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## **CONTENT ANALYSIS OF DISNEY'S PORTRAYAL OF MINORITY GROUPS AND ITS IMPACT ON MINORITY ADOLESCENTS AND CHILDREN**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Owing to its extensive and long-lasting influence, the Walt Disney Company has earned icon status. Its merchandise is a staple of popular culture in many nations throughout the world. Disney has produced films for generations that are intended to teach children about the significance of friendships, family, imagination, and other values, but they have also distorted and poorly portrayed many minority groups.

From queer coding villains (Ursula, Jafar, etc.) to racist representations of ethnic characters, the studio has been under fire throughout the years for its lack of cultural sensitivity (Pocahontas, Aladin, etc.) Disney has promoted a number of stereotyped ideas that may harm children and adolescents from minority communities. This research paper will examine how minority groups (in terms of ethnicity, gender, race, and sexual orientation) are portrayed in Disney films and how this affects minority adolescents and children. It will also determine whether Disney's last few portrayals of minority groups have had a positive impact on minority adolescents and children and why.

The paper will include an overview of author and scholar criticisms and insights, as well as an analysis of prior surveys and psychological experiments and postcolonial literary theories. A brief summary of Disney's representations of minority group characters throughout the last three decades will also be included in the study.

Disney's portrayal of minority groups will be examined as part of this research, as well as whether or not this has changed with time. To achieve this purpose, Disney animated feature films were analyzed. This paper takes a qualitative approach, focusing on postcolonial literary theory and imagology.

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## 1. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As technology advances, cultural standards vary, and entertainment evolves, the definition of childhood entertainment has adapted and reformed throughout history. Children are continuously learning from mass media sources, but the preceding generations were nurtured without popular terms like television or Google. The psychological effects of Disney on children in terms of growth, play, and self-awareness will be investigated through definition.

### **Growth:**

There are five areas of growth across age groups, according to Schaefer & DiGeronimo (2000):

- 1) Emotional health
- 2) Family and peer relationships
- 3) Cognitive development
- 4) Personal growth
- 5) Character formation.

### **Play:**

Imagination is another important part of psychological development. Play is based on creativity, which is defined as "a psychological process that involves the invention of new ideas and derives usefulness from potentially practical ideas," and is an important part of human development (Hill 2012). Play is one of the most important resources for a child's psychological development, and it is even considered a "deep biological process." When infants establish notions about how they should play, they often imitate the characters and stories they've seen on television, becoming the person rather than expanding upon themselves.

### **The Discourse of Self:**

Memories of magic carpets and glass slippers imbue childhood with magical quality, and they frequently characterise a lifetime. These cartoon views, on the other hand, "These cartoon visions ...make crucial contributions to our most important discourses of the self" (Bell et al.), and can even create a person's identity.

A self-constructed dynamic organisation of desires, beliefs, abilities and personal history into a coherent and autonomous self that leads the unfolding of one's adult life course is referred to as a sense of identity. As the media has ingratiated itself into the very formation of childhood as it exists now, the question must be asked: who, if not the parent or the teacher, will become the primary educator in the lives of children?

### **1.1 Definition in Context:**

Throughout its history, the mysticism of Disney enchantment has swept into society's everyday life, continually forming a monolithic philosophy of individualistic, mainstream culture. Today's children are continuously exposed to Disney Culture and are subjected to the pedagogy of social ideals that Disney promotes. Once the layers of enchantment have been revealed, showing the corporate persona that has materialized the notion of innocence and is motivated simply by profit, the causality for this cultural profile that Disney deploys is identified.

### **Marketing: Pursuing the Perfect Audience:**

Disney has transformed the childhood entertainment industry into an educational powerhouse, instilling ideas and social systems that influence the fundamental foundation of childhood imagination. Disney has created the optimal execution to make youngsters into the perfect consumers through deliberate commercialization, a process that is a primary reason for the widespread influence Disney has today through merchandise, films, and advertising.

Children become idealistic customers as a result of their fragility and malleability, as their hearts are open and their feeling of devotion is unwavering. Disney has hired researchers, marketers, and advertisers to collaborate with professionals in the field of child psychology to better comprehend how to specifically serve their culture, generate appealing and profitable marketing content, and finally define the requirements and aspirations of the youth market).

Disney has become one of the most influential educators of its time, teaching youngsters how to express cultural conceptions of race, gender, sexuality, and, ultimately, a discourse of the self, thanks to its influence.

