

**Stereotypes and signifiers of cultural change: Situating Disney presentations of
mental health conditions as feminine**

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to study portrayals of mental health conditions in animated children's film, situating them as feminine. Specifically, it aims to add to the understandings of Disney-Pixar's portrayals of mental health conditions and the resulting cultural stereotypes. This paper utilizes a content analysis of three Pixar films with female lead characters from the 2000s and 2010s. Additionally the methodology draws on a diachronic total history as described by Klinger (1997) in order to study these films as larger cultural objects of influence, in the conversation between mass media and mental health portrayals. Conclusions can be drawn about whether Disney-Pixar's presentations of mental health conditions and female characters reflect, parallel, or deviate from the cultural views of the time period.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

According to The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2015a), there were approximately 43.4 million American adults, age 18 and over, that had *any* mental illness. Any mental illness can range in impact from no impairment, to mild impairment, or disabling impairment of major life activities. The NIMH (2015b) further reports that in 2015, about 9.8 million American adults had *significant* mental illness. This is defined as a mental, behavioral, or emotional disorder that results in serious functional impairment, which interferes with one or more major life activities. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (2012), an estimated 13% of children aged 8 to 15 had a diagnosable mental health disorder, across all categories, in the last year. In terms of children's mental health the most common conditions are Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder at 8.6 percent, followed by major depressive disorder at 2.7 percent (CDC, 2012). These are important statistics to consider because they show that a significant proportion of the American population currently has, or has experienced a mental health problem. There is a negative stigma regarding mental health conditions that affects how others perceive those with the lived experience of a mental health condition. These stigmas are often perpetuated through media representations.

Disney-Pixar has built an empire anchored in the medium of animation. Animated film can provide the viewing audience an outlet for understanding people and popular issues. One way that animated movies, specifically Disney and Pixar films, have functioned in this capacity is the changing representations of mentally challenged characters. In fact, Pixar Animation Studios is celebrated for its willingness to give

disability, especially mental health challenges, high profile exposure via the character of Dory from *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory* (Heady, 2016). Overall, mental health professionals laud the change in presenting characters with mental health problems (Heady, 2016). The introduction of characters that are explicitly identified as having a mental health conditions is worth noting because Walt Disney films have historically blurred the line between fiction and reality, madness and sanity. While representations of mental health conditions in Disney films have become more positive and accurate, Disney-Pixar, like earlier Disney films, still falls victim to common film tropes that continually present mental health struggles as ‘feminine.’ This gendered depiction of mental health conditions does allow for more awareness and conversation to occur, but this may both help and hurt the female population that these characters, like Dory, represent.

This paper analyzes the use of stereotypes in regard to mental health and women in order to determine if and how they are or are not used in Pixar films in order to create more conversation and awareness around a topic such as women’s mental health. To do this, I employ three film analyses and an additional analysis of two of the films using Klinger’s (1997) idea of total history. Using a critical methodology, I argue that while Pixar does employ some stereotypes about females and mental health in the films *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Finding Dory* (2016) and *Inside Out* (2015), the reduced reliance on these stereotypes allows for larger conversations and understandings to occur regarding mental health as a whole, that exceeds the confines of the films themselves. To illustrate this, this paper progresses in six total chapters. Following this first chapter, in chapter 2, a review of literature on stereotypes, Disney, women, and mental health is presented. Chapter 3

outlines my critical methodology and research questions. Next, in chapter 4, my analysis first applies the usage of stereotypes and mental health presentation to the films *Finding Nemo* and *Finding Dory*, and it covers *Finding Dory's* total history. Then chapter 5 applies the usage of stereotypes and mental health presentations to the film *Inside Out* and explores the film's total history. Last, in chapter 6, the implications of the analysis are presented and possibilities for future research are outlined.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Before conducting my analyses of *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Finding Dory* (2016), and *Inside Out* (2015), it is imperative to have foundational studies and previous research grounding my theoretical framework and perspective. This chapter reviews literature on the main elements of my study: stereotypes and methods for studying film, the Disney Studio, women, and mental health. The purpose of this review is to present past and current research in these areas of study and to illustrate the backing, development, and innovation of this analysis. The first section covers foundational information on stereotypes in popular culture and studying film. The Disney Studio section discusses Walt Disney and his animations, the ideas and influences of Victorianism and Modernism, and previous academic studies of Disney films. Then, the section on women discusses female stereotypes in film and then also more specifically in Disney film. Lastly, the section on mental health covers the stereotype of madness, mental health regarding Disney and his films, and women's mental health historically.

Film and Popular Culture

Studying Film

Film studies prior to the 1970s were preoccupied with auteurism and film aesthetics. Beginning in the 1970s the literature was broadened to, “include the ‘public visions’ of popular filmmakers, ‘box office’ and industrial factors, and the idea that a movie says as much about its audience as it contributes to the development of its art form” (Edgerton, Marsden, & Nachbar, 1995, p. 1). When applying a sociocultural tradition to film studies, it is important to note that the cultural context trumps the medium. According to Edgerton et. al (1995), film is a cultural product and form of social

knowledge that is meaningful within its relationship to broader contexts, institutions, and discourses. For example, the genre of animated is part of this relationship. Animation is not solely used for entertainment, but also for the purposes of education. A more present day view of animation and its roles comes from Bolaki (2016) who argues that animators need to focus more on content and purpose of their animated pieces. Currently animation is being applied to documentary film intended to inform the viewing public about complex public health issues and illness experiences.

Klinger (1997) proposes a new addition to the academic area of reception studies called *histoire totale*, or total history, which aims to put the film studied in larger cultural contexts. This is accomplished in both a synchronic or diachronic method. A synchronic focus believes the object of interest has multiple histories. Specifically this is studied in three zones: cinematic practices, intertextual zones, and the social and historical contexts (Klinger, 1997). Cinematic practices are, “primarily all of the practices associated with film production, distribution and exhibition that shape the film the audience finally sees” (Klinger, 1997, p. 115). Intertextual zones are focused on the influences between film and practices outside the film industry in other media and businesses. Lastly, the social and historical context looks at the social processes that can impact what a film means publicly. Diachronic studies look at the film’s total lifespan through revivals and retrospectives, reviews, academic theory, criticism and history, television, video and laserdisc reproduction, fan culture, biographical legend, and cross cultural reception (Klinger, 1997). While not the only way to study film, total history provides a way of engaging with the film to understand its role as a cultural object. Understanding Klinger’s (1997) method of total history is necessary, as it is the method that will be used in this

study.

Popular Culture and Stereotype

Popular culture is mass produced, available for the largest group of people, reflects and shapes current beliefs and values, is commercial, imitative, and is part of our everydayness (Nachbar & Lause, 1992). In fact, “the health of a society is directly reflected in the liveliness and quality of its entertainment (Inge & Hall, 2002, p. xvi). In popular culture the work of art, film, or other media produced appeals to the mass audience’s tastes and indicates a status quo in culture (Himmelstien, 1981). According to Hall (1977) the dominant view of what is acceptable is constantly gaining legitimacy through shaping and producing consent from the public through the media. Stereotypes are an easy way of gaining acceptance from the public without much difficulty.

One of the six main areas of popular culture studies is stereotype (Nachbar & Lause, 1992). Further, according to Nachbar and Lause (1992) stereotype is a standard conception or image of a particular group of people or objects, held by a group of people, that are a direct expression of hidden beliefs and values. There are four important characteristics of stereotypes according to Nachbar and Lause (1992): (1) stereotypes are overly simplified understandings of reality; (2) people learn stereotypes from cultural mediators rather than direct experience with the stereotyped group; (3) all stereotypes are false though each has varying degrees of falsity and harmfulness; (4) stereotypes are resistant to change.

Stereotypes are ingrained into our cultural makeup, and are often used as storytelling shortcuts. Using stereotyped characters allows writers to not have to explain every character’s motivations (Nachbar & Lause, 1992). Most stereotypes are transmitted

via mass media, allowing these representations and stereotypes to be shared by billions of people across time and distance (Stangor & Schaller, 1996). Film is a medium that is designed to reach large audiences, and the storylines, characters, and other aspects are meant to work together to be easily recognizable and understood by audience members across age, geographic distance, and other factors. In a discussion of television, which can also be applied to films, Gitlin (1979) argues that characters in television do not change. Audiences' tolerances may cause character changes, but hegemonic values stay the same. In this, alternative material outside of the dominant view is either incorporated or excluded wholly or partially (Gitlin, 1979). This argument speaks to mass media on a larger scale as an enforcer of cultural values and hegemonic, dominant ideologies. The stereotypes and character tropes exist and while there may be changes in how characters are portrayed based on audience desires, these different depictions still work within the boundaries of the dominant view.

Disney Studios

Disney in the Film Industry Today

Disney Studios aims to be, “one of the world’s leading producers and providers of entertainment and information” (The Walt Disney Company, 2017). The Walt Disney Company owns nine studio entertainment branches including The Walt Disney Studios, Walt Disney Animation Studios, and Pixar Animation Studios (The Walt Disney Company, 2017). According to Szalai (2016) Disney earned a profit of \$2.53 billion and has finished in first place for the third straight year in The Hollywood Reporter’s rankings of the six main film studios. Disney films continually lead rankings of the Best Animated films. In a list compiled by *Time Magazine* eleven of the twenty-five films

included were Disney produced (Corliss, 2011). According to Rotten Tomatoes (n.d.) thirty-two of the top 100 animated films are also Disney produced. These films are strong objects of study because of the studio's position as a box-office heavyweight, its high revenues, and multiple films on Best Animated Features lists. These all indicate the studio's popularity among audiences.

Disney and his animations

Walt Disney is a key pioneer in the world of animation, helping to make the industry what it is today. While he is a celebrated figure, he is also a divisive figure. "Disney disciples venerate Saint Walt as the purveyor of innocent imagination and uplifting fantasy; Disney denouncers bitterly decry Huckster Walt as a cynical manipulator of cultural and commercial formulas" (Watts, 1995, p 84). His interest in drawing and then his interest in animation helped to create one of the largest most widely recognized animation film companies. Walt was a brilliant storyteller who changed animated cartoons by making characters with distinct personalities, taking risks, and continually working for the best quality possible (Bryman, 1995). Walt is described as a serial visionary who had big dreams about new ways of doing many things (Bryman, 1995). Whether it was for animation, his amusement parks, or another topic, Walt was constantly moving his company forward. In this case, his constant reimagining of animation and the stories he animated is of high interest. Animation, overall, had many draws to it: the inertia from print to film, money, the technological appeal, and the possibility for attention and success. What made Disney stand out among other animators is his psychological connection to animation based in his childhood experiences (Gabler,

2006). In fact, to Disney, cartoons reconnected him to the romantic spirit of youth (Wills, 2017). Overall it seems as if Walt and animation were always meant to come together.

Disney's Victorianism and Modernism

Animation can be considered a Modernist art form as it came into popularity in the early Twentieth Century. According to Watts (1995) while Disney experimented with the modernist forms and techniques he still was led by Victorian sensibilities.

Victorianism separated binary elements of the human experience such as human and animal, civilized and savage, and reason and emotion. Modernism recombined these elements with the intention of reconstructing the totality of human nature (Watts, 1995).

Disney preferred to think of his works as magical instead of technical feats and when telling time-tested mythic material, he showed it using easy to understand artistic terms showing his audiences the familiar making it easier to arrive at the place where the audience suspends disbelief (Schickel, 1997). More human-like animation and the magical sense of wonder have continually defined the Disney animation products throughout the company's existence and are hallmarks of all their films.

Disney never thought of children as his primary audience because when the studio made a movie they tried to please themselves instead of an imaginary child, thus widening the films' appeal to people of all age groups (Miller, 1956). Scholars such as Giroux (1999) also argue that Disney fused both education and entertainment to promote the Disney Company's cultural pedagogy. Teaching was not limited to school, and education could be transformed through new leisure spaces, electronic technologies, and global markets (Giroux, 1999). These beliefs indicate that Disney is meant for mass

audiences across age groups, and that everyone can arguably learn something from a Disney film.

Previous Studies of Disney Films

Children's film has been the focus of various studies regarding how they portray and describe characters, because of the view that there are possible implications for children's exposure to these characterizations. According to Wills (2017), cartoons offer a childlike view of the world that helps influence how children navigate their own experiences. The Disney Company has promoted various fundamental notions and ideals that have shaped American mass culture including universal love, good conquering evil, happy endings, a Protestant-style work ethic, absolute morality, and traditional family roles (Wills, 2017). One theme studied is the idea of demonizing characters, or attributing evil to a character that is participating in harmful or bad behavior. This attribution can occur even if the character is not truly bad. Fouts, Callan, Piasentin, and Lawson (2006) found that a majority of Disney films had instances of demonizing that were modeled repeatedly by various characters. Televised cartoons also had demonized characters and the demonizing was associated with negative emotional states of the character (Fouts et al., 2006). For example, being angry or nervous would cause a character to be demonized. Moreover, Li-Vollmer and LaPointe (2003) argue that gender transgression and queering is an indicator of deviance and villain making in Disney films. The male villain-as-sissy archetype and the female villain as tomboy shows villains, or those who take on opposing gender qualities, as deviant and enhances the positive gender qualities of heroes and heroines (Putnam, 2013). There is a tendency to demonize or other characters that are not considered socially acceptable, whether it is due to emotional state,

participating in bad behavior, or exhibiting qualities not typically associated with one's biological sex. Having this act of othering in children's film can teach children that it is acceptable to look down on people unlike themselves.

Studies of children's film have also included portrayal of negative behaviors such as smoking and drinking. In Disney films, the use of tobacco products decreased while the use of alcohol products increased (Ryan & Hoerrner, 2004). In these films, according to Ryan and Hoerrner (2004), children were shown using the specific alcohol or tobacco products cigar, pipe, beer and champagne, which is ironic since using tobacco and alcohol products is illegal for children. Previous research indicates children learn and internalize traditional gender roles from television and film (Witt, 2000). In line with this research, the amount of negative behaviors shown in films directed at children is concerning especially since children do internalize behavior shown in media, and then have the possibility of emulating the behavior.

On the other hand, a more recent trend in studying Disney films looks for positive behaviors within the films. Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, and Stockdale (2013) studied Disney films for their inclusion of pro-social behavior. Disney films have a high level of pro-social behaviors, and that these acts were rarely paired with aggression, targets were more pro-social with friends, and helped those similar to themselves (Padilla-Walker et al, 2013). Overall, it is important to note that Disney films portray both positive and negative behaviors that could influence how children act in real life. According to Scherman (2011), children's cinema can be used as a signal that social change has occurred in mainstream society. Having positive behaviors in Disney films shows there is potential for children to learn good behavior from watching these films as well. Though,

the fact that characters were more pro-social to people similar to themselves could still be continuing the act of othering characters based on their differences from someone.

Disney princess media exposure was also found to increase levels of female-gender stereotypical behavior for girls and boys. Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson, & Birkbeck (2016), found that high Disney Princess engagement via playing with toys, viewing princess media, and identifying with princesses, was more common with girls than boys. Yet, while Disney Princesses perform more pro-social behaviors, such as being kind, self-sacrificing, or helping those in trouble, the girls did not pick up on or perform these behaviors. Instead boys adopt the pro-social behaviors portrayed by the Princesses after high levels of active mediation from parents. Additionally children's adherence to female gender stereotypes was longitudinally predicted if parents talked to their children about the media (Coyne, et. al). In a study of prince and princess characters, England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek (2011) found that across the princess films, the gender role portrayals are sometimes stereotypical representations of gender. While they have changed over time, male characters exhibit more androgyny and less change in their gender roles. Additionally Bazzini, Curtin, Joslin, Regan, and Martz (2010) found character attractiveness is a significant predictor of the character's portrayal. But, while children rated the attractive character higher, film exposure did not increase their use of the beauty-goodness stereotype. Overall, just because Disney films may show more positive behaviors, other factors such as understandings of gender can prevent these behaviors from being recognized and adopted.

