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MEDIA REPRESENTATION OF THE NEW DISNEY PRINCESSES: PORTRAYAL OF
GENDER ROLES

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BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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DEDICATION

THIS THESIS IS WHOLEHEARTEDLY DEDICATED TO MY FATHER AND MY BROTHER, THE UNWAVERING PILLARS OF MY LIFE. THEY HAVE CEASELESSLY INFUSED MY WORLD WITH LOVE AND SUPPORT, MAKING ME FEEL LIKE THE CHERISHED PRINCESS OF THEIR LIVES. THEIR CONSTANT ENCOURAGEMENT TO PURSUE MY DREAMS HAS BEEN THE GUIDING LIGHT ON MY JOURNEY, ILLUMINATING THE PATH TO ACHIEVING THIS MILESTONE. TO THEM, I OWE A WORLD OF GRATITUDE AND LOVE.

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Abstract

This study explores the evolving representation of gender roles in the Disney Princess movies: *"Tangled"* (2010), *"Moana"* (2016), and *"Raya and the Last Dragon"* (2021). Utilizing semiotic methodology, the research examines Ronald Barthes theory on how these films both challenge and perpetuate cultural myths and ideologies related to gender roles focused on a Western-Euro American perspective. The investigation focuses on the portrayal of New Disney Princesses and their alignment with contemporary mythological constructs. By analyzing the visual, textual, and symbolic elements in these movies, the study seeks to uncover the interplay between cultural themes and narrative structures, and how they reflect and influence societal narratives and cultural ideologies. The research contributes to scholarly discourse on media representation and gender dynamics, highlighting the evolving roles of Disney Princesses as influential cultural artifacts in shaping societal values, particularly among younger demographics. This study is significant in understanding the reciprocal influence between media and societal ethos, offering insights into the fabric of contemporary mythology as it intertwines with popular media.

Keywords: Disney Princesses, Gender Roles, Semiotic Analysis, Cultural Myths, Media Representation, Contemporary Mythology, Roland Barthes, Narrative Structures, Societal Narratives, Visual Analysis.

Chapter 1 Introduction/Rationale

"One of the most prolific authors of the princess today is Disney organization which produces her in animation, theme parks, on stage, and in merchandise" (Do Rozario, 2014, p. 34). The princesses that come from Disney are not the same princesses that came from past tales or folklore of the past. These Disney princesses have played a significant role in global popular culture, transcending generations and borders. They captivate people of all ages and backgrounds, offering timeless tales of love, bravery, and overcoming adversity. These iconic characters not only entertain but also convey universal values such as the importance of friendship, determination, and authenticity. Their presence in movies, theme parks, and a wide range of consumer products have turned Disney Princesses into a cultural phenomenon (Do Rozario, 2004).

The purpose of this study is to understand the contemporary mythological construction of the New Disney Princesses focusing on portrayal of gender roles. While acknowledging the significance of intersectional dimensions such as ethnicity, socioeconomic class, and other facets of identity, this thesis primarily concentrates its analytical efforts on the exploration of gender roles. It is important to note that this focus does not diminish the relevance of other intersectional characteristics, but rather defines the specific scope of this research within the broader context of identity studies. The study aims to decode the myths that have been articulated in the semiotic systems that are being created in the newer Disney films primarily focusing on a Western-Euro American perspective. This builds on Roland Barthes' perspective on myth, which is a form of communication that takes ordinary, everyday objects, concepts, or ideas and imbues them with a particular cultural or ideological meaning. These meanings are not inherent in the objects themselves but are constructed and perpetuated by society through signs, symbols, and

narratives. (Barthes, 1972). This study implements a meticulous research methodology using textual analysis underpinned by semiotic analysis. This methodological framework enables this study to deconstruct and scrutinize the textual elements, symbols, and signifiers inherent in the material, toward understanding of the interplay between cultural themes and narrative structures in the depiction of modern Disney Princesses. This approach aims to contribute to the perspective into scholarly discourse on the evolving representations of Disney Princess animated films.

This research uses the classification framework proposed by England et al. (2011) for categorizing Disney Princess films, which organizes them into three distinct groups based on their chronological release: "the earlier movies, middle movies, and the most current film." (England, 2011, p. 555) According to England's chronological scheme, the earlier films include *"Snow White and the Seven Dwarves"* (1937), *"Cinderella"* (1950), and *"Sleeping Beauty"* (1959). The middle films include *"The Little Mermaid"* (1989), *"Beauty and the Beast"* (1991), *"Aladdin"* (1992), *"Pocahontas"* (1995), and *"Mulan"* (1998). As for the most current one England analyzed *"Princess and the Frog"* (2009). Notably, at the time of the study and data collection, certain films had not yet been released, requiring the grouping of *"Tangled"* (2010), *"Brave"* (2012), *"Moana"* (2016), and *"Raya and the Last Dragon"* (2021) to be part of the most recent films category for the purposes of this investigation. It is essential to bear in mind that this categorization is based on the temporal context of the analysis and may evolve as additional films become available for scrutiny.

This study focuses on an analysis of the three most recent Disney Princess films, as of the time of this research, which were not included in England's examination. These films include *"Tangled"* (2010), directed by Nathan Greno and Byron Howard; *"Moana"* (2016), directed by

John Musker and Ron Clements; and *"Raya and the Last Dragon"* (2021), directed by Don Hall and Carlos López Estrada. This thesis focuses on a textual analysis of the three films. It would remain for future research to explore the creative contributions of the people responsible for creating these movies.

On the other hand, it should be noted that while the character Merida from the movie *Brave* (2012) is recognized as an official Disney princess ("Disney Princess," n.d.) she is not the focus of this study due to this film's origins with Pixar, rather than Disney's mainline animation studio. While Merida has indeed been incorporated into the Disney Princess lineup, her origins in a Pixar production pose unique challenges for a consistent analysis because Pixar operates with distinct narrative and artistic sensibilities when compared to Walt Disney Animation Studios (Wise, 2014). In the book by Prince (2008) "*The Pixar Touch: The Making of a Company*" talks about how the developmental and creative processes at Pixar, from storyboarding to character development, differ from those of Disney, even though both studios have been under the larger Disney corporate umbrella since 2006 (Pierce, 2008). On the other hand, the cultural, historical, and thematic contexts embedded within Pixar films might not seamlessly align with those intrinsic to movies produced directly by Walt Disney Animation Studios. Thus, while Merida is officially recognized as a Disney Princess, for a rigorous and consistent analysis that sought to uncover patterns, themes, and trends within the official Disney Princess movies, it was methodologically prudent to exclude Merida due to her Pixar origins. This ensures a more cohesive dataset based on origin studio, creative process, and potentially shared thematic undertones.

Investigations have been carried out over the years on the films of past Disney princesses, their characters, and their impact on children. In the research "Pretty as a Princess: Longitudinal

Effects of Engagement with Disney Princesses on Gender Roles Stereotypes, Body Esteem, and Prosocial Behavior in Children," Coyne, Linder, J. R., Rasmussen, E. E., Nelson, and D. A., & Birkbeck (2016) show that engagement with the Disney Princess paradigm has been demonstrated to impact the assimilation of gender-based stereotypes, potentially facilitating the propagation of a culture characterized by pronounced gender-specific behaviors and their associated valuation.

It is important to state early on that this study primarily focuses on a Western-Euro American perspective, examining the representations of Disney Princesses through a lens deeply rooted in contemporary Western cultural and societal contexts. The analysis is anchored in the norms, values, and ideologies that are prevalent in Western societies, particularly those pertaining to gender roles and dynamics. This perspective is critical in understanding how Disney Princesses are depicted and interpreted within this specific cultural framework. The evaluation of gender role performance must be contextualized within specific cultural frameworks or underlying assumptions regarding the dynamics of gender roles. This study, focusing on films primarily produced, but not strictly for a Western Euro-American audience, addresses, and interprets issues of gender roles within this particular cultural context. However, it's important to acknowledge that this approach may not encompass the diverse interpretations and perceptions that might arise from different cultural or global contexts. As such, the findings and insights derived from this study are significantly influenced by, and perhaps limited to, the Western-Euro American viewpoint, necessitating caution when applying these conclusions universally.

The Disney Princess movies, *Tangled, Moana, and Raya and the Last Dragon* serve as influential cultural artifacts with the potential to shape societal values and perceptions, especially

among younger demographics. The messages they convey provide insights into the evolving dynamics of gender roles, representation, cultural inclusivity, and the socio-cultural zeitgeist of the contemporary era. Additionally, understanding these representations can contribute to understanding Disney's strategic narrative choices in response to global societal trends and audience preferences. This research, which is focused on a textual analysis of these films, attempts to further academic discourse surrounding cultural motifs that manifest in contemporary Disney films. The investigation specifically analyzes these themes, grounding an analysis in frameworks of portrayal of gender roles, thereby enriching the existing body of knowledge in media studies and cultural representation.

This research delves into the portrayal of gender roles in Disney Princess movies, particularly in *"Tangled," "Moana," and "Raya and the Last Dragon,"* areas not thoroughly examined in prior studies, since these are relatively new films. Distinct from earlier research, this study investigates these modern Disney Princess films through the lens of contemporary mythology, using Roland Barthes' semiotic theory. It aims to shed light on how these movies both challenge and reinforce cultural myths and ideologies about gender roles, thereby offering new insights into the dynamic roles of Disney Princesses and their influence on societal values, with a specific focus on younger audiences. By applying Barthes' theory, the study uncovers the intricate ways these films shape and mirror societal narratives and cultural values, particularly concerning the evolution of gender roles. This research significantly enhances the understanding of how media influences societal perceptions of gender, particularly in younger demographics.

This study acknowledges its limitations. Firstly, there is an emphasis on subjectivity in semiotic analysis: The study employs semiotic analysis, which inherently involves a degree of subjectivity. Interpretations of symbols, themes, and messages can vary, and different

researchers might draw different conclusions from the same material. Secondly, there is the

cultural and societal specificity: The findings and interpretations are specific to the cultural and

societal context within which these films were produced and may not be universally applicable.

The study is grounded in contemporary Western Euro-American perspectives on gender roles,

which might not resonate or be applicable in different cultural contexts. It is essential to also

acknowledge that contemporary Disney Princess films, in the context of character representation,

have not markedly deviated from their predecessors with regards to the portrayal, or rather the

absence, of non-binary characters. This observation is critical when analyzing the evolution of

character representation in these films. Despite advances in other areas, such as the depiction of

more autonomous and complex female leads, the continued lack of non-binary character

representation suggests a persistent adherence to traditional gender binaries. This aspect warrants

further examination to understand its implications for audience perception and the broader

cultural narrative around gender identity in mainstream animated films. Lastly, there is also an

active changing of societal norms through the years. The conclusions drawn are based on the

current societal and cultural norms and interpretations. These norms are continuously evolving,

and what is considered a progressive or challenging representation today might be viewed

differently in the future. On the other hand, this study focuses on the content of the films

themselves and does not incorporate how audiences, especially children, perceive and are

influenced by these films. Audience reception is a crucial aspect of understanding the impact of

media representations. The study recognizes that its analysis reflects a particular perspective and

acknowledges that interpretations of these films may vary among different individuals. This

implies a subjective element in the research, where different viewers might derive different

meanings from the movies based on their personal experiences and perspectives.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Numerous scholarly investigations have been undertaken over the years regarding Disney and its cohort of Princesses. However, this literature review will exclusively study the representations of Disney Princesses, concentrating particularly on aspects of portrayal of gender roles. Disney Princesses are characters that, over the years, have been called iconic and "The Princesses of Princesses" because they have had a significant impact on popular culture and many people's lives, especially during their childhood (Do Rozario, 2004). This impact has created an emotional bond since many people have memories and connections with Disney princesses (Hernández Gutiérrez, 2020). These characters often generate "reflective" nostalgia and a sense of belonging since they have been part of many people's childhoods who, as adults, find community in their past shared media experience (Boym, 2001, p.49). While the character of *Snow White* in the movie and *"Snow White the Seven Dwarfs"*, the first Disney Princess, made her debut in 1937, it was not until the year 2001 that the official Disney Princess franchise was established (England, 2011) The establishment of the Disney Princess product line wielded a significant influence on the economic landscape of the Disney Princess franchise, resulting in a remarkable 123.3% sales increase over a mere seven-year period, transitioning from a valuation in the millions to a multibillion-dollar enterprise (Setoodeh and Yabroff, 2007) Given its substantial market presence, it is unsurprising that Disney possesses the capacity to influence and alter the viewpoints of its audience (Wardah et al., 2022) "The popularity of the princesses in Disney feature animation, merchandise, theme parks, and ice shows makes her one of the best-known models of princesses construction" (Do Rozario, 2004, p. 34) Over time, the portrayal of Disney princesses has undergone transformation, both in terms of introducing new characters and in the evolution of their attributes and narrative themes, as they are presented to successive

generations across diverse media adaptations. At present, Disney has a total of 13 Disney princesses ("Disney Princess," n.d.)