### **Growth: How Disney Affects the Stages of Development:**

Psychological development is critical for intellectual success in our world, and children develop based on their perceptions of the world. Modern-day mass media is a source of information and expertise for children as they develop their own identities. Growth is such a changeable experience because young infants have such a limited frame of reference and learn from concrete examples and experiences, as opposed to adults' abstract knowledge.

Disney explains how to feel, belong, achieve, think, and be. Obesity, advanced sexual displays, violence, eating disorders, family stress, and an inhibited ability to create have all been connected to media's impact on children.

**Play: How Disney Creates Imagination:**

The lifestyle that Disney instils in our children's imaginations is frequently a false sense of creativity. Children learn how to create their own identities and what it means to be feminine or masculine through Disney characters. In the 1970s, parents typically tried to avoid gendered toys like Barbie and Superman in order to allow their children to develop naturally, according to Cochrane (2006). The play, on the other hand, has been built by the media over time.

In reality, one of the most significant talents in a child's frame of reference is observational learning, and they use what they're seeing and hearing throughout not only their playtime but also their social learning.

Popular culture is among the most common forms of instructional knowledge a child might obtain, providing insight into the current social norm, resulting in "a sociocultural framing of identity construction" (Collier, 2014). Gender is one of the dimensions of identity, or feeling of self. Between the ages of 3 and 5, gain a sense of gender identity and the features that divide males and girls, according to Hunnington (2013). Femininity and masculinity are proven through the ability to discern gender profiles through practises, materials, and speech, and it is a constant political and cultural conflict that is never fixed.

As Disney has grown in popularity around the world, academics are being forced to explore if Disney films and music are being used by the Western aristocrats to influence the less powerful.

In the context of socio-economic structural inequalities, the Walt Disney Company's management of race, gender, and sexuality deserve careful consideration. Some experts feel that Disney productions could have a good impact on people, particularly those dealing with challenging conditions or who have a progressive outlook. Different techniques for evaluating Disney films as cultural artefacts employ various theoretical viewpoints to define the value of unobvious and underlying symbolic meaning in the films.

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Disney's treatment of 'Princess Tiana' is an illustration of their racial insensitivity. Princess Tiana wasn't really as well-known as the other Disney princesses. Despite the backlash caused by Tiana's apparent biracial appearance, Disney subsequently modified the animation to restore Tiana's original appearance in *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). This shows that Disney was able to spend the extra money to make the changes, illustrating the power of public opinion in the creation of media material.

Disney's films are mostly influenced by audience approval and represent societal trends of a specific time period. A pre-release image from *Ralph Breaks the Internet: Wreck-It Ralph 2* was released in the summer of 2018, depicting Disney princesses gathered in a group, demonstrating how they had altered their looks for the sequel.

However, their outright portrayal of queer-coded characters as villains, as well as their racially insensitive representation of minority groups, serve to perpetuate stereotypes about such groups (people of colour, women etc.)

**Queer coding:**

Queer coding is the subtextual coding of a character in media as queer. Though such a character's sexual identity may not be explicitly confirmed within their respective work, a character might be coded as queer through the use of traits and stereotypes recognisable to the audience.

Such traits are greatly varied, but traits of exaggerated masculinity and femininity, vanity, and hypersexuality are frequent. Queer coding is a concept both in the discussion of media portrayal of LGBT people and academic research involving queer theory or gender studies.

**2. Theoretical FRAMEWORK**

This chapter delves deeper into the scope, technique, and premise of my thesis. Existing studies on Disney's ethnicity and race dynamics will be examined, as well as my research problem. I intend to demonstrate what we already know about this subject and how my research contributes to it by doing so. A significant section of this chapter has been reserved for a review of my primary source, in which I will emphasise the importance of the films selected for my research.

A review of the important concepts and theories will be provided, and by the end of this chapter, we would have all of the required tools to go to the thesis's core.

**2.1 Previous Research:**

Disney—the man, the studio, and the films—have been the subject of not only widespread criticism but also a significant amount of scientific inquiry, with multiple volumes published in support of and against Disney's position on diversity since the 1990s. *Multiculturalism and the Mouse: Race and Sex in Disney Entertainment*, *Deconstructing Disney*, and *The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of 8 Innocence* are three books that could be useful in this study. These three significant publications on Disney's representation of ethnicity and race were all issued at least five years apart.

