

**Powerful or Pretty: A Content Analysis of Gender Images  
in Children's Animated Films**

by

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was the exploration of the portrayal of gender roles, images and stereotypes in children's animated films. A content analysis of five animated children's films was conducted. The sample consisted of the top money-making children's animated movies from 2004 to 2008. Quantitative data were obtained to examine the distribution of male and female characters, to document character's physical appearance, social roles and behavioral attributes, and to determine in what ways and to what extent, the sample of movies used stereotypical gender images of males and females in relation to the attributes of traditional masculinity and femininity.

Results revealed that male characters are still overrepresented in children's animated films. Male characters were often portrayed in a diverse array of roles and with various characteristics, including follower role, with a career, as leaders and heroes, as angry, happy, dominant, etc. Female characters were often portrayed as beautiful, in leadership roles, with careers, as angry, dominant, caring/loving, etc. Although females were shown in a variety of roles and behaviors, including traditional masculine ones, the trend of underrepresentation of female major and minor characters still persists.

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Acknowledgments .....	iii
List of Tables.....	vii
List of Figures .....	viii
Chapter 1 Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2 Literature Review .....	6
2.1. Gender Images and Stereotypes in the Mass Media .....	6
2.1.1. Gender Stereotyping.....	8
2.1.2. Racial and Ethnic Stereotyping.....	10
2.2. Studies of Gender in Children’s Animated Productions .....	13
2.3. Media Impacts on Children.....	20
2.3.1. Gender Socialization .....	20
2.3.2. Media Effect Theories .....	22
2.3.3. Consequences of Stereotyping – Gender Inequalities .....	25
2.4. Summary.....	28

Chapter 3 Research Design and Methodology.....	30
3.1. Research Questions .....	30
3.2. Content Analysis .....	31
3.3. Sample Selection.....	32
3.4. Coding Procedures .....	33
3.5. Unit of Analysis and Measures .....	34
3.5.1. General Identifiers.....	35
3.5.2. Appearance, Social Roles and Behaviors .....	35
3.6. Validity and Reliability .....	38
Chapter 4 Results.....	40
4.1. General Identifiers.....	40
4.1.1. Gender and Character Status .....	40
4.1.2. Character Form and Race.....	43
4.2. Appearance .....	47
4.3. Social Roles .....	50
4.4. Behavior.....	52
4.5. Qualitative Analysis of Gender Images.....	58
4.6. Summary.....	61
Chapter 5 Discussion and Conclusion .....	62
5.1. Summary of Results and Theoretical Implications .....	62
5.1.1. Overrepresentation of Male Characters .....	63
5.1.2. Character Form and Racial Representation.....	65
5.1.3. Images of Masculinity and Femininity .....	67

5.1.4. Socialization, Internalization and Modeling .....	72
5.2. Future Implications.....	73
5.3. Assumptions and Limitations of the Study.....	75
5.4. Outlook .....	76
5.5. Conclusion .....	77
References .....	80
Appendices.....	90

## List of Tables

Table 1 – Overview of Films in the Study Sample .....	33
Table 2 – Identifying Variables and Coding Categories .....	35
Table 3 – Study Measures for Appearance .....	36
Table 4 – Study Measures for Social Roles and Behavior .....	38
Table 5 – Number and Percentage of Major/Minor Characters by Sex .....	41
Table 6 – Number and Percentage of Character Form by Sex.....	44
Table 7 – Number and Percentage of Character’s Race by Sex .....	45
Table 8 – Number and Percentage of Character’s Bodyweight by Sex .....	47
Table 9 – Number and Percentage of Appearance Characteristics by Sex.....	48
Table 10 – Number of Appearance Portrayals, Total Expressions, and Average for each Appearance by Sex .....	49
Table 11 – Number and Percentage of Social Roles by Sex.....	50
Table 12 – Number and Percentage of Characters Portraying Masculine and Feminine Traits by Sex .....	53
Table 13 – Number of Behavioral Expressions, Total Expressions, and Average for each Behavior by Sex .....	55

## List of Figures

Figure 1 – Percent of Major and Minor Characters by Sex .....	42
Figure 2 – Percent of Male and Female Characters by Form .....	45

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In modern-day American society a life without the media is hardly imaginable. Whether magazines, newspapers, radio, television, movies or the internet, the media is affecting our day-to-day lives. The impact of the media on our daily lives is tremendous, and most of the time we are not aware of this huge influential factor. The variety of media has increased and the age in which children make their first contact with media outlets has decreased. Particularly, the medium television plays an important part in the socialization process and is typically accessible to children in the United States at birth. Movies shown on television or in movie theatres contain strong mediated messages, norms and values related to gender.

At the moment of birth, a human being is defined as being a boy or a girl. Everything a person does with her or his life is dependent on that simple categorization. Socialization, specifically gender socialization, begins with family as the primary agent and later other agents of socialization become more influential, e.g. peers, school, and media. But how are male and female characters presented in animated Hollywood films? Children are bombarded with diverse messages, images and representations of gender, constructing a dreamlike world of childhood innocence (Giroux, 1999). Particularly the physical appearance of characters on the movie screen, their social roles and positions in

society as well as their behavioral attributes shape children's view of gender unknowingly. The characters shown in animated children's movies serve as role models and provide a wide array of multi-faceted images reinforcing various attributes, looks, behaviors and social roles which are often based on traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Children's media plays an important role in their perceptions of males and females. Images of gendered behavior in movies shape what we know and understand about ourselves and others. Furthermore, children's animated films have an important educational value by teaching kids certain societal norms and values, and by sending out diverse cultural messages to children of all ages (Giroux, 1996).

The purpose of this study is the exploration of the portrayal of gender roles, images and stereotypes in children's animated Hollywood movies at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century by conducting a content analysis of five animated children's movies and collecting data on major and minor characters in these films. The sample consisted of the top money-making animated children's movies from the years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008, and was chosen based on the criteria of top domestic gross per year. The movies analyzed were *Shrek 2* (2004), *Madagascar* (2005), *Cars* (2006), *Ratatouille* (2007), and *Wall-E* (2008). The researcher used the obtained data to report the distribution of male and female characters in children's animated movies and to determine whether or not, in what ways and to what extent, the sample of animated Hollywood movies from the 21<sup>st</sup> century did stereotype the appearance, social roles, and behaviors of male and female characters in relation to the attributes of masculinity and femininity.

This work gives insight into the mediated gender images in animated Hollywood movies for children in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It adds new knowledge to already existing studies on gender roles and stereotyping in children's animated films. Recent studies of male and female characters in children's movies reported that the number of occurring male characters, whether animated or real, were much higher than the numbers of females (Faherty, 2001). This study provides a more current analysis that contributes to the knowledge gained by previous studies of children's animated movies.

Furthermore, this study adds unique information to the body of knowledge dealing with effects of animated Hollywood films on children. The investigation of stereotypes of masculinity and femininity in five of the most popular and top money making animated Hollywood movies from 2004 to 2008 will make this study not only valuable for sociologists, but also for parents, educators and filmmakers.

Previous research on children's animated films and cartoons reported that female characters have been underrepresented and consequently male characters have been overrepresented (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995; Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002; Smith & Cook, 2008). Furthermore, female characters have been linked to the stereotypical images of beauty, sexuality and thinness (Trites, 1991; Bell, 1995; Signorielli, 2001), while males have been linked to an exaggerated muscularity (Sparks, 1996; Katz & Jhally, 1999). In previous studies males were more likely portrayed in more leadership positions, as angry, independent, athletic, aggressive and emotionally controlled (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995; Baker & Raney, 2007). On the other hand, female characters were more likely shown as affectionate, dependent and passive (Stone, 1975; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). As stated in the literature male and female characters

have been often portrayed in stereotypical ways on the movie screen, offering young boys and girls a one-sided portrayal of gender images and stories, and limiting the amount of models for females.

This work is divided and organized into several chapters. Chapter 2 presents the literature on gender images and stereotypes in children's media, in particular animated films. A review of the literature on gender, racial and ethnic stereotyping in the media, and on previous studies of gender images in children's animated productions is included. Media impacts on children, in particular gender socialization, media effect theories as in social learning theory and cultivation theory, and consequences of stereotyping are incorporated in this chapter.

The third chapter presents information on the research design and methodology used for this study. The research questions are stated and a brief description of the content analysis method is given. An explanation of sample selection, coding procedures and unit of analysis is given, and study measures are introduced and defined. Validity and reliability of this research are discussed at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 4 reports the findings of the study. First, results on general identifiers (gender, character status, character form, and race) are reported. Statistical findings and examples from the films are given for the main analytical areas of appearance, social roles and behavior, to determine common representations of male and female characters in children's animated films and to find out if these portrayals are stereotypically masculine and feminine characteristics or if they deviate from these traditional gender representations. The final section of this chapter includes a qualitative analysis of significant themes on gender representations which emerged during data collection.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research findings and addresses the theoretical implications of the results. The overrepresentation of male characters, character form and racial representation, and images of masculinity and femininity are discussed. Socialization, internalization of roles and behaviors and modeling are discussed in relation to the findings. Assumptions and limitations of the study are presented and directions of future studies are suggested.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter explores the literature on gender images and stereotypes in the media, particularly in children's animated films. First, gender, racial, and ethnic stereotyping in the media are examined. Furthermore, previous studies conducted on gender images in children's animated productions are presented. Following this, media impacts on children are discussed by looking at gender socialization of children. The media effect theories, social learning theory and cultivation theory, are examined in order to understand how children may model male and female characters in animated films. Then, consequences of stereotyping which result in gender inequalities are explored.

#### *2.1. Gender Images and Stereotypes in the Mass Media*

Gender images in the popular culture always have been, and still are, heavily influenced by stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity i.e., the norms and expectations of how males and females should and should not behave. Traditional gender role portrayals in the mass media are part of our culture, and give insight into the role relationship between male and females.

Mass Media are means of communication which spread information and cultural stories through scriptures, pictures and sound. There are traditional mass media such as newspapers and magazines, but over the course of time electronic media such as radio,

television, film and the newest development the World Wide Web have developed (Douglas, 1994). All kinds of media are easily accessible and available to the public. Mass media has the function to inform, educate and socialize American society, while simultaneously getting commercial sponsorship through advertising. Furthermore, mass media mediate norms and values of society as well as role behavior (Donnerstein & Smith, 2001). According to Donnerstein and Smith (2001), there is evidence that mass media has an influence on a wide range of behaviors and attitudes, including violent behavior, and gender.

The term gender is used in various contexts and can be defined as “the varied and complex arrangements between men and women, encompassing the organization of reproduction, the sexual divisions of labor and cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity”, which have been socially constructed (Bradley, 2007:1). Basically, gender is the social distinction between men and women. It is a social construction, assigned by cultural meanings for men and women in a specific society (Bradley, 2007). Gender represents and reproduces certain behaviors, expectations and roles which are connected to males and females (Bradley, 2007).

Gender roles and stereotypes are, and have always been, important issues in American society. What does it actually mean to be a man or a woman, a boy or a girl? In 1955, the American scientist John Money coined the term *gender roles* and defined it as “all those things a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of a boy or man, girl or woman” (Money, 1955, as cited in Money, 1973: 397). Elements of gender roles include appearance, language, interests and many other factors which are not limited by biological sex (Lindsey, 1994). So, when gender roles are

assigned, society expects certain behaviors (thinking, feeling, and acting) from women and men. According to Bourdieu (1991), these social expectations come true and are reproduced in the events of everyday life. Gender identity is produced by our everyday social interactions with others; this is referred to as “doing gender” (West and Zimmermann, 1987). Gender roles are characterized by the psychological, social and cultural differences between men and women, and are affected by several factors such as socialization, including social norms learned through the media.

Gender stereotypes are defined as conceptions that men and women adopt masculine or feminine traits. The idea of stereotypes is that every member of each sex shares the characteristic of their gender stereotype. This can be applied to personality traits, as well as physical traits, social roles and sexuality.

### *2.1.1. Gender Stereotyping*

Throughout our lives we gain knowledge of certain roles which label men and women, and their corresponding characteristics, masculinity and femininity. Male and female behavior is characterized by social expectations of the society and the internalization of those expectations by its members. Prevalent gender stereotypes of male and females focus on appearance, social roles, and behavior.

Appearance of men and women in the media is characterized by traditional stereotypes of women’s beauty and thinness, as well as men’s muscularity. A study by Signorielli (2001) found that the body of females on television or in movies is typically thin and represents the social definitions of what is considered sexy and perfect, and portrayals of men’s bodies in the media have become more muscular over the course of

time, emphasizing a paradoxical evolution of a more masculine male. Females are objectified by their physical appearance such as a thin body and sexy features (Signorielli, 1997; Lippa, 2005). According to Sparks (1996), many male characters are represented in an exaggerated image of muscularity.

Stereotypical images of men and women are not only concerned with physical traits, but also with roles and behavioral traits. Portrayals of male and females on television have been traditionally stereotyped in terms of roles and personality characteristics, but portrayals of women have become less traditional in recent years (Calvert, 1999). The majority of females on television or in the movies are restricted to a few roles. Women have been historically linked to the private sector which includes family and household, and have been predominantly shown in the domestic sphere on television (Durkin and Nugent, 1998). Their characters in the media are limited to a small amount of occupational and social roles such as nurse, secretary and housewife (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Kite, 2001). Women are often shown in subservient roles, and lower statuses (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). If women are portrayed in high occupations or intellectual roles such as lawyers and doctors they are often sexually objectified. Furthermore, Calvert (1999) states that the role of females as hero has been infrequent. In contrast, male roles are more multifaceted and characterized by power, status and success (Kite, 2001). Historically men have been regarded as more powerful, more influential and more prestigious than women. On television men are displayed in diverse occupations, being problem solvers, leaders or heroes (Lippa, 2005).

Behavioral stereotyping of males and females in the media is highly prevalent in American society. Men are traditionally seen as being tough, powerful, controlling,

aggressive or violent (Hofstede, 1998; Calvert et al., 2001). In addition, males are supposed to be unemotional except for anger, and not allowed to cry or show fears (Calvert et al., 2003). Other personality attributes of males are being strong, athletic and competitive which serve as male traits which are reinforced in American society (Calvert et al., 2003). Independence and intelligence are other highly recognized traditional values of boys (Signorielli, 2001; Katz, 2002). By contrast, women are traditionally seen as gentle, nurturing, dependent and overly emotional (Hofstede, 1998, Calvert et al., 2003). Emotional expressions such as happiness and sadness are stereotypically associated with girls and women (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995; Kelly & Hutson-Comeaux, 1999). Furthermore, the traditional portrayal of women in American society has been characterized by weakness, emotionality and passiveness (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995).