In terms of Disney works, according to Dines quoted in Brode (2005) Disney's "scripts are written by real people, who themselves, have been socialized by this society,

and they have internalized these norms and these values. So when they produce work, it's bound to come out in some way [expressing that society]—unless they make a conscious decision to operate within an alternative ideology (p. 18). Therefore, Disney films are not free from stereotypes or assumptions. But, in order to get outside of the dominant societal ideology, the creators have to make the choice to do so.

Women

According to Kurylo (2013) if people hope to minimize prejudice and discrimination, attention needs to be brought to minority group stereotypes (including women) because they are greater in amount, negativity, interconnectedness, and comprehensiveness. When studying stereotypes related to prejudice and discrimination, they can be subtle or overt, have negative effects for the members of the targeted group, and are particularly consequential when occurring in interpersonal, intercultural, and work and small group contexts, because they involve topics such as employment, financial wellbeing, and health (Kurylo, 2013). These topics brought up by Kurylo (2013) are key stereotypes that are associated with women and the feminine, persist across historical time frames, and are easily accessed across media that use them.

Female stereotypes in film

Across film there has been a continual reliance on simple characterizations of the female and the feminine. In a discussion on feminism, femininity, and its place in popular culture, Hollows (2000) provides an overview of key themes in feminist film studies working toward a claim that popular culture can make over feminism instead of feminism making over the popular. One key theorist, Mulvey argued that women in cinema have the potential to threaten the male spectator. Therefore, dominant cinema has created

forms of looking such as fetishism, voyeurism, and narcissism, to keep the female in a subordinate position. For example in 1940s horror films, the audience is introduced to the trope of the paranoid woman (Jancovich, 2011). This is a historic portrayal of women in horror film where the woman questions the male lead's intentions or her own feelings for him (Jancovich, 2011). During the 1970s there were advancements in female portrayals, though they still relied on feminine ideals. While the 1970s television show *Bionic Woman* exhibited the United States superiority through the strength of the female character's embodiment of liberal and radical feminism to overthrow the patriarchal institutions, she still adhered to very feminine looks and qualities.

Women in Disney Films

Depictions of femininity have also been a focus of Disney scholars. According to Wills, (2017) Disney films have typically both restricted and empowered the female characters in its films. This creates both proponents of the feminine representations in the films, as well as detractors. In terms of proponents, Davis (2006) argues that Disney films' depictions of femininity do represent the wider attitudes of American culture at the historical time each film was produced. It is because of this that these depictions still resonate with audiences today and keep them popular. Disney never competed with Hollywood, not believing that popular tastes turn in cycles (Miller, 1956). Brode (2005) argues that Disney films are full of respect for women. Films that Disney himself supervised as well as the current studio progress along a continuum, adhering to social and political attitudes set in motion by Walt Disney.

Some Disney scholars are more critical of female representation in Disney films. The construction of gender identity for girls and women is a controversial issue for

Disney's films. For example, Giroux (1999) argues that female characters are subordinate to males and the female power and desires are typically defined in terms of male dominated narratives. Stone (1975) states that *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, and *Cinderella*, three Disney films based on the Grimm fairytales, all contain passive, pretty heroines who are patient obedient, industrious, and quiet. If a woman did not have each of these characteristics she would fail to be a heroine. Additionally these films contained female villainesses. According to Stone (1975) this reinforces the stereotype of the innocent beauty victimized by wicked female villain. Bell (1999) argues that Disney animation uses women's bodies to align the audience with the beginning and end of the female life cycle, but they do not address the middle part of the woman's life. Additionally, Disney films present women's nature as escapist and androcentric providing a static, absolute depiction of women in order to have the female-centered films be considered timeless classics regardless of decade (Murphy, 1999). Additionally, female characters have been used in Disney films to speak to larger issues. For example the witches, considered unwomanly women, are used to validate traditional values and images of the woman and family life (Cuomo, 1999). In a more current critique, Ebrahim (2014) argues that Pixar has a girl problem where most human female characters are negatively characterized, and that adult female characters, like Dory, though she is not human, fare better since they are cast as a co-protagonist. Presentations of the female and the feminine have been a persistent and popular topic for those studying Disney. Decades have passed since its inception as a film studio and scholars continue to study presentations of the female and the feminine. Therefore, Disney's presentations may not be as forward thinking as the public is lead to believe.

Mental Health

The Stereotype of Madness

To look specifically at one often-stereotyped characterization, in terms of health topics, madness is a common stereotype. Studies consistently show that attitudes toward those with the lived experience of mental health conditions are among the most negative (Schneider, 2004). In studies regarding if people recognize health conditions, some studies show that people are willing to say targets displaying deviant behavior fall into the category of having a mental health problem (Crocetti, Spiro, & Siassi, 1974; Rootman & Lafave, 1969). Further, these individuals are stereotyped as unpredictable and dangerous which can lead to interpersonal wariness, rejection, and overt discrimination (Schneider, 2004). In media portrayals, otherness here has been typically portrayed through specific images like facial appearance and expression, and, body build and gestures. Rohr (2015) argues there are traditionally three main tropes of mad characters: the wise fool who has vast knowledge on a lasting human truth, the animal like savage who needs to be removed from society, and the mad genius who possesses a special ability that separates the individual from others. Other common negative portrayals of those with mental illness are the homicidal maniac, the rebellious free spirit, the female patient as seductress, the narcissistic parasite, the zoo specimen, the simpleton, and the failure or victim (Pirkis, Warwick Blood, Francis & McCallum, 2006). Rohr (2015) argues there is a new type emerging: autism as the new normal. This keeps the character from being othered in the ways of previous tropes. Autism is not a mental health condition, but it is a disability that can establish the individual as other because people do not understand the autism spectrum. The positive change in autism representations in

media could indicate a similar trend for mental health. Because there is confusion around the true realities of mental health challenges, there is an opportunity for possible change with this stereotype (Schneider, 2004). Therefore, overcoming the stereotypes of mental health conditions is possible and seems to slowly be happening in film.

Mental health, Disney, and his films

One person that seems to have impacted Walt Disney's outlook in life is his uncle, Edmund Disney. According to Gabler (2006), Edmund had an intellectual disability and was incapable of signing his own name. Edmund is also described as amiable and a free spirit who Walt remembers fondly. "I've never met a finer person. Uncle Ed may have been touched in the head, but he was happy" (Miller, 1956, p. 13). Edmund was often a playmate for young Walt when he would visit and Disney always spoke of Edmund as the boy who never grew up (Miller, 1956). "To me he represented fun in its simplest and purest form. I never could figure out who was crazy, Uncle Ed or everybody else" (Miller, 1956, p. 13). It seems as if the permanent state of childhood Uncle Edmund's condition put him in, left a real impact on how Walt viewed the world.

Because a focus of this study is portrayals of mental illness and the changing of and perpetuation of mental illness stigmas, it is necessary to discuss how viewing mental illness in various media affects viewers' perceptions. Studying film portrayals of mental illness allows for the discernment in recognizing the perpetuating stock images of individuals with mental health conditions as dangerous people that need to be confined. It also shows how society relies on the labeling and excluding of elements it finds mystifying or threatening (Beveridge, 1996). Kimmerle and Cress (2013), found that audiences do not acquire more knowledge about mental disorders from fictional films,

and fictional films experience more rejection and negativity toward an individual with mental health problems. The portrayals of mentally challenged characters in film reveal that viewers have the potential to accept current stigmas surrounding mental health.

Walt Disney's films are particularly popular to study for animated films' portrayals of mental health conditions. Beveridge (1996) posits that Disney films claim, "madness is a label society uses when confronted with behavior it cannot understand" (p. 620). For example, Belle is considered mad since she does not act like the other villagers due to her bookish ways, Mr. Banks from *Mary Poppins* is considered mad when he becomes fun-loving and demonstrative when he previously did not act that way, and Dumbo learns he can fly after the hallucinatory experience with the pink elephants. These characters act out in ways that others in the films cannot understand since the behavior is so unlike the majority or what is expected. Lawson and Fouts (2004) provided support to the use of labeling madness in Disney films, finding that films containing references to mental health problems were used mainly to 'other' and denigrate the character thought to be living with a mental health condition.

Disney films have indirectly taught audiences about intellectual disabilities through the characters of Gus, LeFou, and Dopey from *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Snow White* respectively. These portrayals reinforce the historical patterns of treatment those with the disabilities experience. The characters do not need to be expressly stated as having a disability for audiences to pick up on the differences; the characters' traits reveal their status and audiences make those connections (Schwartz, Lutiffya, & Hansen, 2013). Animation can be used as a teaching tool and Disney both

directly and indirectly educates audiences through the company's endeavors and the content of its films.

Women's Mental Health

Understandings of women's mental health are historically rooted in Nineteenth Century Victorianism. According to Vrettos (1995), Victorians read bodies as texts, believed that people spoke through their bodies and others' bodies were interpreted in gendered ways. Victorian culture believed women interpreted the body in this way more than men of the period (Vrettos, 1995). In studies of Victorian madness, Martin (1987) defines madness as the range of mental conditions in which what is accepted as normal behavior is suspended or disrupted. Often, women were considered mad during times of natural female bodily phenomena, such as childbirth and menstruation (Martin, 1987). Under this view, women are naturally ill and madness cannot be separated from being female. Yet it is important to note that Victorian physicians could not classify, diagnose, and treat nervous ailments easily because of the changing definition of nerves (Vrettos, 1995). It wasn't until later in the 1800s that thinking moved away from the physical to the psychological causation of neurosis.

Feminist critics of Nineteenth century culture view women's illnesses at this time including madness as assertions of patriarchal power. Madness signifies women as the 'Other' (Ussher, 1991; Vrettos, 1995). Originally deviant women were known as witches and the terms madness, hysteria, and insanity came to replace that terminology (Ussher, 1991). Also in the Victorian era, madness associated with femininity was also tied to female sexuality and deviancy. According to Ussher (1991), women's biological or cerebral defects can cause deviance, but they can also be seen as symptoms of deviance.

Understandings of psychiatry may have expanded in the 1900s, but the tie between femininity and insanity was not forgotten. The new scientific theories and official classifications of madness only further entrenched female madness as a legitimate discourse (Ussher, 1991). By marking the woman as mad, in fact her voice is being silenced. As women learn sex-appropriate behavior, the socially learned attitudes and behaviors are seen as women's essential qualities and not as products of social norms that devalue women (Rieker & Jankowski, 1995). While Rieker and Jankowski (1995) argue that this essentialist view and resulting polarizing stereotypes are used to justify a restricted division of labor, the premise is still the same; the women are continually placed in the role of 'Other' because they are thought to be different and deficient.

Even into the twenty-first century, while there is a larger understanding of mental health, gender still influences how mental health is viewed and discussed. According to the World Health Organization (2017), women are more likely diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and somatic disorders. In fact, depression is the most common women's mental health problem. Women also experience different kinds of mental health problems at times of hormone changes such as perinatal depression, premenstrual dysphoric disorder, and peri-menopause related depression (NIMH, 2017). Additionally, older adult women are at higher risk for depression, organic brain syndromes, and dementias. Factors like gender-based roles, gender based violence, socioeconomic disadvantage, income inequality, low social status, and having the responsibility of caring for others are interconnected with anxiety, somatic symptoms, and high comorbidity rates. Women typically experience a higher rate of lifetime occurrence of mental illness and comorbidity, experiencing three or more mental conditions over a one-year period

(Kessler, McGonagle, & Zhao, 1994). These findings help to reinforce the historical stereotypes about women and mental health that began decades ago.

In this literature review I have discussed why and how film can be studied, pertinent aspects of Walt Disney's life, Victorian and present day depictions of women and their mental health, stereotypes in popular culture, previous studies of Disney films, female stereotypes across film genres, and mental health in Disney films. Looking into the previous research has allowed me to find a gap in research surrounding Disney films. The first gap is how Disney's history plays a role in his films. The second gap is a lack of a current discussion on the portrayals of female characters in these films. These gaps matter because they allow me to enter a conversation surrounding Disney films that has not been explored. Research has been done individually in the areas of past Disney films, women, and mental health in these films. No studies to my knowledge have combined all three areas into one project. Combining these areas into one project begins to address the two gaps in literature previously mentioned and to provide a new way of thinking about these films.

In order to study how Disney films have portrayed mental health conditions as feminine over time, the following research questions have been created based off the existing literature. The first research question is the driving question for this project.

RQ1: How have present Disney-Pixar films portrayed mental illness?

RQ1a: What cultural attitudes about mental illness do these depictions express and what larger historical attitudes come into play?

The next research question delves into Walt Disney's life experiences and how they have influenced the characterizations of female characters. These questions are

based off of Watts' (1995) description of Walt Disney as a Sentimental Modernist who held true to Victorian ideals and values while at the same time moving his animation and art into a Modernist direction.

RQ2: What role do Victorian values and historical views regarding women have in creating how the female characters in Disney films are portrayed and the use of stereotypes to tell these portrayals?

Presently, Disney-Pixar Animation has been lauded for its inclusion of characters that have explicit mental health conditions and reviewers hope that these portrayals will help to change in how the public accepts those with these health issues. The next research question is meant to explore these topics.

RQ3: What larger mental health discourses, including film tropes and popular culture stereotypes, are used in the construction of Disney's representation of female characters with mental health conditions?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study is a master's thesis qualitative content analysis of three films from Disney-Pixar, exploring how female characters and mental health intersect using Klinger's (1997) total history methodology. Due to the nature of being a master's thesis, a study of three films was most appropriate for the time and expectations of this endeavor. This study is based in an interpretive methodology. This study is coming from a critical perspective focusing on the idea of social construction- that our understandings of the world form the basis for our shared assumptions about reality. These shared understandings about reality become embedded in societal institutions. Under this epistemology, groups are marginalized due to prior conditions. The two marginalized groups of interest for this study are those with the lived experience of mental health disorders and women. Specifically the interest lies in how these two groups intersect due to the existing dominant societal structures in place, which have come into existence after centuries of belief, preventing other viewpoints and experiences to be heard. Learning about how this group (women with mental health challenges) is communicated about may achieve change for this groups in the face of the existing understandings.

The three films for analysis are *Inside Out* (2015), *Finding Nemo* (2003), and *Finding Dory* (2016). These films were specifically selected because they are believed to show varying degrees and types of mental health conditions. Overall, these films have a female main character that the films are based around making them viable options for exploring the feminine characters of Walt Disney films. Two of these films come from the most current decade in the Disney film canon, the 2010s, though Dory's first introduction took place in the early 2000s. Since two of these films were released in the

2010s, this provides a way to analyze how these films are working both in the present moment in their depictions of female characters. Incorporating *Finding Nemo* (2003) into this analysis also allows for changes in Dory's character role and the use of mental health stereotypes to be considered.

Both *Inside Out* and *Finding Dory* bring additional reasons justifying their inclusion in the analysis including their storylines, depiction of mental health conditions, and female lead characters. The films' storylines are original content and not based on previously published works. These two films may reflect more current viewpoints and provide a way to analyze the present day understandings of mental health challenges. While both *Inside Out* and *Finding Dory* are animated, they depict mental health problems in a real world setting and imaginary world respectively. Specifically, Riley from *Inside Out* (Lasseter, Nielsen, Rivera, & Stanton, 2015) experiences symptoms of depression. Dory from *Finding Dory* (Collins, Lasseter, & Roath, 2016) is explicitly stated as having short-term memory loss. These films follow more current examples of two distinct mental health conditions. The two lead characters of interest are also considered to be female. Because one film has an anthropomorphic fish and the other has a human character, for the purposes of this study female is explicitly defined. First the definition is based in the Merriam Webster (2018) definition for female, which includes an individual of the sex that is typically capable of bearing young or producing eggs. Specific definitions that are of interest from Merriam Webster (2018) are "characteristic of girls, women, or the female sex" and "having some quality associated with the female sex." Because these Pixar films do not explicitly claim or that these characters are female, other means of identification are necessary. Often for animation, character design and

actions are used to convey the sex or gender of a character. For this reason American/Western gender roles and understandings will be used to further define these characters are female, including personality traits and physical appearance (Planned Parenthood, 2018). Specifically, the tone and pitch of voice and way of dress help to indicate these characters' sex. Additionally, Pixar created material about these characters indicates Dory and Riley are to be understood as female due to the chosen pronouns being used, specifically she/her/hers (Pixar, 2018a; Pixar 2018b). Further, Riley and Dory are voiced by women who identify as biologically female: Kaitlyn Dias and Ellen DeGeneres respectively (IMDb, 2015; IMDb 2016). All of these things taken together help draw the conclusion of femaleness.