Presently, the Disney Company is one of the world's most renowned media and entertainment companies, and it's practically impossible to avoid viewing one of its works. The impact of cinema, media, and language on our world realities has been extensively studied, and how race or ethnicity subgroups are depicted in popular animated films will undoubtedly have an impact on children and adults, whether they are in the minority or the majority.

However, because Disney is an "international family entertainment and media enterprise," and Disney's movies (both newer versions and classics) remain vital aspects of many children's lives, it's arguable that the company has played, and will continue to play, a significant role in shaping our world realities.

As a result, The Walt Disney Company bears a significant amount of responsibility, which is why I believe it is critical to discuss what these commodities truly imply. I'd like to emphasise that this thesis will focus on racial and ethnic portrayals in animated Disney films, with no reference to Walt Disney or any of the studio's other non-cinematic segments.

However, owing to the Walt Disney Company's enormous size, including all of its animated products in a study like this is nearly impossible. As a result, I'll only discuss feature-length films produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios, a division of the Walt Disney Company's Walt Disney Studios. Because of the large amount of source material produced by focusing primarily on Walt Disney Animation Studios, the movies had to meet extra criteria before they could be designated primary references.

Deconstructing Disney is still one of the most commonly mentioned critical editions on Disney and diversity, with volumes like *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*. While the authors cover topics like gender, religion and sexuality throughout the book, they devote an entire chapter to racial and ethnic communities.

## 2.2. Hypothesis and Research Questions

While the thesis topic may have already been determined, the study's research questions have yet to be presented. These questions were created to help me narrow my focus and define the thesis's goals and constraints even more clearly. The main research topic for this project is straightforward:

**Q1.** How has the representation of race and ethnicity at Walt Disney Animation Studios changed over time?

Because of the range and variety of Disney's output, I'll limit myself to animated feature films created by Walt Disney Animation Studios. For the reasons described above, I've opted to concentrate on films released following the start of the Disney Renaissance (which began with the release of *The Little Mermaid* in 1989) — giving me roughly 30 years of Disney productions to examine.

However, there is one more question to be asked.

**Q2.** At Walt Disney Animation Studios, what role does race and ethnicity play? In movies like *The Lion King*, *Aladdin*, *Lilo & Stitch*, *Mulan*, *Big Hero 6*, *The Princess and the Frog*, and *Moana*?

As this thesis is clearly written from a Western perspective, "racial and ethnic minority" refers to races and ethnicities which are considered minorities in Western modern civilization.

Furthermore, the spotlight will not only be on the minority characters, but also on the various cultures that Disney will depict, as this combination may provide moviegoers a generic perspective of the minority. It would be unjust to classify this research question as secondary as it will surely address an important aspect of this investigation. The most important concerns will hopefully be emphasised, and the study findings will be used to investigate the core research topic. These conclusions will be founded on current literary theory as well as historical study and critique, such as those discussed previously in this chapter.

Disney appears to be becoming less problematic and more culturally sensitive over time. Focus groups representing the people portrayed through animation have been consulted for various movies, and the creative people behind the films often spend some time in the nation or culture where the film would be set. Nonetheless, even these measures were insufficient.

While institutional racism (as shown in some of the original Disney films) may have disappeared, many allegedly subconscious Disney actions can still be considered problematic. The two Disney films examined in my thesis were chosen in part because of the heavy condemnation they had received. With a greater focus on a larger number of Disney movies and varying degrees of relevant criticism, it should be clear whether or not this theory is valid.

### Argument:

The psychological repercussions of Disney's messages being distributed to thousands of kids are tremendous when it comes to how this big corporation affects children's social ideals and should be taken into ethical account by consumers and producers alike. The solid belief that Disney socially trains children through gender performance, identity construction, and racial stereotypes, thereby affecting society as a whole, is supported by sources such as Bell et al., (1995), and Strasburger et al., (2014) and, Giroux (2010). These themes are implanted in children as they learn through these practices, and they will eventually replicate them in their own children. An argument is thus formed inside the evaluation of how incredibly ubiquitous the enchantment of Disney actually is, how their effect is felt inside a child's environment itself, or what to do about this widespread issue in society today through a studied analysis within the modern literature.

### Proposal:

While scholars, educators, and individuals have discussed the topic of early entertainment education, the fact is that Disney creates a stage with accentuated gender identities, explicit sexual themes, and problematic relationship management.