Stereotypical images of masculinity and femininity are reinforced by the consistent gendered portrayals in popular culture, and more specifically, mass media. However, in the past fifty years in the United States, many women and men have increasingly challenged the traditional gender roles, but media representations seem to lag behind the reality.

### *2.1.2. Racial and Ethnic Stereotyping*

Race is a prevalent issue in American society, a society which is described as a melting pot and characterized by multicultural diversity. Race is a social construction, which means that “race is not a fixed identity, and racial dynamics are flexible, fluid, and always political” (Zatz & Mann, 2006: 2). Racial and/or ethnic minorities in the United

States are made up of African-Americans or Blacks, Hispanics or Latinos, Asian Pacific Americans and Native Americans. According to the United States Census Bureau of 2005, an estimated 80.2 percent of the total population was White, while 14.4 percent was of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, and 12.8 percent comprised the Black or African American population<sup>1</sup>. It is projected that by the middle of the twenty-first century, the White population will constitute less than fifty percent of the U.S. population, and this trend will dramatically change the future of the American society (Entman and Rojecki, 2001; Wilson et al., 2003). Hispanics and African Americans comprise a high number of the U.S. population, although only a small percentage of them are represented in the media outlets. However, around one-third of the movie audiences are Black and Hispanic, with Blacks watching more television than any other racial group (Entman and Rojecki, 2001; Wilson et al., 2003).

When represented, racial and ethnic minorities on the movie screen have been and continue to be stereotypically portrayed (Rome, 2006). Americans partially shape their perceptions of minorities by how they are presented in the media. Media images of minorities have changed over the course of time. There has been a positive movement from the criminal stereotypical image of African Americans (especially males) toward a more integrated image with a broader range of roles in movies or television shows (Entman & Rojecki, 2001). Nevertheless, many Black characters have traditionally been limited and reduced to negative violent portrayals (Rome, 2006). Their media images are characterized by distortion giving them a damaging effect (Hunt, 2005). Willis (1997) stated that African American characters in Hollywood productions are usually introduced as threatening and judging, and appear as guests in the narrative, who “emerge as

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<sup>1</sup> Numbers do not add up to 100 percent because some individuals belonged to several racial minorities.

accidental or incidental presences whose impact is often much more powerfully visual than verbal” (Willis, 1997:5). Furthermore, images of racial minorities are completely absent in many media productions (Entman & Rojecki, 2001). This absence of images presents a one-sided level of visibility in the media, or in this case, invisibility, which contribute to real-life outcomes of inequality.

bell hooks’ publications give deeper insight into the personal and political consequences of contemporary representations of black women and men within the white supremacist culture. According to hooks, “there is a direct and abiding connection between the maintenance of white supremacist patriarchy in this society and the institutionalization via mass media of specific images, representations of race, of blackness that support and maintain the oppression, exploitation, and overall domination of all black people” (hooks, 1992:2). African American people are socialized by mass media images which are influenced by white media writers, casting directors, and executives. In addition, hooks (2004) states that today in American society, black males get the most media attention when they are acting out of control, showing stereotypical violent behavior. Due to the concentration of media ownership and limited positions at the creative level, racial diversity in the media has been minimal and continues to produce more racial stereotyping, misunderstanding, and distance in between races (Hunt, 2005). A main criticism of the literature on representations of Blacks in films is that most of the characters are presented as one-dimensional, lacking complexity and not reflecting heterogeneity of real people (Entman and Rojecki, 2001).

In the 1980s and 1990s, popular films such as *Lethal Weapon* and *48 Hours* offered Black images characterized by subordination and stereotypes (Entman and

Rojecki, 2001). Images of Blacks in movies have often been characterized e.g., by hierarchical relationships in conversations between Black and White characters, the use of language in different ways (e.g. grammar, profanity, ghetto slang), or portrayals of less-educated characters or hypersexualized characters (Entman and Rojecki, 2001). According to Entman and Rojecki (2001), African American and Hispanic females in Hollywood movies are often portrayed as sexualized, which strengthens the traditional stereotype of minority women as being sexual objects.

The scholar Jack Shaheen reviewed hundreds of films presenting the Arab culture, and he found a vast amount of stereotypical images of Arabs as being violent and dangerous (Shaheen, 2003). He stated that “seen through Hollywood’s distorted lenses, Arabs look different and threatening” (Shaheen, 2003:175).

Literature shows that there have been some positive changes in the representation of racial and ethnic characters in Hollywood productions over time. However, underrepresentation and stereotypical images of racial minorities on the movie screen are still prevalent and influence the public’s understanding of racial minorities in a negative way.

## *2.2. Studies of Gender in Children’s Animated Productions*

An extensive collection of studies has been conducted to examine children’s animated productions, particularly Disney animated films. Research on Disney movies has been very popular in last decades because of their high presence in children’s lives and their role in socializing children. Studies of children’s animated films have not only

been significant in social studies such as sociology, education and psychology, but also in media studies such as communication.

Movie characters relate to a certain public image of males and females. Giroux found that “the mass media, especially the world of Hollywood films, constructs a dreamlike world of security, coherence, and childhood innocence in which kids find a place to situate themselves in their emotional lives” (Giroux, 1999:84). Mainstream motion pictures can be seen as modern myths in society because they create hero models corresponding to the dominant culture of the society they are designed for (Hofstede, 1998).

Significant research on animated Disney movies was conducted at the end of the last century. Disney movies were seen as narrative stories combining innocence, dreams and entertainment which offer children views of their roles in society and several forms of identification (Giroux, 1999). Scholar Henry Giroux looked behind the Disney entertainment industry by questioning the diverse messages presented in the children’s movies. He examined popular animated Disney movies such as *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *The Lion King* (1994) and many more. He argued that Disney used its power to construct gender identity for girls and women by narrowly defining gender roles and continuously repeating the stereotyped gender roles (Giroux, 1996). Giroux’s research reported that the principles of Disney’s children’s movies include issues regarding the social construction of gender, race, class and many other aspects of self and collective identity. Disney images are significant in children’s construction of desires, imaginations, roles, interests, behavior, and hopes. As Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997) summarized Giroux’s research:

In Disney animated films, as Henry Giroux points out, girls and women are depicted within constrictive gender roles. In *The Little Mermaid* and *The Lion King* women characters are subordinate to men: Mermaid Ariel appears to be on a liberatory journey against parental domination, but in the end she gives up her voice in a deal to trade her fin for legs, so she can pursue her faire prince; in *The Lion King* all leaders are male, recipients of patriarchal entitlement. After King Musafa dies, the duplicitous Scar becomes the new monarch. The lionesses are powerless, granting Scar the same deference as they had Mufasa. The female lions have no agency, no moral sense – they are merely backdrops to the action that males initiate and in which they take part. Similar gender dynamics are present in *Aladdin* and *Beauty and the Beast*. (1997:25)

Almost all female characters in Disney movies examined by Giroux are subordinate to males, e.g. Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*. Traditional sexy and beautiful images of females are the standard in Disney films and provide young children (both girls and boys) with an unconscious perception of stereotypes. Giroux stated that “the construction of gender identity for women and girls represents one of the most controversial issues in Disney’s animated films” (Giroux, 1999:98). Zipes (1995) found, that “young women are helpless ornaments in need of protection, and when it comes to the action of the film, they are omitted” (Zipes, 1995:37). Another theme Giroux identified was the absence of mother roles but the existence of strong father roles which emphasizes the masculine type of power in animated Disney movies in the nineties (Giroux, 1997; Bell et al., 1995).

In addition, racial stereotyping is another major concern in many of the Disney animated films. For instance, *Aladdin* has been widely criticized for depicting the Arab culture in a racist manner, as cruel and violent (Giroux, 1997).

During the opening credits, the song *Arabian Nights* depicts a horrific image of Arabs and their culture:

Oh I come from a land, from a faraway place  
Where the caravan camels roam  
Where they cut off your ear  
If they don't like your face  
It's barbaric, but hey, it's home.

The third and fourth lines were changed by Disney in an “unprecedented gesture” and read, “where it's flat and immense/and the heat is intense”, but the last line “It's barbaric, but hey, it's home” was retained (Addison, 1995:21).

Another example is the movie *Pocahontas* in which Native Americans are portrayed in racist and sexist ways (Giroux, 1997; Dundes, 2001). A study of Disney heroines investigated the construction of female characters of color and reported a trend of *orientalization* which emphasizes the exotic and an increase in sexuality (Lacroix, 2004). Furthermore, racially coded language and accents are prominent in *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*. In *Aladdin*, a thick accent is used for the bad Arabs in the movies, and in *The Lion King*, the hyenas which are also bad characters are spoken by Whoopi Goldberg and Cheech Martin, representing a Black and Latino accent (Giroux, 1997).

Two recent studies of top-grossing G-rated movies found interesting patterns in gendered representations of characters (Smith & Cook, 2008). The first study looked at the nature and extent of the portrayals of male and female characters and showed remarkable results in 101 top-grossing G-rated movies released between 1990 and 2005. The research showed that only 17 percent of the film narrators and 17 percent of the characters in crowd scenes were females (Smith & Cook, 2008). The second study examined “the prevalence and portrayal of single, speaking characters in popular motion

pictures” (Smith & Cook, 2008:13) in top-grossing G- and PG-movies released between 1990 and 2006. The analysis focused on change in the amount of males and females in those movies over time. The results showed no increase or decrease in the prevalence of female characters in sixteen years. In addition, in G- and PG-rated films females were more likely shown in the role of parent than males, and females were five times more likely shown in sexually revealing clothing (Smith & Cook, 2008). A qualitative analysis of 13 female leads in G-rated movies from 1937 to 2006 showed that almost all 13 females were valued for their appearance (Smith & Cook, 2008: 16). There is a disparity of images between male and female characters. The repetitive and continuous gender images in the media consistently reinforce certain values and norms in children from a very young age.

The works of scholars such as Sut Jhally, Jean Kilbourne and Jackson Katz who have studied gender and media in recent years state that girls and women are objectified in relation to their beauty and relationships with men (Kilbourne, 2000; Katz, 2002; Jhally, 2006). According to Jhally (2006), “women are constantly shown ’drifting away’ mentally while under the physical protection of a male, as if his strength and alertness were enough” (Jhally, 2006). Media tells young girls over and over again that women must be beautiful in order to be recognized by men in this society (Kilbourne, 2000). In contrast, boys and men are encouraged to be tough, independent, strong and respected (Katz, 2002). In addition, Katz (2002) asserts that the media informs young boys constantly that “real men” have to be tough and independent or they will be considered as weak and called derogatory (usually feminine) names. Hypermasculinity is a major theme in Disney animated films (Katz, 2002). It transmits the message that “masculine

power is embodied in muscle, firepower, and physical authority” (Katz and Jhally, 1999). Young boys and young girls are expected to behave these certain ways in society.

The issue of gender in Disney animated films has been one of the most popular themes among many researchers. Numerous other works dealing with stereotypical images of females in Disney movies have been published in the past 35 years. Stone (1975), and Dundes and Dundes (2000) criticized Disney for his portrayal of female sexuality and passivity. Other studies addressed the issue of ideological patriarchy which dominates Disney animated films (Addison, 1995; Sells, 1995). According to Sells (1995:181) who examined *The Little Mermaid* females are mainly voiceless, but if they are shown in power they appear as monstrous as seen in the character Ursula. In addition, a study by Trites (1991) also analyzed the Disney film *The Little Mermaid*, and found that the movie is full of sexism, that females are dependent on males, and physical appearance takes an important part in the character’s consciousness. A study on feminism and femininity in Disney animated films reported that almost none of the feminist ideologies were adopted in animated films by Disney (Craven, 2002). There have been a lot of studies on negative stereotypes Disney depicts. In contrast, a study by Do Rozario (2004) explored the transformation of female characters, in particular Disney princesses, from a passive to a more active role, and therefore caused a disruption of the traditional patriarchal society created by Disney. For example, *Pocahontas* can decide if she wants to stay with her tribe or marry John Smith (Do Rozario, 2004).

Several studies have explored the physical appearance of characters in children’s cartoons and movies (Bell, 1995; Klein & Shiffman, 2006). Bell (1995) analyzed the physical portrayals of females in Disney animated movies, which were characterized by

“perfect girls”, and “femme fatales”. Klein and Shiffman (2006) analyzed the messages about physical attractiveness in animated cartoons. They found that being attractive was associated with socially desired characteristics and being unattractive was linked to socially disapproved traits (Klein & Shiffman, 2006). A number of studies on animated movies investigated societal issues. Trites (1991) analyzed the weight aspect in *The Little Mermaid*, and found that being thin has become a standard in American society. It was reported that evilness was associated with weight which can be observed by looking at the character Ursula who is very large in contrast to Ariel (Trites, 1991).

Another study by Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) examined children’s cartoons and found that males outnumbered females more than 3 to 1 among major characters, and almost 5 to 1 among minor characters. In addition, male characters were more likely to show leadership, anger, independence, athleticism and the use of aggression (Thompson and Zerbinos, 1995). In contrast, female characters were more likely to ask for advice, and to show affection (Thompson and Zerbinos, 1995).

Baker and Raney (2007) analyzed physical appearance, personality attributes, and communicative behaviors of male and female characters in cartoon programming, and found that male characters outnumbered female characters. They reported that males occupied more lead roles, and that male characters were more likely to express anger and more emotionally controlled than female characters (Baker & Raney, 2007).

Previous research on gender images in the media showed that popular culture has an enormous impact on gender expectations of males and females in children’s perceptions of themselves and others. By looking at past research, many images of masculinity and femininity are still traditionally stereotyped in the media, and the

majority of Disney animated movies contain a higher amount of male characters than female characters (Faherty, 2001). The stereotyping of males and females in the media has an enormous influence on viewers, particularly kids.