Cultural texts, such as films, are inherently polysemic resulting in multiple meanings. Due to this, this study will employ Klinger (1997)'s total history to establish a framework to help place the research project into larger, yet more guided cultural contexts. Under total history, there are three zones: (1) cinematic practices, (2) intertextual zones, and (3) social and historical contexts. These three zones will be explored using a diachronic total history in order to provide a more detailed depiction of how these two films act as cultural objects ideal for studying stereotypes of females and mental health conditions. Specifically to understand how these disorders are discussed and acknowledged medically, medical websites such as those from the Centers for Disease Control, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration were consulted. To study how the public is being told about these disorders, women's lifestyle and health magazines were analyzed. In order to better understand the films and their reception, sources for analysis include the films' Blu-ray discs and bonus material,

reviews from major newspapers, YouTube videos, and screening information. Engaging with all of these sources allowed me study how these films act as cultural texts both as Disney-Pixar intended them and how that has changed once they became available to the public.

The aspects discovered and discussed in the application of cinematic practices to each film will help create a fuller, richer conversation around each presentation of mental health conditions. The results will be organized into two chapters. Each film will be its own case study. The case studies will incorporate all the material collected for the total history study. Ultimately, the case studies will work in conversation with each other to draw conclusions about the current conversations around mental health and what the female representations indicate culturally.

Chapter 4: Finding Dory

Introduction: Film Analysis

In 2003, Pixar introduced audiences to a brand new undersea world through the film, *Finding Nemo* (Lasseter, J., Walters, G., Gotoh, Stanton, A. & Unkrich, L., 2003). This film is overflowing with characters that exhibit various disabilities including Nemo and his small fin, and a fish that is allergic to water. While many of the characters in this film have physical disabilities only one major character, a female blue tang named Dory, struggles with her mental health instead of a physical impairment. In order to understand the role of Dory and her thirteen-year evolution as a character both *Finding Nemo* (2003) and the sequel, *Finding Dory* (2016) need to be discussed. Analysis of both films indicates that while Pixar seems to have created a more positive portrayal of mental health in the newer film, stereotypes about disabled characters as well as the power dynamic between Dory and Marlin indicate that while Dory's lived experience with her short term memory loss is more positive, there is not much advancement in improvement in how she is truly handled as a character, in fact still leaving her wrapped up in a much larger story about family and belonging.

Apologies, Anger, and Patriarchal Power

When Dory first enters the film, Marlin is distractedly swimming around trying to find the boat that took Nemo when he and some of his classmates went to visit the area where the reef drops off into unfamiliar ocean. While Marlin is struggling to find the boat, he swims directly into Dory. When Marlin states Nemo was taken by a boat Dory says she has seen a boat and can help lead him to it. As Marlin is describing the boat, Dory looks at him and says, "Hi, I'm Dory." Marlin then still talking about the boat

reminds Dory she has seen a boat and he begins to follow her. As they swim in the direction the boat went, we see Dory begin to swim faster and glance back at Marlin almost as if she is wary of him following her. She gets angry and complains that he is swimming so close to her as if the ocean is not big enough for him. In response Marlin yells back that she is supposed to be showing him where the boat went. Dory then says she's seen a boat and that she can follow him. When Marlin gets angry and tells her she's already mentioned a boat, Dory gets quiet and says, "I did? Oh no." Thus, Dory apologizes for the fact that she has difficult time remembering things because she has short-term memory loss that runs in her family (at least she thinks it does). This is the first time Marlin and the audience is given an explanation for why Dory has acted the way she did earlier in the scene. Yet, Marlin still does not believe her, says she is wasting his time and tries to leave so he can find his son.

This interaction speaks to a larger conversation on both Dory's lived experiences as a female and as a fish with mental health struggles. The audience sees an interesting dynamic at play when Dory begins to swim away from Marlin as she feels she is being followed. Her feelings are not necessarily wrong. During this whole sequence he and she are the only fish swimming at that time. The story focuses solely on them, and any other fish around do not seem to pay them any mind. Dory's action of constantly looking behind her at Marlin and swimming away from him indicates that she does not feel comfortable with him at all. Additionally during this sequence Dory feels the need to apologize for her short-term memory loss. By apologizing for this, she is playing into a role as the weaker individual, assuming a more secondary position behind Marlin. Instead of owning her disability and being proud of it, she automatically feels the need to say she

is sorry. Even with her apologies Marlin does not seem to care. He tells Dory that she is wasting his time and he moves to continue on his quest to find Nemo and the boat without her. These instances indicate that Dory is taking on a lesser role. Specifically that who she is and what she does, at least for Marlin, does not matter. Her memory loss makes her unimportant to him as he attempts to locate the boat that took his son.

Even though Dory is the only one willing to help him, he refuses to look past her disabilities and allow her to really help him, because he is still wary of her. Marlin uses her mental health struggles to his advantage. For example, when the two fish get to a trench, Dory tells him they have to go through it, not over it. The audience knows she is right due to a school of fish telling her these directions, though she cannot remember how she knows to go through the trench and not over. Marlin, who does not trust Dory, goes and does what he wants. Yet, while he thinks he is right, it turns out he put them in a bad situation because they have to get through a wall of jellyfish. Dory gets injured because she is not used to the stings. Due to Dory's injuries, which Marlin caused, the viewer then finally sees his first moments of sadness and caring for Dory because of realizing his mistakes and that they have consequences.

While it seems he is beginning to care for her, the male dominant role is still at play here. Because Marlin is a fish without the lived experience of a mental health disorder, he puts himself in a power role above Dory. No matter how many times she tells him that she has a feeling they need to go over the trench, Marlin disregards her, saying he thinks they need to go through it because it will be faster. His actions are in opposition to the school of fish who talk to Dory in this scene. The fish school is assumed male, because, at least the fish who talks to her has a deep, rough voice which are all qualities

associated with masculinity and maleness. These qualities come across even more when paired with Dory's uncertain, higher pitched, feminine voice. When interacting with Dory, the male school of fish gives her power Marlin does not. When they have her guess formations they are in and the objects they are representing, even if she is wrong or takes a while to answer, they still celebrate her responses and continue with the game. They do not berate her for her mistakes. Additionally, these fish trust her with the ability to tell Marlin what to do when they reach the trench. They have a faith in Dory that Marlin lacks. Maybe it is because they do not know of her memory loss. Maybe something like that does not matter to them. But it is worth noting that these fish build up Dory's power and confidence when Marlin continually seems to take it away or deny it.

The Clouducukoolander

Yet no matter how many times Marlin tries to rid himself of Dory, she becomes his de-facto sidekick for the film. On a simple level, Dory serves a basic character role in the story, being the bubbly, optimistic foil to stoic, pessimistic Marlin. More specifically, in this film, Dory can be classified as a Clouducukooland character. Clouducukooland is a common film trope used to describe common story elements in fiction (Carlin, 2016). Specifically defined, a character in this category exists in a story to offer a different perspective than the accepted worldview of the other characters. While everything the Clouducukoolander character does makes sense from their point of view, they are often used as comic relief because they respond in unexpected ways as compared to the other characters.

The Introduction of Stereotypes

While Dory and her short-term memory loss are used to provide comedic moments in the film, Dory also takes on two specific mental health stereotypes used in story telling from Rohr (2015). Dory is both the mad genius who has a special ability that separates her from others, as well as the wise fool who has a knowledge on a lasting human truth. Dory's special ability is her ability to read. When Marlin finds the diving mask from the diver who took Nemo, he cannot read the writing on the strap. Dory takes it and brings it to the sharks to read. Since Marlin is trying to get away from the sharks, he pulls the mask from Dory, accidentally hitting her in the nose. While Marlin and Dory are trying to take the mask and swim away, Marlin and Dory are trying to find a way out of the abandoned submarine. Dory sees an escape hatch. When she reads it, she pronounces it es-cah-pay, but does not realize it really says escape. In a rush to get away Marlin realizes she can read, Dory confirms, surprised she can read. When the two first discover the mask again, she uses the light from a predator fish in order to read what was on the mask. While Marlin is swimming away from the fish, Dory is reading the mask determining that it says, P. Sherman 42 Wallaby Way, Sidney. Once they get away from the new predator, Dory tells Marlin what the mask had written on it. While Marlin is worried with where that is located, Dory is only excited that she remembered because she normally forgets.

Even though Dory has these abilities to help Marlin find his son, he still seems wary of her. Ultimately, Marlin's beliefs and reactions to Dory bring about another common story-telling stereotype: viewing individuals with mental health struggles as unpredictable (Schneider, 2004). Viewing these individuals as unpredictable causes those

they interact with to experience interpersonal wariness, causing them to reject the individual. While he and Dory are swimming around, she is talking about the address in Sidney. Marlin, getting exasperated tells her that he thinks it is best they part ways and he continues on alone because she is one of the fish who causes delays which he cannot afford. He tries to mask it by saying sometimes causing delays is a good thing, that she is part of a large group of fish known as delay-fish. Dory, though takes it to heart getting upset because she thinks he does not like her. When he swims away, Dory asks what is wrong. In his moment of anger Marlin says he is miles from home with a fish who cannot remember her own name. Dory, not realizing he is referring to her, says that she bets it is frustrating. He thinks he has to do everything on his own and that no one will help him. But the thing is, Dory, due to her forgiving nature, is willing to help him. She can overlook his faults.

Throughout the film, Dory is also the wise fool who has knowledge on a lasting human truth. This truth is the importance of friends, family, and belonging. Throughout the film the audience gets hints that Dory is alone. She cannot remember if she has a family or where they are. Additionally, we never meet any friend she may have either. The more time she spends with Marlin the more she considers him a friend. At the trench, she tells Marlin that he needs to trust her, because that's what friends do. Yet, the friendship Dory thinks they have is one sided. It is only when she is hurt that Marlin begins to indicate that he considers Dory a friend. Those feelings of friendship take a back seat when Marlin and Dory make their way to the dentist's office where Nemo is, and Marlin thinks Nemo is dead. When the two return to the water, Marlin leaves Dory. She does not want him to go, because she considers him family. When she is with him,

Dory remembers things better and she feels at home. This is the first time she's had those feelings. She does not want to forget, while he does. She recognizes the feelings of belonging and the importance of family that Marlin is so hesitant to remember and believe in. It is through Dory joining Marlin on this quest to find Nemo, that he is taught that lesson again.

Dory's larger role and agency

Thirteen years later Pixar brought audiences back to the undersea world with the sequel to *Finding Nemo*, aptly named *Finding Dory*. In this film, Dory moves from Cloudcuckoolander character used for comic relief, to a major character with a much more serious importance to this film. This film is used to answer the question asked in the first film, where did Dory come from, where is her family? While Dory is given a starring role in the storyline, Pixar again seems to rely on stereotypes and tropes used in the first film, but Dory, as female fish and a disabled fish, does have more agency than in the first film.

When the film begins, the viewer learns how Dory came to swim the ocean by herself. The opening scene shows baby Dory talking to the viewer saying, "Hi, I'm Dory. I suffer from short-term memory loss." Her parents come into view and the audience realizes they are teaching her what to say, and celebrating her getting the sentence right. Just as quickly as they celebrate her successes, when she almost swims off to play with other fish, her parents ask her about the rhyme they are teaching her about the undertow, which if she gets caught in it will take her away from them. She ultimately forgets coming up with incorrect rhymes. When she notices her parents looking at her worriedly, she asks her parents if she forgot again. Then she worries if she will forget her parents

and if they will forget her. Ultimately they tell her there is no way they will forget each other. While this leaves the audience with a positive feeling, it does not last.

The transition from Cloudcukoollander to Main Character

Although Dory is much more of a main character in this film, she still begins the present day part of the film as comic relief before she transitions into a more serious role. The comic relief comes in two examples. First, Dory keeps swimming into the anemone getting stung and hurt by it. She wants to tell Marlin and Nemo something and they keep sending her back to sleep. After the first time she should stop, but her short-term memory loss makes her forget. Continually doing this is ultimately meant to be a humorous moment. Additionally, while Nemo's class is learning about the stingray migration and going home, the students wonder where Dory's family is. As she is talking, Dory's short-term memory loss comes back into play. She forgets what she was saying turns back around and asks the students if she can help them. Again, this is a very humorous moment highlighted by the fact the kids find it funny causing Dory to apologize and repeat that she has short-term memory loss. The need for a female to apologize for her faults is something that carries over from the first film. Dory is still a subordinate character, not in a power position as compared to Marlin or Mr. Ray the teacher figure for Nemo's class.

Different film, same stereotypes

Various parts of the movie demonstrate that Pixar is still relying on stereotypes prominent in *Finding Nemo* (2003) in order to tell Dory's story as well. These are the wise fool who knows about a larger human truth, the individual with mental health issues being unpredictable, and the mad genius with a special ability. One of the first

stereotypes the audience is introduced to again is the disabled being seen as unpredictable. In the film, the audience is fast-forwarded to Dory at various ages beginning as a baby up until adulthood swimming around asking other fish if they have seen her family, letting the audience experience the first tropes Pixar relies on for this installment: the individual as victim, and as dangerous. In one instance, baby Dory is asking a husband and wife fish if they can help her find her parents. The female fish immediately feels sorry for Dory, saying oh you poor thing. She views Dory as a victim who cannot help that she is in this situation. They cannot understand why she keeps forgetting and repeating things she has already said. By the time the husband and wife come to help her, Dory is gone. This continues with other fish throughout Dory's life. She asks other fish for help and they either ignore her, or they volunteer to help but due to her short-term memory loss she refuses the help. Ultimately, because she is different, the other fish seem to mistrust her leaving her by herself.

Additionally, the field trip brings up the trope of unpredictability. When she finds out Nemo is going on a field trip, she wants to join, but Marlin and the teacher, Mr. Ray would prefer she did not go. When Marlin tries to explain it to her, this scene is reminiscent of him calling her a delay-fish in the first film. Instead, this time Dory is a wander-fish. Mr. Ray has too many fish to keep track of and he cannot watch her to make sure she does not wander. Yet, Dory does not understand that they do not want her to go. Instead she determines that Mr. Ray needs her to be the teaching assistant for the visit.

The next trope that is present in this film is the wise fool who understands a universal truth. While on the field trip, one of the students asks Dory how she knows she has a family if she has short-term memory loss. Here Dory answers with the film's

universal truth. While she has short-term memory loss, she knows she has to have a family, because everyone has a family. Everyone comes from somewhere. This universal truth is what guides the film's entire storyline. In fact, it takes Dory relying on her universal truth of family and her desire not to forget that convinces Marlin to help her in her quest to find her family. The universal truth about family also extends to outside shared bloodline. Family can be the people we choose, as well as the people we are related to. During the film Nemo worries that once Dory finds her parents that she will leave them. But, at the end of the film it is clear that Dory has enough room in her heart to consider her parents, Nemo, and Marlin her family.

Lastly, during this trip the viewer is introduced to Dory's special ability. In this film it is a bit less remarkable than her ability to read, but it is no less important to the storyline. Her ability is the ability to remember. Specifically, her memory is triggered by certain experiences. For example, when Dory gets caught in the undertow of the stingray migration, it triggers her first memory where she recalls her parents, and that they are in the Jewel of Morro Bay, California, which is the fictional Marine Life Institute. Throughout the film Dory's special ability is triggered by some action that happens in the present day of the film, whether it be words or actions. The event then sets off an onslaught of memories from before Dory lost her parents. These memories then move the plot line forward. More than that, the more Dory remembers, the more she is confident in her abilities and her quest to find her family. She does not see her memory loss as a deficit, but instead continues despite it.