All of these factors contribute to a young, developing mind's concept of self. Whatever one's point of view, Disney is a latent educator who uses cultural themes to teach youngsters how to operate in society, how to dress, how to act, and, finally, how to mature. As a result, there is a problem, and a solution is just over the horizon. As social educators, childhood entertainment educators must be held to a greater standard of accountability.

## 2.3. Source Materials:

First, I'll explain how I selected these particular films. Eliminating material from a study like this could be problematic, as some selections could lead to biased results. As a consequence, the animated feature films included in this study were carefully chosen based on the stated criteria below.

Based on my thesis explanation, I'd like to emphasize movies that people from all around the world have actually viewed. Would it matter if Disney made the most holistic and culturally sensitive film ever made if no one saw it? As a result, the second condition is related to popularity, which is a

tough concept to grasp and to which a subjective viewpoint cannot be applied. A film with a high international gross may be considered a popular production since people paid to see it, paraphernalia was sold, and people were generally exposed to the movie and what it might symbolise.

Unfortunately, such data is difficult to come by, and the only figures commonly available are box office receipts. This is an unreliable characteristic in this context, as numerous Hollywood blockbusters with big box-office receipts have received negative reviews. These "poor" movies are rarely re-watched, and they may just be "forgotten." This is why another aspect of popularity – ratings – must be addressed.

There are numerous mediums for rating films; however, the Internet Movie Database, or IMDB, is one of the most prominent nowadays, and it is to this source that we look for more information. Unlike sites like Rotten Tomatoes, IMDB's ratings are exclusively based on user feedback, making it more meaningful for this criterion. A film with a solid general audience rating and a large initial international revenue will undoubtedly be remembered and replayed many times. To determine the remaining Disney films' popularity, we use the following criteria:

1. The film's global box office gross surpasses \$314 million dollars (inflation-adjusted).
2. On IMDB, the film currently has a 7.1 or higher rating.

### 2.2.1 The Disney Renaissance:

As previously said, the Disney Renaissance is one of the most successful periods of Disney animation; despite the fact that the animation technique became more demanding, the films themselves made more money than ever before. Many of these Renaissance animations have previously been (or are currently being) adapted into live-action feature films by Walt Disney Studios, thanks to the popularity of the films published during this time period. In other words, although they were aired in the previous millennium, these films are still relevant.

The majority of Disney's Renaissance films incorporate non-Western locales and protagonists, and three of the films examined in this study are found here. The list of relevant films starts with *Aladdin*, an Academy Award-winning box-office triumph whose plot and characters are partially inspired by one of *The Thousand and One Nights'* most well-known stories.

This movie, directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, is set in the imaginary and mystical city of Agrabah at an unknown point in history and tells the story of the orphan Aladdin who discovers a magical lamp containing a genie. The genie provides Aladdin with three wishes, and the orphan child sets out to transform his life in order to capture Princess Jasmine's affection. *Aladdin* drew a lot of criticism from its spectators, notably the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, despite becoming an instant success. Many aspects of Disney's representation of the Middle East were deemed inaccurate and misleading, and *Aladdin* became one of the most divisive films of all time as a result of the film's post-Gulf War setting and orientalist stereotypes.

### 2.2.2 The Disney Post-Renaissance:

After another four years, the Disney Renaissance comes to an end, and a number of less popular feature films are made before Disney's 2002 release *Lilo & Stitch*. The fact that *Lilo & Stitch* seems to be the only movie from this period to pass the previously established popularity criteria shows that Disney's Post-Renaissance was certainly not as lucrative as its prior era. The film's success is backed up by the fact that it is the only Post-Renaissance movie yet to be adapted into a live-action/CG version in the near future (McNary, 2018).

In this story, Lilo, a lonely orphan who is misunderstood, befriends the creature Stitch, an alien experiment confused for a dog who is later adopted by Lilo and her sister. *Lilo & Stitch* is among the few Post-Renaissance movies set in a non-Western setting, with much of the action taking place on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. Although it is unknown whether Disney's decision to return exotic civilizations contributed to the film's success, this fact makes this feature extremely interesting for this research. *Lilo & Stitch* is directed by Chris Sanders and Dean DeBlois, two of the persons most involved in the story-writing of *Mulan*, and, like *Mulan*, this film has not received the same level of criticism as *Aladdin* or *The Lion King*. Even when compared to *Moana* (also set in Polynesia but released almost a decade later), *Lilo & Stitch* may be considered the more progressive and culturally sensitive picture, as it appears to have gotten greater accolades for its depiction of Polynesian culture and people.