Numerous scholarly investigations have been conducted to examine the portrayal of the Disney princesses. The present study concentrates on and cites prior research endeavors related to Disney princesses. Specifically, this study draws upon the analyses conducted by England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek (2011) in their work titled "Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses," as well as the research of Do Rozario (2004) as presented in the study titled "The Princess and the Magic Kingdom: Beyond Nostalgia, the Function of the Disney Princess" and lastly the study of Maegan Davis (2014) titled "From Snow to Ice: A Study of the Progression of Disney Princesses from 1937 to 2014." Elizabeth England and her colleagues (2011) classify the Disney princesses into three distinct groups: those from earlier movies, those from middle movies, and those from the most recent movies. "The films span a period from 1937 to the present, allowing for a chronological analysis of the princess line" (England, et al., 2011, p557)

Alternatively, Do Rozario (2004) presents a classification scheme somewhat analogous to that of Elizabeth England and her colleagues. Nevertheless, Do Rozario distinguishes between two categories: the princesses created during the tenure of the founder, Walt Disney, and those crafted posthumously, which remained under the stewardship of the Disney Era when the studios were managed by Michael Eisner. It is noteworthy that the movies of Do Rozario's classification of Walt Disney princesses align with England et al.'s grouping of princesses from the earlier movies such as "*Snow White*" (1937) and "*Sleeping Beauty*" (1959). On the other hand, Disney Era analyzes "*The Little Mermaid*" (1989), "*Aladdin*" (1992) and "*Pocahontas*" (1995) movies that are incorporated in the middle movies of England and her colleague's classification.

In Megan Davis's (2014) research, a similar categorization of the princess to the current study was employed, with reference to England's (2011) study as a foundational framework. Davis conducted an analysis aimed at tracing the developmental trajectory of Disney Princesses spanning the years from 1937 to 2014. It is pertinent to note that during the timeframe of Davis's investigation, two additional films, "*Tangled*," which is also a subject of scrutiny in the present study, and "Frozen," were incorporated into her analysis. It is important to keep in mind that at the juncture when Davis scrutinized the film *"Frozen"* (2013), both Ana and Elsa held the official designation of Disney Princesses. However, the subsequent release of *"Frozen II"* in 2019 resulted in Elsa and Ana ascending to the status of queens, thereby marking their departure from the roster of Disney Princesses ("Disney Princess," n.d.)

The earlier movies – the earlier princesses

According to England and her colleagues' analysis (2011) the categorization of the earlier movies is three Disney Princesses from the movies *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), "*Cinderella*" (1950), and "*Sleeping Beauty*" (1959) These three movies exhibited more pronounced gender stereotypes and adhered to traditional gender roles compared to their counterparts in the middle and the more recent movies (England et al., 2011) The characters *Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora*, were intricately crafted to embody a multifaceted blend of behaviors and attributes that both shaped their roles in their respective narratives and mirrored the societal norms and ideals prevalent during their respective creation periods (England et al., 2011)

Another important aspect of England's (2011) study talks about the assertiveness of the three princesses and how this was more prominent in interactions with animals and children than

with adult figures. These princesses were notably absent from narratives involving power acquisition, leadership roles, fear-inspiring actions, or heroic rescues, as these aspects of the storyline primarily revolved around their respective princes (England et al., 2011)

England (2011) emphasizes how these princesses consistently exhibited a specific range of behaviors, such as affectionate gestures that showcased their warmth, kindness, and great capacity for compassion. Their helpful nature further defined their characters as they often went to great lengths to assist others, whether it was aiding animals, friends, or even strangers, reinforcing traditional gender roles that highlighted women's roles as caregivers and nurturers. (England et al., 2011). Moreover, these princesses found themselves entangled in troublesome or challenging situations within their stories. Moments of fear or vulnerability were also woven into their narratives. The study "Gender role portrayal and the Disney princesses" (2011) also analyzes how the movies highlight the princesses physical beauty, an undeniable facet of their characterizations, this was often described by England and her colleagues, as unparalleled and central to their stories; Snow White's beauty catalyzed her stepmother's jealousy, *Cinderella*'s transformation into a vision of loveliness was pivotal to her narrative, and *Aurora's* ethereal beauty was integral to her fairy-tale charm. (England et al., 2011)

The depiction of gender roles in these early princess tales was notably simpler and more traditional. Snow White and *Cinderella*'s engagement in domestic labor was a prominent feature in their stories, reflecting both their servitude and their pursuit of affection through domestic work. In the case of *Cinderella*, her unwavering commitment to managing her stepmother's household was depicted without complaint, emphasizing her role as an obedient caretaker. In the context of these narratives, domestic work served as a multifaceted expression of servitude and a means to seek love and approval from others. (England et al., 2011)

In accordance with Do Rozario's categorization, Walt Disney's Princesses, notably *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, were depicted as performing household chores with a sense of contentment, under the implicit understanding that these domestic responsibilities would conclude upon their eventual union with their prince charming (Do Rozario, 2004)

In her scholarly work, Davis (2014) undertook an analysis of the article "Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses" by England and her colleagues (2011). Her study primarily focused on elucidating several key points regarding the depiction of these princesses. First and foremost, she noted that in the earlier Disney movies, the princesses were consistently portrayed as helpless individuals in distress, often in need of rescue by their respective "Prince Charming."

Furthermore, Davis (2014) emphasized that Snow White epitomized the stereotype of the ideal woman within these narratives. Beyond their involvement in domestic labor, these princesses were predominantly preoccupied with familial and personal relationships. They exhibited heightened emotional sensitivity and appeared less self-reliant, often relying on their male counterparts for both emotional and financial support. In the context of Snow White's story, Davis (2014) illustrated how the character made a pact to perform cooking and cleaning tasks for the male characters in exchange for protection. As England (2011) also observed, femininity was portrayed as closely linked to the pursuit of happiness and personal fulfillment through marriage and motherhood (David, 2014)

Building upon England's (2011) framework, David (2014) further delved into the characterization of Snow White as gullible and susceptible, citing her belief in the old hag's "magic wishing apple." The narrative stipulated that her revival hinged upon receiving a kiss from her true love, the prince. Moving on to *Cinderella*, Davis (2014) highlighted the adversity the character faced following her father's demise, leaving her in the care of her malevolent

stepmother. *Cinderella*, as depicted, exhibited minimal agency, and made no active attempts to ameliorate her living conditions until her fortuitous encounter with Prince Charming. The narrative underscored the notion that their love was pivotal in transforming *Cinderella*'s life for the better. Lastly, Davis (2014) analysis extended to the film *"Sleeping Beauty,"* wherein she underscored the significance of Prince Phillip's role in the story. Without his intervention, *Aurora's* fate would have been sealed when she pricked her finger. The researcher states that *Aurora* herself emerges as the most helpless among the early Disney princesses, largely characterized by her sedentary and comatose state throughout a substantial portion of the film (Davis, 2014).

The middle movies – the middle princesses

Proceeding with the subsequent series of analyses conducted by Elizabeth England and her research collaborators, the princesses from the movies *"The Little Mermaid"* (1989), *"Beauty and the Beast"* (1991), *"Aladdin"* (1992), *"Pocahontas"* (1995), and *"Mulan"* (1998) represented departure from their earlier counterparts in terms of character portrayal. In these films, the princess characters displayed a heightened level of assertiveness, especially in their interactions with both animals and human characters. This evolution in character traits reflects the shifting landscape of gender expectations, which became more complex with the emergence of feminist ideologies in the 1970s. (England et al., 2011) As Elizabeth England and her colleagues noted that contemporary expectations for women encompass a blend of traditional feminine traits alongside elements traditionally associated with masculinity, such as assertiveness, especially when women pursue roles outside the home "Women now are expected to maintain such a feminine traits and also incorporate aspects of "male" traits, such as assertiveness, if they are to

succeed outside of the home" (England et al., 2011, p. 563). This shift is prominently illustrated in the characters of *Pocahontas* and *Mulan*, who actively engaged in traditionally masculine activities. According to England and her colleagues the first Disney Princess film to challenge conventional gender roles was "*The Little Mermaid*." The titular character, *Ariel*, sought to explore the world, displaying independence and assertiveness. Interestingly, this film still upheld consistent stereotypes with regards to high levels of feminine behaviors. In "*Beauty and the Beast*," the princess, *Belle*, showcased a unique blend of bravery and femininity. She demonstrated assertiveness, independence, and intelligence while also harboring fears. Her intelligence set her apart as "different than the other girls." (England et. Al., 2011) In the case of "*Aladdin*," the princess, *Jasmine*, emerged as the most affectionate among the Disney Princesses. Conversely, *"Mulan,"* although initially portrayed as highly submissive, ultimately defied stereotypical gender roles by gaining physical strength and executing a powerful final rescue, challenging conventional expectations of femininity (England et al., 2011)

According to Do Rozario's categorization, the Disney Era featuring films such as *"The Little Mermaid," "Aladdin," and "Pocahontas"* present princess characters who deviate from traditional roles by eschewing household chores, neglecting conventional obligations, and embracing a more independent and unrestrained lifestyle. In this context, the tasks assigned to these princesses become their personal responsibilities, emphasizing their autonomy, openness, and the acknowledgment of their capacity to make choices, whether it pertains to selecting a husband or shaping their own future. While ostensibly existing within a patriarchal framework where paternal authority holds sway, these princesses actively engage in disrupting the established norms. In contrast to previous narratives where the femme fatale character disrupted patriarchal continuity, in this era the princess herself assumes an active role in challenging and

altering the existing order. Importantly, her choices are consistently respected and upheld, marking a departure from the prior patriarchal structures with no return to the previous status quo (Do Rozario, 2004)

Examining the research conducted by Davis (2014) the middle movies spanning from 1989 to 1998, shows a pivotal moment in the company's evolution towards presenting more proactive and empowered depictions of female characters. Notably, *Belle*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan* emerge as particularly progressive princesses within this period for several compelling reasons. Firstly, the princesses of the middle films initiate a shift towards collaborative endeavors with their male counterparts, aiming to attain happiness, stability, and well-being, in contrast to the traditional trope of passively awaiting the male rescue. *Belle* in *"Beauty and the Beast"* serves as a groundbreaking example, as it marks the first Disney Princess film where the female lead is portrayed as self-sufficient and unburdened by a love interest formed hastily. *Belle* displays agency in her decision-making process, recognizing her capacity for independent choices (Davis, 2014) Moreover, *Belle's* progressive nature is further demonstrated by her proactive role in rescuing both her father and the Beast, instead of relying on another male character to extricate her from adversity.

"*Pocahontas*" exhibits curiosity and a yearning for a more fulfilling life beyond her existing circumstances. Her relationship with John Smith is built on mutual trust and knowledge exchange, akin to the dynamics seen with *Belle. Pocahontas* significantly contributes to the male lead's survival, and her story departs from the traditional "happy ending" narrative observed in prior films (Davis, 2014), as she opts to remain with her family rather than pursue a conventional "happily ever after" by accompanying John Smith to England.

Davis (2014) highlights how in *"Mulan,"* there is a highly progressive portrayal of a female character. For the majority of the film, *Mulan* does not articulate the conventional qualities expected of women, such as poise, refinement, quietness, and punctuality. However, *Mulan's* actions defy these expectations; she is portrayed as clumsy and talkative. Her quest to bring honor to her family takes an unconventional route, ultimately challenging gender norms (Davis, 2014) *Mulan* embarks on her mission with confidence and a deep understanding of the potential outcomes, regardless of their nature.

Davis (2014) focuses on how the middle films in Disney's canon represent a significant departure from the earlier theme of rescuing family members and pursuing romantic interests, as exemplified in "*Beauty and the Beast"* and *"Pocahontas*." In *"Mulan,"* particularly, the female lead undertakes a remarkable role in safeguarding an entire nation (Davis, 2014)

The recent movies – the recent princesses

Focusing on the final group of Disney Princess films, characterized as "The most recent movies," In the research made by England and her colleagues (2011) they make a singular focus on the movie "*The Princess and the Frog*" (2009). This is attributed to the fact that it was the sole film accessible at the time of the investigation. Princess *Tiana*, the central character in this film, displayed a notable increase in assertiveness. Similar to the transitional films from the previous era, the portrayal of gender expectations became more intricate in this more contemporary narrative, coinciding with the rise of feminist ideologies in the 1970s (England et al., 2011). The researchers also highlighted how Princess *Tiana* was distinctly career-driven, a departure from traditional roles, and her singular dedication to her professional aspirations was initially presented with an undertone of concern, as it seemingly eclipsed her focus on socializing

or romantic love. However, the narrative ultimately demonstrated her success in both her career and love life, highlighting a nuanced perspective on balancing ambition and personal relationships (England et al., 2011) Notably there is a shift in the portrayal of femininity as Disney discontinued the emphasis on domestic work as a symbol of femininity, signifying a departure from earlier stereotypes. Princess *Tiana*, while skilled as a waitress and cook, acquired these abilities from her father, signifying a shift away from the traditional association of domestic skills with female characters, but at the same time ". "Race scholars may find it worth examining further that a resurgence of domestic work accompanied the first black princess" (England et al., 2011)

At the time of Davis (2014) study the three most recent Disney Princess films in chronological order were *"The Princess and the Frog," "Tangled,"* and *"Frozen."* Davis analyzes how in these films there is a noteworthy shift in how female characters are portrayed in Disney narratives, emphasizing the notion that women possess the capability to pursue and achieve their dreams independently, without the traditional reliance on male characters (Davis, 2014)This transformation in the portrayal of female characters represents a departure from previous Disney conventions and is indicative of a changing narrative landscape for instance in *"The Princess and the Frog,"* as expounded upon by Davis (2014), the movie exemplifies the values of perseverance and presents female characters in a distinct manner. Notably, *Tiana*, the protagonist, is portrayed as a resilient and determined individual who, unlike previous Disney princesses, is not primarily defined by her romantic aspirations or dependencies on male characters. Additionally, the character Charlotte, a childhood friend of *Tiana*, initially holds affection for Prince Naveen. However, upon discovering the developing relationship between *Tiana* and Prince Naveen, she lends her support without resorting to the conventional jealousy

often portrayed in earlier Disney films. For instance, in "Snow White," the Queen embodies the typical female archetype, perpetuating the image of the femme fatale, characterized by jealousy, self-centeredness, manipulation, and conniving behavior, ultimately necessitating her disguise to harm Snow White (Maity, 2014)