Presence of Patriarchy

While Dory is ultimately excited by the fact she remembers her parents, and is on her quest to find them, she is still limited by her own memory. For example when she cannot recall something well or remember it properly, Dory tells herself not to be such a Dory. Yet, while she is negative toward herself Nemo acts as her cheerleader helping her remember and helping to remind her of the things she has forgotten. On the other hand, Marlin still thinks she is unpredictable and he is wary of her believing that she will not be able to find her parents. Once the trio has gone across the ocean, they wind up in a dark kelp forest that Dory finds familiar. Nemo encourages Dory to call out for her parents so maybe they will hear her. Marlin on the other hand tries to quiet her down saying that they should not be drawing attention to themselves in a strange place. When the fish get caught in a chase scene where they are swimming for their lives, Nemo winds up getting hurt. Dory tries to help, but Marlin tells her she has done enough. He tells her to go wait over in a spot away from them and forget because that is what she does best. Yet, while Marlin refuses Dory's help, she still insists on seeing him as a good guy choosing to go find help because that is something she can do. Here, Marlin's mistrust of Dory is extremely high. Ultimately, while Marlin's actions are driven by reliance on stereotypes, he is still justifying his words remembering them in a way that makes him feel he was praising Dory for things she is good at instead of causing her to swim off. Yet, Nemo refuses to let him misremember and justify his words. He makes sure his dad knows that Dory swimming off is his fault. Nemo makes sure his dad is not blinded by stereotypes.

Marlin's actions also help Dory move away from Marlin's negativity so she can grow as a character and become more confident in what she can do. But before that

happens, Dory's mental health is first taken advantage of. This happens when she meets Hank the septopus in the quarantine area of the Marine Life Institute. Dory has a tag on her fin that signals she is going to be on a truck the next morning to an aquarium in Cleveland. She does not want to go so she can find her parents. Hank, on the other hand, wants the tag so he can live in an aquarium display instead of going back to the ocean. In a comical scene reminiscent of Dory, Marlin, and the boat from the first film, Hank learns Dory has short-term memory loss. Originally she does not want to give up the tag, but through Hank taking advantage of her forgetfulness, they strike a deal where Dory is the one to offer up that if he helps her find her family, she will give him her tag. On one hand, this scene is negative in the sense it shows someone without a mental health issue taking advantage of someone who does. Ultimately, having this depicted in the film helps reinforce the unequal treatment of those with cognitive disabilities.

While this unequal treatment is there, the audience eventually sees Hank begin to really trust Dory and trust that she can ultimately find her parents. While Hank may have first started out as taking advantage of Dory, it definitely does not stay that way. Throughout the film Hank becomes Dory's sidekick. He goes along with her crazy plans to get to the Open Ocean exhibit where her parents are supposed to be. Hank takes Dory's directions as he is trying to drive a baby stroller across the aquarium's campus, trusting that Dory will give him the proper directions. He trusts her to get them out of a touch tank full of children's hands that terrifies the septopus. Dory's confidence in what she can do increases so much, that by the end of the film, she is orchestrating the plan to get Marlin and Nemo rescued from the truck that is on its way to the aquarium in Cleveland.

While Nemo has never seen Dory's memory loss as a negative, and Hank does not see Dory's cognitive impairment as a problem, the same cannot necessarily be said as true for Marlin. As the film continues it seems as if Marlin is coming to understand that Dory's illness does not define her. For example, at one point when the father and son pair has to leave one tank to get to another tank, there is no easy way to accomplish it. The only way is across a set of in-ground water fountain spouts. Marlin is too afraid to go using that path. Yet, he takes on the attitude of 'What Would Dory Do?' and despite his misgivings, he sheds his inhibitions, trusts his gut, and takes that journey across the spouts with Nemo. Yet, while there seems to be some growth with Marlin as a character, the end of the film raises the question of if he truly believes in Dory's independence and capabilities she exhibited through the film. While everyone is back at the reef, Dory goes on her own to the Drop Off, where the coral reef meets the open ocean. Marlin does not trust her to go out there on her own. He sneakily follows her as she swims there, making sure he knows where she is at all times. At the end of this scene, Marlin tells Dory she did it, that she found her way home. While Dory did this, and finding her way home ties everything up nicely, this ending makes the viewer think Marlin finally trusts Dory to be on her own, but his decision to follow her to the Drop Off proves otherwise. Here it seems that Marlin may always consider Dory lesser and that he may continually be influenced by the stereotypes he believes, even though he has tried to be more open and accepting.

Conclusion

Overall, both *Finding Nemo* (2003) and *Finding Dory* (2016) do rely on mental health stereotypes in order to tell a larger story of family and belonging. The use of

stereotypes, especially in *Finding Nemo*, seems to indicate that the conversation about mental health is not a primary focus. Yet, with *Finding Dory* (2016) though stereotypes still play a major role in the format of the story, the focus is much more on seeing Dory not let her lived experience with memory loss define her. Instead she is able to become more confident in her strengths and abilities, not letting any of the other fishes' views on her affect her goal. Dory's new found view of herself is then used to change the opinions of some of the other male characters who seem to doubt her. While not every character is able to completely change their views on mental illness, there seems to be some positive change occurring in how Pixar presents Dory and her experiences from the first film to the second.

Introduction: *Finding Dory's* Total History

A film is a much larger object than just the scenes and acts put together for viewing in a movie theater, or even via a DVD or Blu-ray disk for private viewing. So, while the content of the film speaks on its own to convey a story, the film is also a cultural object. While *Finding Dory* (2016) relies on mental health stereotypes to tell its story of Dory's quest to find her parents, it does limit the film's ability to speak on a larger scale regarding short-term memory loss. Here, Klinger's (1997) total history will be applied to the film in order to open up the possible larger conversations and implications surrounding this film. Doing so will aim to provide more answers to the research questions established through the literature review. Specifically this section will look at the film in regard to Dory's short-term memory loss, perspective on the film, and lastly, the larger questions and implications the glossing over of short-term memory loss has in this film.

Short-term Memory Loss

Medically, memory loss can be caused by a multitude of health concerns including medication, psychological disorders, dementia, nutritional deficiencies, and head injuries (MedlinePlus, 2017). Short-term memory loss is actually understood under the scientific name of anterograde amnesia. This is the inability to form and store memories of new experiences. Additionally, the long-term memories that were made prior to the amnesia, remain intact and are available for recall (Zangwill, 2018). The film does not convey the story of what happened to Dory to cause the amnesia. Since amnesia is triggered by traumatic events, it is possible that she suffered a head injury. Anterograde amnesia's effect on only the short-term memory would also explain Dory's ability to recall her life at the Marine Life Institute before she finds her way into the ocean. The assumed trauma she experienced had to have happened some time during her early childhood, but still late enough that she is able to remember whom her parents are as well as some details about the Marine Life institute.

When discussing the topic of memory loss in the United States, whether short-term or long term, there is typically an age component to it that makes it an issue for adult women. To study how women are educated about this issue, women's lifestyle magazines' websites were searched using the term 'memory loss.' These magazines were chosen using Cision Top Ten Women's Interest Magazines list (Cision Staff, 2011). While there are a multitude of causes for memory loss, many of the articles in women's lifestyle magazines that cover memory loss relate it to Alzheimer's disease and aging, and have a focus on prevention. Parrish (n.d.) states that pursuing hobbies, participating in social outings, exercise, and healthy eating can all help lower one's risk for

Alzheimer's. Alzheimer's isn't the only way memory loss can occur. Other magazines highlighted the fact that memory loss can also occur because of medications like reactions to antibiotics and traumatic brain injuries (Welch, 2015; Jarvis, n.d.). Prevention minded articles focus on foods to eat or avoid, like chocolate and trans fats respectively (Zabell, n.d.; Friedman, 2014). Additionally, they focus on actions that boost memory such as making mistakes to remember correct answers and lowering stress levels (Zabell, n.d.; Wadyka, 2012.) Overall, these articles do not cover memory loss as a disability, but instead as something to fear or as something that is unavoidable but also preventable.

Additionally, while amnesia is not a distinct learning disability, Dory's anterograde amnesia could be understood as a sort of learning disability. The Learning Disabilities Association of America (2018a) does not recognize memory as a specific learning disability, but memory disorders are related to learning disorders. Short-term memory is the process of storing and retaining information for a limited time. It is only available for quick recall, and is not stored for long-term retention (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2018b.) The amnesia would make learning difficult for Dory. In the United States it is difficult to determine how many Americans have lived experiences with learning disabilities due to different testing and diagnosing requirements in each state. Some reports indicate that 15-20% of Americans have learning disabilities. It is believed that approximately 4.6 million school-aged children have a diagnosed learning disability (NIH Office of Communications, 2016). These numbers indicate that learning disabilities, as an umbrella term, are experienced by a large number of Americans, making it an important topic for presentation in media.

Since Dory's short-term memory can be understood as a learning disability, is there a larger conversation about learning disabilities or even just short-term memory loss, happening through Dory's character? In order to determine if there is a larger conversation around this topic happening, reviews from national news outlets, review videos on YouTube, content from Pixar and Dory's voice actor Ellen DeGeneres, and information on showings of this film are considered.

Pixar's Perspective

While Dory does give some high-profile exposure to mental health disabilities, she is a special-needs fish, surrounded by other characters that also experience some sort of mental or physical limitation. In a film where many of the characters have disabilities, is the conversation around Dory's experiences with her amnesia and memory troubles really happening or is she lumped into a larger grouping of 'everyone with disabilities?' According to Andrew Stanton, the film's director, "I wasn't trying to literally say she's a representation of a specific [disability]. I just wanted to show that this one thing that was funny and actually helpful in the first movie, (Dory) saw as a burden. And she had to apologize for it" (Heady, 2016). Yet, it seems to be that the individuals at Pixar did not want the message of this film to be solely directed at children with disabilities. To them it takes on a larger message of parents knowing that their children, any child regardless of ability, are going to be fine (Heady, 2016). Getting Dory her own film was even begun as a campaign by Ellen DeGeneres, Dory's voice actor. DeGeneres campaigned for years for a sequel to happen, though Dory was not necessarily stated by DeGeneres to be the intended main character. DeGeneres was just campaigning for a sequel (The Ellen Show,

2016). In this way, it seems like Dory was never meant to stand on her own as a major character.

Pixar driven content around this film is a good place to start when trying to figure out more about where a production company stands on their work and the characters contained within. Many times when films are released on discs, such as DVD or Blu-ray, for at home viewing the film company will include bonus content including deleted scenes. Deleted scenes provide audiences and others interested in the film a previously unknown perspective as the scenes and the discussions surrounding them explore more about what the creative process for the film was like. These scenes take viewers through the film's inception to its final product and the steps it took to change the film from what the audience knows it as, versus where it began. Studying these changes through the deleted scenes open up a new area of inquiry about the film's intention and focus and add to its overall status as a cultural object. Specifically, the deleted scenes and a segment called *What Were We Talking About* (2016) are considered to get more of an understanding on where Dory's characterization comes from. These were the only features that provided any more insight into Dory. In the deleted scenes the viewer hears from director, Andrew Stanton as he explains what happened in these scenes and why they were cut from the film. In one deleted scene, Dory takes Nemo to visit the stingray migration parade and loses him in the process. This scene was originally meant as a way to amplify her lived experience with short-term memory loss, not to create a whole new problem for the film (Deleted Scenes, 2016). This scene took the focus from Dory's experience and made it more about losing Nemo again. In another deleted scene, Dory's parents also had short-term memory loss. Yet, according to director Andrew Stanton,

having three characters with the lived experiences of memory loss was a chore and was not as funny or interesting as it could have been (Deleted Scenes, 2016). A last deleted scene showed Dory's memory loss as a weakness. While she is trying to ask some hermit crabs if they've seen her family, a hidden giant squid takes advantage of her convincing her that he is her uncle just so he can capture her (Deleted Scenes, 2016). Overall, while there are other deleted scenes, these three scenes indicate some of the issues the story creators faced while trying to tell the best story for Dory. Dealing with a character with such a disability can be a fine line to walk, but these three scenes indicate that those working on this film really was not sure how to let Dory stand on her own to carry an entire film.

More of the same feelings come to light when viewing the bonus feature, *What Were We Talking About* (2016). This feature, through interviews with the Pixar team involved in this film, really gives an idea of what Pixar feels about Dory as a character. One of the big questions they ask themselves is how do you take a main character who forgets what their drive is (*What Were We Talking About*, 2016). Director Andrew Stanton brings up the idea that Dory began as a guide who was supposed to help Marlin across the ocean. In fact, her memory struggles are rooted in the fact that Stanton read somewhere that goldfish have five-second memories, which he thought was hilarious. So, how do you make a side character that forgets things instantly, into a main character that can carry a plot? According to this bonus feature, you cannot take away, or cure, Dory's memory loss since that defines her. Instead, she's given the ability for emotional memory. In other words, if Dory loves you, she will remember you (*What Were We Talking About*, 2016). Love and nurturing is a typically understood female trait often

associated with mothering. By giving Dory the ability to remember through her ability to love, there is a reliance on a gender stereotype occurring. While it does not change who Dory is, it adds another aspect to her character, making her a de facto mother to Nemo in the quasi-family dynamic that Marlin, Dory, and Nemo have created. For example, in the film Nemo worries that Dory's ability to remember and locate her parents will cause her to forget or not love Nemo and Marlin. Nemo's fears are not realized because at the end of the film it is made clear that Dory has room in her heart for everyone. By relying on the assumption that females are loving and motherly and the idea that memory and love are somehow not mutually exclusive, the individuals working on the film were able to overcome their creative struggle of what to do with Dory to translate her to a main character. Through these behind the scenes features, it is a bit clearer that Pixar seemed to struggle with translating a sidekick to a full-blown main character. This struggle may have translated to how the audience viewed Dory and her lived experience, because Dory's memory loss could have also been muddled and lost among the other characters and minor story lines.

YouTube can often be another outlet for expression about how the studio feels about a film or its characters. This does not seem to be the case for the Disney sponsored video playlist for *Finding Dory*, (Disney Movies, 2016). For example on YouTube, the Disney Movies channel has a playlist titled Finding Dory. This playlist contains twenty-five videos mostly containing videos about the Easter eggs tying this film to other Pixar films, the behind the scenes bonus content found on the Blu-ray disk, a video celebrating its release on Blu-ray and DVD, and random holidays such as World Septopus Day. All of these videos do not necessarily add any new information to how Pixar views this film.

Yet, if all of these videos are found on the disc releases or if they are marketing plugs for the movie, then it is possible that this film does not have a high level of importance to Pixar at this point in time. But also, if the playlist is made of content available on other platforms, such as the Blu-ray release, the company may not have anything additional to say about the mental health aspect of the film. It is possible, that what they do have to say in this content they want to ensure that audiences will view. Therefore it was included in the release.

Audience Perspective

When looking into specifics on how the movie is understood and received by the public audience, YouTube has become a hub for everyday people to post their thoughts on a film. Ultimately these videos are a great way to understand the conversations people are having around a film outside of the intended message from the film company themselves. The videos used for this section were found searching the terms ‘Finding Dory Reviews Verified’ on the social media platform. Not all results were verified channels, but out of the results the videos watched are posted from verified channels only.

The film and its decision to feature Dory as a lead character seems to be viewed positively by reviewers whose opinions were presented in national news outlets. There are some differences in how Dory is referred to. For example, Scott (2016) refers to Dory negatively using the word absentminded and Ebert (2016) recognizes Dory’s experience as a learning disability. The film takes Dory’s memory issues and allowing them to have deeper meaning than the just-for-laughs role they had in the first film (Phillips, 2016). But it is also seen that Pixar misses the comic potential with Dory’s disability due to its

limits or by politely not exploiting it (McCarthy, 2016). According to Brown (2016) “Suddenly, short-term memory loss is something we should treat with a bit of gravitas. Now that Dory understands the profundity of what her condition has caused her to lose — a home, her parents — we can no longer dismiss it as a cutesy punch line.” This film accomplishes something great; it took a strong character and deepened her qualities making her even more likeable. Audiences become more invested in Dory and the new characters than the old characters from the original film (Murrell, 2016). And more so, with the dimension Dory gains, she becomes a fish who knows what she does not know (Gleiberman, 2016). Here it becomes clear that people are recognizing that Dory is a major character now with something more to say than just her well-timed jokes and comments alleviating the effects of Marlin’s stoic, pessimistic personality.

