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<div align="center">Changing Patterns of Gender Representation in Disney Films</div>

Introduction

When one talks about gender, they imply the conceptualization of what it means to be female and male, as well as the appropriate behaviors and attitudes that each should have (Mallan and Bradford 8). The formation of this conceptualization is influenced by various factors such as external instruction, social interaction, as well as the observation of females and males considered to be models. In this regard, the media to which one is exposed, such as films significantly, influence the conceptualization of gender. The media content influences one's conceptualization of gender by providing an individual with female and male features from whom one can copy behaviors and attitudes that one considers being appropriate.

The pattern of gender presentation in films, particularly Disney animation films, were meant for consumption by children and how they represent the gender can significantly influence their conceptualization of it.

The content of these films can significantly influence their internalized norms of what is considered to be appropriate behavior, as well as the way they respond directly to emotional stimuli in their environment (Mallan and Bradford 22). All norms and patterns of behavior are susceptible to change. However, this susceptibility is significant on the level of entrenchment of the norms and response patterns. The less entrenched they are, the higher the susceptibility to change and vice versa. This, therefore, implies that the norms of appropriate behavior and

response patterns in children which are less entrenched are highly susceptible to modification by the media content they consume. One of the areas of internalized norms in children that are highly susceptible to modification by the media content they consume is the area of gender roles conceptualization. In children, gender schemata are usually still underdeveloped (Mallan and Bradford 22). The schemata are thus highly susceptible to the modifying effects of external influence like media content. The results of inappropriate gender presentations in the media on gender role conceptualization are already evident. Men and boys are often under pressure being responsible for the discrimination of women and they conform to the standards of hegemonic masculinity (Pascoe 332). This reinforces the need to ensure appropriate gender representation in media.

Traditionally, the pattern of representation of gender in Disney animation has been skewed. The plots of these films have always revolved around female characters and their relationships with another character of the opposite sex. This pattern of gender representation served to glorify the importance of heterosocialism. The majority of these films portray a flawless princess who contributes to the common good of the society while her determination is being derailed by another male character or a group of male characters. This skewed pattern of gender representation in the Disney animated films is, however, changing. Pixar Animation Studios, a key player in the creation of animated films for children, has adopted a new gender representation pattern in which the plots revolve around male characters and their relationships with other male characters. Pixar Animation Studios has deviated from the traditional skewed pattern of gender representation by increasing the representation of male/male social ties and presenting such ties as beneficial to the characters and the society at large.

New Patterns of Gender Representation in Pixar Films

The pattern of gender representation in the majority of Pixar films was skewed towards the female gender. Even though the male gender was adequately represented in these films through the various male characters, the creators of the films deliberately presented the male gender in a bad light compared to the female gender. While female characters would be seen as doing something good and kind, the male characters would be seen conspiring to derail the efforts of the female characters. This skewed pattern of gender representation significantly impacted the audience's conceptualization of gender roles. From the pattern of gender representation, the audience saw the female gender to be more concerned about the common good of the society while the male gender was seen as selfish and malicious.

Films by Pixar Animation Studios have deviated from the traditional gender representation and now present more instances of friendship among the male characters. One negative aspect of the male gender that was unfairly highlighted by the skewed traditional pattern of gender representation in the Disney animated films is selfishness. The male gender was presented as being selfish and less willing to establish meaningful relationships among themselves. In these films, the female characters were usually shown establishing meaningful relationships with other female characters. Conversely, male characters were shown to be less outgoing and they preferred to work alone instead of establishing relationships with other male characters. This kind of representation made the audience believe that the people of male gender are selfish and less outgoing. However, Pixar Animation Studios is changing this notion created by the skewed representation of gender in the Disney animated films. This company has increased their portrayal of the instances of male characters establishing relationships with other male characters. In the article published in 2014 *Are the Boys at Pixar Afraid of Little Girls,* Haseenah Ebrahim notes this change of gender presentation pattern which is evident in the

following remark: "Male bonding, in several variations, is a conspicuous theme in a number of Pixar films" (Ebrahim 44). In this quote, Ebrahim acknowledges the increased frequency of male relationships representations in Disney animation films, particularly, those produced by Pixar Animation Studios. This increased frequency of male relationships representation in these films serves to reverse the false impression that had been created by the biased pattern of representation that the male gender is selfish and male characters are less willing to work with others.

Films by Pixar Animation Studios have deviated considerably from the traditional skewed pattern of gender representation by presenting the relationships between male characters as beneficial to the characters and the society at large. In the traditional pattern of representation of gender in the Disney animation films, a few instances of relationships between the male characters were portrayed in a bad light. While the female characters were establishing relationships among themselves to advance courses that served to benefit the society, the same could not be said of the male characters. The few instances in which male characters were portrayed to establish relationships among themselves showed them conspiring to derail the efforts of the female characters. This kind of portrayal painted the male gender negatively in the eyes of the audience and reinforced the wrong perception that the male gender is malicious. However, Pixar Animation Studios has deviated from this skewed pattern of representation. In most of the films produced by this company, the relationships established among male characters are shown to advance courses that benefit the characters as well as the society at large. This trend has been observed in many films by Pixar Animation Studios. Ken Gillam and Shannon Wooden observe this change in the pattern of portrayal of relationships between male characters in Pixar films in their article *Post-Princess Models of Gender*, when they remark as follows: "Same-sex

(male) bonds- to temporarily avoid the more loaded term desire- are obviously important to each of these films. In fact, male/male relationships move the fallen alphas in their journey towards changing the concept of masculinity. In each case, the male lead's first and/or primary intimacy- his most immediate transformative relationship- is with one or more male characters (Gillam and Wooden 63)." In this quote, the authors acknowledge that Pixar films have changed the pattern of the portrayal of the relationship between male characters so that the characters are now shown to advance positive courses through these relationships.

Conclusion

The content of films meant for consumption by children can significantly influence their internalized norms of what is considered to be appropriate behavior, as well as the way they respond directly to emotional stimuli in their environment. This is so because, among children, gender schemata are less developed and are thus highly susceptible to the modifying effects of external influences like the media they consume. The traditional patterns of gender representation in Disney animated films have been biased towards the female gender. The instances of representation of relationships among the male characters have not only been fewer but also painted in the negative light. These patterns of gender representation served to create the notion that the male gender is selfish and malicious. However, Pixar Animation Studios has deviated from the traditional skewed pattern of gender representation by increasing the representation of male/male social ties and presenting such ties as beneficial to the characters and the society at large.

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