Davis analyzes how in *"Tangled," Rapunzel* emerges as a character marked by curiosity and a strong desire to embark on her life's journey by leaving the tower she has been living in her whole life. Notably, *Rapunzel* does not succumb to the allure of *Flynn Rider's* external charm and instead maintains her independence and self-identity. While *Flynn Rider* plays a role in aiding *Rapunzel's* escape from the tower and journey to see the floating lights, it is essential to recognize that *Rapunzel* remains the central figure with agency and power throughout her narrative. Although *Rapunzel* utilizes the assistance of a male character to fulfill her dreams, her character is not depicted as dependent on him, underscoring her autonomy and capability. Davis highlights that these three recent Disney Princess films, challenge traditional gender dynamics by showcasing female characters who possess the determination and agency to pursue their dreams independently, without solely relying on male counterparts. "The Disney Princess films have progressed with nearly every movie, therefore as more films are made, one can only assume that further progression will occur" (Davis, 2014)

Disney Films and Gender Roles

Lori Baker-Sperry and Liz Grauerholz, "The Pervasiveness and Persistence of the Feminine Beauty Ideal in Children's Fairy Tales" (2003) delve deep into the roots of how femininity, especially beauty, is depicted in the foundational stories of people's childhood. The

authors highlight how in Disney tales, it's evident that the "feminine beauty ideal – a construct where a woman's worth is often tied to her physical appearance – is not a recent phenomenon but has been deeply embedded in societal narratives for centuries" (Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, 2003). What the authors make in the research is that feminine beauty ideal refers to the commonly held notion or standard of what is considered beautiful or attractive in women encompassing various aspects of a woman's physical appearance. "Beauty is often portrayed as being the key to happiness and success in fairy tales. Beautiful female characters are often rewarded for their beauty, while unattractive female characters are often punished or ridiculed." (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 712) In this context, the authors refer to "a construct" of feminine beauty as a set of ideas and expectations about how women should look to be considered attractive. When Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz (2003) mention that the feminine beauty ideal is not a recent phenomenon, they emphasize that this concept has been a recurring theme since the first Disney Princess movie in 1937, illustrating how long-standing and deep-rooted these portrayals are in popular media. This concept has historical roots and has been present in societies for centuries, suggesting that it is deeply ingrained in cultural norms and beliefs, and it is deeply woven into the stories, traditions, and values of various societies throughout history. It has become a fundamental aspect of how women are perceived and treated within these societies which is what Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz's (2003) work analyzes, the evolution of the modern Disney Princess from their original form. The researchers proceed to analyze the adverse consequences associated with the heightened focus on beauty within this context. They observe that girls and women exposed to these messages, especially from an early age, may internalize the belief that their physical appearance holds paramount importance in defining their worth. Such beliefs can precipitate diminished self-esteem and the development of

eating disorders. Girls who are exposed to these messages from a young age may come to believe that their physical appearance is the most important thing about them. This can lead to low self-esteem, eating disorders, and other mental health problems. (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 721) Furthermore, the authors contend that the accentuation of beauty within "The emphasis on feminine beauty in fairy tales can contribute to sexism and misogyny by reinforcing the idea that women are valued primarily for their physical appearance. (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003, p. 723)

Maity's "Damsels in Distress: A Textual Analysis of Gender Roles in Disney Princess Films" (2014) talks about how Disney princess movies depict women in conventional and detrimental manners, often portraying them as helpless individuals in need of rescue, relegated to supporting roles, or emphasizing self-sacrifice. These entrenched stereotypes within these films can exert an adverse influence on the self-esteem of young girls and their comprehension of their inherent value. The author directs the attention toward three principal features:

1. Damsels in distress: Several Disney princesses are portrayed as lacking personal agency and depending on male characters to secure a better life or to be rescued from dire circumstances. For instance, Snow White is spared from the consequences of a poisoned apple through the intervention of Prince Charming, and *Sleeping Beauty* is roused from her extended slumber by his kiss "This recurring thematic archetype reinforces the perception of female vulnerability and underscores their reliance on male intervention for their deliverance and overall well-being This stereotype teaches girls that they are weak and need to be saved by men, which is harmful to their self-esteem and sense of independence." (Maity, 2014, p. 28)

2. Supporting Roles: the authors highlight how "In numerous instances, the female protagonist played a supporting role to the male protagonist. Weak Princesses always needed to be rescued by Prince Charming." (Maity, 2014, p. 29). For instance, *Ariel* relinquishes her voice to be with Prince Eric, and *Cinderella* sacrifices her personal freedom to reside in the castle with Prince Charming. "The recurring stereotype of damsel in distress imparts the message to young girls that their principal life objective should revolve around finding a husband and pursuing a 'happily ever after' ending." (Maity, 2014, p. 28)

3. Self-sacrifice: "A recurring theme in Disney princess narratives involves the depiction of several princesses as exemplifying selflessness, willing to forfeit their own well-being for the benefit of others." (p. 29) For instance, *Jasmine* relinquishes her freedom to marry *Aladdin*, and *Pocahontas* forsakes her romantic love for John Smith in order to protect her community. This stereotype can instill in girls the notion that they should consistently prioritize the well-being of others over their personal needs, potentially leading to detrimental consequences for their mental and emotional well-being. Maity's (2014) analysis highlights that Disney princess films perpetuate detrimental stereotypes regarding women and gender roles. She contends that these cinematic portrayals may exert an adverse influence on the self-esteem of girls and their comprehension of their intrinsic value. (Maity, 2014)

In the article "Animating gender roles: How Disney is redefining the modern princess," Juliana Garabedian (2015) states that Disney is reshaping the contemporary concept of princesses in its recent animated films. She acknowledges that "Disney has a long history of reinforcing traditional gender roles, with its princesses often portrayed as damsels in distress who

need to be saved by their male counterparts" (Garabedian, 2015, p. 4) Nonetheless, the author contends that in recent times, Disney has started to depart from this conventional portrayal, crafting princess characters who exhibit greater independence, courage, and heroism. Garabedian (2015) cites films like *"Brave"* (2012) and *"Frozen"* (2013) as instances of this emerging archetype within Disney princess narratives. In "*Brave,*" the central character Merida is portrayed as a proficient archer who challenges her parental expectations and undertakes a journey to alter her destiny by forgoing marriage. In "*Frozen,*" the two main characters, Elsa and Anna, are depicted as resilient and competent young women who discover the value of mutual reliance rather than relying on a prince for their salvation. The researcher argues that these contemporary Disney princesses hold significance as they offer positive role models for young girls. "These new Disney princesses are important because they provide young girls with positive role models. They show girls that they can be strong, independent, and successful without needing to be rescued by a man." (Garabedian, 2015, p. 4). Moreover, they impart the importance of pursuing one's aspirations and remaining authentic to oneself. Lastly the researcher posits that "Disney's redefinition of the modern princess is a positive step forward for gender equality." (Garabedian, 2015, p. 5) Through the portrayal of princesses characterized by strength, independence, and heroism, Disney contributes to the dismantling of conventional gender norms and fosters the cultivation of a more inclusive environment for young girls.

Barthes' Semiotics of Myth

Barthes was interested in how everyday things, like images or characters in a movie, carry deeper meanings that often go unnoticed. He argued that these elements become "naturalized" over time, which means we accept them as just the way things are, without

questioning their origin or deeper significance (Barthes, 1957). This acceptance process turns them into myths. Barthes' (1957) framework helps us see that these characters and narratives are not just entertainment; they're also vehicles for conveying broader cultural messages. These messages, over time and repetition, become so ingrained that we often don't even realize they're there. That's the power of myth, according to Barthes (1957). "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact," (Barthes, 1972).

Disney stories often have a deeper layer of meaning beyond just the colorful animations and catchy songs. These tales are rich with symbols and narratives that resonate with cultural beliefs and values. In his essay "Myth Today" (1957), Roland Barthes argues that semiotics can be used to decode the myths that surround us in everyday life. He defines myth as "a type of speech" (p. 109) and a "second order semiological system" (p. 111), meaning that it is a system of signs that refers to another system of signs. The first-order system of signs is the literal meaning of the myth, while the second-order system of signs is the latent meaning of the myth.

Barthes also discusses the concepts of denotation and connotation in his essay. Denotation is the literal meaning of a sign, while connotation is the cultural or emotional associations that a sign carries with it. Barthes argues that myths use connotation to create their latent meanings. Denotation is the literal, dictionary meaning of a sign. It is the meaning that is agreed upon by most people in a culture. Connotation is the cultural or emotional associations that a sign carries with it. Connotations can vary from person to person and from culture to culture. For example, the connotation of the word "dog" might be "loyal and loving companion" for some people, while it might be "wild and dangerous animal" for others.

Barthes defines myth as "a second order semiological system" (p. 111). This means that myths are systems of signs that refer to other systems of signs. The first-order system of signs is the literal meaning of the myth, while the second-order system of signs is the latent meaning of the myth.

Barthes argues that myths use connotation to create their latent meanings. The latent meaning of a myth is its hidden or underlying meaning. This meaning is often created through the use of connotation. For example, the Disney Princess myth uses connotation to create a latent meaning of femininity that is based on passivity, beauty, and dependence.

The literature review provided predominantly centers its attention on preceding Disney Princess films and their treatment of gender roles. Although it briefly alludes to *"Frozen"* (2013) and *"Brave"* (2012) as instances of princess characters exhibiting greater autonomy and strength, it refrains from conducting an in-depth analysis of more recent Disney Princess movies, including *"Tangled"* (2010), *"Moana"* (2016), and *"Raya and the Last Dragon"* (2021) based on Ronald Barthes theory of the Myth.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

The realm of Disney Princesses, an integral component of animated film history, has long served as a mirror reflecting societal norms, values, and transformations (Do Rozario, 2004). In such a cultural ambiance, the narratives, and portrayals of these princesses play an important role in influencing and molding the perceptions and ideologies. With this in consideration, the pursuit of understanding the portrayal of gender roles of the New Disney Princesses through the prism of contemporary mythological constructs becomes crucial in decoding the intersections between media representation and societal shifts.

The research questions that will be asked to further analyze the media representation of New Disney Princesses are:

1. How do the most recent Disney Princesses movies, such as *Tangled* (2010) *Moana* (2016) and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021) challenge traditional gender roles within the framework of current mythologies?

2. How do the most recent Disney Princesses movies, such as *Tangled* (2010), *Moana* (2016), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), perpetuate cultural myths and ideologies related to gender roles, as analyzed through Roland Barthes' semiotic methodology?

The first research question ventures into the portrayal of New Disney Princesses, seeking to correlate their narratives and visuals with contemporary mythological constructs. Analyzing such connections is significant as it delves into how prevalent societal narratives and cultural ideologies are embodied and potentially propagated through these characters. It uncovers

the layers of societal values and norms linked within these portrayals, offering insights into the fabric of contemporary mythology as it connects with popular media.

The second question is attempting to investigate how recent Disney Princess movies create and sustain cultural myths and ideologies regarding gender roles. It seeks to understand how these films, when subjected to analysis using Roland Barthes' semiotic methodology, utilize signs, symbols, and narratives to shape and reinforce particular cultural beliefs and stories about how gender roles function in society. This question aims to explore how the visual, textual, and symbolic elements within these Disney Princess movies convey messages and ideas about gender roles in contemporary culture. It intends to uncover whether these films contribute to the perpetuation or challenge of traditional gender norms and how they participate in the broader discourse on gender representation in media. "Myth does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact." (Barthes, 1972)

Addressing the representation and challenge of traditional gender roles by the New Disney Princess movies is essential, given the influential nature of Disney in shaping societal norms (England, 2011). By examining the framework of current mythologies in these films, this research aims to evaluate how Disney navigates the balance between perpetuating and challenging ingrained gender norms, thereby contributing to the ongoing dialogue surrounding gender dynamics in media.

Understanding how these narratives are enriched by diverse elements provides an avenue to explore the role of Disney films in shaping and expanding the boundaries of contemporary mythological narratives. Examining these research questions is invaluable as they collectively

elucidate how influential platforms like Disney interact with and are molded by the evolving

cultural, societal, and mythological narratives of our contemporary landscape. This exploration

serves as a medium to understand the reciprocatively influence between media and societal

ethos, making it a crucial academic endeavor.

Chapter 4: Methods

The objective of the research is to delve into the subtextual narratives present in three Disney Princess films: *Tangled* (2010), *Moana* (2016), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021). The aim is to elucidate the themes and messages, particularly focusing on the contemporary mythological constructs of the New Disney Princesses, with an emphasis on the portrayal of gender roles. From a cultural perspective, this study endeavors to deconstruct the myths articulated within the semiotic frameworks established in these recent Disney productions. For the intent of this research, the underlying rationale is posited on the premise that the three films in question serve as conduits for understanding what values and ideologies have been naturalized within societal contexts.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is a systematic method employed to scrutinize and interpret a diverse range of textual artifacts, encompassing written materials, spoken discourse, visual representations, cinematic productions, advertising campaigns, and various modes of communication. "Textual analysis is all about language, what it represents and how we use it to make sense of our lives" (Brennen, 2021, p.203) Its primary aim is to elucidate the latent meanings, conveyed messages, and inherent significance embedded within these textual entities. "In other words, text are things that we use to make meaning" (Brennen, 2021, p. 204) This analytical approach helps this study because it entails a comprehensive examination of the textual components, encompassing content, structural elements, linguistic features, symbolic representations, and the surrounding contextual milieu of the three Disney Princesses movies. According to Brennen (2021) by doing so, it facilitates a deeper comprehension of the text's

underlying purpose, ideological underpinnings, and its alignment with the cultural, social, or political contexts within which it originated. Textual analysis is a crucial mythology for this research because it implements semiotic analysis. "While semiotics is a general term that includes a variety of different methodological tools and theoretical perspectives, it provides insights for analyzing texts within culturally specific social practices" (Brennen, 2021, p. 207)

 The study draws on Roland Barthes' perspective on myths as forms of communication that imbue objects, concepts, or ideas with cultural or ideological meanings through signs, symbols, and narratives. Semiotic analysis allows to delve into the symbolic and cultural meanings embedded in the Disney Princess narratives focused on gender roles. This approach helps uncover the hidden messages, values, and beliefs conveyed by these films. The research also focuses on the deconstruction of textual elements. Textual analysis enables the study to deconstruct and scrutinize the textual elements, symbols, and signifiers present in the Disney Princess movies. By examining the visual and narrative components of these films, the study can identify how gender roles are portrayed and the ways in which they are constructed within the movies.