For *Finding Dory*, the video film reviews vary from commenting on Dory’s disability to not considering it directly at all. Harloff and Ellis (2016) and Stuckmann (2016) do not bring up Dory’s mental health. Instead these commenters were more worried about Dory’s ability to carry an entire movie and the possibility of getting annoyed with her character’s forgetfulness. Additional reviewers make it clear that while Dory’s forgetfulness was cute and served the storyline well in the first film, it is now wearing thin, annoying both the adult characters in the film as well as audiences (Hornaday, 2016; Truitt, 2016). While many consider Dory unfit to carry an entire movie, Ellen DeGeneres, the voice of Dory, is praised for her ability to add innocence to the film, which makes it enjoyable (Truitt, 2016). The dislike for the character, but praise for the voice actor ultimately takes away from Dory’s lived experiences and the potential for a focus on mental health.

Other videos call attention to Dory's mental health. For example, Flickinger (2016) immediately focuses on how this film shows how debilitating the amnesia can be which was not done in *Finding Nemo*. Yet, while this reviewer brings up Dory's short-term memory loss and its importance, he makes a joke of it, stating that he too has short-term memory loss some days. This is why he had to write out his notes on what he wanted to bring up in this video. This indicates that Dory's short-term memory loss is not considered that serious of an issue here; that it is not being understood as a serious illness that people live with. On the other hand, Channel Awesome (2016) acknowledges Dory's memory loss, and sort of makes a joke about it relating back to the fact he does not have a very good memory. Yet, while he makes the joke in the beginning, his review really focuses on the mental health aspects of this film. For example, he acknowledges that he thinks Pixar represented the determination and frustration with experiencing memory loss. Specifically he highlights the scene where Dory is experiencing a panic attack because she cannot remember. He applauds Pixar for this emotional scene. He also acknowledges that while many of the other characters in the film get annoyed with her, they still recognize her perseverance. Even, Nashawaty (2016) recognizes that while Dory's memory is a handicap, it is a key, if not the key, to her resilience. The film is celebrated for how it handles topics of disability. This does not mean how it handles Dory's specific condition of short-term memory loss, but how it is relatable for parents of any child with special needs, whether cognitive or physical (Atchity, Duralde, & Lemire 2016). In this way, it seems as if Dory's lived experience, which is highlighted in the film and made a focus, becomes a bit more general when being applied to the real, human world.

Yet many of the reviewers actually do not focus on Dory so much as they do the other support characters in the film. The character of Hank the septopus is especially lauded as the breakout character of the film and not Dory herself, though the storyline revolves around her (Murrell, 2016; Atchity, Duralde, & Lemire, 2016; McCarthy, 2016). Becky the bird, a new character mainly for humorous addition, is also well liked, due to her mothering instinct and desire to do the right thing (Zacharek, 2016). These characters are considered to be welcome breaks from Dory because she can be seen as grating especially since she cannot remember anything, even though she is aware of her limits. To these critics, the support characters take the pressure off of Dory as a character. While the pressure is off of Dory and her amnesia, it does allow for the other supporting characters with disabilities to take the stage.

Does Dory's Femeness Really Matter?

Because the focus of this film is not a single disability, the message of this film is much more inclusive, which is in-line with the director's statement on how Dory was not intended to represent one disability (Heady, 2016). When considering this, does it even matter that Dory is a female fish? If thinking about Stanton's statement as quoted in Heady (2016) and Pixar's stance on the character, probably not. Dory is a fish and when looking at her, she is not overtly feminine. Yes, some of her facial expressions could be considered female, a woman voices her, and the feminine pronouns are used to describe her. While this is true, Dory's facial features and expressions can arguably be seen as child-like. Her fish-body does not indicate any obvious markers of femininity or being of the female sex. As for being voiced by a woman, Ellen DeGeneres is recognized more for her comedic timing, making Dory the loveable, innocent, blue tang audiences recognize

(Truitt, 2016). Overall, yes, Dory can be recognized as a female, but just as easily she is just recognized as a fish. Because her biological sex is not overly apparent and her personality is so child-like, the fish with the disability is easily relatable to audience members regardless if the audience is male or female. Considering Dory's femaleness does not define her, but it can add another dimension to her character and to the conversations surrounding her.

An additional element to thinking about Dory's character is Ellen DeGeneres. Ellen is a well-known comedienne who is also known for her sexuality and her masculine sort of presentation in terms of dress. One aspect to consider is if Ellen in any way affects her character and the role of Dory. While Dory is biologically female, gender-wise she is not necessarily defined as female. In the same way, Ellen is biologically a woman, but presents herself in the gender spectrum as more masculine. It is probable that the casting agents chose Ellen for a specific reason, but to say that Ellen was chosen due to her gender presentation so that Dory could also be less defined by gender is not an accurate statement. Truitt (2016), recognizes DeGeneres for her comedic timing making Dory who she is. DeGeneres is not recognized for her gender presentations or her sexuality in making Dory the character she is. What DeGeneres brings to the table in regard to that is not the key aspect. Yet it still does play a role, though not an overt one. DeGeneres's gender presentation does indicate that the filmmakers may be moving away from needing the character she portrays to be so easily defined as a female. Casting DeGeneres may have allowed Dory to not present so feminine. DeGeneres is recognized as a biological woman by audiences, so in the same way, Dory can be understood as a biologically female fish due to the audience's connection and understanding of DeGeneres. Because

of this, it is possible that the filmmakers did not have to be so obvious in making Dory a female fish based on looks following DeGeneres's more masculine presentation. In fact, DeGeneres and Dory connect on the idea and feelings of being lost. Specifically, Dory is lost because she does not have her parents, and DeGeneres was lost due to the fact she had to hide her sexuality in Hollywood until she came out in the 1990s (Good Morning America, 2016). By connecting to the character via an emotional feeling, this allows Dory to be more inclusive and relatable to all audience members. Her biological sex does not define her and therefore does not overshadow the overall message of inclusivity and belonging that the film has.

Inclusivity Inside and Outside of Disability

In fact a film about inclusivity was even inclusive when it was in theaters. For example, in eighty-five participating AMC Theaters, *Finding Dory* was shown in a sensory-friendly format for individuals with autism (AMC Sensory Friendly Film Showings, 2018). Showing a film in this format, especially a film that is full of characters with varying levels of abilities lets the message of this film get to those who need it most. Specifically, it ideally allows those without the lived experiences of disability to learn more about those who have those experiences, but also lets those with the disability recognize something they can relate to on screen. Showing this film in a sensory friendly format opens up the message to more people and fits so well with the messages of the film, creating a sense of equality in the human world that the fish world seems to advocate for. This ability to learn something new and have a character on screen that audience members can relate to because one of the characters is like them has the potential to have a positive message for individuals with disabilities. The theme of family

and belonging that is the major lesson of the film creates a foundation for audience members who may have a disability in a human world that can often tell them ‘no,’ to find acceptance and affirmation in the oceanic world of the film.

While this film came out in 2016, its message of inclusivity is still being used outside of the cognitive and physical disability narrative it has. Specifically, Ellen DeGeneres, the voice of Dory, used the film on her talk show to comment on current political issues regarding immigration. The idea in this monologue on the show was that Dory, Marlin, and Nemo live in Australia. They travel to America where Dory’s parents live, but in order to get into the aquatic life center Dory is from, the characters have to rely on the other support characters to get them to their destination (DeGeneres, 2017). Here, the message of the film is being separated from the disability/ability narrative of the film. Instead of focusing on disability, it is being used to discuss respect and support for those unlike you in a much more general sense that can be understood for topics such as immigration.

Conclusion

Through analysis of Pixar’s additional content surrounding *Finding Dory* and audience reception about this film, there are some similarities and differences that add an interesting dynamic to the total history of this film. One of the results of a total history is to put the creative, social, and organizational aspects that make a film in conversation with each other to understand how each has influenced the film to be what it is. For *Finding Dory*, all three do play a role to varying degrees. Dory was such a loved character from the first film that there was a public call from Ellen DeGeneres on her television talk show to create a film starring Dory that Pixar had to respond (The Ellen

Show, 2016). Additionally, more than a decade had passed since the first film's release, so the social understandings of mental health had changed. All of these things were components the film's team had to work with while still staying true to the first film so that the sequel made sense with it. It seems like Pixar was not sure what to do with Dory as a character to transition her from a sidekick to a main character. It is possible that some of that confusion may have resulted from corporate desires to make a profit being at war with creative choices, though the total history completed here does not touch on Disney-Pixar's corporate nature.

This confusion from the creative side seems to have transferred over to the audience as well. Some people really enjoyed Dory's story and how disability was discussed and handled. While to others, she gets lost in a sea of other characters and the message about Dory and mental health gets overlooked. Overall, there seems to be a much larger, more important message about general inclusivity which has influenced the ways this film is exhibited such as in sensory friendly films, and applying the message to larger current politically charged topics. Therefore, it does not seem that memory loss, or even general mental health is a focus for this film and the larger conversations surrounding it. Overall, the result that mental health is not the focus even in a Dory-centered movie is a result of the three aspects of corporate, social, and creative coming together to make a film.

Chapter 5: *Inside Out*

Introduction: Film Analysis

According to Bolaki (2016) animation has now taken on a more educational role, as it is being used to inform the viewing public about complex health issues and illness experiences. Disney-Pixar's film, *Inside Out* (Lasseter, Nielsen, Rivera, Stanton, Doctor, & Del Carmen, 2015) combines the entertainment and education aspects of animation into one. This film follows eleven-year-old Riley and her family as they navigate life after the family moves from Minnesota to San Francisco. As Riley experiences this major life change, the audience is brought inside her head where the anthropomorphized emotions of Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, and Disgust live. These five emotions, living in Riley's brain, also known as Headquarters, help her navigate her new reality through the decisions the Emotions help her make. These decisions from the Emotions translate to Riley's real-life actions. Through the addition of screens, and not relying on stereotypes to tell the story, *Inside Out* and its Pixar creators give the audience a new way to look at how mental health, emotions, and memories all work together in our brains. Through this new way of looking at the complex world of the brain, Pixar is starting a conversation around mental health asking the question, which emotion matters more? Additionally, Riley's interactions with the outside world indicate that while her emotions are battling each other, she is experiencing life in a way that hints at depression. Ultimately, the screens work together with the other aspects of the film to show that all emotions have to be felt, that we often feel many emotions at once, and that if someone is exhibiting signs of depression, there is help and solutions.

The memory orb as window and barrier

In the opening scenes of the film the audience is introduced to the emotions and is made aware of how Riley's memories are created and captured. With each new experience Riley has, a new emotion is created until there are five: Joy, Fear, Anger, Disgust, and Sadness. When newborn Riley opens her eyes for the first time, her father calls her a little bundle of joy. The audience watches this event through the screen of Riley's eyes, which act as window framing what she sees. In this moment, Riley's first emotion, Joy, is created. Joy captures the moment of Riley meeting her parents for the first time by clicking a button on a console. This creates a golden colored orb. This orb is baby Riley's first memory. When Joy picks up the orb its surface turns into a film screen, which plays back the golden tone memory contained in it. Once captured in the memory orb, it seems as if the memory remains there unchanged and untouchable. In *The Virtual Window*, Friedberg (2004) discusses the window metaphor stating, "In architectural terms, the window brought light into a darkened interior. But the window left its images outside, framed for the view" (p. 152). Based on this understanding, the memory orb in this moment acts as window into that specific time in Riley's life. At the same time that the orb acts as a window into previous moments of Riley's life, its screen also acts as a protective barrier keeping it safe from outside forces. According to Kress (2006), the French word *écran* is a protective barrier, which parallels the English translation of sheltering through protection. Here the memory orb protects and shelters the memory from being altered by anything. This includes the Emotions that touch the memory ball. When the Emotions hold the memory orb to replay it, the surface of the orb keeps their hands from changing the memory. This shows how important the memories are to the

foundation of Riley's being, because they are kept safe from even the Emotions that are helping create her remembrances.

Memories, screens, and educational cinema

When Riley and her family first move to San Francisco everything seems to be falling apart. The house is not what Riley thought it would be, the moving truck is delayed, and her dad is working a lot more as he helps get his technology start-up off the ground. Joy recognizes that Riley is not happy. Instead of letting her feel those negative emotions, Joy replays happy memories from the golden colored memory orbs, as well as inserting positive ideas into her brain. The ultimate goal is to help change Riley's point of view on the situation. When Joy is helping Riley recall memories, the memory orbs are placed on a projector system. The projection screen is located just in front of the control panel full of the switches and buttons the Emotions use to help dictate Riley's actions. In her studies on television, Spigel (1992) argues that the television, "was seen as a kind of household cement" and that household spaces were organized around, "ideals of family togetherness" (p. 39). The control desk is situated so that all of the Emotions can still see the screen when they are determining Riley's actions. Since all of the emotions have to use the control panel, all of them at one point or another also look at the screen. The projection screen where the emotions can watch Riley's memories be played back acts as a unifying source among the five emotions. It gives them a communal place to gather and celebrate the one thing they have in common: Riley.

When the memories are projected on the screen, Riley is able to recall them and react to help change her situation. Here the film screen performs a function of useful cinema. According to Acland and Wasson (2011), "cinema has been implicated in a

broad range of cultural and institutional functions from transforming mass education to fortifying suburban domestic ideals” (p. 3). Here Riley’s memories projected in this non-theatrical space of Headquarters, serves as a way to reinforce the institution of her family and its ideology, especially in this moment of upheaval where they are trying to get acclimated to a new home life in a new geographic area.

Yet, while these memories act as useful cinema to stabilize the family and bring joy to the forefront, it does not stay that way. For example, when the house is not up to snuff, Joy gives Riley the idea to play broom hockey in the empty living room. Riley’s parents join in and it turns the not so great moment into a positive memory. When her father has to leave interrupting the broom hockey game, the moment turns sad again. Joy then gives Riley the idea to go get pizza, which does not turn out well either. In a bonding moment between Riley and her mother, they discuss their favorite memories of the drive to San Francisco. When Joy puts Riley’s favorite memory on the screen, it starts off golden in color so the whole screen is bathed in that color. While the memory plays, and the emotions and the audience are watching it on the screen, the memory suddenly turns blue because Sadness reached out and touched the orb while it was being projected. When the Emotions realized this happened they hurry to try and save the memory to keep it a happy one. Joy is able to pull the ball off of the projection system but cannot turn the blue orb back to gold. Therefore, Riley will now remember the once happy memory as a sad one.

The memory orb as a sieve and Sadness’ power

Unlike the earlier understandings of the memory orb keeping the emotions from altering it after its capture, the memory orb is not as invincible as once believed. Here,

the protective barrier screen allows Sadness to touch and change the memory. Once that change occurs, Joy is blocked from making any additional alterations. In this case, the memory orb's screen takes on the role of a sieve. Kress (2006) describes the sieve as the screen preventing the coarser particles from coming through it. He argues, partitioning occurs because, "there is stuff on one side that does not reach the other- and is not supposed to- the stuff on the one side is actively sorted so as to make it suitable for whatever use there may be on the other" (p. 201). In terms of sheltering, "that which is not allowed to get through the riddle would be useless, or maybe harmful for the purposes on the other side" (p. 201). When the memory orb lets Sadness change the emotion related to the content and prevents Joy from changing it back, partitioning and sheltering are occurring. Sadness is let in, Joy is kept out, and Riley is also being sheltered from Joy. By acting as a barrier for Joy, the memory orb is allowing Sadness to take over in Riley's brain so she is more influenced by that emotion.