All of this could lead to an interesting parallel between *Lilo & Stitch* and the other movies in the analysis, as one might wonder whether this picture is indeed more progressive and culturally aware than the others. Are certain creative brains simply more sensitive to racial and ethnic portrayal, or is *Lilo & Stitch's* excellent reception due to other factors?

### 2.2.3 The Disney Revival Era:

The Revival Era, as its name suggests, brought back much of Disney's former splendour, commencing with the release of *The Princess and the Frog*. This is Musker and Clements' fifth Disney feature, and while the film's success and importance in the resurrection of Disney animation have previously been addressed, the plot has yet to be revealed. Tiana, the African-American leader of the narrative, is mistakenly transformed into a frog after kissing one.

Tiana's transformation brings her and the frog-prince Naveen on a voyage into the Louisiana swamp, where they meet new friends while searching for a method to remove the frog curse imposed by Dr Facilier, an evil voodoo witch. Disney worked with 17 African-American focus groups to make the story of the first African-American princess as progressive and devoid of racial bias as possible. *Big Hero 6* was launched after a string of popular sequels to *The Princess and the Frog*. This picture, directed by Don Hall and Chris Williams, was even more profitable than any of its Disney Revival forerunners, yet differs significantly from them.

*Big Hero 6*, inspired by the Marvel comic book of the same name, is Disney's first foray into the superhero genre. Hiro Hamada, a 14-year-old mixed-race protagonist, and his healthcare robot Baymax are the focus of the plot. Following the murder of Hiro's brother Tadashi, the designer of Baymax, the lead eventually organises a superhero team made up of himself, Baymax, and Tadashi's former university buddies in order to unravel the mystery surrounding his brother's death.

The film also takes place in the fictional city of San Fransokyo, which is a fictional hybrid city that combines elements of both San Francisco and Tokyo. *Big Hero 6* garnered a lot of attention for its multicultural environment, and the picture was generally well-received by audiences. The film's

multiculturalism will be a fascinating topic to discuss, especially in light of Disney's representation of Asian culture in *Mulan* and Disney's other, previously mentioned, imaginary city Agrabah.

*Moana* is the most recent Disney film to be included in this analysis, and it is correlated to many of the other titles. This is one of three focus films made by Disney vets Musker and Clements. It was also co-directed by Hall and Williams, who also directed *Big Hero 6*.

It can even be tied to the study's lone Post Renaissance film, *Lilo & Stitch* because it shares some of the same locations. Both films are set in Polynesia, however, although *Lilo & Stitch* is plainly situated in modern-day Hawaii, the fictional incidents of *Moana* took place approximately 2000 years ago. *Moana*, an islander and the local chief's daughter, is at the centre of the plot and is eager to explore the seas.

*Moana* sets off to enlist the help of the demi-god Maui when her people start to struggle to make ends meet on their dwindling island, and the two embark on a voyage similar to that of *The Princess and the Frog*. Disney's production of *Moana*, like that film, was impacted by appropriate focus groups. Despite getting fewer criticisms than *The Princess and the Frog*, *Moana* had sparked debate, particularly over Maui's portrayal as an overweight, lethargic guy rather than a thin, powerful demigod.

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### 3. LITERARY, MEDIA AND OTHER THEORIES

We now know the subject matter of this research. We are aware of previous research and understand how this research fits into the larger picture. We've defined the research questions and are prepared to start the analysis. However, we must still explain the theories and concepts that are pertinent to our research.

While it has been determined that a qualitative approach to the seven films chosen is required to address the thesis's core research question, the precise theory required for the analysis has yet to be established. Because we're talking about race and ethnicity in Western films, important theories like Disneyfication, imagology and postcolonialism need to be revised and discussed in the subchapters that follow.

#### 3.1 Imagology:

"The practice of attributing distinct attributes or even characters to various societies, races, or 'nations' is both ancient and prevalent." The study of the created representations of national characteristics in literature, known as imagology, has only been around for a few years. While early studies of national traits and attributes aimed to prove that certain behaviours and ideas were associated with a specific race or nationality, current imagology appears to be doing the exact reverse.

