

### Week 3: Genre, gender and Disney

1. In groups decide on one Disney (can be Warner Bros etc.) film with a male lead, and one film with a female lead. Note down the characteristics of that lead character

Female Lead characteristics Give name of character and film	Male lead characteristics Give name of character and film

2. Do they reinforce gender stereotypes? If so, how (give examples)

3. Do they challenge gender stereotypes? If so, how (give examples)

4. Compare the portrayal of motherhood and fatherhood in relevant Disney/other films.

<b>Motherhood</b> Give name of film and character	<b>Fatherhood</b> Give name of film and character

5. What is the ideology implicit about motherhood and fatherhood in your chosen films?

6. Choose one film with a male villain and one film with a female villain and describe how the villains are portrayed in relation to

Name	Female villain	Male villain
Looks		
Voice		
Gender		

Age		
Body		
Please add any other characteristics		

From the readings (if there are words that you don't know the meaning of, on first reading do not worry – just try and get the general meaning. You can look up the meanings of words afterwards).

**Extract 1:** Gillam and Wooden (2008: 3) 'Unlike many of the princesses, who remain relatively static even through their own adventures, these male leads are actual protagonists: their characters develop and change over the course of the film, rending the plot. Ultimately these various developing characters, particularly Buzz and Woody from *Toy Story*, Mr Incredible from *The Incredibles*, and Lightning McQueen from *Cars* – experience a common narrative trajectory, culminating in a common 'New Man' model: they all strive for an alpha-male identity; they face emasculating failures; they find themselves, in large part, through what Eve Sedgwick refers to as 'homosocial desire' and a triangulation of this desire with a feminized object (and/or a set of feminine values); and finally, they achieve (and teach) a kinder, gentler understanding of what it means to be a man.'

**Questions:**

1. Do you agree that men in Disney/Pixar and similar films tend to be portrayed as new man masculinity? Can you give other examples?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. What ideology is present in such films that show a 'kinder, gentler understanding of what it means to be a man?'

**Extract 2:** Gillam and Wooden (2008: 3) 'A working definition of alpha male may be unnecessary; although more traditionally associated with the animal kingdom than the Magic Kingdom, it familiarly evokes ideas of dominance, leadership and power in human social organisations as well. The phrase 'alpha male' may stand for all things stereotypically patriarchal: unquestioned authority, physical power and social dominance, competitiveness for positions of status and leadership, lack of visible or shared emotion, social isolation. An alpha male, like Vann in *Cars* does not ask for directions; like Doc Hudson in the same film, he does not talk about his feelings. The alpha male's stresses, like Buzz Lightyear's, come from his need to save the galaxy; his strength comes from his faith in his ability to do so. These models have worked for Disney for decades. The worst storm at sea is no match for *The Little Mermaid's* uncomplicated Prince Eric – indeed any prince charming need only ride in on his steed to save his respective princess. But the postfeminist world is a different place for men, and the post-princess Pixar is a different place for male protagonists.

**Questions:**

1. How is the alpha male defined?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Are there elements of the alpha male in any of the Disney/Pixar or similar films? Give examples to support your argument(s).

**Extract 3:** England et al. (2011: 563) ‘ In contrast to earlier films, the middle and most current films had princesses who were more assertive than in earlier films, and these princesses were assertive towards both people and animals... Gender expectations were less complex when the first Disney Princess movies were produced and with the rise of feminism in the 1970s through current times they have become more complicated. .. The prevalence of domestic work is an important theme in the Disney Princess movies and a substantial change that Disney incorporated over time was the temporary discontinuation of domestic work as a symbol of femininity. The first three princesses frequently were shown doing domestic work. In *Cinderella*, the princess did domestic work as an act of submission.

**Questions:**

1. Do you agree that gender expectations were less complex when the first Disney princess movies were produced and that it is the rise of feminism that they have become more complicated?
2. The extract suggests that domestic work is a symbol of femininity in past films – what symbols of femininity exist in contemporary films?

**Extract 4:** England et al. (2011: 564) ‘With the increase in breadth of gender roles displayed in these movies, it could be argued that a viewing child would be exposed to more balanced gender role portrayals. However, the middle movies and most current Disney Princess film still retained messages that are reminiscent of traditional roles, and there are many contradictory gender messages in the later movies that should not be discounted despite evidence of overall improvement in egalitarian content... many gender stereotypes consistent with those in the three earlier movies, such as high levels of behaviours, including fearfulness, affection and tending to physical appearance frequently.’

**Questions:**

1. Although this was written in 2011, do you think that there are contradictory gender messages in later films (e.g. *Frozen*, *Moana* etc.).
2. Are there elements of fearfulness, affection, and the importance of female appearance in later films for female characters?