Throughout the film, the audience gets a sense that there is a tension existing between the characters of Joy and Sadness. When Joy first introduces the audience to all of the emotions, each character except for Sadness has a clear role. Joy makes Riley happy. Fear is what keeps Riley safe. Disgust keeps Riley from being poisoned physically and socially. Anger cares about everything being fair. While Joy knows what she and those three emotions do, she is not certain on what Sadness does, other than exist in Headquarters. At the end of the first bad day in San Francisco Riley's mother is saying goodnight. The audience, and Riley's emotions are watching this exchange through the screen of Riley's eyes. In this exchange, Riley's mom lets her daughter know how much it would help if Riley continues to stay her parents' happy girl since the move has not

been going so well. Joy takes this very literally and makes herself the prominent emotion that dictates Riley's actions. In her quest to keep Riley happy and make the first day of school go well, Joy gives everyone a role including keeping Sadness away from the control panel and memory creation part of Headquarters. The plan goes well until Riley introduces herself to the other students in her class on her first day.

Sadness ruins Joy's plan of making sure the day goes off without a hitch. As she is introducing herself, Riley's nerves are very evident because she is not sure what to say to the other students. Because it is Joy's mission to make sure Riley's day goes well, Joy jumps in to help her overcome her nerves. She projects a positive memory of her time skating on the lake in Minnesota with her parents to help her remember. The Emotions and the audience see this memory on the projector screen as Riley is remembering it. Once the memory is playing Riley clearly feels more comfortable because the audience sees her become visibly relaxed and confident in her responses of what living in Minnesota was like. Then, the memory turns blue to the shock of the other Emotions. When Joy realizes Sadness touched the memory orb she runs over to take the orb off the projector, but she is too late; the memory is already altered to sad. As the memory turns, Riley is seen visibly getting upset, beginning to cry talking about Minnesota. Her tone goes from bright and happy to sad and despondent. Having the sad tinge on the memory makes her realize how much San Francisco and Minnesota are different. Her longing for her life in Minnesota is evident. As Joy tries to salvage the situation, a blue memory orb about the class introductions is created. This memory is slightly different than previous memories because it is a core memory. The core memories are the pillars of Riley's personality. This is the first core memory based in sadness. The creation of the blue

memory orb indicates that Riley is being impacted more by sadness than any other emotion at this time. Because Sadness is becoming a more prominent emotion, this indicates that Riley is experiencing hints of depression. Denying the feeling of sadness so she is her parents' happy girl has really allowed the negative thoughts and feelings to take hold in her brain since she is not allowed to perform the emotion. As a result of the depression and sadness taking hold, Joy does not know how to navigate a world where she is not in control.

Screening out emotions

After the creation of the blue core memory wrecks havoc in Headquarters, Joy and Sadness navigate Riley's brain together help save her other core memories and keep her personality from falling apart. In a moment on the Train of Thought, Joy pulls out a core memory the characters refer to as the "Big Twisty Tree Memory." It turns out that Joy and Sadness have different remembrances of that day. When Joy looks at the memory orb for the Twisty Tree, she thinks of it positively. The memory orb screen plays a memory tinged in yellow of Riley celebrating a big hockey win with her parents and her team. Sadness instead remembers that yellow memory as the day Riley's hockey team lost the playoff game. Riley missed the winning shot, and she wanted to quit. At the end of the scene Sadness apologizes to Joy for getting sad again, and the memory is pushed to the side at that time.

Memory orbs as haptic screens

This memory plays an extremely pivotal role in the film. In terms of screen interaction it is the memory orb and screen Sadness and Joy interact with the most. The memory is introduced again when Joy falls into the abyss of Riley's brain where the

memories are forgotten. In her despair of possibly being forgotten and unable to help Riley, Joy reminisces with memories, watching each orb replay back the memory contained in it. She gathers multiple orbs in her arms but cannot hold on to them. The orbs' spherical shape makes it impossible for her to hold all of them. When studying screens one thing to consider is fit. "The MSD screen likewise participates, but does so differently, since it is handheld and mobile, and therefore, gains access to places beyond the reach of other screens" (Cooley, 2017, p. 319). In this case, the screens do not fit in Joy's arms, preventing her from creating that personalized experience mobile screening devices (such as the orbs) create. This indicates how difficult it is to hold on to all of our memories though each of them are impactful in making us who we are.

After the memory orbs fall out of her arms, Joy grabs the gold Twisty Tree Memory again. Here the audience sees Joy swipe her hand across the ball, which fast-forwards and rewinds the memory. The surface of the screen, "is rather like a skin, a touch-sensitive surface that registers my every touch in its specific degree, direction, and expressiveness" (Schneider, 2017, p. 326). The touchscreen memory orb allows for the whole repertoire of hand motion. Joy fast-forwards the memory until we see the orb turn blue to the part Sadness described on the Train of Thought. In this memory Riley is sitting in the tree sad and alone until her parents come and comfort her because of losing the game. Re-watching this part of the memory makes Joy realize she, Riley's parents, and Riley's teammates came to help because of Sadness. According to Kress (2006), screens can screen out and he asks, "who is being sheltered? Who is doing the sheltering? . . . who is the implied observer? And what is he or she wishing to observe? . . . who – and what – is being partitioned from – whom and – what?" (p. 200). In this specific instance,

Joy screens out the other emotions and she chooses to remember a memory for its happy parts. In the same way, Sadness remembers memories for their sad parts only. The act of screening out has created a divide between Joy and Sadness. Yet the haptic nature of these memory orb screens repairs the rift and makes Joy realize that the emotions can and do all work together in each memory's creation.

By the end of the movie all parts of Riley's brain have turned gray indicating she cannot feel any emotions. Because Sadness and Joy have repaired their relationship, they are able to work together to help Riley when she returns to her parents after trying to run away. Joy gives Sadness the gold core memories and each memory turns blue once Sadness is holding them. Sadness places each core memory on the projection system and they play on the large screen as Riley recalls them, tinged in blue. The size of the screen plays a key role in Riley finally admitting to her parents that she misses Minnesota and regains her ability to feel emotion. "In which case, window-ed seeing institutes a detached engagement, while screenic seeing encourages an experience of an encounter" (Cooley, 2017, p. 321). The memory orbs are tiny and Riley's brain holds millions of them. The tiny screens replay the memory on a small scale making the Emotion personally interact with it and participate in personalized screenic seeing. When the memory is projected onto the larger screen it is a window-ed experience used for memory recall, which allows Riley to act in the real world. When Riley's core memories are projected by Sadness, Riley is finally able to admit to missing Minnesota. Due to her admission, her parents can bond with her telling her why they miss their home state too. When they finally hug, Sadness calls Joy over so that she can turn the sad moment into a happy memory. The resulting memory orb is both gold and blue indicating that the

memory is colored and created by both emotions. This conclusion allows for a new era in Riley's mind and emotional capability, where all emotions can interact together and are held to equal importance.

Conclusion

Through this film, Pixar has entered the conversation on emotional health in a very Pixar way. Pixar is known for their computer-aided animations, so why would their film about emotions and memories be any different? This film, released in 2015, is a more recent Pixar film. It is also set in San Francisco in the 2010s. Technological advances are rampant in this setting. The time period of the film, both in the film and the year it was released, coupled with Pixar's technological savvy have combined to give a new understanding to our memories and emotions. This new understanding is reliant on screens and screen technology. All of the human characters' memories are contained in screens, are recalled via a screen, and more so these memories have a haptic technology capability to them. Our memories are very personal and the screens in turn are personalized. Memories and modern screen technology, in Pixar's understanding, are tied together to the point where we cannot imagine one without the other. Using modern screens to illustrate the concepts of memories and emotions allows a larger mass audience to comprehend and discuss a topic most people do not know all about. Approaching it in this way, allowing all of the Emotions to realize they each are important and need to work together lets Pixar enter the conversation about emotional and mental health in a way not previously done before.

Introduction: *Inside Out*'s Total History

Klinger's (1997) total history is a method for exploring a film as a cultural object through the creative, corporate, and social/public aspects that make a film what it is before viewing in a theater, during its release, and its life after that time. Thinking of *Inside Out* as a cultural object raises more questions about the larger implications for the story contained in the film. This allows an exploration of the research questions in the context of this film. This is accomplished by thinking of the film in regard to depression, the Pixar perspective on the film, the audience perspective on the film, and lastly, the larger questions and implications the inclusion of depression in this film have.

***Inside Out* and Depression**

When analyzing *Inside Out* for how it talks about mental health, Pixar artfully uses touch screens and technology to get the audience involved in how Riley's life has changed due to her family's move from Minnesota to California, and how her internal thoughts and feelings on this life change affect how she interacts and acclimates to her new life. When reading this film as a commentary on mental health, the disorder that seems most closely tied to Riley's experience is depression. Depression affects both men and women, but depression diagnoses typically occur more in women than men (Office on Women's Health, 2017). In fact, there are specific types of depression that occur in women, specifically Premenstrual Dysphoric Disorder, Perinatal Depression, and Perimenopausal Depression (NIMH, 2017). Because these types of depression are specific to women, the stereotype of depression being a woman's health issue is often believed. Yet, the United States Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women's Health are quick to attempt to dispel this stereotype on their website page

dedicated to depression in women: “That being said, depression is not a "normal part of being a woman" nor is it a "female weakness." Many women with depression never seek treatment. But most women, even those with the most severe depression, can get better with treatment” (Office on Women’s Health, 2017). Even though trusted medical sources attempt to combat the stereotype of the depressed woman, *Inside Out* can be understood as being rooted in this women’s health stereotype, though it is much more than that.

But Riley is eleven years old, and not necessarily in the age range for the female-specific types of depression. If this is the case, how does the viewer understand that Riley is depressed? Do mass audiences understand her experiences as depression? Is there a larger conversation about depression that is happening because of Riley’s emotional journey in this movie? In order to determine if there is a larger conversation around this topic happening, reviews from national news outlets, review videos on YouTube, news articles on the film, and the Pixar-owned video playlist for this film are considered.

Depression in Women and Children

First, in order to understand how Riley can be understood as depressed, the signs of depression must be understood. According to the National Institutes of Mental Health’s Depression in Women (n.d.) sadness is only one indicator of depression. In fact, there are twelve total signs for depression including feelings of hopelessness and pessimism, feelings of guilt, worthlessness and helplessness, irritability, and loss of interest in hobbies and activities. In the film it is clear that Riley’s mood becomes persistently sad. Sadness takes on a larger role in Riley’s brain as many of Riley’s memories change from joyful yellow to sad blue. When her core memories are affected and change to blue, Riley’s personality is affected as well. These are the first, most

obvious indicators that something is happening to Riley. Yet, there are more events in the film that hint at Riley's mental health. For example, it is clear Riley experiences the feelings of hopelessness and pessimism when she introduces herself to her new class. She talks so positively about her life in Minnesota and then by the end of this introduction to the class Riley is crying and saying that everything is different since they moved. This hints at pessimism that nothing is going to be the same as it was prior to the move. Additionally, it can be inferred that Riley feels guilt when her mom thanks her for continuing to stay their happy girl during this time of confusion in their lives. Yet, this is at odds with the feelings she displayed in earlier scenes in the film that actually show her unhappiness. Because being happy, yet feeling how she truly wants are at odds with each other, Riley could be feeling guilty because her mom is asking her to react one way, though the large collection of sad memories Riley is amassing indicate the opposite. Riley is irritable during the dinner scene at the end of her first day of school. When her dad asks her how her school day went, Anger steps in for her response. Riley, with annoyed tone and snap in her voice, says that school was fine. Her dad takes her reaction as disrespectful and when Riley tells him to shut up, he sends her to her room. She pushes away her chair in a huff, stomps up the stairs, and slams her door. Acting angry is out of character for Riley, but it is a definite indicator that something much larger is wrong. Lastly, Riley experiences a lack of interest in hobbies and activities she once loved. In one instance where Riley loses interest in an activity is sliding down railings. When she and her mom go out for pizza with poor results, at the end of that scene in order to make it a happy moment, Joy sets Riley up to slide down a railing, which is an activity she associates with happy moments. Yet, Riley overtaken by Sadness, does not slide down

the rail and the once happy activity becomes associated with unhappy memories. Another moment where this happens is when Riley, who loves hockey, tries out for the new hockey league her mom found. Hockey is something that ties her to her old life in Minnesota, but when Riley is playing on the ice, due to some issues in the Control Center with her memories, Anger and Fear take over causing Riley's experience on the ice to be negative. She leaves after she misses a shot at the goal before the tryout is over throwing her stick. While her mom says everything will be fine, Riley gets angry telling her to stop thinking everything will be fine. It becomes clear that Riley's love of hockey is harmed when the audience, Joy and Sadness, see Hockey Island (a pillar island making up Riley's personality) fall apart and become dark. Ultimately all of these instances come together to indicate that what Riley is feeling is depression though it is not clearly named in the movie.

If Riley seems to be experiencing depressive symptoms, what does the state of childhood depression look like in the United States? According to the Forum on Child and Family Statistics (2017) a total of about 12.5% of children ages 12-17 had at least one Major Depressive Episode (MDE) in 2015, and 19.5% of females in this age group had a Major Depressive Episode in 2015. Also between the years 2004 and 2015 the rate of MDEs among females was twice as high as that among males in the same time period. Lastly, treatment for MDEs is higher among females than males in 2015 (Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2017). Just as depression among adult women is more common than depression in adult males, depression among pre-teen girls seems to be more prevalent than depression among preteen boys.

If this is a current issue that affects a large number of the youth aged population, how is the public, particularly parents, educated about this issue? To explore this, the term ‘childhood depression’ was searched on parenting magazines’ websites. These magazines were chosen using Cision Top Ten Lists for Family and Parenting Magazines (Cision Staff, 2013; Cision Media Research, 2016). The magazine articles mostly discuss what can trigger depression. These include stressful life events like deaths in the family, moving, and fighting between parents. They also discuss the signs to look for such as irritability, loss of interest, change in appetite, and thoughts of running away (Ludwig, n.d.; Bayless, n.d.). According to Barbalich (n.d.) children with depression are treated using medication, therapy, or both. Even the American Academy of Pediatrics has changed the recommended ages for screening for depression to begin at age 11 (Actman Becker, 2018). These articles make sure to include both sexes instead of making childhood depression seem like it favors girls or boys. Overall, these articles are meant to be learning tools for parents so they are aware of what to look for, how long it needs to last to be considered depression, and when to seek help. These articles indicate that this is an issue that their child could possibly face.

Inside Out Pixar’s Perspective

One of the best ways to understand a film’s purpose is to look at material coming from the studio backing the film. In this case, looking at both the Disney-Pixar YouTube Channel and the extras that are contained on the Blu-Ray/DVD disks. Looking at the videos on the YouTube channel (Inside Out, 2018) there is a playlist of forty videos. These videos are mainly promotional material for the film and other Disney films. In terms of film trailers, there is the teaser trailer, official Cannes Film Festival

announcement and clip, the two official American trailers. Then there are meet each emotion videos, a video with the cast advertising the film's release date, and interviews with each voice actor asking them what goes into making a Pixar film. There are clips about important moments in the film like a clip about long-term memory. Additionally, there are multiple videos of television spots typically revolving around pop culture moments like the royal baby, college basketball's March Madness, and the film being played in theaters again over Labor Day 2015. The playlist is rounded out with three more fun videos: the emotions reacting to an upcoming Disney-made Star Wars movie, a Disney Easter Eggs video which shows how parts of *Inside Out* tie into or pay homage to other films and the creators, and lastly a video showing the script and how that translated to actual film content. Overall, these videos are mainly advertising and marketing content used to push this film and other Disney owned properties to drum up interest and keep the film relevant. They do not indicate a focus on Riley's mental health experiences and that conversation.