### *2.3. Media Impacts on Children*

How do societal expectations of men and women influence individual boys and girls? The lack of understanding about gender stereotypes is pervasive. The public presentation of traditional masculinity and femininity influences the identities and behaviors of boys and men, and girls and women. Especially television has become the primary common source of everyday culture, politics and values of society (Morgan, 1989:242). New times have led to a new era of childhood, an era characterized by new technologies, communication media and an easy access to media outlets (Marsh, 2005). A Kaiser Family Foundation study reported that young people between 8 and 18 spend an average of almost 6 ½ hours with media every day (Rideout et al., 2005). Another study by Dubow et al. states that “forty-three percent of four to six year olds and sixty-eight percent of children eight and older have a TV in their bedroom” (Dubow et al., 2007:405-406). Consequently, television is the most significant media with the power to socialize children in American society. Children at very young age are influenced by masculine and feminine images in children’s programs.

#### *2.3.1. Gender Socialization*

Socialization is the process whereby individuals “are taught the skills, behavior patterns, values, and motivations needed for competent functioning in the culture in

which the child is growing up” (Maccoby, 2007:13). Socialization is the life long process which requires social interaction, and results in the internalization and attainment of rules, roles, norms and values in the social, personal and cognitive sphere (Handel, 2006; Grusec and Hastings, 2007). A child is born with ascribed statuses such as sex or race. However, throughout his or her life, a baby will learn how to cooperate and interact in society. This learning takes place through the process of socialization. Face-to-face interactions between children and significant others lead to the “development of a self, the growth of human sentiments, and the acquisition of language” (Handel, 2006:16).

Human beings are divided into two biological categories, male and female (Lindsey, 1994). Our society has added behavioral expectations to the biological differences between men and women. There are different behavioral aspects such as language use, occupations and emotional expressions which have been socially defined as masculine or feminine (Handel, 2006:277). Gender socialization starts right at birth.

From the moment a girl infant is wrapped in a pink blanket and a boy infant in a blue one, one gender development begins. The colors of pink and blue are among the first indicators used by a society to distinguish female from male. As these infants grow, other cultural artifacts will assure that this distinction remains intact. Girls will be given dolls to diaper and tiny stoves on which to cook pretend meals. Boys will construct buildings with miniature tools and wage war with toy guns and tanks. In the teen and young adult years, although both may spend their money on records, girls buy cosmetics and clothes while boys buy sports equipment and stereo components. The incredible power of gender role socialization is largely responsible for such behavior. Pink and blue begin this lifelong process. (Lindsey, 1994:47)

Being a boy or a girl is one of the most important aspects of a child’s experience in the first years of his or her life. Through the interaction with parents and other children, as well as the exposure to the stories told by media, a child learns very quickly what it means to be a boy or a girl, and what it means in differentiating gendered behavioral

patterns (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001). Gender has an effect on the future opportunities of boys and girls. Interestingly, Grusec and Hastings (2007) have noted, if girls and boys are given the same opportunities in life they often behave in the same way. The mass media is one of the main sources for information on gender. Children's animated films bombard children with many stereotypical images and messages about males and females. Consequently, because of the overrepresentation of males in most children's programs, kids connect power and status in society with men (Leaper and Friedman, 2007). In addition, the reverse is true for women in that they are often shown as less important because they have fewer roles on television. Children's animated films have become a contributor to the gender socializations process, which plays a significant role in the development of gender stereotypes and the internalizations of such roles.

### *2.3.2. Media Effect Theories*

Several theories can be found in social studies, such as psychology, which explore the influence of images and messages in the media and their impact on children. Media, particularly television, has become a powerful and influential common source for learning, for teaching children about norms and values in society, and constructing a social reality (Gerbner, 1998).

Theories on media effects include social learning theory, which is also known as observational learning theory, and cultivation theory. Social learning theory states that children model, imitate and adapt the behavior they observe in their social environment as much as behaviors they see on television (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bandura, 1977). Images in the media create social norms and behaviors which become an integral part of

children's perceptions of how to act in various situations and circumstances. The observations children make in movies produce certain actions and reactions.

A study by Nathanson et al. (2002) illustrates that television has a huge impact on children's attitudes towards gender identification of certain traits and behaviors, as well as the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Children learn about social roles and behaviors of gender from television or movies. Children at a very young age copy the actions of people around them and of characters shown in movies or on television by observing their emotions, social interactions and behaviors (Mumme & Fernald, 2003).

Fictional representations of characters in movies have a powerful socializing effect on the lives of children because young children have a hard time to differentiate between reality and fantasy. According to Mumme and Fernald (2003), children learn "how to interpret and predict the behaviors of other people and to relate this understanding in their own behavior" (Mumme & Fernald, 2003:221). Identification with media characters plays a crucial role in children's internalization of certain values, norms, and behaviors (Cohen, 2006). When the viewer identifies with a character his or her viewing experience will be intensified (Cohen, 2006). Children engaging in identification will more likely memorize the behaviors and actions of the characters they identify with. As stated by social learning theory, if a child identifies with a character he or she might be more likely to internalize and model the behaviors shown in animated films.

Cultivation theory views the media's role as a significant agent of socialization, and explains the impacts of television programs on attitudes and behaviors on viewers (Signorielli, 2001). The permanent and consistent exposure to stereotypical images in the

media influences the perceptions and attitudes of children, and results in cultivation effects. The theory states that “the more time the viewer spends with television, the more likely their conceptions about the world and its people will reflect what they see on television” (Signorielli, 2001:344). Gerbner (1998) illustrated that cultivation contributes to the conception of social reality, and television is “an integral aspect of a dynamic process” which reinforces images, beliefs and opinions (Gerbner, 1998:180). According to Huntemann and Morgan, permanent media exposure contributes to “the cultivation of a child’s values, beliefs, dreams, and expectations, which shape the adult identity a child will carry and modify through his or her life” (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001:311). A study of young adults’ wishful identification with television characters reported that men were more likely to identify with male characters they perceived as successful, intelligent, and violent, while young women were more likely to identify with female characters they perceived as successful, intelligent, attractive, and admired (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). So, media plays an important role in modeling gender-specific behavior. Children tend to imitate same-gender characters more than opposite-gender characters (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995).

Social learning theory and cultivation theory provide explanations of how media impacts children, how it influences their social reality, and how it promotes certain perceptions, stereotypes and attitudes by looking at messages and portrayals in media outlets.

### *2.3.3. Consequences of Gender Stereotyping – Gender Inequalities*

Media images that primarily show men in dominant roles and women in subservient roles, and being beautiful and sexy, have the potential to negatively influence girls' and boys' perceptions of their roles in society. These stereotypical images of males and females in the media can result in devastating gender inequalities, inequalities which mainly disadvantage women. Body images on movie screens mainly offer problematic portrayals of "perfect" people which reinforce narrow and impossible beauty standards that result in personal insecurities that often are addressed by plastic surgery and epidemics of eating disorders (Wolf, 1991; Pipher, 1995; Bordo, 1999). In addition females are very often presented as helpless victims who are in need of male assistance (Howell, 1990). One of the most recognized gender inequalities can be found in the division of labor in which women are still fighting for equal rights on all levels, including wages and underrepresentation in higher positions (Bollinger & O'Neill, 2008).

The objectified images of females in advertisements, on television and in Hollywood movies, shape young girls' and boys' conceptions of women. The desire for "perfect" beauty becomes a standard image in the media and the communicated messages are internalized by young girls. Popular culture has a huge effect on the body images of young females. Images of "perfect" females can result in fatal self conceptions because this standard of ideal beauty is impossible to reach (Kilbourne, 1999). Eating disorders as well as plastic surgery among some young girls and many more women are common consequences of female images in media (Martin, 2007).

Most of the images of females presented in the media, particularly in advertisements, television shows, and movies emphasize and objectify the female body as

thin and sexy (Kilbourne, 1999; Shandler, 1999). Shandler stated (1999), that images of women in the media are characterized by perfection, and a “cute nose, perfect skin, long legs, a flat stomach or long eyelashes” (Shandler, 1999:3). American women are defined by beauty, and it seems to be essential for success in American society (Pipher, 1995). Adolescent girls are the most affected age group of gender stereotyping because they are in search of themselves, most worried about their outward appearance, and lack self-confidence (Kilbourne, 1999). Young females compare their bodies to those of movie stars, models, or women in their surroundings. For instance, James Bond movies are full of gorgeous women, every one of them having a “perfect” face and body (Streitmacher, 2004). These dominant images result in the promotion of an impossible beauty standard for women and young girls and often give them a feeling of inadequacy (Wolf, 1991). Poor body images that result from media reinforce a negative self concept.

There have been severe consequences for women and girls, e.g., the development of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, and the increasing interest in cosmetic surgery. Bordo (1999:216) reported that “today, eating problems are virtually the norm among high school and college women- and even younger girls”, which make women more vulnerable and support the weak image presented in a lot of Hollywood movies. Anorexic young women “epitomize our cultural definitions of feminine: thin, passive, weak and eager to please” (Pipher, 1995: 175). The diet and cosmetic surgery industries have become very powerful and profitable in the last few decades, and arose from beauty concerns and insecurities reinforced by media images (Wolf, 1991).

Many forms of media disproportionately show females as victims, being helpless or in need of male assistance (Howell, 1990). Media images of females as victims are

common in movies and on television (Howell, 1990). These messages of female powerlessness are manifested in everyday life and are problematic for the speed of social change toward greater gender equality.

There are differences between men and women in the distribution of power, prestige and material resources. Wolf states that “as women demanded access to power, the power structure used the beauty myth materially to undermine women’s advancement” (Wolf, 1991:20). American society is patriarchal, i.e., dominated and ruled by men. In the workplace, men still occupy more high-level positions than women, and there is a discrepancy between average earnings of women and men (Bollinger & O’Neill, 2008). According to Kimmel (2004):

The combination of the persistence of traditional gender ideologies and changes in economic and social realities makes today’s workplace a particularly contentious arena for working out gender issues. On the other hand, women face persistent discrimination based on their gender: They are paid less, promoted less often, and assigned to specific jobs despite their qualifications and motivations; and they are made to feel unwelcome, like intruders into an all-male preserve. (Kimmel, 2004:177)

In the popular media, women are more often shown in the domestic setting, as housewives and caretakers of children, than their male counterparts (Durkin & Nugent, 1998). There are still many Americans who believe in the traditional work model of males being the breadwinners and family providers, and females being the caretakers of the children and house, even when their own lives no longer reflect this stereotypical image (Kimmel, 2000).

Another major consequence of gender stereotyping is the wage gap between males and females. According to Bollinger and O’Neill (2008), “Clara Jeffery, an editor of *Mother Jones* Magazine, reported in 2006 that women were then making 80 cents on

the male \$ 1.00, that over her career the average working woman loses \$ 1.2 million to wage inequity, and that since 1963, when the Equal Pay Act was signed, the wage gap has closed by less than half a cent per year” (Bollinger and O’Neill, 2008:184).

Interestingly, despite being an industrial country, the United States has one of the highest levels wage gaps between males and females (Kimmel, 2004). In American Society, women having the same job, doing the same work with the same skill levels as men are paid less than their male counterparts.<sup>2</sup>

#### *2.4. Summary*

Media is one of the most pervasive agents of gender socialization. The attainment of life roles, rules, norms and values is an important process in a human being’s life. Through the steady use of television, children’s understanding of male and female behavior, roles and expectations is shaped by fictional characters and storylines shown in movies and on television. Previous studies reported, most of the time, those images portray gender in traditional stereotypical ways. Gender representations in the popular culture reinforce the stereotyping of norms related to masculinity and femininity. Men are characterized by traditional gender roles of dominance, power and status and are cast and shown in a diverse array of roles, and women are characterized by beauty, attractiveness and nurturing, and have a very limited range of “appropriate” feminine roles.

Studies on children’s animated films have shown that females are usually underrepresented, and that gender and racial stereotyping still takes place. This

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<sup>2</sup> During the conduct of this study, President Obama signed the Ledbetter Act, a law which is the first step toward equal pay for equal work.

stereotyping in media can affect children who learn about social roles and behavior from their observations of characters and patterned behavior in television and movies. In spite of maintaining stereotypical images of males and females in the mass media, there have been progressive changes in American society, particularly the growing visibility of women and racial minorities in movies, and the improvement of women's position in the workplace. However, consumers must realize that most of the images of males and females in the media do not reflect the current, more egalitarian reality.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides information on the research design and methodology employed to conduct the study, including the research questions, a description of the content analysis used, and an explanation of the sample selection, coding procedures, and unit of analysis and study measures used. Furthermore, this chapter gives a presentation of validity and reliability of the research study. The study consisted of a content analysis of five children's animated Hollywood movies from 2004 to 2008. Quantitative data were obtained to examine the distribution of male and female characters in major and minor roles, to document character's physical appearance, social roles and behavioral attributes, and to determine in what ways and to what extent, the sample of movies used stereotypical gender images of males and females in relation to the attributes of masculinity and femininity.

#### *3.1. Research Questions*

The research questions for this study focus on the nature and extent of traditional gender images of major and minor characters presented in children's animated Hollywood movies over the past five years (2004-2008). The following research questions are posed.

- 1: Who is occupying the major and minor roles in animated children's movies – male or female characters, and what is the distribution of male and female characters portrayed in major and minor roles in each of the five movies?
- 2: How are male and female characters represented in terms of *character form* (human, animal, object or others) and *race*?
- 3a: How are male and female characters represented in terms of *appearance*?
- 3b: Are these *appearance* characteristics stereotypically masculine or feminine, and to what extent, if any, do they deviate from traditional stereotypical presentations of gendered appearance?
- 4a: What are the *social roles* of male and female characters in children's animated movies?
- 4b: Are these *social roles* stereotypically masculine or feminine, and to what extent, if any, do they deviate from traditional stereotypical presentations of gender roles?
- 5a: What *behavioral traits* do male and female characters possess?
- 5b: Are these *behavioral traits* stereotypically masculine or feminine, and to what extent, if any, do they deviate from traditional stereotypical presentations of gendered behavior?

### 3.2. Content Analysis

Content analysis represents the most appropriate methodology for obtaining and classifying the data related to the stereotyping of male and female characters featured in children's Hollywood productions. This method is defined as “a research technique that is based on measuring the amount of something (violence, negative portrayals of women, or whatever) in a representative sampling of some mass-mediated popular art form” (Berger, 1991: 25).

This content analysis focused on the analysis of the major and minor characters in a sample of five movies (Appendix A), for a total of 8.4 hours of film footage. Three analytical areas were explored: characters' physical appearance, social roles and behavior.