Semiotics

Semiotics is the study of signs, symbols, and their meanings and interpretations (Saussure, 1916). It delves into how humans construct and derive meaning from these signs within various contexts. According to Saussure (1916) "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image." This notion, presented in *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), underscores the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified,

emphasizing the integral role of societal conventions in the formation of meaning, which in turn highlights the central importance of semiotics in linguistic analysis.

In textual analysis, semiotics is vital because it allows for a deeper understanding of underlying cultural codes, power dynamics, and layered meanings in texts. By examining the relationship between signifiers and the signified, semiotics offer insights into how texts communicate, often beyond their explicit messages, highlighting the complex ways meaning is constructed and conveyed. Saussure (1916) introduced this perspective on language, conceptualizing it as a system of signs. He delineated the sign into two parts: the "signifier" (the form or sound image of the word) and the "signified" (the concept the word refers to) (Saussure, 1916). What's key in Saussure's (1916) assertion is the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified. By stating that semiotics is a method of textual analysis, Saussure (1916) emphasizes the structured nature of language, where meaning arises not from an inherent connection between words and their referents, but from the relational differences between signs within the linguistic system. This differential approach laid the groundwork for structuralism in linguistics, where the focus shifts from individual signs to the overarching system and relations that shape meaning. For example, for *Moana's* body:

Signifier: *Moana*, unlike many previous Disney princesses, has a more athletic and sturdy build. She's not the waif-thin archetype that's often associated with femininity in animations.

Signified: This physical portrayal suggests strength, resilience, and capability. *Moana's* body type aligns with her role as a voyager and leader. It signifies that she's equipped for physical challenges and is not just a passive figure.

"If is the meaning of something that you want to study, semiotics may be the best approach for you" (Stokes, 2003). Stokes (2003) advocates for the utility of semiotics as a rigorous

methodological approach when the primary objective is to discern or decode meaning. Semiotics doesn't just examine the overt, surface-level content; it delves deeper into the underlying structures and systems that generate meaning. This includes studying how signs function within a system, how they relate to one another, and how cultural, social, and historical contexts influence their interpretation. By suggesting that semiotics might be the "best approach" for those who want to study meaning, Stokes (2003) acknowledges the unparalleled depth and complexity of this method can provide in the realm of textual, visual, and auditory analyses, making it an invaluable tool in the scientific study of communication. The utilization of semiotic analysis in this research provides a rigorous methodological approach for the systematic evaluation of symbolic representations in three Disney Princess films: *Tangled* (2010), *Moana* (2016), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021). The research implemented a meticulous research methodology covering textual analysis underpinned by semiotic analysis. The primary aim is to interpret the concealed or hidden semiotic structures and underlying belief systems inherent within the content. This work compelled iterative examinations of the dialogues and multiple screenings to fulfill the predefined research objectives.

This research employs the semiotic analysis method as recommended by Stokes (2006). The initial phase involves delineating the subjects for examination. The selected subjects are three Disney Princess movies *Tangled* (2010), *Moana* (2016), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021). These films were chosen as they are, at the time of this writing, the most recent Disney Princesses.

In the initial phase of the analysis, the textual content was delineated. Utilizing an approach influenced by Roland Barthes and his theoretical framework from "*Mythologies*" (1957), each film was examined in succession. The primary objective was to identify themes,

with particular emphasis on the predefined research categories of Portrayal of Gender Role. This was analyzed through Ronald Barthes denotative and connotative semiotic theory lens. The semiotic approach employed in this research aims to analyze the interplay between denotation and connotation within filmic texts. This involves systematically cataloging instances at the denotative level — the literal, direct meaning of elements in the films — followed by an examination at the connotative level, which pertains to the implicit, symbolic meanings these elements may convey. By scrutinizing the dynamics between these two levels of meaning, the study seeks to elucidate the underlying ideological constructs being presented and how they are shaped and communicated through the filmic medium.

The films were accessed via Disney+, facilitating the process by allowing for rewinding for enhanced clarity and pausing for the documentation of arising themes. Repetitive viewings will be conducted to ensure comprehensive identification and documentation of all relevant thematic elements.

In the subsequent phase, the themes were delineated. Themes pertaining to gender roles, such as leadership, independence, and emotional expression were identified. This identification process was achieved via a detailed textual analysis, examining plot trajectories and character functions. Attention was given to the way each princess embarks on her respective journey and the roles other characters play in either facilitating or impeding her progress. Additionally, through dialogue scrutiny, emphasis was placed on segments that either explicitly or implicitly shed light on gender roles.

For the semiotics part the research identified recurring symbols and signs in each movie. For instance, *Rapunzel's* hair or *Moana's* ocean. These signs were decoded in a way of what they represent in the context of gender roles. The research also focuses on cultural codes by

recognizing cultural symbols, attire, rituals, or other elements that give insight into the cultural setting and representation of each film. The goal is to understand how they align with or diverge from real-world cultural practices.

In the next step of the research process, a rigorous examination is employed through a meticulous cross-film examination, focusing specifically on unveiling existing patterns or disparities in the portrayal of gender roles across the trio of films. This examination facilitated a nuanced exploration into whether and how the depictions of gender roles have evolved or undergone any paradigmatic shifts of the narrative of *Tangled, Moana, and Raya and the Last Dragon.*

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, individual elements, such as character interactions, dialogue, and contextual elements, are scrupulously assessed to discern underlying themes and representations in each film. The comparative lens will enable an investigation into the progression or transformation of these elements over the span of the films, providing insights into the evolving dynamics of gender and cultural representations in contemporary Disney Princess Films. This will not only contribute to an understanding of individual film's thematic structures but will also enable a broader synthesis of overarching trends, nuances, and trajectories in the evolving landscape of Disney Princesses storytelling.

Chapter 5: Data

Tangled (2010)

Tangled (2010) is a modern retelling of the Rapunzel (1812) fairy tale. The story revolves around Rapunzel, a young princess with magical, healing hair who has been locked in a tower her entire life by an evil woman named Mother Gothel. Rapunzel longs to see the world beyond her tower, and when a charming thief named Flynn Rider stumbles upon her hiding place, she seizes the opportunity to leave. Together, they embark on an adventure to the kingdom, encountering various challenges and discovering each other's secrets. As their bond grows, Rapunzel realizes her true identity and confronts Mother Gothel. In the end, she sacrifices her magical hair to save Flynn, and they are reunited with her real parents, leading to a joyous celebration in the kingdom.

In the movie, Rapunzel's hair, which is both long and magical, serves as a central plot element, symbolizing both her uniqueness and the unfolding narrative., serving as the key to her captivity and escape. Connotatively, Rapunzel's hair can symbolize the traditional view of femininity, as long hair is often associated with beauty and vulnerability. It can be seen as a sign of her passive, captive state. However, her hair also represents her unique power, challenging the idea that femininity is synonymous with weakness.

In the captivating world of the film, Rapunzel's passive captivity is a poignant portrayal that carries both denotative and connotative layers. Denotatively, the film clearly illustrates how Rapunzel spends the majority of her life isolated and passive within the tower. However, the connotations interwoven into her captivity offer a more profound perspective. Rapunzel's situation reinforces traditional gender roles by casting her as a classic damsel in distress who requires rescue, aligning with the conventional narrative of women being dependent on men for

their salvation. This depiction highlights the pervasive influence of gender stereotypes, underscoring the need for more diverse and empowering representations of women in storytelling, where they can take on active and self-reliant roles, rather than being confined to traditional roles of dependency.

Rapunzel's creativity and curiosity manifest in a multitude of ways within the tower, as she engages in activities such as painting, reading, and exploring her limited surroundings. Beyond the denotative meaning, *Rapunzel's* interests in art and literature, coupled with her boundless curiosity, defy conventional gender norms by portraying her as a person with a broad range of interests that extend beyond stereotypical feminine pursuits. Through her creativity and thirst for knowledge, she challenges the notion that women should be confined to traditional domestic roles.

Rapunzel's yearning for independence is unmistakably conveyed through her journey beyond the tower's walls, symbolizing her profound longing for freedom and autonomy. Beyond the denotative interpretation, *Rapunzel's* quest also serves as a powerful challenge to conventional gender norms, as she boldly breaks free from her confinement and endeavors to carve out her own path in life. Her relentless pursuit of autonomy directly challenges the long-held expectation that women should be reliant on others for their well-being.

Rapunzel's interactions with *Flynn* Rider are multifaceted. On a denotative level, she forges an intricate relationship with *Flynn*, who starts as a thief, as they embark on a joint journey. Beyond the surface, *Rapunzel's* connection with *Flynn* disrupts traditional gender roles. She doesn't play the role of a helpless damsel in distress but instead takes an active role in their adventures, defying the notion that women should depend on men for protection or guidance.

Rapunzel's strength is evident throughout the film. On a denotative level, she displays both physical and emotional fortitude. On a connotative level, *Rapunzel's* strength serves as a potent challenge to conventional gender norms by presenting a female character who is capable of self-sufficiency and caring for others. Her unwavering resilience in the face of obstacles and adversity boldly contradicts the stereotype that women are inherently delicate or fragile.

In a connotative sense, *Rapunzel's* compliance with authority is evident through her initial obedience to *Mother Gothel's* commands, a behavior shaped by her captivity. However, when viewed in a denotative sense, *Rapunzel's* submission aligns with traditional gender norms that portray women as obedient and subservient. Her reluctance to challenge *Mother Gothel's* authority is a reflection of the societal expectation that women should conform to figures of authority.

In the story of *Rapunzel*, her empathy and compassion are displayed both denotatively and connotatively. In explicit terms, *Rapunzel* consistently demonstrates empathy and compassion toward others, even extending it to *Mother Gothel*, who has held her captive for years. However, the connotative aspect of *Rapunzel's* compassion goes beyond surface-level interpretations. It challenges prevailing stereotypes about women being overly emotional or weak. Her kindness and empathy not only enrich her character but also serve as a powerful reminder of the multifaceted nature of individuals, breaking free from traditional gender expectations.

Rapunzel's personal growth is evident both in its denotative and connotative dimensions. On a literal level*, Rapunzel* experiences substantial personal development as the story unfolds. However, the connotative perspective of her journey delves deeper, challenging conventional gender roles by highlighting the importance of self-discovery and self-empowerment. *Rapunzel's*

narrative underscores the value of personal agency over conforming to societal expectations, breaking free from traditional gender norms and offering a broader perspective on individual growth and empowerment.

In terms of denotation, *Mother Gothel* is presented as an elderly woman who maintains her youth and beauty by utilizing the magic of *Rapunzel's* hair. However, when considering the connotative layer, *Mother Gothel's* appearance serves as a commentary on society's fixation with youth and beauty, especially concerning women. This portrayal underscores the idea that a woman's worth is frequently associated with her physical attractiveness and perpetuates the anxiety surrounding the natural process of aging.

Regarding the manipulation of *Rapunzel,* the denotative aspect involves *Mother Gothel's* actions, where she manipulates *Rapunzel* by confining her in the tower and feigning motherhood. On a connotative level, *Mother Gothel* symbolizes a darker facet of motherhood and female authority. Her manipulative behavior serves to reinforce traditional gender roles, portraying women as crafty and domineering, frequently resorting to emotional manipulation as a means to attain their objectives. This depiction highlights the complexities and potential abuse of power within traditional gender dynamics.

In terms of domineering behavior, the denotative aspect involves *Mother Gothel's* actions, where she exercises control over every aspect of *Rapunzel's* life, setting strict rules and limitations. On a connotative level, *Mother Gothel's* domineering conduct aligns with established gender stereotypes that depict women as nurturing, yet it also underscores the potential for them to become overbearing and controlling, especially within mother-daughter relationships. This

portrayal highlights the nuanced dynamics and societal expectations surrounding women's roles, even in familial bonds.

Concerning the fear of loss, the denotative aspect involves *Mother Gothel's* specific apprehension, which is about losing *Rapunzel's* magical hair and the power it grants her. However, when considering the connotative dimension, *Mother Gothel's* fear of losing power through *Rapunzel's* growing independence can be seen as a reflection of broader societal anxieties about women gaining autonomy and challenging established gender roles. This depiction underscores the notion that women who strive for independence are often perceived as threats to the status quo, illustrating the complex relationship between power, gender, and societal expectations.

In terms of Motherly Guilt, the denotative component entails *Mother Gothel's* manipulation of *Rapunzel*, wherein she employs guilt as a tool to make *Rapunzel* feel indebted for her upbringing. However, on a connotative level, *Mother Gothel's* utilization of guilt aligns with entrenched gender roles portraying women as emotionally manipulative and skilled in inducing feelings of guilt. This strategy further reinforces the societal expectation that women should embody qualities of nurturance and self-sacrifice, illustrating how gender norms can influence interpersonal dynamics and power dynamics within relationships.