While the YouTube videos are more promotional material, the content on the DVD/Blu-Ray disc should be a bit more in depth about aspects of the film to give the fans of the movie or Pixar fans more detailed and behind the scenes information about this film. Two specific pieces of bonus content really let the audience understand how this film was made and what it meant to the animators. *Story of the Story* (2015) gives more information on how the story of this film came to be focusing mainly on how director Pete Docter's vision began and changed to what the film is in its final form. According to Docter, this film began as a way to dramatize growing up because of things he noticed with his daughter's behavior changes. At ages eight and 9, she had the world

open to her, yet a few years later he would notice her in the backseat of the car sighing and being dramatic. This was a change he was not expecting and was not sure what brought it on or what to do with it. But, while it may have started as a way to dramatize growing up, the film became more about the idea that emotions are the key to relationships, whether they are with family, friends, or anyone else in our lives. Originally in the film, Joy was the central character and to the filmmakers the answer to their story. Yet, really, Sadness is the answer and the focus now becomes what Joy can learn from Sadness (Story of the Story, 2015). So, if according to Mapping the Mind (2015) this film is focusing on the idea that in life you cannot be happy all the time, that you cannot be a child forever, how do you actually visualize the mind for the screen? The filmmakers are clear that even from the start this film was set in the mind, not the brain, and it had to be magical and interesting, but obvious all the same. To the creators the mind is such a large place that not all of it could be captured on screen, there is more to it than the audience ever sees. The filmmakers and animators spent a lot of time learning about the mind (Mapping the Mind, 2015). They talked to psychologists, neurologists, and emotion experts about how emotions manifest in the body. To these animators the film focuses on how people remember, how people feel about their memories, how people dream, and how the functions of the mind are also connected (Mapping the Mind, 2015). The worlds we experience are all metaphors for metaphors as a way to more easily explain the mind.

Inside Out Audience Perspective

Inside Out is understood by the creators to be a film about growing up and the emotions involved in those changes. Yet, looking at this film through medical

understandings of depression, Riley seems to have undiagnosed depression. If the film can be read this way, are audiences and reviewers picking up on this as well? Turning to review videos on YouTube and professional reviews from news outlets provide some answers to this inquiry.

When looking into the reviews to this film, there seems to be one concrete argument that exists in how this film is understood by audiences. Is what Riley is experiencing just due to the fact that she is eleven years old, and likely going through puberty and moving into adolescence, or is what is being shown on screen something more; is it childhood depression? Atchity, Duralde, and Lemire (2015) seem to straddle both sides of this issue. For example they recognize that child psychology professionals can use this film as a teaching tool. But, at the same time they also acknowledge that Riley is an eleven year old, who does not know anyone in San Francisco, at the height of angst and awkwardness that that age brings. While this is not a direct acknowledgement of either case, they hint that the film can be read both ways. Other reviewers on the puberty side of the argument focused more on how Riley is questioning herself, getting angry with her parents, growing up and letting go of the familiar things from her earlier childhood (Flickinger, 2015; Stuckmann, 2015; Truitt, 2015). On the other hand, those who believe this movie is discussing depression focus on how the change in Riley's emotions are due to the stressful time of the move. Here it is understood that the film shows how the other emotions work to keep Riley stable when Sadness and Joy are off on their quest, and what happens when the emotions try to impersonate each other (Jahns, 2015; Harloff & Ellis, 2015). There is no clear-cut answer to the puberty versus depression debate. It is worth noting that while the filmmakers intended the film to be a

dramatization of growing up and the changes in the mind that result, there are other ways audiences have read into the film and its messaging.

There are also debates surrounding the standout character and who this film is actually meant for. According to the director in the film's bonus content (Story of the Story, 2015), Joy and Sadness are the main characters, but does the viewing public see them that way? To some Sadness is the character that steals the show, while it is Anger that stands out to others. Additionally, reviewers felt that Fear and Disgust were underutilized (Atchity, Duralde, & Lemire, 2015; Harloff & Ellis, 2015). Though some of the emotions may stand out more than others, Seitz (2015) recognizes that none of the emotions should be lauded over the exclusion of the others, and that memories are more complicated than just a single emotion. They can be remembered with specific emotions depending on where we are in our lives, and the part of the memory we fixate on. Overall, the takeaway here is that all of the emotions are here to keep Riley going, that the emotional lives of humans is full and complex (Orr, 2015; Phillips, 2015; Pols, 2015; Turan, 2015). The equality of emotions seems to come across no matter who the favorite anthropomorphic emotion may be.

Due to the heavy subject matter of this film, focusing on the mind, memory creation and retention, and emotions, there is another question of whether this family-movie is meant more for children or adults. Across the board while reviewers believe that kids will learn from this movie and enjoy it, the real audience who will benefit from the story and the jokes are, in fact, the adults. While adults may be the major audience according to the reviews, the film does turn a critical eye on the fact that adults impose being happy all the time on children (Scott, 2015). While adults' intentions may be good,

it is possible that adults may learn about the negative effects of this action, while children learn that not being happy all the time is acceptable. Travers (2015) calls this film about adolescence and emotions angling for a truce between them, too sophisticated that it may go over kids' heads. Yet, across the board, it seems that no matter your age, something in this film will stick with you.

One interesting idea brought up in the reviews is using this film as a teaching tool for children. Specifically, according to Atchity, Duralde, and Lemire (2015), the idea is that child psychologists can use this film to ask kids how they feel and what is going on. The easily identifiable actions and nature of each of the five emotions will help children better explain what is going on in their heads, possibly in ways these professionals could not do before. According to Schonfeld (2015) child psychologists view this movie as insightful into a child's emotional development though it does lack scientific support. Dr. Judith Joseph, who was quoted in the article states, "I think what the character was trying to portray was what we call Childhood Depression. That's pretty accurate in terms of what you see with depressed pre-teens: social withdrawal, lack of friendships..." Yet, while the message of childhood depression is picked up here, Dr. Kevin Kalikow, another professional quoted in the article, is worried the film over simplifies the issue because not everyone feels the same emotions the same way or to the same extent.

Depression, Biological Sex, and a Simplified Solution

Therefore, the question becomes: Is this really a movie about female depression only? While females do experience depression more, an argument can be made that Riley is more of a universal character. While she is a girl in the film, there are many things that make her biological sex less important than the actual message. For example, the name

Riley in itself is used to name both sexes of babies. It is not a name that is typically associated with only one sex. Additionally, Riley's anthropomorphized emotions are a mix of male and female. Anger and Fear are male, while Sadness, Disgust, and Joy are female. In real life our human emotions are often gendered and expected to happen in certain ways. For example, it is acceptable for a man or boy to be angry because anger is a male emotion, while if a woman or girl was angry she is seen in a negative way. Women and girls are expected to be happy and joyful, so joy is a female emotion and girls are assumed easily grossed out, so disgust being female also meets a societal gender expectation.

This is different than her parents' emotions or even any of the other human characters the audience sees inside the minds of, such as the boy who has a crush on Riley when he meets her in the hockey rink at the movie's end. Riley's mom's emotions are all understood to be female, while her dad and the boy, whom she meets at the hockey rink at the end of the movie, both have male emotions running their thoughts and actions. This gendering of the emotions opens up a new line of thought about what gender roles play in our lives. Is there a specific age where we distinctly follow male or female gender roles? If this were true, then Riley's parents having solely male and female emotions would make sense. Yet, if *Inside Out* were to have a sequel, would Riley's emotions change to being only female? The filmmakers cannot suddenly change Fear or Anger to being female, especially since audiences have already come to know Anger and Fear as they were in the film. The mixed gender emotions in Riley's brain help reinforce Riley's lack of strict adherence to gendered expectations. If Riley is going through puberty as some have argued, prior to puberty, maybe gender expectations are not realized. Maybe

after puberty they change, but maybe they do not have to. Having Riley's emotions be mixed sexes helps to solidify the idea that all emotions need to be felt. To bring that further, people should not be afraid to feel certain emotions because we are told because someone is a woman that they should not be angry, that if someone is a man they cannot feel sadness.

Having Riley keep her mixed-sex emotions could indicate that she is not going to adhere to gender roles and expectations and is not defining or limiting herself due to her biological sex. As a character she seems to straddle the lines of gender roles and norms, often breaking them in ways that may make her character and her experiences relatable to boys and girls who watch the movie. For example, she is a girl who likes sports and plays hockey. If this film is read as a commentary on puberty and adhering to gender roles, or if this movie is hinting at experiences of childhood depression biological sex and even gender do not define who can or cannot experience these things. Just because a child is going through puberty does not mean that they have to suddenly change to meeting every societal gendered expectation and if it is depression, the condition is not solely a woman issue.

Additionally, is the issue of depression too simplified? Does the film wrap up the end in too neat of a bow, making it seem like one can just snap out of depression? Debruge (2015) comments on the fact that Fear, Anger, and Disgust decide the best course of action to save Riley is running away. While this may be used to keep the story simple, the question raised is now, how would Riley react with an event that would cause greater emotional upheaval? Seitz (2015) notes that in the movie Riley is depressed. The abyss where her core memories have been dumped is in fact, the representation for

depression. She stays in her depressed state until she is ready to leave it, being patient and feeling loved. While Seitz (2015) realizes there is no magic cure for this mental health struggle, depression is often more of a life long battle. In fact, often to begin to feel better, individuals have to see a doctor and craft a treatment plan of medication and/or therapy (Office on Women's Health, 2017). While support from family and friends is part of this journey it is not the only solution as the movie seems to show.

Conclusion

When looking at the total history of this film, there seems to be disconnects between how the filmmakers have imagined this film and how the audience have received this film. This is again a result of the three components of corporate, social, and creative coming together to produce a film ready for public viewing. Originally, the filmmakers imagined this film as being a visual dramatization of the process of growing up. Yet, through an understanding of the signs and symptoms of depression in addition to the current status of women being diagnosed with depression it is possible to view Riley as having a form of childhood depression. Therefore this film can be seen as more than just about growing up; it can be about a much larger health issue. Due to the Pixar-based and health-based readings on the film, the audiences have generally latched on to both readings. There are those who view this film as a commentary on adolescence and those who think of it as a commentary on childhood depression. These two readings indicate that there is the possibility for creating a larger conversation around this film and its potential for creating change in how we view, discuss, and understand mental health, especially in children. Corporately, a movie powerhouse like Pixar would want to turn a profit for this film. While creatively this film began as a story about growing up, the

filmmakers' desire to tell a story about the mind opened them up to a new world of understanding the science of the mind and how it does what it does. This knowledge whether directly, or indirectly, altered the plotline, but Pixar's basis in technology did not stray from this film keeping their company identity and personal stamp very present. These components seem to complement the social movement happening concurrently to understand, recognize, and discuss depression. Having these three things come together help to make this film what it is.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study set out to explore the combination of gender representations and mental health discussions as contained in the Disney-Pixar animated films *Inside Out* (2015) and *Finding Dory* (2016). Specifically, this study sought to understand how stereotypes and historical attitudes have shaped or influenced Pixar's portrayal of mental health conditions. Research question one set out to explore how these Disney films portray mental illness and consider the present day cultural attitudes and historical attitudes in play that affect the representations.

Research question two was designed to look at the Victorian ideals that colored many of Disney's earlier movies, though the animation was more in the Modernist direction. In other words, this question set out to look at how Victorian ideals about and toward women influenced the portrayals of the female characters. The last research question is particularly interested in how Pixar has been lauded for its inclusion of characters that have explicit mental health conditions, which may create change in how the public views and accepts those with the lived experiences of these conditions. Specifically, it asks what larger discourses are constructing the current Pixar representations of female characters with mental health conditions?

In terms of research question one, both *Finding Dory* (2016) and *Inside Out* (2015) portray mental health conditions in two different ways. Dory from *Finding Dory* experiences an interesting character arc from the first film she introduced in in 2003's *Finding Nemo* until her starring role in *Finding Dory*. In the first film, Dory's character is used as comic relief and Pixar's reliance on stereotypes and tropes about mental health is apparent. In fact they use three distinct stereotypes in order to move the plot along and to

tell a story with the larger message about family and belonging. In *Finding Dory*, a storytelling shift seems to occur. Here, while Pixar does rely on the same stereotypes used in the first film, they are less apparent. While Marlin does still seem to struggle with moving past his beliefs on what Dory can and cannot do, Nemo's unwavering support of Dory and her abilities provides a strong contrast to Marlin who is stuck in his ways and views. Dory also seems to grow and become more confident and accepting of her short term memory loss, so it is no longer a hindrance, but seen as a strength.

In *Inside Out* (2015) stereotypes are not used as storytelling tools. Instead, Pixar uses screens and screen technology to explore the complex world of the human emotional ability. In the film, the emotional upheaval occurring in Riley's brain can be seen in how her memories are being turned blue to indicate they are remembered sadly. As Sadness takes up more and more of her memories, Riley's personality begins to fall apart. As Riley experiences these changes, the way she experiences her daily life at school, with hockey, and with her parents changes. Her actions, which are influenced by her changing emotions, indicate that what she is experiencing hints at childhood depression.

In regard to research question two, at the root of these films and their displays of mental health conditions is the Victorian understanding of the female as mad or crazy. This understanding of women's mental health began in Victorian Era medical practices. These views by doctors have infiltrated their way into our daily conversations and discourses so that women are seen as inferior or as Other. These two Pixar films do not overtly hold the Victorian Era viewpoint or state it obviously. Instead, the Victorian view is still evident because it has influenced how women talk about their mental health experiences and their propensity to seek help. Whether it is intentional for Pixar to have a

female character with mental health conditions in these films, showcasing female characters that have mental health conditions plays into the established Victorian views.

The last research question looks at the implications of Pixar's inclusion of characters with mental health conditions, specifically what the effect of having these characters on screen has for the larger conversations surrounding mental health. This was studied by completing a total history (Klinger, 1997) for the two films. For *Finding Dory* (2016) the topic at hand is amnesia and memory loss. In common discourse, memory loss is communicated to women as due to aging and also on a more severe level, being Alzheimer's disease, which affects women more often. Though it is recognized that other issues like brain injuries and allergic reactions can also trigger memory loss. Many articles focused on prevention of memory loss through activities, foods, and other methods. None of the women's lifestyle magazines discuss short-term memory loss as a distinct disability or condition. When looking at how Pixar thought about Dory's character, it seems as if they struggled to reimagine her character, taking her from a sidekick for comic relief to a more serious, important main character. The struggles as described in the behind the scenes footage content of the Blu-ray disc indicate that it took a long time to really get a feel for what Dory could do and they were limited as well because she was so well-liked from the first film, so her character could not change too much. The different directions Pixar tried to go in translate to the film itself, especially when considering how reviewers have commented on the film. When looking at reviews, the main takeaways are that audiences were worried Dory would become too grating and be unable to carry the film, and that her disability gets lost in a sea of fish with other disabilities. Other characters, such as Hank, take the spotlight. This makes the story less

about her short-term memory loss and the resulting lived experience. While the film is less about Dory's individual memory loss, audiences see her become more confident in her abilities, finding strength as the movie continues. While there may not be a larger conversation around memory loss happening because of this film, the message of diversity and inclusion has been translatable to areas of interest both regarding disability and topics outside of it.

For *Inside Out*, the topic at hand is childhood depression. Depression is understood as happening more often to women. When childhood depression is discussed for parents, the magazines focus on the signs and symptoms of depression so parents know what to look for if their child needs help. These articles do not focus specifically on boys or girls and talk more in a general sense, even though depression in children has been found to happen to girls more often than boys. Pixar themselves, did not set out to tell a story about depression. Instead their story focused more along the lines of adolescence and the emotional upheaval that can be experienced from that. Their work was grounded in knowledge from emotion experts, psychologists, and other experts regarding the mind. Because of this, it is possible that their work was indirectly affected by the knowledge gained, so the film can also be read not only to be about Riley's transition to adolescence, but also as depression. In terms of audience reaction and reception, there are two camps, those that follow the adolescence focus and those who follow the idea the film is about depression. While some of the emotions stand out over others, generally people understood that the overarching idea is that it is acceptable to feel sad and that all of the emotions are all important to make us who we are and influence how we remember events. This movie can be used to help children better

explain how they are feeling and what is going on in their heads, but there is some concern that the topic of emotions and something as potentially serious as childhood depression is being overly simplified for the sake of a story.