### 3.3. Sample Selection

Five (recently released) movies were selected for the sample based on the criteria of top domestic gross per year (United States yearly box office), 2004 to 2008, for children aged five and older. Animated movies have always been popular among children, in part because animation allows them to dive into a world full of fantasies and dreams. But such films are also “producers of culture” and “teaching machines” which target children as consumers (Giroux: 1997:53; Lacroix, 2004). The internalization of social expectations for male and female behavior and characteristics plays a significant role in animated movies as well as in movies with real human actors. Animated characters offer children a wide array of fictional images to identify with.

The movies were chosen for ages five and up. The recommended age for the movies was adopted from *Common Sense Media*<sup>3</sup>, which is a non-partisan and non-profit organization that provides information about children’s movies for parents. The ratings of children’s movies on *Common Sense Media* are based on age appropriateness, and rely on developmental criteria from some of the nation’s leading authorities to determine what content is appropriate for which ages. The five movies in this study are G and PG rated, which indicates that they are admitted for all ages. The rating *G* stands for *General Audiences* and that all ages are admitted, and *PG* recommends that *Parental Guidance* is suggested because some of the material might not be suitable for children.<sup>4</sup>

The year of film’s release, the movie title, its rating (G or PG), age recommendation, and yearly box office gross in the United States and rank among the

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.common sense media.org/about-us/our-mission/about-our-ratings>

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.mpaa.org/FilmRat\\_Ratings.asp](http://www.mpaa.org/FilmRat_Ratings.asp)

Top 50 Annual Box Office Grossing movie were recorded.<sup>5</sup> The following movies comprised the study sample: *Shrek 2* (2004), *Madagascar* (2005), *Cars* (2006), *Ratatouille* (2007), and *Wall-E* (2008). All of these movies were popular among American viewers, particularly children, and were significantly profitable films. In 2007 *Shrek the Third* was the top children’s movie for viewers aged seven and up. However, *Shrek 2* had already been selected for 2004. To avoid the duplication that a sequel would impose on the analysis, *Shrek the Third* was excluded from the sample for 2007, and the second top grossing age appropriate movie was chosen, *Ratatouille*. Table 1 shows an overview of the top animated children’s movies for this study from 2004 to 2008, based on top domestic gross per year.

Table 1 – Overview of Films in the Study Sample

Year of Release	Title of Movie	Rating	Age Recommendation	Yearly Box Office Gross	Rank
<b>2004</b>	<b>Shrek 2</b>	<b>PG</b>	<b>6+</b>	<b>\$ 441,226,247</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>Madagascar</b>	<b>PG</b>	<b>7+</b>	<b>\$ 193,595,521</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>2006</b>	<b>Cars</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>5+</b>	<b>\$ 244,082,982</b>	<b>3</b>
2007	Shrek the Third (excluded)	PG	6+	\$ 322,719,944	2
<b>2007</b>	<b>Ratatouille</b>	<b>PG</b>	<b>5+</b>	<b>\$ 206,445,654</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2008</b>	<b>Wall-E</b>	<b>G</b>	<b>5+</b>	<b>\$ 223,808,164</b>	<b>5</b>

### 3.4. Coding Procedures

The order of viewing the films was randomly selected. An analysis codebook was created for data collection on male and female characters (Appendix B). The analysis codebook was used with several coding forms to record the data on a character’s gender, form, race, appearance, social roles and behavior. The major and minor male and female characters were coded for bodyweight, exaggerated physique as height, weight, and

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<sup>5</sup> <http://boxofficemojo.com/>

strength/muscularity. In addition, the quantity and frequency of three physical characteristics were coded. The coder used a 2-point scale for the appearance measures (present, not present). Every time a character was mentioned possessing a certain physical characteristic the trait was noted as present and marked on the coding sheet. The characters in the sample were coded for ten social roles. When a character was identified with a specific role, the coder recorded a cross on the coding sheet. The characters were also rated on 15 behavioral traits using a 2-point scale (present, not present). These traits were selected from past research and included such traits as athletic, caring, sad, etc. Every time a trait or attribute was identified, a character was mentioned as possessing a certain characteristic or the character exhibited the trait in his or her behavior in the specific movie, the coder recorded it on the form as being present. After completing the data collection, the data were compiled and summated, and then frequency distributions were calculated.

Each movie was viewed multiple times by a trained coder. While viewing each film, the coder looked for the presence of study measures, but also noted when unexpected themes or extreme anecdotal examples emerged. These data were recorded and reported as qualitative.

### *3.5. Unit of Analysis and Measures*

The unit of analysis was each individual character who spoke or performed actions significant to the story in the sample of five movies. The characters were divided into two categories, major and minor characters. A major character was defined as any character who was essential for the story and the plot centered around him or her. In

addition, a major character was generally on the screen for a significant amount of time and had extensive dialogue. A minor character was identified by having a significant relationship with other characters, and this relationship had an active impact on some aspect of the major character's life and was important to the story. Only characters who were essential to the plot and whose presence was fundamental to the story were coded. Consequently characters, such as incidental characters shown in background roles or as non-essential for the storyline were not coded.

### 3.5.1. General Identifiers

The variables gender (sex identity), character status, character form and race were recorded for each individual character in order to get a general overview of major and minor characters in the sample. The coding categories for each identifying variable are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 – Identifying Variables and Coding categories

Variable	Coding Category
Gender (Sex Identity)	Male, Female, Unable to determine
Character Status	Major, Minor
Character Type/Form	Human, Animal, Object, Others
Race	Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Foreign, Other (write in), Does not Apply, Unable to determine

### 3.5.2. Appearance, Social Roles and Behaviors

To examine gender images in the sample, data on appearance, social roles and behavior of all major and minor characters were collected. Most of the masculine and feminine stereotyped appearances, social roles, and behavioral traits selected for this

study derived from Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). Other similar studies that conducted content analyses of television programs and movies also helped in forming a study design (Signorielli, 1997; Calvert et al., 2003). A few more characteristics were added by the researcher as exploratory measures.

Appearance measures were derived from previous studies by Thompson and Zerbinos (1995), and Signorielli (1997; 2001). These included the character's body weight, which was adapted from the Children's Body Image Scale (CBIS; Truby and Paxton, 2002), the occurrence of an exaggerated physique by examining height (extremely short, extremely tall), weight (extremely thin, extremely heavy) and strength/muscularity (extremely weak, extremely strong), and the categories of beautiful, dirty and sexual. An overview of appearance study measures can be found in Table 3.

Table 3 – Study Measures for Appearance

--Bodyweight
--Extremely short
--Extremely tall
--Extremely thin
--Extremely heavy
--Extremely weak
--Extremely strong
--Beautiful
--Dirty
--Sexual

Detailed operational definitions for appearance measures are included in Appendix C.

Social role measures were also derived from past research on stereotypical images of male and females in the media (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995; Calvert, 1999; Lippa, 2005). As shown in the literature, male roles are typically characterized by status, dominance, success (Kite, 2004). Social roles typically identified as masculine were career, leader, and hero (Lippa, 2005). The social roles of explorer, military and villain were added to the study design by the researcher. In contrast, females have been shown most often in subservient roles, identified in the literature as domestic role, follower and no career. The role of females as victims was added to the final study design. The final study design on social roles included six masculine roles: career, explorer, hero, leader, military and villain; and four feminine roles: domestic role, follower, no career and victim. Operational definitions for masculine and feminine social roles are found in Appendix D.

The masculine and feminine behavioral traits for this study derived from Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) and the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974). In the final study design the following behavioral attributes were coded as masculine: angry, athletic, brave, competitive, dominant, independent, intelligent, and rebellious/troublesome. The following traits were coded as feminine in the final study design: caring/loving, childlike, crying/whining, dependent, fearful, happy, and scared/desperate. Operational definitions for each of these terms were developed by reading dictionary definitions and discussing their meanings in society. Appendix E provides an overview of the detailed operational definitions for the behavioral traits. Table 4 presents an overview of the study measures for social roles and behavior.

Table 4 – Study Measures for Social Roles and Behavior

	Social Roles	Behavior
Masculine	Career Explorer Hero Leader Military Villain	Angry Athletic Brave Competitive Dominant Independent Intelligent Rebellious/Troublesome
Feminine	Domestic Role Follower No Career Victim	Caring/Loving Childlike Crying/Whining Dependent Fearful Happy Scared/Desperate

### 3.6. *Validity and Reliability*

This content analysis of five children’s animated films provided a sound methodology to answer specific research questions. The concepts of validity and reliability are important parts of the study’s instrumentation. Validity indicates the extent to which the data collection instruments and procedures measure what they are intended to measure. The question is: “Are we measuring what we want to measure?” (Neuendorf, 2002:112). This study collected data on several measures, including characteristics related to appearance, social roles and behavior patterns, which have been associated with traditional gender-role stereotyping. Content validity was established by an extensive literature review of gender stereotypes presented on television or in movies.

Reliability clarifies the extent to which the instruments yield consistent results with minimal error. The coding sheet was used to document the occurrences of gendered traits throughout. Therefore there must be at least two coders who take part in human-

coding content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). To ensure reliability, in addition to the primary researcher, an independent coder received thorough training and instructions to code two randomly selected movies, which represented 40% of the entire film population. The coder was instructed to code all instances in a process that duplicated the primary researcher's findings. Reliability was tested by comparing the summative data collected by the primary researcher and the independent second coder. Intercoder reliability was calculated by using the percentage agreement, an exact agreement between primary coder and second coder. Results showed extensive agreement in almost all analytical categories: identifiers (sex identity of characters = 100% agreement, character form = 100% agreement, race of characters = 92% agreement), bodyweight (62% agreement), appearance (83% agreement for male characters; 75% agreement for female characters); social roles (86% agreement for male characters; 90% agreement for female characters); and behavior (74% agreement for male characters; 74% agreement for female characters).

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The chapter begins with an overview of identifiers which present information on the sample in general. They included sex identity, character status, character form and race. Findings on the three main analytical areas of the study, appearance, social roles, and behavior, are reported, and examined in terms of stereotypically masculine or feminine characteristics. Examples of images that deviated from traditional gender representations are also presented. The final section of the chapter included a qualitative analysis of significant themes on gender images which emerged during the data collection phase.

#### *4.1. General Identifiers*

The general identifiers of this study included gender (sex identity), character status, character form and race. They will give a broad overview of the male and female characters in the sample.

##### *4.1.1. Gender and Character Status*

The first research question asked if more male or female characters occupy the major and minor roles in each of the five animated films. The percentages and numbers of major and minor characters by sex are shown in Table 5.

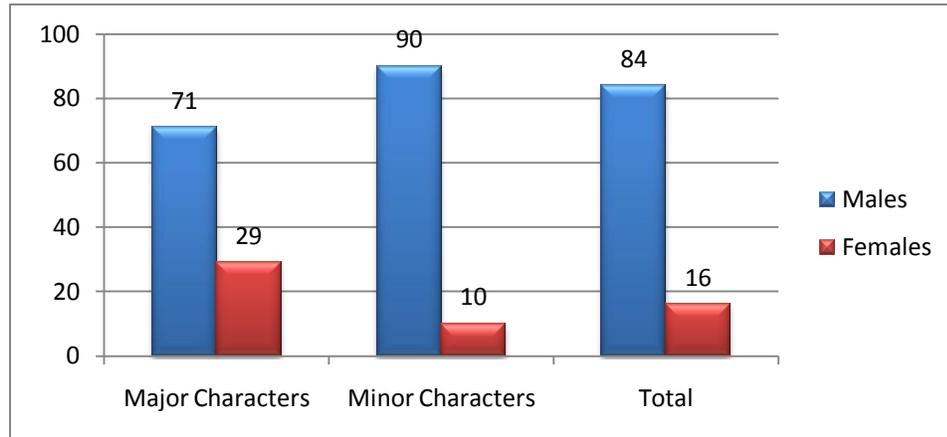
Table 5 – Number and Percentage of Major/Minor Characters by Sex

Movie	Character Status	Male (N=37)		Female (N=7)		Total (N=44)		Percentage		Total %
		n	%	n	%	n	%	M	F	
Shrek 2	Major	2	35%	1	33%	3	30%	67%	33%	100%
	Minor	5	65%	2	66%	7	70%	65%	35%	100%
	Subtotal	7	100%	3	100%	10	100%	70%	30%	100%
Mada-gascar	Major	3	30%	1	100%	4	36%	75%	25%	100%
	Minor	7	70%	0	0%	7	64%	100%	0%	100%
	Subtotal	10	100%	1	100%	11	100%	91%	9%	100%
Cars	Major	2	22%	1	100%	3	30%	67%	33%	100%
	Minor	7	78%	0	0%	7	70%	100%	0%	100%
	Subtotal	9	100%	1	100%	10	100%	90%	10%	100%
Ratatouille	Major	2	35%	0	0%	2	25%	100%	0%	100%
	Minor	5	65%	1	100%	6	75%	83%	17%	100%
	Subtotal	7	100%	1	100%	8	100%	87.5%	12.5%	100%
Wall-E	Major	1	25%	1	100%	2	40%	50%	50%	100%
	Minor	3	75%	0	0%	3	60%	100%	0%	100%
	Subtotal	4	100%	1	100%	5	100%	80%	20%	100%
Total	Major	10	27%	4	57%	14	32%	71%	29%	100%
	Minor	27	73%	3	43%	30	68%	90%	10%	100%
	Total	37	100%	7	100%	44	100%	84%	16%	100%

In the five movies, a total of 44 characters were identified as major and minor characters (*Shrek 2* = 10, *Madagascar* = 11, *Cars* = 10, *Ratatouille* = 8, and *Wall-E* = 5), of which 32% were major characters ( $n = 14$ ) and 68% were minor characters ( $n = 30$ ).

As shown in Figure 1, among the 44 characters identified in the sample, 84% were males ( $n = 37$ ) while 16% were females ( $n = 7$ ). Among the 14 major characters identified, 71% ( $n = 10$ ) were males while 29% ( $n = 4$ ) were females. Among the 30 minor characters, 90% ( $n = 27$ ) were identified as male characters while 10% ( $n = 3$ ) were identified as female characters. The ratio of major male and female characters was 2.5 to 1, while the ratio for minor male and female characters was 9 to 1. The ratio of all male and females characters was 5.3 to 1.