Mother Gothel's fate, the denotative aspect involves her tragic demise, where she rapidly ages upon the cutting of *Rapunzel's* hair. However, when considering the connotative dimension, *Mother Gothel's* fate can be interpreted as a cautionary narrative, warning against the repercussions of prioritizing one's appearance and youth excessively. It also serves as a reflection of society's tendency to devalue older women once they no longer conform to traditional beauty standards, emphasizing the broader societal attitudes towards aging and beauty.

When examining *Flynn Rider's* initial behavior, the denotative aspect involves his beginnings as a thief and rogue who pilfers the princess's crown. However, in terms of connotation, *Flynn Rider's* initial behavior subverts conventional expectations surrounding male heroes. His role as a thief challenges the typical portrayal of male characters as inherently virtuous and morally upright, diverging from the traditional image of male heroes who are heroic from the very start. This characterization adds depth and complexity to his role in the story.

In terms of *Flynn Rider's* character development, the denotative aspect involves his substantial transformation from a self-serving rogue to a more responsible and compassionate individual as the film progresses. However, when considering the connotative layer, *Flynn Rider's* character development challenges the stereotype that masculinity is inherently linked to reckless behavior and selfishness. His evolution suggests that men are capable of change and emotional growth, breaking away from traditional gender roles and illustrating the potential for individuals to defy societal expectations.

When examining the concept of *Flynn* becoming *Rapunzel's* equal partner, the denotative aspect entails their collaborative roles in their adventure, where both actively contribute to their journey. However, from a connotative perspective, *Flynn Rider's* partnership with *Rapunzel* challenges traditional gender dynamics. Their relationship does not conform to the conventional narrative of a man as the sole protector or rescuer of a woman. Instead, they function as equal partners, subverting the stereotype of men as dominant figures in relationships and emphasizing the importance of equality and cooperation in their dynamic.

In the animated world of Disney, *Flynn's* emotional vulnerability stands out as a noteworthy departure from typical male character stereotypes. Denotatively, *Flynn* showcases his

emotional vulnerability by opening up and sharing his personal backstory with *Rapunzel*.

However, the significance of this goes beyond mere disclosure. Connotatively, Flynn's

willingness to be emotionally vulnerable challenges the ingrained notion that men should always

be stoic and emotionally reserved. His openness paves the way for a deeper and more intimate

connection with *Rapunzel*, effectively subverting traditional gender expectations and redefining

the dynamics of their relationship. Much like Disney's "Moana" challenges and transcends

conventional gender roles through its characters, Flynn's emotional vulnerability in "Tangled" is

a pivotal moment that reshapes the narrative of masculinity in Disney storytelling.

  Flynn Rider's selflessness and sacrifice shine as a powerful example of breaking away

from established gender norms. Denotatively, Flynn's actions are crystal clear – he makes a

selfless sacrifice to save *Rapunzel*. However, the deeper meaning lies in the connotation. *Flynn*

Rider's selfless act stands as a direct challenge to the prevailing notion that men must always

prioritize their own needs and desires above all else. His willingness to sacrifice himself for

Rapunzel underscores the significance of empathy and compassion, effectively countering

traditional gender roles that often dictate men should be self-serving and emotionally detached.

Just as Flynn's act of selflessness redefines his character, it also reshapes our expectations of

masculinity within the broader context of Disney's storytelling.

  Within the enchanting narrative of "Tangled," *Flynn Rider's* character redemption serves

as a poignant departure from the conventional portrayal of male characters. Denotatively, *Flynn*'s

redemption arc is a clear depiction of his transformation from a criminal to a hero. Yet, the

underlying message carries profound connotations. *Flynn Rider's* redemption story boldly

challenges the stereotype that men are irredeemable if they have a history of questionable

behavior. It suggests that individuals, regardless of gender, have the capacity for change and the

ability to make amends for their past actions. In doing so, it defies the rigidity of traditional gender expectations, offering a more nuanced and compassionate perspective on personal growth and redemption, all while enriching the tapestry of storytelling within the Disney universe.

In the heartwarming story of "Tangled," the king and queen's protective parenting style offers a refreshing departure from traditional gender norms. Denotatively, the king and queen are depicted as loving and concerned parents who release lanterns every year with the hope of their daughter's return. However, the connotations embedded in their actions run deeper. The king and queen's unwavering devotion challenges the prevailing gender roles that often dictate fathers should maintain emotional distance while mothers bear the brunt of emotional responsibility. Their shared commitment to finding their daughter not only defies these stereotypes but also showcases a harmonious partnership in parenthood that transcends traditional gender expectations. In doing so, "Tangled" contributes to a more inclusive and diverse representation of family dynamics within Disney's storytelling.

The king and queen's ongoing quest takes center stage as a departure from conventional gender roles. Denotatively, the king and queen annually dispatch riders into the world in search of their long-lost daughter. However, the underlying connotations carry a more profound message. Their unwavering commitment challenges the established gender norms, as it portrays both parents as active agents in the tireless search for their child. This approach defies the traditional notion of fathers as passive figures in family matters, highlighting their equal emotional investment and determination to reunite with their daughter. In this way, "Tangled" contributes to a more inclusive and progressive representation of parental roles within Disney's storytelling, emphasizing the shared responsibility and commitment of both parents in a family's journey.

In the poignant moments of "Tangled," the king's expression of grief stands as a profound departure from conventional gender stereotypes. Denotatively, the king is depicted shedding tears during the lantern ceremony in memory of his lost child. However, the connotations inherent in his emotional display carry a more significant message. The king's heartfelt expression challenges the deeply ingrained stereotype that men shouldn't cry. His grief serves as a powerful representation of paternal love and profound loss, effectively countering traditional expectations that often demand indifference from men. In doing so, "Tangled" contributes to a more nuanced portrayal of emotions, demonstrating that anyone, regardless of gender, can experience and openly express deep and genuine emotions in the face of profound loss and love.

The unity between the king and queen serves as a powerful counterpoint to traditional gender roles. Denotatively, the king and queen are clearly united in their shared quest to find their daughter and in their deep love for *Rapunzel*. However, the connotations woven into their partnership hold even greater significance. Their unwavering unity challenges the conventional gender norms that often prescribe distinct roles and responsibilities based on gender. Instead, it presents a partnership where both parents are equally and wholeheartedly committed to their child's well-being. This portrayal defies the notion of gendered divisions of labor and responsibilities, emphasizing the importance of mutual support and collaboration in family life. "Tangled" contributes to a more progressive and inclusive representation of parenthood within Disney's storytelling, highlighting the strength of shared commitment and love between both parents.

The leadership roles of the king and queen provide an intriguing perspective that challenges traditional gender norms. Denotatively, the king and queen are clearly portrayed as

the rulers of their kingdom. However, the connotations embedded in their positions carry deeper implications. Their leadership roles defy conventional gender roles by presenting a queen in a position of power. Although this aspect is not explicitly explored in the film, it hints at a more gender-inclusive perspective on leadership. By showcasing a queen as a co-ruler alongside the king, "Tangled" subtly challenges the notion that leadership is inherently gender-biased, opening the door to a more diverse and inclusive portrayal of leadership roles in storytelling.

In the animated feature *"Tangled"* (2010) the character development and interactions provide an interesting lens through which to examine gender roles. The film presents a compelling challenge to conventional gender roles within contemporary mythologies through its central character, *Rapunzel*. *Rapunzel's* long, magical hair serves as both a denotative and connotative symbol in the narrative. Denotatively, her hair represents a key plot element, signifying her captivity and unique power. Connotatively, it symbolizes traditional femininity, often associated with beauty and vulnerability, thereby challenging the prevalent notion that femininity equates to weakness. *Rapunzel's* captivity in the tower aligns with traditional gender roles, casting her as a classic damsel in distress, thus emphasizing the urgent need for more diverse and empowering portrayals of women in storytelling. Furthermore, *Rapunzel's* diverse interests in art, literature, and her insatiable curiosity defy established gender norms by showcasing her as a multi-faceted individual with a broad range of passions extending beyond stereotypical feminine pursuits. Her pursuit of independence challenges the traditional expectation that women should depend on others for their well-being. Her partnership with *Flynn Rider* disrupts the damsel-in-distress trope and presents women as equal partners in their adventures, promoting the principles of equality and cooperation within relationships. *Rapunzel's* evident strength and resilience stand in contrast to the stereotype that women are inherently

delicate or fragile, underscoring the complex and multifaceted nature of individuals. In essence, "Tangled" offers a robust challenge to traditional gender roles by introducing a female character who is self-sufficient, creative, and resilient. Nevertheless, it also underscores the pressing need for more diversified and empowering representations of women in the realm of storytelling.

Despite its efforts to challenge traditional gender roles, "Tangled" inadvertently perpetuates certain aspects of these roles within its narrative. *Mother Gothel's* actions, for instance, involve manipulating *Rapunzel* by confining her to the tower and feigning motherhood. Connotatively, *Mother Gothel's* behavior serves as a symbolic representation of a darker aspect of motherhood and female authority, inadvertently reinforcing traditional gender roles that cast women as manipulative and domineering.

Additionally, *Flynn Rider's* initial behavior presents a challenge to the typical portrayal of male heroes, as he begins the story as a morally questionable character. However, his character arc ultimately transforms him into a more responsible and compassionate individual, which challenges the stereotype that men with questionable pasts are irredeemable. While this transformation is a positive aspect, it also highlights the prevalent trope of male characters evolving from flawed to virtuous, suggesting that this narrative pattern remains deeply ingrained. Furthermore, the film portrays the king and queen as active agents in the search for their daughter, *Rapunzel*, which challenges traditional gender norms by presenting both parents as equally committed to the quest. This dynamic emphasizes the strength of mutual support and cooperation in family life, but it also underscores the rarity of such portrayals in mainstream storytelling, indicating a persistent need for more diverse representations of familial roles. *"Tangled"* offers a nuanced narrative that both challenges and perpetuates traditional gender

roles. While it endeavors to break away from established norms, it also inadvertently reinforces certain stereotypes, highlighting the complexity of addressing gender dynamics in storytelling.

Moana (2016)

Moana is a Disney animated film that follows the journey of *Moana* Waialiki, a spirited Polynesian girl, daughter of a chief of a coastal village. She is chosen by the ocean to save her island and discover her true destiny by restoring the heart of Te Fiti, a goddess. When a number of unfortunate events happen in her island, *Moana* sets sail in search of *Maui*, a legendary demigod, in hopes of returning the relic to Te Fiti and save her people. Along the way, *Moana* and *Maui* face many challenges. Through courage, perseverance, and a deep connection to the ocean, *Moana* learns about leadership, self-discovery, and the importance of embracing one's heritage, all while delivering a visually stunning adventure and a strong female protagonist. *Moana's* journey to becoming a master way-finder and *Maui's* evolution into a humbler and more compassionate individual are pivotal to their quest. Eventually, they reach the island of Te Fiti, which has undergone a dramatic transformation into a formidable lava entity. *Moana*, drawing on her newfound skills and inner strength, realizes that the only way to vanquish Te Kā and restore the heart of Te Fiti is through her own fortitude and valor. She confronts Te Kā, reminding the latter of her true identity, leading to the profound transformation of Te Kā back into the resplendent goddess Te Fiti. This culmination of their growth and understanding plays a crucial role in resolving the conflict and restoring balance. Following the restoration of the heart of Te Fiti, the blight plaguing *Moana's* island is eradicated. *Moana* returns to her homeland as a celebrated hero, reuniting with her community. *Maui* likewise returns to his abode as a transformed demigod who harbors gratitude for *Moana's* friendship.

Disney introduces characters that challenge and transcend conventional gender roles. For example, *Moana's* clothing is initially seen wearing traditional Polynesian attire. But the connotative meaning of her clothes signifies her cultural heritage and connection to her people. It reflects the traditional gender roles of her society, which include tasks like fishing and farming.

The character *Moana* assumes a pivotal role within the narrative. Denotatively, she is introduced as the daughter of *Chief Tui*, with the implicit expectation that she will one day assume leadership and guide her people. However, the connotations associated with her position as the chief's daughter extend beyond mere lineage. They carry with them profound implications of leadership and responsibility, reinforcing traditional gender roles tied to both leadership and cultural heritage. Much like the clothing choices in the film signify *Moana's* connection to her cultural roots and traditions, her role as the chief's daughter reflects the deep-seated gender roles within her society. These roles encompass tasks such as fishing and farming, and while they initially appear to conform to conventional expectations, they ultimately serve as a backdrop against which *Moana's* character challenges and transcends these traditional gender roles throughout her heroic journey.

Moana's character in the film exemplifies a significant departure from traditional gender roles, especially in terms of leadership and heroism. In a striking role reversal, *Moana*, a female character, is chosen by the ocean to undertake a mission typically reserved for male chiefs or warriors, thereby challenging the convention that such heroic quests are exclusive to men. This narrative choice is not just a plot device but a deliberate subversion of the classic hero's journey, traditionally dominated by male protagonists. *Moana's* journey, characterized by courage, determination, and empathy, reframes the concept of leadership and heroism, demonstrating that these qualities are universal and not confined to a specific gender. Her role in the film thus offers

a more inclusive and progressive representation of leadership, breaking away from long-held notions and expanding the scope of storytelling in modern cinema.