Following WWII, there was renewed interest in the notion of national characters and attributes, the notion of stereotypes grew in popularity, and imagology arose. While imagology has its roots in comparative literature, it has evolved into a multidisciplinary field with significant ties to the social sciences (Chew, 2006). The analyses in this study will also be subjected to imagology.

#### 3.2 Postcolonialism and orientalism:

Since there have been Western colonisers and colonies, there have always been Western texts on these colonies and their people. The majority of these texts were written about colonial people by colonists. As the name implies, postcolonialism is concerned with what happens after colonisation. Camelia Elias (*The Way of the Sign*, 2011) expands on this concept by emphasising the differences between "postcolonialism" and "post colonialism." While postmodern criticism has focused on the aftermath, effects, and products of imperialism and colonialism, postcolonial critique is concerned with representations of communities and places prior to, during, and post colonisation (Elias, 2011). The significance of colonised peoples' own depictions of themselves and their traditions is emphasised in postcolonial literary criticism, which regards Western publications about the colonies as unreliable tales. Because all of the films in this study are set in nations influenced by the British Empire, and because Disney is now such a large Western organisation, postcolonialism will surely remain important in this research.

#### 3.3 Disneyfication:

As previously said, Disneyfication is an important concept in this concept. With so many research on Disney in so many fields, the term "Disneyfication" has grown rather vague. Disneyfication, according to a sociology-related definition, is the change of society into anything imitating a Disney theme park, all in the service of Western globalisation, consumerism, and merchandising.

"The transformation (as of anything genuine or terrifying) into totally safe and controlled enjoyment or a setting with equivalent features," according to Merriam-Webster (Merriam-Webster Inc., 2019). This phrase can be applied to both sociology and literary studies.

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## 4. HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

Walter Elias Disney was born in the city of Illinois on December 5, 1901. Walter "Walt" Disney and his brother Roy Disney founded the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio in 1923 (now the Walt Disney Studio). Mickey Mouse was born four years later. While the Walt Disney Company is clearly one of the most well-known companies of our time, it is also one of the most controversial, since instances of the company's racial and cultural prejudice can be seen in Disney films from all ages.

The world of animation was forever revolutionised with the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937. It was among the earliest full-length animated films ever created. This is the beginning of Disney's Golden Age (1937-1942), which features movies like the successful *Pinocchio* adaptation (1940), the aforementioned *Dumbo*, and the hit *Bambi* (1942). Another film from the Golden Age that is still criticised for its racial overtones is *Fantasia* (1940). Sunflower, a centaur with the torso of a black girl and the bottom body of a donkey, was a divisive character in the movie.

This character was widely panned for its caricatured appearance and duty as a servant to the "white" centaurs, and Disney eventually removed it (Byrne & McQuillan, 1999). Although some content was controversial, the majority of films made in the Golden Age were extremely successful. In 1941, however, Disney was on the brink of insolvency and, in order to stay afloat, began creating government-sponsored short films.

The seven dwarfs who journey to town to sell their freshly discovered gems for war bonds (7 Wise Dwarfs, 1941) and Donald Duck who fights with thoughts of residing in Nazi Germany (Der Fuehrer's Face, 1940) were among the characters featured in these short films. This era in Disney animation is known as the Wartime Era, which is not surprising (1943-1949). Due to Disney's financial problems at the time, feature films based on both animation and action movies were made (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018).

Another Disney product that was highly condemned for its image of African Americans and black history was the box-office blockbuster *Song of the South* (1946). *Song of the South* is set in a post-slavery America in which racism does not appear to exist and everyone looks to be happy, regardless of race or status; a phenomenon described by Richard M. Breaux as "a cleansing of African-American history and denial of its and our nation's racist past" (2010: 399). According to Breaux, underlying racism may still be present in many Disney films, but more explicit themes like those in *Fantasia* may have faded over time as Western culture got more varied and socially conscious.

While several of the films produced in Disney's Silver Age (1950-1967) were lauded as improvements over Disney's works produced during WWII, a number of them remain problematic. Many Disney issues, such as the highly comical Native Americans in *Peter Pan* (1953) and the main song "What Made the Red Man Red," persist to this day.

The antagonistic Siamese cats in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) are obviously based on negative preconceptions about East Asians, whereas the apes in *The Jungle Book* (1967) are the only animals in the picture with African-American accents. Furthermore, the orangutan King Louie sings "I Wan'na Be Like You," which depicts the monkeys' yearning to become even more human, which many critics have found distasteful owing to the animals' supposed stereotypical features (see e.g. Giroux, 2010).