Figure 1 – Percent of Major and Minor Characters by Sex



*Shrek 2* had a total of ten characters, with 70% ( $n = 7$ ) identified as males (two major 35%, five minor 65%) and 30% ( $n = 3$ ) as females (one major 33%, two minor 66%), while 30% ( $n = 3$ ) of the characters in *Shrek 2* were identified as major characters (2 males 67%, 1 female 33%), and 70% ( $n = 7$ ) were identified as a minor characters (5 males 65%, 2 females 35%). *Madagascar* had a total of eleven characters coded, with 91% ( $n = 10$ ) identified as males (three major 30%, seven minor 70%) and 9% ( $n = 1$ ) identified as females (one major 100%), while 36% ( $n = 4$ ) were identified as major characters (3 males 75%, 1 female 25%), and 64% ( $n = 7$ ) were identified as minor characters (7 males 100%). *Cars* had a total of ten characters, with 90% ( $n = 9$ ) identified as males (two major 22%, seven minor 78%) and 10% ( $n = 1$ ) identified as females (one major 100%), while 25% ( $n = 2$ ) were identified as major characters (2 males 100%), and 75% ( $n = 6$ ) were identified as minor characters (5 males 83%, 1 female 17%). *Ratatouille* had a total of eight characters coded, with 87.5% ( $n = 7$ ) identified as males (two major 35%, five minor 65%) and 12.5% ( $n = 1$ ) identified as females (one minor 100%), while 25% ( $n = 2$ ) were identified as major characters (2 males 100%), and 75% ( $n = 6$ ) were identified as minor characters (5 males 83%, 1

female 17%). *Wall-E* had a total of five characters, with 80% ( $n = 4$ ) identified as males (one major 25%, three minor 75%) and 20% ( $n = 1$ ) identified as females (one major 100%), while 40% ( $n = 2$ ) are identified as major characters (1 male 50%, 1 female 50%), and 60% ( $n = 3$ ) are identified as minor characters (3 males 100%).

Among the male characters presented in the sample ( $n = 37$ ), 27% ( $n = 10$ ) were identified as major characters while 73% ( $n = 10$ ) were identified as minor characters. Among the significantly fewer female characters ( $n = 7$ ), 57% ( $n = 4$ ) were identified as major characters while 43% ( $n = 3$ ) were identified as minor characters.

The number of male characters in each movie varied between four and ten. Three movies (60%) had two males in major roles (*Shrek 2*, *Cars*, *Ratatouille*), one movie had three male leads (*Madagascar*), and one movie had one male major character (*Wall-E*). Four films (80%) had only one female character, which was identified as a major character in three of the four movies (*Madagascar*, *Cars*, and *Wall-E*), and identified as a minor character in *Ratatouille*. *Ratatouille* was the only movie which did not have a major female character. *Shrek 2* was the movie with the greatest number of female characters with three, identified as one major and two minor characters.

#### 4.1.2. Character Form and Race

The second research question addressed the issue of character form (human, animal, object, or others) and race, and how male and female characters are represented in relation to these variables. The representation of the male and female character's form is shown in Table 6.

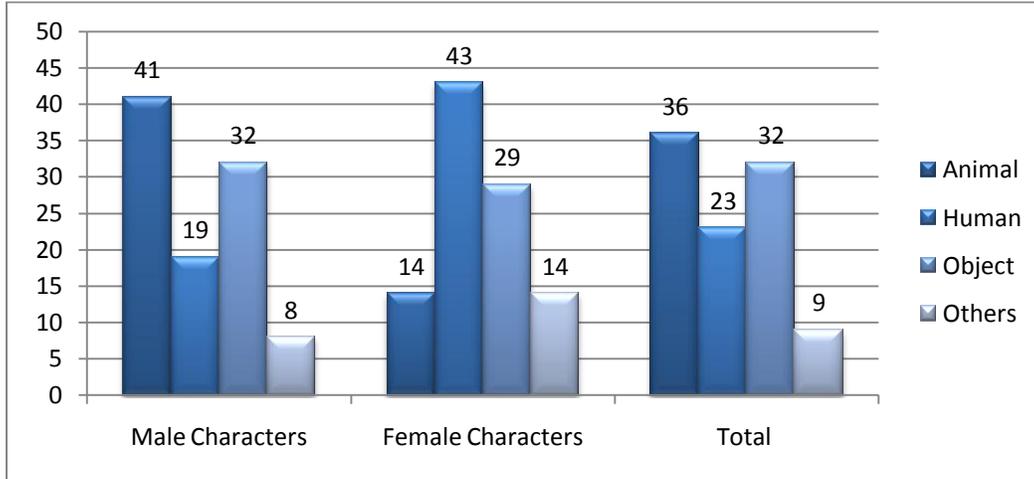
Table 6 – Number and Percentage of Character Form by Sex

Character Form	Male Characters (N=37)		Female Characters (N=7)		Total (N = 44)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Animal	15	41%	1	14%	16	36%
Human	7	19%	3	43%	10	23%
Object	12	32%	2	29%	14	32%
Others	3	8%	1	14%	4	9%
TOTAL	37	100%	7	100%	44	100%

The predominant character forms in the sample of children’s animated films were animal characters ( $n = 16$ , 36%) and objects ( $n = 14$ , 32%), while 23% ( $n = 10$ ) were presented as humans, and 9% ( $n = 9$ ) as others. Among the 37 male characters ( $N = 37$ ), 41% ( $n = 15$ ) were identified as animals, 32% ( $n = 12$ ) were identified as objects while 19% ( $n = 7$ ) were identified as humans and 8% ( $n = 3$ ) as others. Among the seven female characters ( $N = 7$ ), 43% ( $n = 3$ ) were identified as humans, 29% ( $n = 2$ ) were identified as objects while 14% ( $n = 1$ ) were identified as animals and 14% ( $n = 1$ ) as others.

Figure 2 represents another way to view the results on character form. While male characters appeared more often as animals, female characters appeared more often as humans. The category of objects was almost equally represented by both sexes.

Figure 2 – Percent of Male and Female Characters by Form



The characters in *Shrek 2* were characterized by a mix of humans, animals and others. They included four humans, two animals, and four others (two ogres, and two fairy-tale figures). In addition, the characters Fiona and Shrek transformed into humans for a short period of time, and King Harold transformed into an animal (frog) for a short period of time. This was not recorded in Table 4. All the major and minor characters in *Madagascar* were identified as animals, while every character in *Cars* was identified as an object appearing in the form of automobiles. The movie *Ratatouille* was made up of a mix of human ( $n = 5, 62.5\%$ ) and animal ( $n = 3, 27.5\%$ ) characters. Major and minor characters in *Wall-E* were identified as four objects (robots) and one human.

The racial representation of the characters was limited to only two categories and is shown in Table 7.

Table 7 – Number and Percentage of Character’s Race by Sex

Race	Male Characters (N =37)		Female Characters (N = 7)		TOTAL	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Does not Apply	30	81%	4	57%	34	77%
Caucasian	7	19%	3	43%	10	23%

Only two racial categories could be identified among the male and female characters in the sample, which were not applicable ( $n = 34$ , 77%) and Caucasian ( $n = 10$ , 23%).

Among the 37 male characters identified in the sample ( $N = 37$ ), race did not apply to 81% ( $n = 30$ ) of the characters while 19% ( $n = 7$ ) were identified as Caucasian. Among the seven female characters identified ( $N = 7$ ), race did not apply to 57% ( $n = 4$ ) of the characters while 43% ( $n = 3$ ) were identified as Caucasian. The racial makeup was made up by characters which could not be assigned by a racial category and by Caucasians, showing no racial variety in the sample. In two movies of the sample, *Madagascar* and *Cars*, race could not be applied to any of the characters, while the other three movies showed a mix of Caucasian and no application to race, with *Shrek 2* (6 does not apply, 4 Caucasian), *Ratatouille* (3 does not apply, 5 Caucasian), and *Wall-E* (4 does not apply, 1 Caucasian). Race was limited in the sample of five movies due to the characters form.

A subsample of the two movies *Shrek 2* and *Ratatouille* shows a higher number of identifiable characters. If the characters appeared as humans in the sample, they all represented only one racial category, Caucasian, showing no racial diversity. In *Shrek 2* the characters Shrek and Fiona transformed into humans for a short period of time which were identified as Caucasian as well, but were not recorded in Table 5. While the majority of the characters in the sample could not be assigned to a racial category, the most prevalent racial category presented in the sample was Caucasian, showing no racial diversity.

#### 4.2. Appearance

The appearance characteristics of male and female characters, as addressed in research questions 3a and 3b, included the measures of character's bodyweight, and appearance characteristics discussed earlier. As shown in Table 8, the most common bodyweight of characters in the five movies was *average* ( $n = 8$ , 18%).

Table 8 – Number and Percentage of Characters Bodyweight by Sex

Bodyweight	Male Characters ( $N = 37$ )		Female Characters ( $N = 7$ )		TOTAL	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Very thin	1	3%	0	0%	1	2%
Thin	1	3%	1	14%	2	5%
Average	5	14%	3	43%	8	18%
Overweight	1	3%	0	0%	1	2%
Obese	3	8%	0	0%	3	7%
Unable to determine	26	70%	3	43%	29	66%

The bodyweight of 66% ( $n = 29$ ) of the characters could not be determined because of their appearance as animals or objects. Among the 37 male characters, 70% ( $n = 26$ ) of male characters were *unable to determine*, while 14% ( $n = 5$ ) were identified as *average*. The majority of female characters were identified as *average* ( $n = 3$ , 43%), and 43% ( $n = 3$ ) were *unable to determine* due to their animal appearance, while 14% ( $n = 1$ ) were shown as *thin*. The only female character perceived as thin was Colette in the movie *Ratatouille*. The findings that reported a specific bodyweight did not reinforce the stereotypical affiliation of females being overly thin as shown in past studies and in the literature.

Table 9 represents the number and percentage of appearance characteristics portrayed by male and female characters in the five films.

Table 9 – Number and Percentage of Appearance Characteristics by Sex

Physical Characteristic	Male Characters ( <i>N</i> = 37)		Female Characters ( <i>N</i> = 7)	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Exaggerated Physique	6	16%	2	29%
Beautiful	6	16%	4	57%
Dirty	8	22%	2	29%
Sexual	1	3%	3	43%

When analyzing the results for exaggerated physique, findings showed that this measure was not significant in this study sample. Only 16% ( $n = 6$ ) of male characters were shown physically exaggerated (one extremely short, one extremely thin, two extremely heavy, and two extremely strong), while 29% ( $n = 2$ ) of female characters were shown in exaggerated physique (two extremely strong). Table 9 shows that out of 37 male characters, 22% ( $n = 8$ ) were portrayed as dirty, while 16% ( $n = 6$ ) were portrayed as beautiful, and only 3% ( $n = 1$ ) were shown as sexual. Of the seven female characters in the sample, 57% ( $n = 4$ ) were portrayed as beautiful, while 43% ( $n = 3$ ) have been portrayed sexual, and 29% ( $n = 2$ ) appeared dirty at least once throughout their appearance on the screen.

The findings on appearance showed that approximately half of the female characters in the sample were portrayed as beautiful (57%) and sexual (43%), which reinforces feminine stereotypical physical characteristics. Two male and two female characters in the sample were identified as extremely strong which is traditionally considered a masculine characteristic in contrast to the traditional feminine characteristic of physical weakness and vulnerability. However, due to this low number of incidents and the small number of female characters in the sample, these results are quite limited.

As shown in Table 10, male characters had a higher number of two appearance portrayals due to the discrepancy between the number of male ( $n = 37$ ) and female ( $n = 7$ ) characters in the sample.

Table 10 – Number of Appearance Portrayals, Total Expressions, and Average for each Appearance by Sex

Physical Characteristic	Male Characters <sup>6</sup>	Female Characters <sup>6</sup>	Total Expressions	Male $\bar{x}$ <sup>7</sup>	Female $\bar{x}$ <sup>7</sup>
Beautiful	17/6	15/4	32	2.8	3.75
Dirty	21/8	4/2	25	2.6	2
Sexual	1/1	3/3	4	1	1

There were four female characters identified as “beautiful” a total of 15 times, each of them was shown beautiful an average of 3.75 times ( $\Sigma = 15$ ), reinforcing the stereotypical notion of feminine beauty. This is compared to six male characters which were identified as “beautiful” for a total of 17 times and who were recognized as beautiful an average of 2.8 times. There were eight male characters identified as “dirty” in the sample, each of them was shown dirty an average of 2.6 times. This is compared to the two female characters identified as “dirty” who were shown dirty a total of four times, and an average of two times each. Male characters have been more often portrayed as dirty, while the average number of times a male or female character was portrayed as sexual was the same.

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<sup>6</sup> This column presents the number of times a male or female character has been portrayed with the specific physical characteristic, and the number of characters who have been identified with this specific characteristic.

<sup>7</sup> This column presents the average number of times a male or female character has been portrayed in a particular trait, making the numbers more comparable.

### 4.3. Social Roles

Research questions 4a and 4b sought to examine the social roles portrayed by male and female characters in the sample of the five films. The numbers and percentages of social roles exhibited by male and female characters in the sample are shown in Table 11.

Table 11 – Number and Percentage of Social Roles by Sex

Social Role	Male Characters ( $N = 37$ )		Female Characters ( $N = 7$ )	
	( $n$ )	%	( $n$ )	%
Career	19	51%	4	57%
Domestic Role	0	0%	0	0%
Explorer	5	14%	1	14%
Follower	26	70%	5	71%
Hero	11	30%	1	14%
Leader	17	46%	7	100%
Military	1	3%	0	0%
No Career	18	49%	3	43%
Victim	6	16%	0	0%
Villain	4	11%	1	14%

The most predominant social role among male characters was that of a follower with 70% of all male characters ( $n = 26$ ) sharing this social role. Fifty-one percent of the male characters ( $n = 19$ ) were shown having a career, while 49% ( $n = 18$ ) did not have a career. Careers included sheriff, race car driver, chef, food critic and captain. Most of the movies offered a variety of career roles, except for *Madagascar* which was the only movie that portrayed characters without careers, while *Shrek 2* had only one male with an occupation. In *Cars* and *Wall-E* all male characters were portrayed with a career. The role of leader was associated with 46% of the male characters ( $n = 17$ ), while 30% of

male characters ( $n = 11$ ) were shown as heroes. Eighty percent of the movies in the sample had four male characters identified as leaders. *Shrek 2* had only one character (Shrek) portrayed as leader. Three out of five movies in the sample portrayed two male characters as heroes, while one movie showed four male heroes. Approximately 16% ( $n = 6$ ) of all male characters were portrayed as victims, while 14% ( $n = 5$ ) were portrayed as explorers. A small number of male characters ( $n = 4$ , 11%) were represented in the role of villain, and one male character ( $n = 1$ , 3%) was shown in a military role. None of the male characters were shown in a domestic role.