Moana's leadership in the film stands out as a prime example of challenging and transcending conventional gender roles. Denotatively, *Moana* is selected by the ocean to undertake the critical mission of restoring the heart of Te Fiti, a duty traditionally reserved for chiefs or warriors. However, the connotations inherent in this choice go beyond the surface narrative. *Moana's* selection as the chosen one challenges traditional gender roles, as she is recognized as a leader in her own right, irrespective of her gender. This subversion of expectations confronts the long-held notion that only men can embark on heroic quests, showcasing a more inclusive and progressive representation of leadership and heroism in storytelling.

Moana's character in the film embodies a powerful desire to explore beyond the confines of her island. Denotatively, she possesses a profound yearning to venture into the vast ocean, seeking to break free from the limitations imposed by her island's isolation. However, the connotations woven into her adventurous spirit delve deeper. *Moana's* unyielding determination to explore challenges the traditional gender expectations that have historically confined women to the roles of homemakers and caretakers, suggesting that women, like men, can aspire to and achieve their dreams of exploration and self-discovery. Her character serves as a compelling example of transcending traditional gender roles and embracing individual aspirations and ambitions.

In the epic odyssey that is *Moana's* journey, both denotative and connotative elements come together to redefine traditional gender roles. Denotatively, *Moana* sets out on a perilous sea voyage with the noble purpose of saving her people. However, the connotations intertwined with

her voyage are even more transformative. *Moana's* unwavering bravery and determination serve as a powerful challenge to gender stereotypes that have long suggested women should occupy passive or protected roles. Her journey is a profound narrative of self-discovery and empowerment, dismantling preconceived notions about women's capabilities and showcasing the strength and resilience that women can exhibit in the face of adversity. *Moana's* character exemplifies a narrative that celebrates individual courage and the capacity for women to be formidable leaders and heroes.

Moana's dynamic interactions with *Maui*, both denotative and connotative elements contribute to a refreshing departure from traditional gender dynamics. Denotatively, *Moana* forms a formidable partnership with *Maui*, a larger-than-life demigod. However, the connotations infused in their collaboration are particularly noteworthy. *Moana* is portrayed as *Maui's* equal, not merely as his sidekick or subordinate. This depiction challenges conventional gender roles by highlighting a partnership where gender does not determine hierarchy or competence. It underscores the idea that women can be powerful allies and equals to men, breaking away from the stereotypes that often relegate female characters to secondary or less capable roles in such interactions. *Moana's* character exemplifies a progressive representation of gender dynamics, where individual competence and collaboration take precedence over traditional gender expectations.

In the narrative framework of *"Moana,"* the protagonist's attributes of compassion and empathy are consistently highlighted as central to her character. Analytically, *Moana's* odyssey is characterized by a steadfast demonstration of compassion and empathy, directed not only towards the ocean but also towards a range of characters she encounters. Beyond the explicit narrative, the implications of her depiction are multifaceted. While *Moana's* character

perpetuates traditional gender roles that often stereotype women as inherently nurturing or emotionally sensitive, her portrayal simultaneously challenges these stereotypes by illustrating these traits as universally human, rather than gender specific. This representation in the film underscores the significance of acknowledging and valuing traits such as empathy and compassion in all individuals, regardless of gender. This approach promotes a more inclusive and progressive narrative in media, emphasizing the non-gendered nature of these human qualities.

Moana's profound connection to nature and the spirit world serves as a central theme. Denotatively, *Moana's* connection to the natural world and the spirit realm is integral to the story's plot and character development. However, the connotations inherent in her spiritual connection carry deeper significance. *Moana's* spiritual affinity underscores the idea that gender should never act as a limiting factor in one's ability to connect with the natural world or assume the role of its protector. Her character challenges the notion that certain roles or connections are reserved for specific genders, emphasizing that everyone, regardless of gender, can play a vital role in preserving and nurturing the environment. *Moana's* portrayal contributes to a more inclusive and progressive representation of our relationship with nature and the shared responsibility of all individuals in its stewardship.

In the depiction of *Maui's* character, both denotative and connotative elements converge to align with traditional ideals of masculinity. Denotatively, *Maui* is portrayed as a large, muscular demigod, emphasizing his physical prowess. However, the connotations associated with his imposing physique reinforce conventional notions of masculinity, which often prioritize traits like strength and power as positive and desirable. *Maui's* character exemplifies a

representation of masculinity that adheres to these traditional standards, reflecting the prevailing societal expectations of what it means to be a powerful and formidable figure.

In the initial portrayal of *Maui's* character, both denotative elements converge to depict him as arrogant and self-assured. Denotatively, *Maui* exhibits traits of overconfidence and self-assuredness. However, the connotations surrounding his arrogance align with a common trope often associated with male characters, emphasizing a sense of bravado and bravura. This character trait can be seen as an expression of traditional gender expectations that valorize self-confidence and assertiveness in male characters, perpetuating a common archetype in storytelling.

In the course of the film's narrative, denotatively *Maui's* character evolves from a self-centered individual to one who learns the value of humility and teamwork. However, the connotations embedded in his transformation carry deeper implications. *Maui's* character arc challenges traditional notions of masculinity that often prioritize self-reliance and dominance, instead emphasizing the significance of personal growth and cooperation. His journey serves as a powerful narrative departure that highlights the importance of evolving beyond traditional gender expectations and embracing qualities like humility and collaboration as essential components of masculinity.

In the dynamics of *Maui's* relationship with *Moana*, *Maui* initially perceives *Moana* as a means to an end, viewing her primarily as a tool to aid in the recovery of his lost hook. However, the connotations woven into his initial attitude toward *Moana* hold deeper significance. This portrayal can be interpreted as a commentary on power dynamics, specifically highlighting a common narrative trope where a male character initially underestimates or dismisses the abilities and agency of a female character. This interaction serves as a reflection of prevalent gender

stereotypes and imbalances of power that are frequently observed in storytelling, ultimately challenging the need to recognize and value the capabilities and autonomy of individuals regardless of their gender.

In *Maui's* character arc, his vulnerability takes center stage as he shares his backstory and exposes his feelings of inadequacy. From a denotative perspective, this vulnerability plays a pivotal role in his character development, driving the narrative forward. However, the connotations associated with *Maui's* vulnerability hold profound implications. His willingness to display vulnerability challenges the common stereotypes often linked to male characters, who are traditionally expected to always maintain emotional stoicism and an unshakeable demeanor. *Maui's* openness serves to humanize him and underscores the importance of emotional depth in storytelling, ultimately questioning the idea that masculinity must always equate to emotional detachment. It reinforces the significance of portraying the complexity of male characters in narratives, breaking free from narrow gender expectations.

Maui's path to redemption unfolds as he plays a pivotal role in assisting *Moana* in restoring Te Fiti's heart. From a denotative perspective, his redemption is realized through this significant action. However, in terms of connotation, *Maui's* redemption carries a broader message that transcends gender boundaries. It underscores the universal notion that individuals, irrespective of their gender, have the capacity for growth, transformation, and the opportunity to make amends for their past mistakes. His redemption narrative emphasizes the importance of character development and the concept of second chances, highlighting the profound themes of personal growth and redemption that resonate with audiences of all backgrounds.

Maui's willingness to cooperate with *Moana* and the ocean to achieve their shared goals is evident in both its denotative and connotative aspects. Denotatively, *Maui* actively engages in

teamwork with *Moana* and the ocean. However, on a connotative level, *Maui's* cooperative behavior challenges conventional portrayals of male characters as solitary heroes who single-handedly overcome challenges. His willingness to collaborate emphasizes the importance of teamwork and partnership, breaking free from the idea that masculinity is synonymous with individualism and underscoring the strength that comes from working together toward a common purpose.

Throughout the movie we can see how the character of *Maui* develops humility. Denotatively, *Maui* exhibits humility and expresses gratitude. Connotatively, his humility serves as a powerful reminder that masculinity should not be narrowly defined by dominance alone but can encompass a range of qualities, including gratitude and humility. This portrayal challenges rigid stereotypes about male characters and highlights the diversity of attributes that can be part of a well-rounded portrayal of masculinity in storytelling.

Chief Tui's concern is rooted in his fatherly instincts to safeguard his daughter. However, the connotations surrounding his concern delve deeper. It may be seen as emblematic of traditional paternal instincts, reflecting a common trope in storytelling where fathers are portrayed as overprotective, particularly when it comes to their daughters. This portrayal highlights a recurring theme in narratives where fathers grapple with the challenge of balancing their protective instincts with their daughters' aspirations for independence and self-discovery.

In the film *"Moana"* (2016) Disney presents characters that defy and transcend conventional gender roles, particularly exemplified by the character of *Moana*. Her journey represents a narrative of empowerment, where her inherent qualities, actions, and choices challenge and redefine societal expectations associated with her gender. The film encourages its audience to reevaluate the constraints imposed by traditional gender norms on attributes like

leadership, courage, and a sense of purpose, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and forward-thinking perspective on gender roles.

Similarly, *Maui*, another character in *"Moana,"* undergoes significant development that actively challenges and subverts established gender roles. While initially embodying certain masculine stereotypes, *Maui's* character evolution throughout the storyline emphasizes personal growth, collaboration, vulnerability, and humility. His journey within the film compellingly demonstrates that individuals, irrespective of their gender, have the capacity to evolve and exhibit a diverse range of characteristics beyond traditional gender norms. This narrative reinforces a more encompassing and progressive understanding of gender roles.

Princess *Moana* challenges traditional gender roles within contemporary mythologies through the character of *Moana*. Her leadership, courage, and adventurous spirit defy conventional gender norms, promoting a more progressive and inclusive perspective on gender roles within narrative structures. In the context of Roland Barthes' semiotic methodology, the character of *Moana* represents a departure from cultural myths and ideologies related to gender roles. Her portrayal breaks away from traditional gender expectations, emphasizing individual aspirations, empathy, and strength irrespective of gender. The emphasis on empathy in *Moana's* character breaks away from traditional gender expectations by reframing empathy as a key attribute for any individual, irrespective of gender. Traditionally, empathy has been stereotypically associated with femininity, often depicted as a softer, secondary trait, especially in leadership or hero roles. *Moana's* portrayal challenges this by making empathy a central, defining element of her character that is integral to her success and leadership. This move away from gender-based character traits emphasizes that empathy, like strength and individual aspirations, is a universal human quality, essential and valuable in all individuals, regardless of

gender. By doing so, *Moana's* character contributes to a more inclusive and progressive

understanding of gender roles, where traits are not confined or limited by gender stereotypes but

are seen as part of the broader human experience.

      Maui's initial depiction adheres to traditional ideals of masculinity, emphasizing physical

strength and self-confidence. However, his character arc challenges these stereotypes by

highlighting personal growth, humility, vulnerability, and the significance of collaboration,

offering a multifaceted and inclusive representation of masculinity. The interactions between

Moana and *Maui* challenge prevalent narrative tropes concerning gender power dynamics,

particularly as *Maui* initially underestimates *Moana* but later recognizes her capabilities. This

interaction underscores the importance of acknowledging the agency and competencies of

individuals regardless of their gender. *Maui's* journey toward redemption underscores the

universal theme of personal growth and transformation, emphasizing that individuals, regardless

of gender, possess the capacity for change and redemption. *Maui's* willingness to cooperate and

display humility challenges the traditional notion that masculinity is synonymous with

dominance and self-reliance. This portrayal promotes a more comprehensive and diverse

representation of masculinity within storytelling. *Chief Tui's* protective instincts reflect a

recurring theme in narratives where paternal figures grapple with the delicate balance between

safeguarding their daughters and supporting their aspirations for independence and self-

discovery. This highlights the intricate nature of gender dynamics within family relationships.

Raya and the Last Dragon (2021)

      "Raya and the Last Dragon" is a 2021 animated Disney film. The movie is set in the

fictional realm of Kumandra but based in Southeast Asian cultures. a land divided into five

regions, each with unique ecological and geographical characteristics. The division is the result of a historical conflict over the Dragon Gem, a mystical artifact imbued with the power to summon dragons. The dragons, in turn, played a crucial role in maintaining the ecological balance of the land and protecting it from a mysterious and malevolent force called the Druun. This setup presents an opportunity to explore concepts related to environmental science, ecosystems, and the consequences of habitat fragmentation. *Raya*, the film's protagonist, embarks on a quest to locate the last dragon, Sisu, who is believed to possess the power to vanquish the Druun and restore Kumandra's equilibrium. Her journey involves encounters with various landscapes and ecosystems, showcasing the film's attention to world-building and the diversity of habitats within *Kumandra*. From dense forests to arid deserts, the movie offers a visually rich portrayal of these environments. *"Raya and the Last Dragon"* delves into the importance of trust, unity, and cooperation. The division among the regions of Kumandra due to a lack of trust and cooperation serves as an allegory for real-world issues related to conflict and its impact on ecosystems and societies. The film explores how the resolution of conflicts, and the re-establishment of trust are essential for maintaining ecological balance and societal harmony.

Raya is depicted as a young woman with a warrior-like appearance, dressed in traditional clothing that facilitates ease of movement, reflecting her role as a warrior. However, the connotations embedded in her attire and physical strength hold particular significance. *Raya's* character challenges traditional gender norms that have historically associated femininity with more delicate or passive appearances. Her portrayal emphasizes that women can embody strength and resilience without compromising their identity or femininity, contributing to a more progressive and inclusive representation of gender roles in storytelling.

Raya is unequivocally established as the film's protagonist, bearing the crucial responsibility of finding the last dragon to save her kingdom. However, the connotations interwoven into her character are particularly poignant. *Raya's* role as a hero and leader underscores her inherent strength, unwavering determination, and profound sense of responsibility. This portrayal challenges traditional gender roles that have often confined women to passive or secondary positions in such narratives. *Raya's* character serves as a testament to the capacity of women to take center stage as powerful and dynamic leaders, contributing to a more progressive and inclusive representation of gender roles in storytelling.