Discussion

These two films demonstrate that there is a change in how Pixar is portraying mental health. Dory's character experience is at first defined by stereotypes. But, as *Finding Dory* plays out, Dory becomes more than the original stereotypes taking ownership of her short-term memory loss. While she can never change it, it does not define her as much as in the first movie. This film may not be as impactful regarding creating a conversation and change around mental health understandings and stigmas due to the fact that it is a sequel to a successful film and deviation too far from the original would affect the film's box office success or even Dory's likeability. For *Inside Out*, this film shows Pixar not relying on overt stereotypes, instead using the emotions to speak for themselves as they influence Riley's actions. The discussion on depression is much more subtle than Dory's in-your-face memory loss. This subtlety and ultimately, delicately handled subject matter, makes it possible for this film to really focus more on the mental health aspects. As previously stated by Ebrahim (2014), Pixar is seen as having a girl problem. While the health issues used in the films do affect women more, the fact the characters are female may not matter. Dory, the fish, is very childlike. While she is identified as female she is just as easily a character both sexes can relate to. Additionally, Riley may be a girl, but her interest in hockey, neutral name, her mixed gender emotions, and the film's main focus on the interplay between the five emotions in Headquarters, make Riley's femaleness less important. Again, Riley is a character that regardless of her biological sex and gender, audiences, especially children, will be able to relate to her.

Overall, Disney Pixar's presentations of mental health conditions and female characters reflect and deviate from the current conversations and understandings of women's mental health in the 2010s. Conversations surrounding memory are often focused on women, especially since age related memory disorders like Alzheimer's affect women more than men. Conversations around depression are also more focused on females as well. It is a bit more acceptable to discuss women's mental health than men's mental health.

In terms of the Disney model and Disney's background, it is not necessarily surprising that present day Disney films include characters that experience mental health struggles. Walt never saw his uncle Edmund as different and the Disney Company has a moral, teaching component to the content produced. By including characters and storylines that deal with mental health in larger lessons about inclusivity and emotional equality, the company seems to be staying true to the foundation Walt Disney created while also teaching about present day issues such as disability and mental health.

Stereotypes begin somewhere and as indicated through literature, stereotypes toward women's mental health began back in the Victorian era and have continued into the modern time. Even as understandings and perceptions have changed, the stereotypes do still endure and cannot necessarily be fully removed from public discourse. No one can be fully removed from existing stereotypes, so to see them in Disney films in order to tell the stories contained in the films make sense. They seem to be used to create a common understanding, but then the Pixar filmmakers move away from them in order to help establish the message of changing perceptions, keeping up with the moral aspect of the company while also staying involved with the public concern and conversations happening regarding these topics.

The use of stereotypes in *Finding Dory* is less than *Finding Nemo*. This can potentially allow for more of the cultural influences that have characterized women as mad to come to light. For example, Marlin (a male fish) still defines Dory through her mental illness bringing to light the patriarchal power that has influenced some of these characterizations of women's mental health. Nemo's role in the film demonstrates that it is possible for children to not hold the negative stereotypes and to be more accepting of varying levels of mental health than adult characters are.

For *Inside Out* Pixar does not write the storyline based on stereotypes, but they do play into the idea that childhood depression affects female children more. Also in order to anthropomorphize the emotions, Pixar does play into stereotypes by making Joy a female and Anger male for example as those emotions are thought to be feminine and masculine respectively. The filmmakers do step away from emotion stereotypes by letting Riley have male and female, masculine and feminine emotions in her head. By not overtly relying on stereotypes to craft the story, Pixar is able to explore the topic of mental health through technology and screens, which brings a new dimension to the conversation giving audiences a new way to think about everything. This makes the conversation a bit more modern and opens us up further to how technology has permeated our lives so much in this decade, that it now allows us to better discuss and comprehend our minds, emotions, and mental health.

While there is a positive change in how Pixar is portraying mental health conditions on screen within their films, the methodology of Klinger's (1997) total history allows for a more nuanced understanding of how these portrayals come about and how impactful they may or may not be. This is accomplished through considerations of the

creative, corporate, and social. Specifically this means the filmmakers, the company they work for, and lastly the viewing public. There have been many efforts made to help bring conversations around mental health to the forefront of public conversation. While positive change has been made, the total history helps reveal how all of these components come together to allow these conversations to occur in popular culture and the role these films may have in creating change. Stereotypes may never be completely removed from the equation, but this study does indicate that there are indications of a shift in audience's tolerances, which if it continues may help to change the existing dominant view regarding the topic of women's mental health.

Additionally, this study has indicated not only a positive change in how women's mental health is being presented in these films, but also a change in the perceptions of gender. While the main characters discussed here are defined as female due to the biological, when considering the concept of gender neither of these characters are distinctly feminine. Both Dory and Riley do not adhere to strict societal gender expectations. They do things that are both considered masculine and feminine. Having characters that fit along the gender spectrum helps to make these topics in the films relatable to the entire audience. This may be a side effect of the nature of children's and family friendly film, but it may also indicate that these conditions are not being solely defined as male or female and that there is a changing perception of gender happening as well, that this study has only begun to explore.

Limitations

This study is limited to its generalizability by a few key factors. First, it only looks at two films from the lengthy Pixar film canon. Two films cannot make an

overarching claim about Pixar as a whole. At the time this study was completed, Pixar has released 19 full-length feature films, with the addition of a twentieth film to be released later this year. The two films analyzed here only comprise 10% of the total film canon. The two chosen films indicate that there is a change in how female characters with mental health conditions are portrayed. In order to really understand and conclude that there is a real positive change in how mental health is shown on screen within Pixar, more of their films would need to be considered in order to provide a fuller picture on this topic. *Finding Dory* and *Inside Out* were released in 2015 and 2016 respectively. The close release dates do not provide an accurate depiction of changes in attitude throughout the years of Pixar's existence. These two films can add to the discussion of mental health discussions in the 2010s, a decade that seems to be characterized with ideas of mental health self-care and other topics. In order to see if there are real changes in how Pixar presents mental health earlier films would need to be looked at. Characters with mental health conditions, such as Dory, began as a minor character. In order to get a fuller understanding of this issue, earlier films could be looked at for minor female characters that may indicate lived experiences with mental health. Earlier films also have major female characters including, but not limited to, Merida from *Brave*, and Jessie from *Toy Story 2* and *Toy Story 3*. Future considerations of these characters may not necessarily add to a conversation on women's mental health, but it would add a level of understanding as to how Pixar treats and characterizes its female characters.

Additionally, the results here cannot be applied to other movie production companies and their films. Pixar is not the only movie company that creates and releases animated films. It is possible that Disney films do lend themselves more easily to studies

of this nature due to these films often having a moral component or take-away lesson for the audience. Even with this in mind, it does not mean that other film companies such as Dreamworks or Illumination do not have characters that have mental health conditions and that these studios and their films cannot be studied in this way. In using a methodology like Klinger's (1997) total history, the films from Illumination would have to be considered separately from those of Dreamworks or Disney in separate studies in order to complete a true total history and draw conclusions about that specific studio's portrayal of women and mental health.

More so, it is necessary to note that not every female character in the films analyzed in this study is a human female. This is important because it may impact the accuracy or intention of the aspects of the mental health condition being presented within each film and the story contained within. Animated film, particularly film created for children and families will sometimes use anthropomorphized characters to tell stories or teach lessons. These mental health conditions and the symptoms that make them up are distinctly human, and are very complex. Due to Dory not clearly being a human female character, it is possible that her experiences in the film cannot be applied to the true human experience, unlike Riley from *Inside Out* who is a human female child in the animation design and other aspects of the film. Riley's recognizable humanness can both make her relatable to the audience, but it can also hurt her if boys do not identify with her. Additionally, it is the nature of family film and children's film to be widely liked across audiences regardless of age, sex, gender, or other classifying information. The tendency to use anthropomorphic characters helps make the film and its stories more relatable and generalizable for all audience members. Even with Riley being a human

female, the majority of the film is spent inside her head where Riley's humanness does not particularly matter. Therefore, the anthropomorphized characters and aspects take center stage to be more relatable. But, taking human characteristics to make the anthropomorphized characters be more relatable may in fact limit the depth the mental health aspects can be discussed and considered.

Another topic of consideration for limitations of this study has to do with limited and possibly gendered perspectives. First, male directors and producers mainly made the two films under consideration for this study. Secondly, many of the articles and sources used to complete the audience reception section come from male film reviewers. Both of these gender issues arise from the current state of the American film industry. According to *Women in Hollywood* (2015), of 107 directors on the top 100 movies in the year *Inside Out* was released, only 8 women filled the role of director. Also of the 1,365 directors, writers, and producers of the top 100 films, 11.8% of writers and 22% of producers were women. In 2016, the year *Finding Dory* was released (*Women in Hollywood*, 2016), for the 100 top-grossing films, 4% directors, 11% of writers, 13% of executive producers, 19% of producers, and 14% of editors were women. Having small numbers of women in positions like director, writer, and producer limits the ability for the female experience to be told by a woman. There is potential for male perspectives, such as those of male writers and producers, to misrepresent the lived experiences of female characters, especially when it comes to something like mental health where men and women's lived experiences have key differences.

Many of the articles and sources used to complete the audience reception section of this thesis come from male film reviewers. In order to get a fuller picture of each of the

films' total histories, other reviews or articles by female writers would need to be collected and considered. Similar to how there are limited female voices in Hollywood regarding writers, directors, and producers, there is a similar situation when considering film critics. According to Lauzen quoted in Lang (2016), "It reflects the biases within the industry. "This doesn't exist in a vacuum. There are larger cultural biases at work and those favor males." While there are some female film critics, across publications, 80% of reviewers writing in entertainment trade publications were men, 76% of critics writing for general interest publications, 74% of individuals writing for movie and entertainment magazines and websites and 71% of those writing for the biggest U.S. newspapers, were men (Lang, 2016). It is possible that the lack of women working as film critics can be tied to the idea that women are not in leadership roles. These numbers do not include YouTube reviewers, but men ran the verified channels that appeared based on the search terms used in this study. It is also possible that female-run review channels do exist, but they do not meet YouTube's criteria for a verified channel, or they appeared lower in the search results making it so they were not used in this study.

The general aim of this study, as stated prior, was to study the intersection between women and mental health specifically in how they are presented in Pixar animated film. The two chosen films include two distinct characters and lived experiences. In order to explore this intersection and account for the differing lived experiences, the study covered two distinct mental health conditions: short-term memory loss and depression. This generalized discussion on mental health/mental illness that is happening in here may be considered to be too broad. By covering two separate conditions the study is unable to fully consider all aspects, qualities, and characteristics

that define short-term memory loss and depression to their full understandings in the field of psychology. Memory loss and depression are completely unrelated mental health conditions, so covering them in the same study affects the ability to really go in depth about the changing perceptions that are occurring for each within these films. This is a thesis focused on media portrayals of health conditions and the stereotypes used to communicate about them. Stereotypes are used for ease of storytelling. In the same way, the mental health conditions portrayed in the films may experience a necessary ease for storytelling. This may be done through certain characteristics and aspects of each condition being highlighted over others, therefore denying a full exploration and consideration of the illness in depth. Focusing on one film and one character experience may have allowed for the ability to delve more deeply into one condition, and fully recognize the psychology aspect of these conditions, and the stereotypes involved with each.

One last limitation to consider is the children and adult factor with these films. Pixar films are often considered in the category of family film making them appropriate for both children and adults to watch together or separately. Ultimately, the idea that these films can create new conversations about women's mental health makes the assumption that both parents and children, or children and adults are viewing these films together. It also assumes that the children watching these films are old enough to really comprehend the topics of disability and the issues these mental health conditions may entail as depicted in these films. An audience of adults will pick up on different things in each film than an audience of just children, or a mixed audience likely would. The print and video reviews of these films come from an adult perspective especially in regard to

what an adult thought of the film and what the adult thinks a child could take away from the film in question. It would be important to find content that discusses the films with children to really understand more about what children pick up on and learn from these films.

Implications

This study is exploratory and small in scope and while it has the limitations as covered above, it does have implications for the larger discourse on feminist film theory as well as mental health and how the media communicate about it. In terms of film theory, this study provides another component to the already existing discussion regarding feminist film theory and female characters and their roles. This furthers some of the ideas presented by Mulvey and other scholars. In fact, it brings a new aspect to it as well in the way that the characters in these films are more defined by gender than biological sex. This move to have characters more defined and recognized in the gender spectrum takes this analysis and study away from defining and being limited by what is traditionally woman or female, and instead moving into a much more current view of this topic.

Mental health is becoming more of a focus for the public and attempts are made for policies and presentations to be more inclusive. It is important that a movie company such as Disney-Pixar is including characters that exhibit mental health conditions. By no means do two films conclude that a real change has occurred. As such, it is acceptable to say that much of our public discourse is still set by outdated, yet persistent stereotypes. So to see indications that Pixar is moving away from relying on stereotypes to tell these stories of characters with lived mental health experiences is encouraging because it may

indicate a shift in audience tolerances and a slight shift or change in the dominant view by including these changing perspectives.

Future Research

This study completed an exploratory qualitative content analysis looking at the intersection between mental health and female characters intersect in the Pixar Films *Finding Dory* (2016) and *Inside Out* (2015). Findings indicate that both films demonstrate that the company is moving away from reliance on stereotypes to tell the stories of female characters with lived mental health experiences. Though the findings from this study indicate a positive change occurring in how mental health is portrayed on screen in these films, there is still more research that can be done in this area of inquiry to build on this current study. Future academic inquiries can expand the number of films being analyzed and considered. For example, a study on the entire Pixar canon, or a study covering more Disney movies including live action films with human actors, not just animated film. Studies like this could explore the idea that Disney and Pixar may have discussed mental health indirectly through various other female characters in earlier decades of the company's history. Other studies could be completed in the same way as the current study in order to explore other animated film companies such as DreamWorks, Illumination and others portray mental health conditions in their films.

While this study focuses on women's mental health, another area of inquiry can focus on male characters and their mental health as portrayed in these films as well as age differences. Men's mental health is an often under-discussed topic, and while it is not a focus of this study, exploring male mental health and stereotypes and then comparing it the female characterizations could explore the gender differences that exist in mental

health discourse. Additional studies focusing on how adult characters, adolescent characters, and child characters understand and discuss mental health could further the discussion on stereotypes who holds them.

Further studies could also be completed to explore the lived experiences of someone with a mental health condition or disability. A more focused study on how Dory, Riley, or another character with the lived experience of disability talks about and understands their own illness or disability could provide more insight into how the individual maneuvers within boundaries the illness or disability can create.

Another possible study could include looking at total history content about how children view these films and what they take away from them, which is not something this current study did. Health discourse not only involves mental health but also physical health as well. Exploring how Disney films portray physical disability would also provide another avenue for related research. Physical disability is stereotyped just as mental health is. Exploring more about the stereotypes used in storytelling for physical disability could add to disability discourse overall.

The filmmakers of *Inside Out* situate their film in a way that could open it up to future research regarding social media and depression. In the film the audience does not see Riley interact with social media, but the setting of the film indicates that social media does exist in the time frame of the film. The film takes place in San Francisco in the present day, which is the home to many of these social media giants that have changed our socialization and relationships. A current conversation surrounding depression is the idea of the links between the use of social media and depression. A future study could continue the look at the links between social media and depression. Specifically, how do

our interactions with physical screens and depression relate, not just how do the memory orb screens that the filmmakers imagined link to experiences of depression? This is not something the film considers, but is definitely not outside the realm of possibility for future studies focusing in the health communication area of focus.

The intersection of female health, media, and physical and mental disabilities can also be further studied as well on other media formats using Klinger's (1997) methodology. Specifically a study could be done looking at other medical conditions that are typically seen as a man's health issue and analyzing media like print ads or television commercials regarding that health issue. For example, the issue of women's heart attacks and how pharmaceutical commercials address this issue as a male health problem when women also experience it. What silencing is happening and how is this affecting the conversation surrounding it? Additionally, the intersection of technology and women's health can be explored. Are women talking about their health through computer-mediated communication? How are individuals with physical and/or mental disabilities finding or creating community online?

The study of female health, media and mental and physical disabilities provides opportunity to add to the existing health communication and explore how these serve as cultural texts.

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