The top role of female characters in the sample was that of a leader ( $n = 7$ , 100%), with all females telling other characters what to do at least once. Of the seven female characters in the sample, 71% ( $n = 5$ ) were associated with the role of followers, while 57% ( $n = 4$ ) of female characters did have a career. Careers of female characters included attorney, hotel owner and chef. Other social roles of female characters with only one incidence ( $n = 1$ , 14%) were explorer, hero and villain. The only character shown in the role of explorer and hero was Eve in *Wall-E*, while the Fairy Godmother in *Shrek 2* was the only female villain in the sample.

Results illustrate that social roles of male characters offer more variety than female characters. The predominant social roles of males in the sample are follower, career, leader, and hero, while female characters are mainly shown in roles as leaders, followers and with careers. The dominant social roles of males in the sample are characterized by traditional masculine roles of leaders, heroes and having careers, but also by less masculine roles such as follower and having no career. Females in the sample are characterized by non-traditional social roles, shown as leaders and having

careers. None of the female characters were portrayed as victim, and none of the characters in the sample were portrayed in a domestic role, which is particularly interesting for female characters.

#### *4.4. Behavior*

This section analyzes behavioral traits in two ways: 1) percentage of male and female characters shown performing the behavior at least once; and 2) number of times the behavior was expressed by male and female characters. Behavior of male and female characters in the sample was addressed in research questions 5a and 5b. Stereotypical behaviors and deviations from stereotypical behaviors were found among the male and female characters.

In examining behavioral traits, this study found that the two most common behavioral traits among male characters were “angry” ( $n = 25, 68\%$ ) and “happy” ( $n = 25, 68\%$ ). The next common traits were “dominant” ( $n = 20, 54\%$ ), “rebellious/troublesome” ( $n = 20, 54\%$ ), and “scared” ( $n = 20, 54\%$ ). Other prominent behaviors included “brave” ( $n = 18, 49\%$ ), “caring/loving” ( $n = 17, 46\%$ ), “fearful” ( $n = 17, 46\%$ ), and “dependent” ( $n = 15, 41\%$ ). Thirty-five percent ( $n = 13$ ) of the male characters in the sample were shown “crying/whining”, while 27% ( $n = 10$ ) were shown “athletic” and “independent”. The behavioral trait “intelligent” was possessed by 22% ( $n = 8$ ) of the male characters in the sample, while 16% ( $n = 6$ ) were identified as “competitive”, and 14% ( $n = 5$ ) as childlike.

Table 12 presents the number and percentage of characters portraying masculine and feminine characteristics by sex.

Table 12 - Number and Percentage of Characters Portraying Masculine and Feminine Behavioral Traits by Sex

Behavior	Male Characters ( $N = 37$ )		Female Characters ( $N = 7$ )	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
<i>Masculine Traits</i>				
Angry	25	68%	7	100%
Athletic	10	27%	2	29%
Brave	18	49%	2	29%
Competitive	6	16%	1	14%
Dominant	20	54%	7	100%
Independent	10	27%	6	86%
Intelligent	8	22%	3	43%
Rebellious	20	54%	1	14%
<i>Feminine Traits</i>				
Caring/Loving	17	46%	7	100%
Childlike	5	14%	0	0%
Crying/Whining	13	35%	3	43%
Dependent	15	41%	2	29%
Fearful	17	46%	1	14%
Happy <sup>8</sup>	25	68%	6	86%
Scared/Desperate	20	54%	4	57%

The findings report that the most prevalent behaviors for female character in the sample were “angry” ( $n = 7, 100\%$ ), “dominant” ( $n = 7, 100\%$ ), and “caring/loving” ( $n = 7, 100\%$ ), being portrayed by all female characters in the sample at least once. The behavioral trait “independent” was possessed by 86% ( $n = 6$ ) of the female characters, and “happy” was possessed by 86% ( $n = 6$ ) of the characters coded. 57% ( $n = 4$ ) of the

<sup>8</sup> Previous research categorized happy as feminine behavior (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). However, after consideration this study identified this trait as a gender-neutral category.

female characters were portrayed as “scared”, while 43% ( $n = 3$ ) were portrayed as “intelligent”, and “crying/whining”. Other traits possessed by 29% ( $n = 2$ ) of female characters were “athletic”, “brave”, and “dependent”. Only one out of seven ( $n = 1$ , 14%) females were portrayed as “competitive”, “rebellious”, and “fearful”.

While male characters were sometimes shown behaving in stereotypical ways as they were portrayed as angry, dominant, rebellious and brave, they were also portrayed in behavioral attributes deviating from masculine stereotypes in society such as scared, caring/loving, fearful, dependent and crying/whining. While female characters were sometimes portrayed in stereotypical ways such as caring/loving, scared and crying/whining, they were also portrayed in behaviors deviating from traditional feminine stereotypes, as they were also shown angry, dominant, independent and intelligent.

As shown in Table 13, male characters had a higher number of expressions for each behavioral trait due to the discrepancy between the number of male ( $n = 37$ ) and female ( $n = 7$ ) characters in the sample. By calculating the average number of times a male and female character was portrayed with a particular trait, the numbers are more comparable.

Table 13 - Number of Behavioral Expressions, Total Expressions, and Average for each Behavior by Sex

Behavior	Male Characters <sup>9</sup>	Female Characters <sup>9</sup>	Total Expressions	Male $\bar{x}$ <sup>10</sup>	Female $\bar{x}$ <sup>10</sup>
<i>Masculine Traits</i>					
Angry	215/25	55/7	270	8.6	7.9
Athletic	28/10	2/2	30	2.8	1
Brave	32/18	5/2	37	1.8	2.5
Competitive	7/6	1/1	8	0.9	1
Dominant	52/20	27/7	79	2.6	3.9
Independent	31/10	11/6	42	3.1	1.8
Intelligent	23/8	8/3	31	2.9	2.7
Rebellious	42/20	1/1	43	2.1	1
<i>Feminine Traits</i>					
Caring/Loving	55/17	35/7	90	3.2	5
Childlike	9/5	0/0	9	1.8	0
Crying/Whining	33/13	8/3	41	2.5	2.7
Dependent	21/15	2/3	23	1.4	1
Fearful	65/17	3/1	68	3.8	3
Happy	131/25	34/6	165	5.2	5.7
Scared/Desperate	63/20	7/4	70	3.2	1.8

The two most often expressed behaviors among male characters were “angry” ( $\Sigma = 215$ ) and “happy” ( $\Sigma = 131$ ), while female characters were more often portrayed as “angry” ( $\Sigma = 55$ ), “caring” ( $\Sigma = 35$ ) and “happy” ( $\Sigma = 34$ ). The top total expressions for

<sup>9</sup> This column presents the number of times a male or female character has been portrayed with the specific behavior, and the number of characters who have been identified with this behavioral trait.

<sup>10</sup> This column presents the average number of times a male or female character has been portrayed with this behavior, making the numbers more comparable.

behavioral traits in this sample were anger (270), happiness (165), caring/loving (90) and dominance (79).

Among all male and female characters in the sample the two most occurring behavioral traits with the highest average number of times were anger and happiness. In addition, female characters were shown an average of five times as “caring/loving”.

There were 25 male characters identified expressing the trait “angry”, each was angry an average of 8.6 times resulting in a total of 215 angry expressions. This is compared to the seven female characters identified as expressing the trait “angry”, who were angry an average of 7.9 times resulting in a total of 55 angry expressions.

Regarding the behavioral trait “athletic”, 10 male characters were identified expressing this trait, each was shown athletic an average of 2.8 times, while two female characters were identified as expressing the trait “athletic” an average of one time. Findings on

bravery showed that 18 male characters were identified with the trait “brave”, each was shown brave an average of 1.8 times, while of the two female characters who were

identified as “brave” each of them expressed this trait an average of 2.5 times. There were six male characters identified expressing the trait “competitive”, each was shown competitive an average of 0.9 times. In comparison to one female identified as being

“competitive” only one time. Concerning images of dominance, 20 male characters were identified expressing the trait “dominant”, each was shown dominant an average of 2.6

times. This is compared to the seven female characters identified as expressing the trait “dominant”, who were each shown dominant an average of 3.9 times. There were ten

male characters identified expressing the trait “independent”, each was shown independent an average of 3.1 times, while there were six characters identified as

“independent” expressing this trait an average of 1.8 times. Findings on the behavioral trait intelligent showed that the eight male characters identified expressing the trait “intelligent” were each shown intelligent an average of 2.9 times, while three female characters were portrayed as “intelligent” an average of 2.7 times. Regarding the behavioral attribute rebellious, 20 male characters identified as expressing the trait “rebellious”, were each shown with this behavior an average of 2.1 times, while there was only one female character portrayed as “rebellious” an average of one time. While 17 male characters identified expressing the trait “caring/loving” were each shown in this behavior an average of 3.2 times, there were seven female characters identified as “caring/loving” each of them portrayed with this trait an average number of five times. Five male characters were identified expressing the trait “childlike” an average of 1.8 times, while none of the female characters were shown as childlike. There were 13 male characters identified expressing the trait “crying/whining”, each was shown crying/whining an average of 2.5 times, while there were three female characters who were identified with this trait showing a similar average with 2.7 times. Of the 15 male characters identified expressing the trait “dependent”, each was shown in this behavior an average of 1.4 times, while there were only two females characters identified with this trait each expressing it once. Results showed that 17 male characters were identified with the trait “fearful”, each of them was shown fearful an average of 3.8 times. This is compared to one female character who was shown “fearful” three times. Concerning the images of happiness, 25 male characters were identified with this trait, each of them shown happy an average of 5.2 times, while there were six female characters shown “happy” an average of 5.7 times. There were 20 male characters identified expressing the

trait “scared/desperate”, each was shown in this behavior an average of 3.2 times, while there were four female characters identified as “scared/desperate” each was shown in this trait an average of 1.8 times.

When looking at the average number of behavioral traits for one character, “angry” ( $\bar{x} = 8.6$ ) and “happy” ( $\bar{x} = 5.2$ ) were the most frequent traits among males, while “angry” ( $\bar{x} = 7.9$ ), “happy” ( $\bar{x} = 5.7$ ) and “caring/loving” ( $\bar{x} = 5.0$ ) were the most frequent traits among females in the sample. Other predominant behaviors among males were “fearful” ( $\bar{x} = 3.8$ ), “caring/loving” ( $\bar{x} = 3.2$ ), “scared/desperate” ( $\bar{x} = 3.2$ ), “independent” ( $\bar{x} = 3.1$ ), “intelligent” ( $\bar{x} = 2.9$ ), “athletic” ( $\bar{x} = 2.8$ ), “dominant” ( $\bar{x} = 2.6$ ) and “crying/whining” ( $\bar{x} = 2.5$ ). Other predominant behaviors among females were “dominant” ( $\bar{x} = 3.9$ ), “fearful” ( $\bar{x} = 3.0$ ), “intelligent” ( $\bar{x} = 2.7$ ), “crying/whining” ( $\bar{x} = 2.7$ ) and “brave” ( $\bar{x} = 2.5$ ).

Male characters had high numbers of expressions for the stereotypical masculine traits angry, athletic, independent, intelligent and rebellious, while they dominated the stereotypical female traits childlike, dependent, fearful, and scared/desperate. In contrast, female characters in the sample dominated the stereotypical masculine traits brave and dominant, deviating from stereotypical representations of females, while they had more occurrences for the stereotypical feminine traits caring/loving, crying/whining, and happy than male characters.

#### *4.5. Qualitative Analysis of Gender Images*

While viewing the five movies, the researcher noted certain themes that were not foreseeable and therefore were not collected as part of the study.

Several themes among female characters are worth highlighting. Female characters were often shown as mediators. Fiona, Queen Lillian and Gloria served as mediators, settling disputes and proving good advice. The overall portrayal showed that all female characters showed signs of independence, dominance and power, disproving the stereotypical representation of females in media. For instance, in *Shrek 2*, Fiona is shown brave and independent, fighting a group of attackers while Shrek is caught in a trap. The Fairy Godmother is portrayed as dominant, in power of King Harold, who is actually afraid of her. Gloria, the only female character in *Madagascar*, was portrayed as strong and dominant in a few scenes, telling male characters what to do. In the movie *Cars*, Sally is another female character who is portrayed as independent and powerful. She is an attorney, and leading the other characters in the town. If we look at *Ratatouille*, Colette (the only female character in this movie) is portrayed as a strong and powerful woman in a male-dominated world, the culinary profession. As the only female in the kitchen she knows there is a hierarchy but considers herself as “the toughest cook in this kitchen”. In addition, she uses aggression to express her role in the kitchen. In *Wall-E*, Eve is portrayed as aggressive when she is shooting her gun, which is attached to her robot arm.

However, the overall portrayal of females was also focused on physical appearance. In *Shrek 2*, the Fairy Godmother mentions that her diet is ruined, showing that she is on a diet to stay slim. In addition, the Fairy Godmother appears to Fiona after she has been sad. The Fairy Godmother is shocked by Fiona’s outward appearance and starts singing a song about how to be happy and how to get the prince, which is full of stereotypical messages on females.

The following verse contains strong messages on the female appearance (minute 19):

Your fallen tears have called to me, so here comes my sweet remedy.  
I know what every princess needs for her to live life happily.  
With just a wave of my magic wand your troubles will soon be gone.  
With a flick of the wrist in just a flash, you land a prince with a ton of  
cash,  
A high priced dress made by mice no less!  
Some crystal glass pumps and almost dressed!  
Worries will vanish your soul will cleanse  
Confide in your very own furniture friends  
We will help you set a new fashion trend!

Another verse mentions “cellulite thighs will fade away” and the use of makeup is referred to such as “lipstick” and “shadow”. Nevertheless, Fiona resists the temptation of becoming pretty and sexy looking, sending out a strong message to female viewers. She is happy without being “perfect” and having everything a stereotypical woman would like to have. In *Madagascar*, the only female character Gloria poses for a photo shoot and has a manicure and mask (cucumber on her eyes). In another scene Gloria is shown in a bikini, with a crawfish covering her bottom, and starfish serving as top, emphasizing her sexy features as a female. Another example is the character Sally whose appearance is highlighted by special shiny effects to emphasize her beauty and attractiveness.