*The Jungle Book* was one of Walt Disney's final four animated feature films, and his death in 1966 is often regarded as the end of the Silver Age.

## 5. DISNEY AND MINORITY REPRESENTATION

### 5.1 LGBTQIA+ Representation and Queer Coding:

The portrayal of the LGBT+ population and how queer-coding is common in most Disney films will be demonstrated using prior Disney films as examples.

Because Hollywood was forbidden to represent LGBTQ+ characters overtly for a long time, gay people were presented as a mash-up of many stereotypes, a technique known as queer-coding. Sadly, since the dominant American society of the early twentieth century could not accept gay people in heroic roles, nearly all of these queer-coded characters were villains.

Disney villains are known for being queer-coded, so keep that in mind. In fact, within LGBTQ+ groups, the role of Disney villains in allowing children to process their own sexual identities is still a point of debate. It's interesting reviewing some of the great Disney villains who were queer-coded now that LGBT individuals have equal representation in the media.

#### (a) Ratigan (The Great Mouse Detective):



Ratigan, the criminal boss, plans to dethrone the Queen and take control of Mousedom. Ratigan aspires to be the next "queen" by being "on top," and his manner and gestures are so queer-coded and exaggerated that they demand their own music solo.

He has one, and it starts with him twirling his wrists and trying to arrange his hair. Ratigan isn't the only character in *The Great Mouse Detective* who is gay-coded; his enemy Basil is also packed with LGBT subtext, which has generated in a slew of fan art and publications.

**(b) Hades (Hercules):**

The Greek God of the Underworld saunters over his domain, his shaky wrists twitching in dramatic movements. He applies lipstick and nibbles or curls his bottom lip throughout the movie.

In a not-so-subtle kind of symbolism, his hair is nearly burning. For those unfamiliar with the phrase, "flaming" refers to LGBT people who are particularly flamboyant. Nonetheless, this version of Hades is more culturally sensitive and acceptable than the other queer-coded characters on our list.

**(c) Captain Hook (Peter Pan):**

Captain Hook, a pirate with a flashy hairdo, feathered cap, and snide swinging motions, is one of Disney's most annoying villains. His same-sex life-mate, Mr. Smee, also lives with him. Captain Hook is a sailor, just like Ratcliffe.

From the spirals of his waxed moustache to his signature hook, nothing about him is straight. He's also fascinated with finding a young kid named Peter Pan, who, like Jafar, equates being homosexual (or at least, feminine) with paedophilia in an inappropriate manner.

**(d) Jafar (Aladdin):**



Although the Kingdom of Agrabah was not really a real kingdom, it appears to have been inspired by the Abbasid Caliphate during Islam's Golden Age, when gay societies flourished in places like Baghdad, Iraq. It's no surprise; therefore, that Jafar is queer-coded.

Apart from the not-so-subtle metaphor of all his might being trapped in a magical phallus (i.e. his staff) and his preoccupation with the young lovely Aladdin, Jafar is presented in a manner that drips clichéd sarcasm. Jafar's fascination with Aladdin, on the other hand, might be seen as disturbing now since it inadvertently obscures homosexuality and pederasty.

**(e) Ratcliffe (Pocahontas):**



Ratcliffe is a great example of a fop, a feminised guy from the Early Modern era who was fashionable and prone to typically feminine affectations. Ratcliffe marches proudly over his ship's deck backed by English marines, clad in vibrant magenta tones with pink accents and ribbons in his hair.

It doesn't help that the navy is sometimes seen as inherently gay since, until recently, primarily male naval members did not have the opportunity to socialise with women for lengthy periods of time. If Ratcliffe wasn't such a bloodthirsty tyrant, he'd be a delightful criminal.

**(f) Ursula (The Little Mermaid):**



Ursula, the sea witch, is an epitome of a queer-coded character. Ursula's bottom half is a wriggling jumble of phallic tentacles, while all of the merfolk in the movie have human anatomy below the waistline replaced with fish parts. Ursula is based on Divine of the Pink Flamingos, who was once crowned "The Drag Queen of the Century" by *People* magazine.