Raya is established as a skilled martial artist and fighter, showcasing her remarkable prowess in combat. However, the connotations associated with her combat skills hold profound significance. *Raya's* proficiency challenges the deeply ingrained stereotype that women are inherently less capable in physical confrontations when compared to men. Her character serves as a compelling embodiment of the idea that physical strength and combat expertise are not limited by gender, defying traditional gender expectations and contributing to a more inclusive and progressive representation of women in action and combat roles in storytelling.

Raya is portrayed as a leader who embarks on a quest to rescue her kingdom. Connotatively, her leadership challenges established gender norms that frequently assign men to positions of authority and decision-making. *Raya's* character underscores the idea that leadership is not limited by gender and that women can be strong and capable leaders, challenging traditional gender roles and promoting gender equality in storytelling.

Raya's emotional expressiveness is a notable aspect of her character when analyzed in both its denotative and connotative aspects. Denotatively, *Raya* undergoes a spectrum of emotions during the course of the movie, encompassing vulnerability, anger, and determination.

However, from a connotative perspective, her emotional depth serves to humanize her character and disrupts stereotypes that dictate women should adhere to specific emotions or behaviors. *Raya's* portrayal underscores the idea that women are multi-dimensional individuals capable of experiencing and expressing a wide range of emotions, thus challenging traditional gender expectations and promoting more realistic and authentic character portrayals.

In *Raya's* relationships, the denotation is shown as she forms connections and alliances with various characters, both male and female. However, the connotation runs deeper. Her remarkable ability to forge these alliances and work collaboratively challenges the prevailing stereotype that suggests women are inherently more competitive or inclined towards cattiness in their interactions with each other. Just as in "Moana," where Disney introduces characters that break free from conventional gender roles, *Raya's* actions showcase a similar defiance of gender expectations. Just as *Moana's* attire symbolizes her cultural roots and connection to her people, *Raya's* relationships reflect a broader shift away from stereotypes and toward a more inclusive and empowering representation of female characters.

In *Raya's* gender neutrality, the denotation is straightforward: the movie's focus is not on *Raya*'s gender but on her hero's journey. However, the connotation carries a more profound message. By choosing not to emphasize her gender as a central plot point, the film subverts traditional gender expectations and presents *Raya* as a multifaceted character rather than reducing her to a mere symbol of femininity. This approach not only enriches her character but also challenges societal norms, demonstrating that a character's gender should not limit their capacity for heroism and complexity. Just as in "Moana," where gender roles are transcended to tell a more inclusive and empowering story, *"Raya and the Last Dragon"* embraces the idea that

anyone, regardless of their gender, can embark on a hero's journey and make a significant impact on the world.

In *"Raya and the Last Dragon," Raya's* vulnerability becomes a pivotal aspect of her character development. Denotation-wise, *Raya* encounters moments of vulnerability and doubt as she embarks on her quest to save her fractured land. However, the connotation behind her vulnerability is what truly defines her journey. It serves to humanize her character, breaking free from the confines of conventional portrayals of unwavering, stoic heroes. *Raya's* vulnerability underscores the profound importance of emotional depth and resilience in the face of adversity, revealing the multifaceted nature of her character and the depth of her inner strength.

Raya's determination is a driving force in her quest to mend the shattered trust within her world. Denotation-wise, she is resolute in her pursuit of this goal, unwavering in her dedication to heal the wounds that have torn her land apart. However, the connotation behind her determination carries even greater significance. *Raya's* steadfast resolve challenges prevailing gender norms that often suggest women are indecisive or easily influenced. Her unwavering commitment to her mission exemplifies her agency and showcases her as a powerful and capable protagonist who refuses to be swayed by doubt or convention. Her determination becomes a beacon of strength, shining brightly as she forges a path towards reconciliation and unity in her fractured world.

Raya's parental relationships hold a significant place in her character's development. The connection with her father stands as a vital element of her character, shaping her motivations and choices throughout the story. However, the connotation surrounding this relationship adds layers of complexity to her character arc. It serves as a challenge to the traditional father-daughter dynamics often seen in storytelling, where fathers typically assume protective or authoritative

roles. Instead, *Raya's* relationship with her father transcends these stereotypes, showcasing a more nuanced and egalitarian bond that highlights mutual respect, shared values, and the importance of cooperation in their shared quest. This departure from convention underscores the film's commitment to breaking away from established norms and providing viewers with fresh and empowering perspectives on familial dynamics.

In the portrayal of *Chief Benja* as both the protector and leader of his community, a similar pattern emerges, mirroring the themes seen in *"Moana." Raya's* father is frequently shown as the guardian and authoritative figure within their community. This depiction, however, delves deeper, reflecting traditional gender roles that tend to assign men to positions of authority and protection. The role of *Chief Benja* underscores the prevalent gender dynamics, reinforcing the societal notion that masculinity is closely linked to qualities such as strength and leadership. Just as in *"Moana,"* where traditional gender roles are initially presented through the character's attire and societal expectations, *Chief Benja's* role invites viewers to reflect on these ingrained stereotypes and their impact on our perception of gender and leadership.

Raya's father imparts valuable life lessons and offers guidance to her. However, the connotation runs deeper, highlighting traditional fatherly qualities that often include providing advice and support. These qualities are typically associated with fatherhood and male authority figures within society. Much like in "Moana," where familial and societal roles initially shape characters' behaviors and expectations, *Chief Benja's* portrayal as a wise mentor underscores the enduring influence of traditional gender roles and the perception of fathers as sources of guidance and wisdom within their families.

In the portrayal of *Chief Benja's* character, both denotative and connotative elements converge to depict a figure with substantial responsibilities and a strong sense of sacrifice.

Denotatively, *Chief Benja* is burdened with significant responsibilities for safeguarding the kingdom, and he is willing to make personal sacrifices for the greater good. However, the connotations surrounding his actions hold broader implications. *Chief Benja's* sense of duty and selflessness align with prevalent societal expectations often associated with fathers and male authority figures, emphasizing their traditional role as providers and protectors of their families and communities. His character serves as a reflection of the archetype of the self-sacrificing father figure, reinforcing the enduring image of men as responsible and caring providers within the narrative.

In the movie *Chief Benja's* character exhibits emotional depth and a profound connection to his daughter, *Raya*. Denotatively, *Chief Benja's* character is depicted as emotionally connected with his daughter, *Raya*, displaying a rich emotional landscape. However, the connotations inherent in this portrayal hold significant implications. *Chief Benja's* emotional depth and strong bond with his daughter challenge prevailing stereotypes of emotional detachment in men. His character serves as a poignant reminder that fathers are fully capable of forging deep emotional connections with their children, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and progressive representation of father-daughter relationships in storytelling.

Chief Benja's parental love and support for his daughter are at the heart of the narrative. Denotation-wise, his unwavering affection and encouragement for *Raya* play a crucial role in her character's development and her journey throughout the story. However, the connotation surrounding this portrayal challenges prevailing stereotypes that often depict fathers as primarily disciplinary figures. *Chief Benja's* nurturing and supportive role underscores the idea that fathers can be just as caring and emotionally connected to their children as mothers, providing a more balanced and inclusive representation of paternal love. This depiction reinforces the importance

of breaking away from traditional gender roles and recognizing the diverse ways in which individuals can express their love and support within a family dynamic.

Namaari's physical appearance carries important connotations that breaks away from traditional gender norms. Denotation-wise, she is portrayed as a highly skilled warrior, dressed in traditional attire designed for ease of movement, which aligns with her role in combat. However, the connotation behind her appearance is even more significant. *Namaari's* attire and physical strength challenge conventional notions that associate femininity with delicate or passive appearances. She stands as a strong and capable female character, highlighting that strength and competence are not limited by gender. *Namaari's* portrayal serves as a powerful representation of women who defy stereotypes, showcasing their ability to excel in physically demanding roles and emphasizing the importance of diverse and empowering representations of femininity in storytelling.

Namaari's competence and leadership within her community is established as a character with exceptional skills and intelligence, holding a prominent leadership position among her people. However, the connotations surrounding her competence and leadership carry significant weight. *Namaari's* portrayal challenges traditional gender roles that frequently depict men as leaders and decision-makers. Her character serves as a powerful female role model, emphasizing that women are equally capable of occupying leadership roles and making crucial decisions. *Namaari's* representation contributes to a more inclusive and progressive view of gender dynamics and leadership roles in storytelling.

In the portrayal of *Namaari's* rivalry and alliance, the denotation shows how *Namaari* and *Raya* share a complex relationship characterized by elements of rivalry and collaboration. However, the connotation delves deeper, challenging stereotypes that often suggest women are

inherently competitive with one another or unable to form strong alliances with other women. This dynamic between *Namaari* and *Raya* highlights the multifaceted nature of female relationships, showcasing that women can have complex interactions that encompass both competition and cooperation, just as men do. Similar to the way *"Moana"* challenges traditional gender expectations, *"Raya and the Last Dragon"* offers a refreshing perspective on female characters and their diverse relationships.

Namaari's motivations and values are central to her character. Denotation-wise, her actions and choices are rooted in a deep loyalty to her people, and she consistently works towards what she believes is best for her community. However, the connotation surrounding her character challenges traditional gender roles by depicting a woman who prioritizes her responsibilities and values above all else. *Namaari's* unwavering commitment to her community emphasizes that women can be strong leaders and decision-makers, dispelling the notion that their roles are limited to more passive or secondary positions. Her character serves as a testament to the diverse range of motivations and values that individuals, regardless of gender, can possess, highlighting the importance of breaking free from stereotypical expectations and embracing a broader spectrum of female representation in storytelling.

Namaari's conflict resolution in the narrative shows how her character highlights her competence and leadership within her community. Denotatively, *Naamari* is established as a character with exceptional skills and intelligence, holding a prominent leadership position among her people. However, the connotations surrounding her competence and leadership carry significant weight. *Namaari's* portrayal challenges traditional gender roles that frequently depict men as leaders and decision-makers. Her character serves as a powerful female role model, emphasizing that women are equally capable of occupying leadership roles and making crucial

decisions. *Namaari's* representation contributes to a more inclusive and progressive view of gender dynamics and leadership roles in storytelling.

Namaari possesses a strong ambition and a desire for independence. However, the connotation carries a deeper message. These traits challenge stereotypes that often suggest women should be passive or dependent on others, emphasizing the significance of female agency and self-determination. *Namaari's* character underscores the idea that women can have their own goals, dreams, and aspirations, and they can actively pursue them. *Namaari's* ambition and independence offer a refreshing perspective on women in leadership roles and the importance of breaking away from limiting stereotypes.

In conclusion the cinematic work of *"Raya and the Last Dragon,"* the character of *Raya* undertakes a compelling challenge to established gender roles within the context of contemporary mythological narratives. She dauntlessly diverges from historical gender norms that have historically linked femininity with notions of fragility and passivity. *Raya's* on-screen depiction as a warrior, leader, and emotionally expressive individual disrupts prevailing stereotypes that have traditionally prescribed specific behavioral and emotional patterns for women. This portrayal serves as a catalyst for a more progressive and inclusive interpretation of gender roles within the sphere of narrative storytelling.

Raya's extraordinary combat proficiency and physical prowess serve as a potent contradiction to deeply ingrained stereotypes that perpetuate the notion of women's lesser capability in physical confrontations compared to men. Her character resonates as a persuasive embodiment of the proposition that physical prowess and combat proficiency transcend gender limitations, thus contributing to a more comprehensive and forward-looking representation of women in roles involving action and combat within storytelling.

Raya's role as a leader who embarks on a quest and her overt emotional expressiveness confront well-entrenched gender norms that frequently assign men to positions of authority and confine women to circumscribed emotional roles. Her character conveys the message that leadership transcends gender boundaries and underscores the notion that women can exercise strength and competence in leadership positions. In so doing, she challenges traditional gender roles and advances the cause of gender equality within the realm of narrative representation.

Raya's adeptness at forming connections and alliances with an array of characters, irrespective of gender, serves to challenge a prevailing stereotype that posits women as inherently more inclined toward competitiveness or predisposed to engage in discordant interactions with one another. Her actions defy expectations based on gender and, in doing so, engender a narrative framework that fosters inclusivity and empowerment for female characters.

The deliberate choice made in the film to not accentuate *Raya's* gender as a central narrative focal point effectively subverts conventional gender expectations. Instead, it presents her as a multifaceted character, unburdened by gender-based limitations. This creative choice challenges societal norms by demonstrating that an individual's gender should not circumscribe their capacity for embodying heroism and multifaceted character attributes.

Despite the film's challenges to certain traditional gender roles, it concurrently perpetuates them, notably through the portrayal of *Chief Benja*. His on-screen depiction as a male authority figure and guardian aligns with conventional gender roles associating masculinity with attributes such as strength and leadership. Nevertheless, the film introduces layers of complexity to his character by emphasizing emotional depth and nurturing qualities, thereby challenging entrenched stereotypes linked to fathers and male figures of authority.

The character *Naamari*, characterized by her competence, leadership abilities, ambition, and independence, presents a challenge to traditional gender roles. However, the film underscores her unwavering loyalty to her community, underscoring her responsibilities as a leader. While *Raya's* character initiates a confrontation with established gender norms, characters such as *Chief Benja* and Naamari contribute layers of complexity to the representation of gender roles. The film's narrative duality engages with these aspects, thereby contributing to a nuanced examination of gender roles within the contemporary mythological context.