Several themes also emerged related to male characteristics and traits. One theme was male arrogance which was particularly displayed by Prince Charming, Alex, and Lightning McQueen. Prince Charming was portrayed as an arrogant character, feeling attractive and wearing glitter on his lips. Alex Lightning McQueen was shown dreaming of being a Hollywood star, and treating other characters as less important.

*Shrek 2* was one of the movies which showed a lot of different images that would be interesting to examine in a more qualitative study of children’s animated films. For example, in one scene the male character Pinocchio was shown wearing female

underwear, a red thong. Two incidental characters which were only shown for a very short period of time and were not recorded in the sample, showed interesting gender images. There was a gender-confused wolf, who wore a red dress. Another character called Ugly Stepsister was identified as transvestite, a man wearing a dress, earrings and make up such as lipstick and eyeliner.

#### *4.6. Summary of Results*

This study showed that female characters are outnumbered by male characters in major and minor roles. The ratio of major male and female characters was 2.5 to 1, while the ratio for minor male and female characters was 9 to 1. The majority of male characters appeared in the form of animals (41%) and objects (32%), while female characters were mainly portrayed as human (43%) and object (29%) characters. Race was almost completely absent. However, all human characters in the sample were identified as Caucasian ( $n = 10$ , 23%).

The findings showed that male characters were often portrayed as angry, dominant, rebellious and brave, with careers, as leaders and heroes, but also as scared, crying/whining, caring/loving and dependent on others as well as followers. Female characters were often portrayed as beautiful, sexual, caring and loving, scared, and crying/whining. But they were also portrayed in leadership roles, with careers, as angry, dominant, independent and intelligent.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presents a summary of results and their theoretical implications. Overrepresentation of male characters, character form and racial representation, and images of masculinity and femininity are summarized and discussed. Furthermore, socialization, internalization and modeling are discussed in relation to the findings. Assumptions and limitations of the study are identified and directions for future research are suggested so that researchers continue to develop and extend their efforts on gender representations in children's media.

#### *5.1. Summary of Results and Theoretical Implications*

Children's animated films "combine an ideology of enchantment and aura of innocence in narrative stories that help children understand who they are, what societies are about" (Giroux, 1996:90). This study examined portrayals of male and female characters in children's animated films popular among young children in the United States. Appearance, social roles, and behavioral traits of male and female characters were examined to determine if these characteristics are stereotypically masculine or feminine. The nature and extent of deviation from those traditional gender images was also examined.

This research found that male characters are still overrepresented in major and minor roles of children's animated films, and they still reflect a higher diversity of images, roles, characteristics and behaviors for male characters than female characters. However, even though male characters were still shown in some gender-stereotypical ways, they were often portrayed in ways that are not traditionally masculine, such as expressing emotionality and affection. In contrast, female characters lacked equal representation in children's animated films, limiting the opportunities for female images and stories to be more diverse. But, within the limited representations, there was more diversity in the nature and extent of female roles and behaviors, which were often characterized by non-traditional feminine attributes, leading towards a high range of positive female images for young girls and boys.

#### *5.1.1. Overrepresentation of Male Characters*

Like previous studies of children's media reported, this study found large disparities in male and female representation in children's animated films, particularly in major and minor character roles (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995; Faherty, 2001; Anderson & Cavallaro, 2002; Baker & Raney, 2007; Smith & Cook, 2008). The findings on gender showed that females are underrepresented and males are overrepresented in major and minor roles of children's animated films. Over half (50.7%) of the American population in 2008 was female while 49.3% were male (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). But the male-female ratio in this sample of five recent top-selling movies displayed that males appear five times more than females, showing a continuing trend in children's media. Male characters outnumbered female characters in major roles with a ratio of 2.5 to 1, while

the ratio for minor male and female characters was 9 to 1, offering a limited amount of female characters, and therefore limited images of female roles and behavior for young girls and young boys to see. Thompson and Zerbinos' (1995) study of children's cartoons found similar results of major and minor role assignment. There were more than three males for each female in major roles, and almost five males for each female in minor roles (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). The underrepresentation of female characters in children's animated films sends young girls and boys subtle messages about the value and importance of females as compared to that of males.

For instance, *Shrek 2* had the highest number of female characters ( $n = 3$ ), containing almost 50% of the total female characters in the sample. Eighty percent of the films ( $n = 4$ ) had only one female character. However, the study found that more than 50% of the female characters in the sample were shown as major characters. Therefore, half of females present in the films were essential for the story as the plot centered around them, and thus were shown a significant amount of time on the screen. Because major characters, if male or female, engage in more activity and take up more screen time than minor characters, the range and diversity of images offered by major characters is more pronounced. Therefore, children viewers, girls and boys, are not only exposed to higher numbers of male major characters, they are also told a broader and more diverse range of stories through the major characters, who are most often disproportionately male. Furthermore, the chance is greater that young boys and girls will observe the actions of principal characters, and model and imitate their behavior.

Interestingly, children tend to imitate same-sex characters more than opposite-sex characters (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). In addition, due to the overrepresentation of

males in children's animated films, children might connect power and status in society exclusively with men (Leaper & Friedman, 2007). As this research showed, female characters continue to be underrepresented in children's animated films, indicating little progress towards more equal representation of both sexes and opportunities to portray a full range of roles and behaviors. Because male characters appear more frequently on the movie screen, they do more of nearly everything compared to female characters.

### *5.1.2. Character Form and Racial Representation*

Male and female characters were also analyzed in terms of character form and race. The analysis of male and female characters' form, which served as a differentiation between real and fictional characters, found that animals were the most occurring figures in five children's animated films, closely followed by objects and humans. Three of the movies (60%) included a mix of human and animal characters, or human and object characters, offering children a variety of different appearing role images and models. Two of the films were identified with only one character form. *Madagascar* consisted of only animal characters, while every character in *Cars* was identified as an object appearing in the form of automobiles. Fictional animated characters offer young children fictional images that let them dive into a world full of fantasy. Children's animated films offer a limited amount of human characters, but an enormous variety of character forms for young boys and girls to identify with.

In addition, the race of characters has been found important in assessing the effects of characters on young children (Brown & Pardun, 2004). A study has noted that race is a basic motivator "for choice of television content, and that adolescents may,

indeed, be seeking models with whom they can identify as they develop as sense of themselves in the larger culture” (Brown & Pardun, 2004: 275). The findings on race in this study were limited. Three fourths of the characters could not be assigned to a racial category because of their appearance as animals, objects or other fictional characters. Each human character ( $n = 10$ ) in the sample was identified as Caucasian (23%), presenting only one racial category and consequently showing no racial diversity.<sup>11</sup> This sample only included White characters, contrasting the racial makeup in American society, and emphasizing the complete absence of diversity in children’s animated films (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005). Children of all colors are exposed to a one-sided level of visibility, or in this case invisibility. This absence of racial minorities has the power to contribute to real-life outcomes of inequality in society. Children begin to internalize the superiority of one human race, the race whose images are seen and stories are told in mass media. Furthermore, minority children who watch children’s animated movies have no images and models of their own race to identify with. Their only heroes are White characters. As West and Zimmerman (1995) argued, the behaviors of the most dominant group in American society, white people (more often males), becomes idealized as the only appropriate way to fulfill one social role.

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<sup>11</sup> The indicators for race are physical features such as skin tone, facial features and hair texture. Caucasian is characterized by light skin tone.

### *5.1.3. Images of Masculinity and Femininity*

Although equality is considered a value in American society, gender stereotypes are still widespread in children's media. In this study, male and female characters were portrayed in somewhat gender-stereotypical ways, but their present representation often deviated from traditional images of masculinity and femininity.

For example, 29% of female characters were shown as physically strong, which deviated from the feminine stereotype of being physically weak. Images of physically strong female characters offer young girls and boys pictures and stories of powerful women who can serve as positive normalized standards for young females to imitate. A significant difference was found in the physical characteristics of beautiful and sexual. Fifty-seven percent of the female characters were portrayed as beautiful and 43% as sexual, while only 16% of the male characters were identified as beautiful and 3% as sexual. In addition, females were portrayed as beautiful an average of 3.75 times, while male characters were shown as beautiful an average of 2.8 times. Many previous studies have reported the importance of beauty and sexuality of female characters (Stone, 1975; Trites, 1991; Bell, 1995; Kilbourne, 1999). The high numbers for beautiful and sexual portrayals of female characters in this research reinforce the traditional feminine stereotype in American society. Such portrayals send girls and boys messages emphasizing a woman's ideal appearance and the overall importance of appearance to their lives. Furthermore, beauty standards sometimes mediate fatal self concepts to young girls who have the potential to internalize this perfect body image (Kilbourne, 1999). This internalization can lead to serious personal consequences such as the development of insecurities and eating disorders (Wolf, 1991; Pipher, 1995; Bordo,

1999). Beauty still is an important value of female characters in children's animated films.

Social roles are insightful when analyzing the positions of male and female characters. This study found some interesting patterns in the nature and extent of role portrayals by male and female characters. Male characters were often portrayed as followers (70%), with a career (51%), as leaders (46%) and heroes (30%), and still reflected a high variety of social roles on the movie screen, while female characters were often shown as leaders (100%), followers (71%), and with a career (57%). So, all female characters (100%) in this sample were portrayed as leaders, being in charge or telling other characters what to do. This image is deviating from the traditional stereotypical feminine role of subordination. In contrast, 46% of male characters were shown as a leader which differs from a previous study by Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) who found that males were more likely to show leadership. Both, male (70%) and female (71%) characters had a high incidence of the follower role.<sup>12</sup> The majority of the characters in the sample took orders from other characters. Interestingly, over half of the male (51%) and female (57%) characters were portrayed with careers, which is surprisingly high for females and surprisingly low for males. The role of hero was more common among male characters (30%). Three films featured a total of two male heroes, while *Shrek 2* had four, and *Ratatouille* only one male hero. In contrast, only one female was shown as hero, which was Eve in *Wall-E*, who was also portrayed as the only female explorer in the sample. None of the characters in the sample were shown in a domestic role.

This sample of children's animated films portrayed female characters in positions of power, as leaders and as career women, occupying professions in different fields such

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<sup>12</sup> Necessarily, most storylines require more followers (regardless of gender), compared to heroes.

as attorney and chef. For instance, Colette, the only female character in *Ratatouille*, was portrayed in a male-dominated occupation as a chef. The position of females in society has changed, and so has the image of female characters in children's animated films. Feminist theory recognizes and emphasizes a power imbalance between males and females. Men are dominant, while women are ranked lower than men. This is caused by the system of patriarchy in American society (Lorber, 2010). However, there has been a shift in women's social positions. As this sample confirmed, women are more often shown outside the home, entering the workplace (Signorielli & Bacue, 1999).

These formerly less visible and rarely existent roles of female characters offer young girls positive images, stories and role models of female power to identify with. Young boys see these same images and are also impacted by their presence and absence. Although, not specifically coded, it was noted that a number of female characters were portrayed as mediators. Settling disputes between other characters seemed to be another main social role for females, emphasizing their social and negotiation skills. The findings on portrayals of females might suggest that while they are shown in positions of power, they still do not occupy the roles of heroes and explorers. While male characters were portrayed in a higher variety of social roles compared to female characters, they were also more often portrayed as heroes. The ever-present male hero and the absent female hero can have a cultivating effect on children (girls and boys), who might associate heroic behavior exclusively with maleness.

The findings on behavioral traits showed that male characters were often portrayed as angry (68%), dominant (54%), rebellious and troublesome (54%), and brave (49%), conforming to traditional masculine stereotypes. However, they were also shown

performing behaviors that are not traditionally associated with masculinity. They were portrayed as emotional, such as happy (68%), scared (54%), fearful (46%), and as caring/loving (46%), dependent (41%), and shown crying/whining (35%). By looking at the amount of occurrences, the top behaviors with the highest number of average expressions for both sexes were anger (8.6 /7.9)<sup>713</sup> and happiness (5.2 /5.7), showing almost no differences between the sexes. Other dominant traits among male characters were fearful (3.8)<sup>814</sup>, caring/loving (3.2), scared (3.2), independent (3.1), intelligent (2.8), athletic (2.8), dominant (2.6) and crying/whining (2.5).

While male characters were still portrayed in powerful ways, showing dominance, control and anger, they were also portrayed out of traditional masculine stereotypes, as emotional, caring and asking others for help or advice, characteristics which were usually affiliated with females. These images show that males are not limited to masculine portrayals, moving away from the stereotypical image of males of being independent and tough (Jhally & Katz, 1999; Katz, 2002), and offering male images and stories, where they are afraid or even cry. Now young boys have the potential to identify with emotional characters who are not only expressing anger and dominance, as they traditionally have, but also feelings such as fears and sensitivity. While male characters in the sample displayed a range of emotional behavior including anger and fear, they rarely cried in sad situations in comparison to females. When Remy thinks he lost his family he is very sad but he does not cry. Young boys are still exposed to a limited set of emotions but there has been improvement for boys in telling them that they do not need

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<sup>13</sup> The first number represents the average number of times a male character, identified with the specific trait, expressed this behavior, while the second number represents the average number of expressions for female characters.

<sup>14</sup> Average number of times a character identified with specific trait was expressing the behavior.

to hide their feelings behind a tough façade but rather show what they feel, if happy, sad or scared. Furthermore, young girls internalize media images of powerful or emotional males and also develop expectations related to masculinity and normative male behavior. Put simply, girls also grow up thinking boys and men who show such emotions are less masculine.

In this research, female characters were often shown caring/loving (100%), happy (86%), scared (57%), and crying/whining (43%), fitting into traditional feminine stereotypes. But they were also shown deviating from traditional feminine portrayals. They were often portrayed as angry (100%), dominant (100%), independent (86%), and intelligent (43%). Female characters showed high numbers for many behavioral traits such as angry (7.9)<sup>15</sup>, happy (5.7), caring/loving (5.0), dominant (3.9) as well as fearful (3.0), intelligent (2.7), crying/whining (2.7) and brave (2.5).