Divine influenced much of Ursula's fashion choices, including her eyelashes, love of expensive jewellery, and even her figure. Divine died before he could see *The Little Mermaid*, but those who knew him well think he would have loved Ursula.

## 5.2. Ethnic Groups and Minorities:

Ethnicity is defined as "status in respect of participation in a group viewed as ultimately of common lineage, or finding a shared political or historical tradition; ethnic character" by the Oxford English Dictionary (2014)

While many people are acquainted with terms like race, ethnicity, multiculturalism, diversity, and minority, a number of these particular ideas will need to be explained before continuing on with the research to avoid misunderstanding. Race is perhaps one of the most difficult terms in this subject, owing to its contentious, convoluted, and ever-changing connotations.

Starting as a denominator for individuals of diverse families and ancestry, race grew to refer to people of various cultures and nations before becoming a categorical term for the classification of people based on their physical characteristics. Georges Cuvier separated mankind into three distinct sorts at the turn of the nineteenth century: Caucasian, Ethiopian, and Mongolian. Cuvier stated that Caucasians were superior to other races based on their physical characteristics - an idea that has been used to excuse numerous atrocities since then. Thankfully, this is no longer the public or scientific opinion, and race is no longer considered a biological notion in that sense.

Physical qualities frequently determine race, but cultural variables such as religion, country, or language define ethnicity. A person can be classed as belonging to many ethnic groups under this criteria, however, most individuals are regarded as belonging to a single race (or being mixed-race). However, the connotations and definitions of these terms may continue to overlap, particularly since the definition of race is still somewhat ambiguous. This uncertainty may be seen in the United States Decennial Census, which divides the US population into various races for statistical purposes.

Because of this uncertainty, I've opted to approach the idea of race in the same way as the National Research Council describes it in *Measuring Racial Discrimination* (2004): There is no universal understanding of race. Rather, race is a complicated notion that is best understood as a subjective social construct based on observable or attributed qualities that have gained socially relevant significance for social science purposes. (National Research Council, 2004, p. 38.)

However, in this study, ignoring or favouring the categories of race or ethnicity may not result in helpful analysis. For the purposes of this study, it doesn't make a difference whether Aladdin is Middle Eastern in terms of race or ethnicity, and because there are clearly 21 different interpretations of the words, I've tried to treat them (more or less) as a unit – taking into consideration the previously mentioned overall strands of race being concerned with physical features and ethnicity being concerned with culture. To put it another way, this research does not focus just on racial and ethnic minorities, but both are included to guarantee that no significant minority is neglected.

While the protagonist Belle from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (set in France) could be deemed an ethnic minority if she lived in the United States, she is not an ethnic minority when given that the entire Western world – and therefore, as previously stated, this type of personality was not included in this study.

There is some variance in the depiction of various nationalities and civilizations, as can be seen in this section. The ethnic minorities depicted in *Lilo & Stitch* and *The Princess and the Frog* may explain why these films deviated from the previous graph's normally rising line of progression. *Lilo & Stitch*, a film about a population that looks to have had a more appropriate depiction in books and movies in general, came in first place and may be considered more liberal than its predecessors.

*The Princess and the Frog*, on the other hand, represents a group that is frequently misunderstood, and as a result, it lags behind other films of the time in terms of progressiveness and cultural sensitivity. To put it another way, while Disney's filmmaking is becoming more culturally sensitive with time, there are still some races that Disney may find more difficult to deal with. The classification of the third anomaly in the graph, *Moana*, as one of the most evolved movies in this study, may also be explained based on what has been stated in this subchapter.

However, the fact that the most noteworthy film examined in this research is still the third most progressed film poses some questions. As a result, other elements may have contributed to *Moana's* reputation as a less liberal character than *Big Hero 6*.

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## 6. CONCLUSION

Using a census analysis, Zurcher et al. look at how family interactions are depicted in 84 Disney animated movies from 1937 to 2018. The writers investigated this issue based on their research on children's identifying with fictional characters and their capacity to get insights into personal difficulties. The authors of a recent research applauded Disney movies for allowing youngsters from disproportionately single-parent households to understand how characters from similar backgrounds deal with issues they face.

Disney movies may serve as role models for dealing with difficult life situations. More realistic pictures of death have become accessible as models of how to handle and exhibit emotion as more individuals experience the death of a loved one. When the protagonists were upset, they turned to friends or family for solace, demonstrating the importance of support networks in building bonds that aid in healthy bereavement.

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