The subsequent phase of this investigation entails a comprehensive analysis of the three films, with a particular focus on discerning the connotative and denotative common elements within them. This scrutiny aims to elucidate the potential emergence of distinctive mythological themes inherent in the context of the three Disney Princess films under consideration.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Roland Barthes in his work Mythologies (1972) used the concepts of connotation and denotation in his semiotic analysis to explore the formation of cultural myths. Barthes argued that cultural myths are constructed through the manipulation of signs and their connotations. "In other words, myth is a system of signification that uses signs to refer to other signs." (Culler, 1975, p. 83) Barthes believed that societies create myths by imbuing certain signs with particular connotations that reinforce the dominant ideology or worldview of that culture. These connotations often serve to naturalize or normalize certain ideas or values, making them seem unquestionable or universal. (Barthes, 1972) By analyzing how connotations are attached to signs and how they contribute to the construction of cultural myths, Barthes aimed to uncover the hidden ideologies and power structures at work in society. His semiotic approach allowed him to reveal how seemingly innocent or neutral signs could be used to convey deeper meanings and maintain social hierarchies.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the focus of this study is predominantly framed within a Western-Euro American perspective. This orientation significantly influences the interpretation and analysis of the Disney Princesses and their representation in media. Such a perspective may inadvertently overlook or inadequately represent the cultural nuances and values of non-Western societies. This limitation is important to recognize as it shapes the understanding of gender roles and their portrayal in Disney films, which are consumed by a global audience. The predominance of a Western-Euro American viewpoint in this analysis underlines the need for more inclusive and diverse perspectives in future studies, ensuring a broader and more comprehensive understanding of media representation in different cultural contexts.

Across the three films *"Tangled"* (2010) *"Moana"* (2016) and *"Raya and the Last Dragon"* (2021) relevant expressive myths were found. The film analysis reveals that certain mythological elements have undergone revision and transformation, while others have remained consistent with their earlier articulation in the context of the Disney Princesses. This includes both modified and enduring mythological aspects.

In this way research question number one suggests that the most recent Disney Princess movies, including *Tangled* (2010), *Moana* (2016), and *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021), challenge traditional gender roles within the framework of current mythologies by portraying their female lead characters (*Rapunzel, Moana, and Raya*) as capable leaders. This challenges the societal belief that leadership is inherently masculine and promotes the idea that leadership qualities are not gender dependent. These films contribute to a cultural shift by encouraging viewers to question the traditional societal belief that leadership is exclusively a male domain.

The characters in these movies, irrespective of their gender, display a diverse range of emotions and vulnerability. This challenges traditional gender stereotypes that prescribe distinct emotional behaviors based on gender and promotes a more inclusive understanding of human emotions. These films encourage a cultural shift by normalizing the idea that individuals, regardless of gender, can experience a diverse range of emotions.

The films emphasize cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork among characters of different genders, challenging established gender dynamics that often depict men as dominant or as the sole bearers of heroic responsibilities. By promoting partnership and collaboration, these films highlight the value of diversity in skills and perspectives and challenge the notion that certain tasks or roles are exclusively reserved for one gender.

Current Leadership Roles

Throughout all three films, the female lead characters (*Rapunzel, Moana, and Raya*) actively challenge established gender norms by assuming leadership roles, demonstrating physical prowess, and defying societal expectations. Their actions and character developments subvert common stereotypes that portray women as passive or confined to specific societal roles. By portraying women as capable leaders, these films contribute to an ideological shift that challenges the notion that women should be confined to specific societal roles. They promote the idea that leadership qualities are not gender-dependent and that individuals, regardless of gender, can excel in leadership positions.

The films challenge the myth that leadership roles are inherently masculine by portraying female characters as capable leaders. They do so by presenting narratives where the female protagonists assume leadership positions and exhibit qualities associated with leadership, such as bravery, strategic thinking, and decision-making. The hidden ideology challenged here is the belief that leadership is a quality primarily associated with masculinity. By portraying women as leaders, these films expose the constructed nature of this ideology and reveal that leadership is not inherently gendered. The films contribute to a cultural shift by promoting the idea that leadership qualities are not limited to any specific gender.

Exploration of Emotional Depth and Vulnerability

The characters in these movies, irrespective of their gender, display multifaceted emotional experiences and vulnerability. This challenges traditional gender stereotypes that prescribe distinct emotional behaviors for individuals based on their gender. It underscores the significance of allowing characters, regardless of gender, to express a diverse range of emotions.

By showcasing emotional depth and vulnerability of the characters, these films contribute to an ideological shift that emphasizes the importance of allowing individuals to express a diverse range of emotions. They challenge the idea that conforming to rigid emotional norms based on gender is necessary or desirable. The hidden ideology being contested is the notion that men should be stoic and emotionally reserved, while women are expected to be more emotional. By portraying characters breaking free from these stereotypes, the films reveal the artificial nature of these expectations. The films encourage a cultural shift by normalizing the idea that individuals, regardless of gender, can experience a diverse range of emotions. They challenge the societal pressure to conform to gendered emotional norms and promote a more authentic and inclusive understanding of human emotions.

Emphasis on Partnership and Collaborative Endeavors

These films underscore the importance of cooperation, collaboration, and teamwork among male and female characters. Male characters such as *Flynn Rider*, and *Maui* are portrayed as equal partners who work alongside the female protagonists. These challenges established gender dynamics that often depict men as dominant or as the sole bearers of heroic responsibilities. By promoting partnership and collaboration among characters of different genders, these films contribute to an ideological shift that challenges the idea of male dominance and female subservience. They highlight the value of diversity in skills and perspectives and challenge the notion that certain tasks or roles are exclusively reserved for one gender. The hidden ideology challenged here is the belief that leadership is a quality primarily associated with masculinity. By portraying women as leaders, these films expose the constructed nature of this ideology and reveal that leadership is not inherently gendered.

The films contribute to a cultural shift by promoting the idea that leadership qualities are not limited to any specific gender. They encourage viewers to question and challenge the traditional societal belief that leadership is exclusively a male domain.

The analysis of the cinematic works indicates that the response to research question number two argues that while the physical appearance and beauty empower female characters in various ways, the consistent depiction of conventionally attractive and physically fit female characters functions as signifiers that reinforce the societal expectation that women should meet specific beauty standards. These signifiers contribute to the myth that a woman's worth is closely tied to her appearance. The films perpetuate the belief that beauty is an essential attribute for female characters, thereby reinforcing gendered beauty norms. This myth is sustained by presenting certain beauty standards as inherent and desirable traits rather than socially constructed.

The presence of male authority figures in these films, despite showcasing strong female leaders, can be analyzed as signifiers that uphold traditional gendered leadership roles. These male characters, often serving as mentors or parental figures, function as signifiers of leadership and wisdom associated with men. While the films challenge traditional leadership dynamics to some extent by featuring strong female leaders, they simultaneously balance this challenge by retaining these male authority figures. This duality perpetuates the myth that leadership and wisdom are more commonly linked to men and reinforces the notion that certain roles are inherently tied to gender. The films create a semiotic code that conceals the constructed nature of these gendered roles, thereby perpetuating traditional gender norms and power structures.

The initial portrayal of male characters exhibiting traits like arrogance or stoicism functions as signifiers that align with cultural expectations of emotional reserve for men. While the films eventually show emotional complexity and development in these characters, the initial signifiers

perpetuate the myth that men should start from a place of emotional reserve or conform to certain stereotypical behaviors before evolving emotionally. This reinforces the societal myth that men should adhere to specific emotional norms. The films create a semiotic code that conceals the arbitrary nature of these expectations, making them seem like a natural progression for male characters.

Physical Appearance and Beauty

While these films empower their female characters in various aspects, they also often depict them as conventionally attractive and physically fit. This can reinforce the societal expectation that women should meet certain beauty standards, perpetuating the importance placed on appearance. The depiction of conventionally attractive and physically fit female characters can indeed reinforce societal beauty standards. This can send the message that a woman's worth is often tied to her appearance. It's essential to remember that while these films may empower female characters in other ways, they don't fully break away from the broader cultural emphasis on beauty. These depictions can be seen as a form of mythmaking because they suggest that certain beauty standards are not socially constructed but are inherent and desirable traits. By consistently portraying physically fit and conventionally attractive female characters, these films contribute to the myth that a woman's worth is closely tied to her appearance. They reinforce the cultural belief that beauty is an essential attribute for female characters and, by extension, for women in society. The myth created here perpetuates the societal belief that beauty is an essential attribute for female characters and, by extension, for women in society. It naturalizes and legitimizes the idea that women should aspire to meet these beauty standards, contributing to the reinforcement of gendered beauty norms.

Traditional Leadership Roles

While the films challenge traditional gender roles by showcasing strong female leaders, there can still be elements of traditional leadership dynamics, such as the male authority figures like *Chief Tui* or *Chief Benja*. These characters occupy roles associated with strength, wisdom, and responsibility, which can reinforce the idea of men as leaders. While the films feature strong female leaders like *Rapunzel*, *Moana*, and *Raya,* there's still a presence of male authority figures. These characters often serve as mentors or parental figures, reinforcing the notion that leadership and wisdom are more commonly associated with men. The films strike a balance between challenging and adhering to traditional leadership dynamics. This reflects a myth that leadership and wisdom are more commonly associated with men, even when women take on leadership roles. The films may challenge traditional leadership dynamics to some extent, but they also balance this challenge by retaining male mentor or parental figures. This suggests that the myth of male leadership is not entirely broken, reinforcing the idea that certain roles are inherently tied to gender. This myth reinforces the ideology that certain roles, such as leadership, are inherently tied to gender. It conceals the arbitrariness of these gendered roles by making them seem like natural and universal truths, which in turn perpetuates traditional gender norms and power structures.

Emotional Expression

While the films challenge stereotypes by depicting emotional complexity, there may still be instances where characters conform to traditional gendered expectations of emotional expression. For example, male characters may initially display arrogance or stoicism before undergoing

character development. The films do challenge stereotypes by portraying emotional complexity in their characters. However, it's worth noting that some male characters initially exhibit traits like arrogance or stoicism. While these traits often serve as starting points for character development, they can still perpetuate the expectation that men should be emotionally reserved or display certain stereotypical behaviors before evolving. The films do challenge stereotypes by portraying emotional complexity in their characters. However, it's worth noting that some male characters initially exhibit traits like arrogance or stoicism. While these traits often serve as starting points for character development, they can still perpetuate the expectation that men should be emotionally reserved or display certain stereotypical behaviors before evolving. This portrayal can be seen as a form of mythmaking because it suggests that men should exhibit certain behaviors before evolving emotionally. It reinforces the idea that men should start from a place of emotional reserve, which is a societal myth in itself. While these characters may evolve over the course of the story, the initial depiction aligns with certain cultural expectations. This myth reinforces the ideology that men should start from a place of emotional reserve or conform to certain stereotypical behaviors before evolving emotionally. It conceals the arbitrary nature of these expectations by making them seem like a natural progression for male characters, thus perpetuating the societal myth that men should conform to these emotional norms.

While these Disney Princess movies challenge traditional gender roles in various ways, they also retain elements that align with societal expectations, reinforcing certain gendered norms and myths. These films reflect a complex interplay between challenging and adhering to traditional gender dynamics, contributing to a more nuanced portrayal of gender roles within the framework of contemporary mythologies. This analysis is an ongoing endeavor, subject to potential revisions as additional movies are released. It is essential to acknowledge that this analysis

reflects a particular perspective, and interpretations may vary among different individuals. This research holds significance because it pertains to the portrayal of gender roles, which plays a pivotal role in shaping young girls' perceptions of womanhood. These ideological lessons are particularly impactful during early childhood, as children often look up to and identify with characters that resonate with them. Consequently, these portrayals serve as templates for their own self-identity and understanding of societal norms. In our examination thus far, there is a noticeable progression in the portrayal of Disney Princesses. They exhibit increased agency and self-reliance, reducing their dependence on male partners as compared to earlier depictions. This evolution in character representation is a notable development in contemporary media.

This study addresses aspects of gender role portrayal in Disney Princess movies that previous studies have not extensively explored. Focusing on the movies "*Tangled," "Moana,"* and *"Raya and the Last Dragon."* This research differs from prior studies by analyzing the latest Disney Princess movies in the context of contemporary mythology, utilizing Roland Barthes' theory. It aims to uncover how these films reflect and influence societal narratives and cultural ideologies, contributing new insights into the evolving roles of Disney Princesses and their impact on societal values, especially among younger audiences. This study offers new insights into how these films both challenge and perpetuate cultural myths and ideologies about gender roles. By applying Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, the study reveals the complex ways in which these popular films reflect and influence societal narratives and cultural values, particularly in relation to evolving gender roles. This research enriches the understanding of media's role in shaping societal perceptions of gender, especially among younger audiences.

Future Research

For the identification of prospective research directions, the following recommendations are proposed, the exploration of audience reception to better understand the impact of media representations on viewers, particularly considering that different individuals might derive different meanings from the movies based on their personal experiences and perspectives. This study primarily focuses on the content of Disney films and does not delve into how audiences, especially children, perceive and are influenced by these films. On the other hand, the study acknowledges the subjectivity inherent in semiotic analysis and the cultural and societal specificity of its findings. Future research could expand on this by exploring interpretations of Disney Princesses in different cultural contexts, recognizing that contemporary Western perspectives on gender roles might not resonate universally. Such research would help in understanding how societal norms and interpretations of gender roles vary across different cultures. The thesis points out that Disney Princess movies both challenge and adhere to traditional gender dynamics, offering a more nuanced portrayal of gender roles. Future research could continue to explore this complex interplay, particularly as new Disney movies are released, to see how these portrayals evolve and what ideological lessons they impart, especially to young audiences.

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