While female characters were portrayed as overly emotional, caring and loving, they were also shown with traits which are not traditionally feminine, such as anger, dominance, independence and intelligence. These images and stories of females as powerful, smart and diverse provide positive messages to young boys and girls, stories that were rarely told in earlier years. Furthermore, young girls who observe these positive images and stories of female power in films may feel empowered, by identifying with the character. When identification occurs internalization takes place, in which the child takes on the characters' attitudes and roles and internalizes them, making them his or her own (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In addition, young boys see portrayals of powerful, angry and intelligent females and not exclusively passive, submissive or

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<sup>15</sup> Average number of times a character identified with specific trait was expressing the behavior.

subservient female characters, which expose them to a more diverse set of attributes as appropriate and normal for females.

#### *5.1.4. Socialization, Internalization and Modeling*

The development of identity is one of the most important features of childhood. Children are impacted by media images, stories and ideals that help them shape their own unique personality. Nowadays, media plays a significant role in the gender socialization of children. Gender images in children's animated films serve as stories and standards of identification for young boys and girls, who internalize the images and behaviors, values and norms of the film characters (Cohen, 2006). Children copy and model the behaviors and actions of people around them (Mumme & Fernald, 2003). As suggested by social learning theory, if a child identifies with a character he or she might be more likely to internalize and model the behaviors shown in animated films. Social interactions and emotions of characters on the screen are observed by young boys and girls and often serve as models of identification. Identification with social roles or behaviors might lead to the modeling or the internalization of roles (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). A steady exposure to these patterned, repetitive gender images may result in cultivating effects (Huntman & Morgan, 2001).

However, children's animated films construct a social reality which often does not correspond to reality (Giroux, 1997). Because children as media consumers have more difficulties in differentiating between fantasy and reality, they easily become victims of the media industry. Children's movies have the responsibility to serve as a social mirror reflecting social reality. However, in reality the presented gender images are often

shaped by socially constructed stereotypes, which children are unaware of until they are exposed to the continuous patterned stories in various forms of media. Many of the gendered images are archaic and no longer reflect reality, especially for women, but children are unaware that these are lingering stories from the past.

The findings show that stereotypical gender representations in children's animated films still occur, but have changed in a positive way, by portraying males in less traditional masculine images such as emotional and caring, and females in more diverse roles as leaders, more powerful, dominant and intelligent. Gender images in children's animated films can have a powerful socializing impact on children's behaviors and values. "Visual imagery plays an important role in socialization, specifically in how we extract and apply meaning from everyday experience, and therefore in how we construct social realities" (Dill, 2009:96). Children learn how to act and behave from watching social interactions in films, which reinforces certain behaviors and actions (Dill, 2009). This learned social behavior will be performed in 'doing gender', as learned from the media (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

### *5.2. Future Implications*

This study adds to the existing body of literature by analyzing a sample that has not been studied before and illustrating that male and female characters are indeed still shown in few stereotypical ways. However, male and female characters are often shown deviating from traditional images of masculinity and femininity, offering young boys and girls improving images. This can lead toward more gender equality in various areas such as the workforce. Challenging traditional stereotypes of males and females in the media

should be a priority in the American culture. This will eventually lead to positive changes that improve the position of women and men in American society, and offer girls and boys a wider variety of gender images, stories and ideals which reflect the ever-changing reality. Animated children's movies provide a steady presentation of images that constantly reinforce attitudes, behaviors and expectations of males and females. Consequently, the images become normalized and ordinary by constant reproduction and promotion of similar messages.

Media producers and story writers must be thoughtful and deliberate in portraying male and female character in children's animated films. A higher representation of female characters and racial minorities are significant changes that will contribute to more accurate and just cultural stories, which in turn will contribute to greater understanding of others.

While this research study was conducted, one of the newest animated Disney productions *The Princess and the Frog* was released with something unprecedented, the first African-American princess in a leading role in Disney's history, setting a new benchmark in the history of African-Americans. Now young girls of color have their own princess to identify with. But equally important, non-minority children see the image of an African-American heroine for the first time.

There is lack of diversity at the creative level which causes the lack of diversity in the media. In the film industry, producers, writers, managers, casting directors, editors and designers are primarily white males. So, the people who create children's films, those who write and tell children's stories, and who make the selection of characters are predominantly characterized by two categories in society: male and white. Gender and

racial diversity among creators is necessary in order to increase the opportunities for more variety on the movie screen, and to offer consumers more diverse images and stories they can identify with.

Furthermore, gender-stereotyping has to be reduced to offer children a better and more diverse picture of male and females in children's films. Future studies on children's animated films will be valuable to parents, educators as well as writers and producers of these films, because they are the ones who can try to make a change by minimizing and eliminating negative gender portrayals.

### *5.3. Assumptions and Limitations of the Study*

Several assumptions existed in this study. The assumptions for this study were: 1) that the presented stereotyping of males and females in the five children's Hollywood movies will give an overview of the current stereotyping trend in American society; 2) that the movies analyzed are primarily intended for children from age five and up, but they are popular among all ages; 3) that children's animated films are widely viewed by American children; and 4) that these movies have a high potential to affect the attitudes, values and behaviors of children.

There were several limitations to this study. First, the results are limited in their external validity. The films selected for this research were a purposive sample of all children's animated films, not a random sample. Because not all children's animated films were analyzed and because not all characters in each film were included, the results may not be generalizable beyond these five films.

Another limitation to this study was the number of coders used. Due to time and cost constraints, the primary researcher coded all five movies in the sample, but the second coder only collected data for two randomly selected films. Multiple coders would have been an advantage.

Furthermore, only a certain amount of gender images and stereotypes were recorded leaving many other stereotypes excluded from analysis. Also, the inability to determine race of most characters (70%) limited the analysis of characters' race.

One of the greatest limitations to this study in relation to the data is the small number of female characters in the sample. Due to this low number it was difficult to identify patterns and trends compared to male characters and to draw conclusions as to the portrayal of females. Finally, there was a limitation in collecting the data on the movie *Wall-E* which mainly consisted of robot characters, whose emotions were often difficult to identify and interpret.

#### *5.4. Outlook*

Research on the prevalence of gender stereotyping in children's media, in particular animated films, is crucial for constant but slow progression toward gender equality in society. This study has extended previous research in this area and provided new insights of gender images portrayed in recently released animated films for children in the United States. Furthermore, the use of a larger sample size of recently released movies and the examination of incidental characters in the movies could increase the understanding of patterned gender images in children's films and might generate a fuller and more accurate picture of the representations of gender images in children's animated

films. In particular, a sample with more female characters would provide a more specific and significant reflection of stereotypical or non-stereotypical gender images on appearance, social roles, and behavioral traits for future research.

Furthermore, the movies in this study can serve as excellent sources for qualitative studies of gender images, in particular examining specific scenes which assign male and female characters to certain categories, as well as a more specific focus on appearance. Other interesting themes for future research might be the examination of the role of females as mediators, their involvement in romantic relationships with male characters, and their appearance and related dialogue. Numerous content analyses should be conducted to continue investigating media messages on gender toward children audiences. Interviews and focus group studies with children on recently released animated movies for children viewers may also be informative to see if and how the gender images in children's animated films affect children, their identities, and their social behavior.

### *5.5. Conclusion*

This study gave an overview of representations of male and female characters and representations of masculinity and femininity in children's animated films. Based on the research findings, there has been some progress toward more positive and less stereotypical representations of male and female characters. While females are still underrepresented in films, limiting their range of roles and behaviors, they have been more often portrayed as powerful, strong and intelligent. The majority of the sample was made up of male characters which were often identified in diverse roles and with various

characteristics, including followers, with a career, as leaders, heroes, angry, happy, dominant, scared, rebellious, brave, caring/loving, fearful and dependent. Some of these portrayals are still considered stereotypically masculine. But males were often shown as emotional offering positive traditionally feminine images for boys to identify with. Female characters were often portrayed as beautiful, in leadership roles, in careers, as angry, dominant, caring/loving, independent, happy, scared, intelligent and crying/whining. Female characters have been portrayed with a high diversity of attributes, still in a few stereotypical ways, but also as more powerful than ever before.

Today, children are heavily influenced by the media they see, hear and interact with. Nevertheless, animated films may not be the primary source of children's perceptions of males and females in American society. Particularly children who spend a substantial amount of time watching animated films can be influenced by their images, stories and messages. Gender images and depictions can have a powerful impact on children's perceptions of males and females, influence the way boys and girls interact with each other and form their identities and personalities.

Male representation in children's animated films is still dominant. Because males are represented in high numbers, they are necessarily portrayed with more diverse roles and behaviors. Female roles and behaviors are more diverse and less traditionally feminine, but there is a disparity in representations which necessarily limits the range of images and stories. Progress toward more gender-neutral roles and behavior requires more female representation.

While male and female characters are still portrayed in some stereotypical ways, there has been some progress on how children's animated films portray masculinity and

femininity, presenting new attitudes on gender, and offer young children more gender-neutral images and stories. It will be interesting to see if these improvements toward more gender-neutral representations of males and females in children's animated films will continue in the future. In conclusion, this research showed that male and female characters are no longer limited to powerful or pretty features and images, but now can be both pretty and powerful.

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## APPENDICES

### *Appendix A: List of Major and Minor Characters by Movie*

#### *Shrek 2 (2004)*

Major: Shrek

Princess Fiona

Donkey

Minor: Puss in Boots

King Harold

Queen Lillian

Prince Charming

Fairy Godmother

Gingerbread Man

Pinocchio

#### *Madagascar (2005)*

Major: Alex

Marty

Melman

Gloria

Minor: Skipper

Kowalski

Private

Rico

King Julien

Maurice

Mort

#### *Cars (2006)*

Major: Lightning McQueen

Mater

Sally

Minor: Strip Weathers “King”

Chick Hicks

Mack

Sheriff

Doc Hudson

Luigi

Guido

*Ratatouille (2007)*

Major: Remy

Linguini

Minor: Colette

Skinner

Emile

Django

Auguste Gasteau

Anton Ego

*Wall-E (2008)*

Major: Wall-E

Eve

Minor: M/O

Captain Mc Crea

Auto

*Appendix B: Analysis Codebook – Sample Coding Sheets*

**Movie Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Coder Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please fill in the code for each character according to the analysis codebook.

Character Name	ID	Description	Gender	Major/Minor	Race/Ethnicity	Bodyweight
	01					
	02					

**Appearance**

Character Name	Height	Weight	Strength/ Muscularity

Please mark/code every single time the character was mentioned possessing a certain physical characteristic.

Character Name	Dirty	Beautiful	Sexual

**Social Roles:** Please mark/code if the character was shown in a certain social role.

Character Name	Leader	Follower	Victim	Hero	Career	No Career	Domestic Role	Military	Explorer	Villain

**Behavioral Traits:**

Please mark/code every single time the character was mentioned possessing a certain role characteristic or the character exhibited the trait in his or her behavior.

Name	Independent	Intelligent	Brave	Athletic	Rebellious	Angry	Dominant	Competitive

Character Name	Dependent	Caring/ Loving	Fearful	Crying / Whining	Scared/ Desperate	Happy	Childlike

*Appendix C: Operationalizations of Character Appearance*

Appearance	Operationalizations
Extremely short	--Very short in relation to other characters
Extremely tall	--Very tall in relation to other characters
Extremely thin	--Very thin in relation to other characters
Extremely heavy	--Very heavy in relation to other characters
Extremely weak	--Very weak in relation to other characters
Extremely strong	--Muscular/strong in relation to other characters --Referred to as strong by other characters
Dirty	--Shown in dirty clothing, with dirty body (face, hair) --Referred to dirtiness and smell by other characters
Beautiful	--Referred to as pretty by other characters --Other character are astonished by character's beauty
Sexual	--Referred to as sexual by other characters --Shown seducing other characters to get their will (flutter eyelashes, touching/rubbing in a seductive way) --Shown in sexy clothing (underwear, bra, heels etc.) --Shown performing sexy movements

*Appendix D: Operationalizations of Character Social Roles*

Social Role	Operationalizations
Leader	--Shown of being in charge and telling others what to do (e.g. decision making)
Follower	--Shown following and supporting the instructions or behaviors of another character willingly/ unwillingly
Victim	--Shown injured or hurt by another character
Hero	--Shown in position of powerlessness or situational circumstances --Admired particularly for having done something difficult or good (e.g. saving someone's life, winning a battle)
Career	--Shown brave and courageous in dangerous situations --Shown having an occupation, a career throughout the movie --Shown in workplace
No career	--Shown with no career and just living day-to-day life
Domestic Role	--Shown spending time in the domestic domain/ household (washing dishes, taking care of kids, cleaning the house, cooking)
Military	--Shown in a military position or uniform (soldier, officer, army, navy) --Shown using military language terms
Explorer	--Shown traveling around a place (surroundings, environment) in order to learn about it
Villain	--Referred to as adventurous by other characters --Shown at odds with the hero or main characters --Shown as wicked, evil character hurting other characters or his/her environment

*Appendix E: Operationalizations of Character Behavior*

Behavior	Operationalizations
Angry	--Shown irritated or annoyed (shouting or yelling) --Shown with angry facial expressions or body movements
Athletic	--Shown playing a sport --Shown having a fit, strong and healthy body --Shown in athletic gear/ attire
Brave	--Shown expressing courage, bravery or fearlessness when facing characters or situations that are dangerous or scary
Caring/Loving Childlike	--Shown being helpful and concerned toward others; good-hearted --Shown having the qualities associated with a child (thumb sucking, acting like a baby)
Competitive	--Shown in the act of competing; a contest between rivals
Crying/Whining	--Shown making noises or produce tears because of being unhappy, sad or scared
Dependent	--Shown asking for help/advice, support, care or directions in decision-making, or emotional and physical sense
Dominant	--Shown commanding, controlling or prevailing over others
Fearful	--Shown feeling afraid of a particular person, situation or thing through facial expression, body language or words
Happy	--Showing pleasure, contentment, or joy (e.g. smiling)
Independent	--Shown autonomous, not requiring or relying on something or others to meet needs, to make decisions, whether those needs are emotional or physical
Intelligent	--Referred to as intelligent by other characters --Shown reading a book, or in the library, or with a backpack; enjoyment --Shown discussing important issues, using knowledge that is/ are above the understanding of other characters --Shown solving a problem as a result of intense thinking or consideration
Rebellious/ Troublesome	--Shown deliberately rebelling against an authority character or societal expectations (e.g. breaking the law) --Shown not doing what society and authority wants you to do
Scared/ Desperate	--Shown expressing sudden fear of a particular person, situation or thing through facial expressions, body language or words; natural reaction to a sudden scary event