al., p. 563) Nowadays, there is a later disposition from Disney to place these princesses at the top of their community as queens: making these characters stronger than the first ones was not enough for the needs of present day society, which demands female characters at the top of their pyramid and Disney has to accomplish that. Princesses like Moana, Elsa, Anna, Jasmine or Aurora, for instance, have climbed their way to the top position of their society as leaders and, what seems more important, their citizens find no complaints about establishing a matriarchal structure in their community.

Finally, the relationship between the princesses and the princes has also been studied in order to discuss the image of women in direct relation with men. The first relationships between these characters manifests the expectations that society has of a perfect relationship in which both parts must exhibit total devotion to one another and in which the female figure must take care of all the need of the male. In this sense, Disney has also moved forward and has displayed more complex relationships with the princes: the princesses no longer fall in love immediately with the prince but rather build a connection with him which has a stronger feeling to the viewer. Some of these princesses even reject the prince in the first moment and it is through knowing the prince personally that the princesses end up being captivated by them instead of focusing merely on their external appearance. Additionally, the later movies also bet to focus their narratives on some other types of



love to replace the traditional romantic one. Some movies concentrate on building a love relationship between the main protagonist and other characters than the prince: in *Brave*, Merida is encouraged to regain the relationship with her mother, in *Frozen*, the love between sisters is what saves Anna or in *Maleficent* the bond established between Maleficent herself and Aurora is more emphasized than the attraction between Aurora and Philip. Disney has reached a point in which their princesses Elsa and Moana eradicate the love affair from their storyline: these characters are in no need of a male to rule by their side nor to solve their problems and none of their respective communities put the pressure on them to find a male prince to stand by their side.

To conclude the paper, it has been observed how society can change with time and with the continuous hard work of people who desire to reshape society and the importance that some entities have in supporting these changes. Disney has played a huge role in the progress of feminism in society since it has been capable of having their female characters evolve according to the demands of present day society. Nowadays, women feel stronger about their situation in society, despite all the progress that remains, and Disney has portrayed characters which are as equally strong as women in the real world. It is through such stories that women might be empowered and encouraged to stand for their rights, to face and maybe overcome discrimination and earn their place in society. Disney has helped to tear up walls in the representation of female characters, breaking gender roles, presenting androgynous characters who are equally feminine and masculine, presenting matriarchal societies that respect and praise their female leaders. The fact that, nowadays, culture is full of stories depicting minorities which have been socially excluded reflects the need to understand and support these minorities: by presenting stories and characters that show non-mainstream behaviours, it raises awareness in society about these outnumbered stories to give them visibility and progressively provoke changes in society that will include and support them.

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