



**Kaunas University of Technology**

Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities

**Exploring Masculinity: A Comparative Study of Male  
Characters' Representation in Disney Animated Films  
between 1990 and 2020**

Master's Final Degree Project

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## **Exploring Masculinity: A Comparative Study of Male Characters' Representation in Disney Animated Films between 1990 and 2020**

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### **Summary**

The main object of this research – 18 Walt Disney Company movies from two different time periods – 10 years' time period from 1990 to 2000 and 20 years' time period from 2000 to 2020. The main purpose of this research is to explore how masculinity is represented in Disney animated films and how it may have changed over 30 years. This paper consists of content analysis of chosen movies and comparative analysis between two different time periods.

These days, the Walt Disney Company is a global cultural phenomenon that reflects and offers insights into social values, culture and people's perceptions of certain ideas. Disney is one of the most popular multinational mass media and entertainment companies, whose animated films captivate the whole world with their enchanting characters, wonderful relatable stories and innovatively created animation. Disney animated films can now even be considered as the new children's fairy tales, but as in fairy tales, it is quite common for Disney films to portray characters in stereotypical ways. Disney princesses and feminine stereotypes are discussed quite often, because feminist movements always bring up and talk about the differences in women's roles, but male stereotypes are sometimes forgotten. Male gender stereotypes may at first glance appear to be positive, because men are depicted as dominant, strong and do not feel oppressed in the same way that women do. However, it is rarely considered that it is this portrayal of masculinity in films that leads to boys developing a sense of what a 'real man' should look like, and if they don't fulfil these criteria, they can be humiliated, which can be detrimental to their emotional health.

Children observe stereotypical, toxic or hegemonic representations of masculinity in Disney films and form an idea of what it should look like. Since gender is considered a social construct that is formed when children observe different gender expressions in their environment, it is very important what content children watch. What adds to the influence of Disney is that Disney films are mostly watched on streaming services or television, which is still one of the most popular media and can still shape children's opinions and thoughts about certain concepts very quickly. The fact that the messages portrayed on television have a significant impact on people's perception of the world is supported by Cultivation Theory. The Social Congruity Theory also reminds us that children tend to imitate the behavior they see in their environment, so it is very possible that children will imitate the toxic behavior they see on television.

Analysing the results obtained, all the examined Disney films share common features. Villains are portrayed with stereotypical masculine traits, while protagonists who display such characteristics are prevented from achieving their goals. The protagonists undergo emotional growth, realizing that

abandoning traits like dominance, aggression, and emotional detachment helps them achieve their goals and form friendships. Male friendships are shown as fulfilling and meaningful, and male characters are usually motivated by personal goals or helping others, rather than romantic love. Modern films rarely feature a prince rescuing a princess, reflecting a shift away from traditional romantic dependency. Additionally, women have begun to be portrayed as villains, a trend absent between 1990 and 2000, indicating that both genders can embody villains.

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## Santrauka

Pagrindinis šio tyrimo objektas – 18 „Walt Disney Company“ filmų iš dviejų skirtingų laikotarpių – iš 10 metų laikotarpio nuo 1990 iki 2000 ir iš 20 metų laikotarpio nuo 2000 iki 2020 m. Pagrindinis šio tyrimo tikslas – ištirti, kaip vyriškumas yra reprezentuojamas „Disney“ animaciniuose filmuose ir kaip vyriškumo vaizdavimas galėjo keistis per 30 metų laikotarpį. Šį darbą sudaro pasirinktų filmų turinio analizė ir lyginamoji dviejų skirtingų laikotarpių analizė.

Dabar „Walt Disney Company“ yra pasaulinis kultūros fenomenas, atspindintis šių dienų visuomenės socialines vertybes, kultūrą ir žmonių požiūrį. „Disney“ yra viena populiariausių tarptautinių žiniasklaidos ir pramogų industrijos kompanijų, o jų animaciniai filmai visą pasaulį žavi dėl išskirtinių personažų, įtaigių istorijų ir modernios animacijos. „Disney“ animaciniai filmai dabar netgi gali būti laikomi naujoviškomis vaikiškomis pasakomis. Tačiau, kaip ir seniau pasakose, taip ir dabar „Disney“ filmuose personažai gali būti vaizduojami gana stereotipiškai. Apie „Disney“ princesės ir stereotipus, taikomus moterims, diskutuojama gana dažnai, kadangi feministiniai judėjimai šio klausimo neleidžia pamiršti, tačiau stereotipai, taikomi vyrams, dažniau lieka nuošalyje. Vyrų lyčių stereotipai iš pirmo žvilgsnio gali atrodyti kaip teigiami, nes vyrai vaizduojami dominuojantys, stiprūs ir nesijaučia engiami taip, kaip moterys. Tačiau būtent toks vyriškumo vaizdavimas filmuose paskatina berniukus susidaryti „tikro vyro“ paveikslą. Vaikams gali būti sudaroma nuomonė, kad būtina sekti ekranuose matomais pavyzdžiais ir atitikti būtent šiuos standartus, o jų neatitikant, gresia būti pažemintais ar atstumtais – tokios situacijos gali kenkti ir vaikų emocinei sveikatai.

Vaikai „Disney“ filmuose dažnai mato stereotipiškai, toksiškai ar hegemoniškai vaizduojamus vyriškus veikėjus ir susiformuoja vaizdinį, kaip atrodo jų sektini pavyzdžiai. Kadangi socialinė lytis gali būti laikoma socialiniu konstruktą, kuris susidaro vaikams stebint skirtingas lyčių raiškas savo aplinkoje, labai svarbu, koks turinys pasiekia vaikus. „Disney“ įtaką dar labiau padidina tai, kad „Disney“ filmai dažniausiai žiūrimi per prenumeruojamas svetaines arba per televiziją, kuri vis dar yra viena populiariausių žiniasklaidos priemonių ir labai greitai gali padaryti įtaką vaikų besiformuojančiam požiūriui. Tai, kad per televiziją vaizduojamos žinutės daro didelę įtaką žmonių pasaulio suvokimui, patvirtina kultivacijos teorija. Socialinio kognityvinė teorija teigia, kad vaikai linkę mėgdžioti elgesį, kurį mato savo aplinkoje, todėl labai tikėtina, kad vaikai mėgdžios toksišką elgesį, kurį mato per televiziją.

Atlikus tyrimą, pastebime, kad visi nagrinėti „Disney“ filmai turi bendrą bruožą. Beveik visi antagonistai filmuose vaizduojami su stereotipiškais vyriškais bruožais, bet būtent tokios savybės

protagonistams dažniausiai trukdo pasiekti savo tikslų ir jie yra priversti jas pakeisti. Protagonistai dažniausiai filmo eigoje patiria emocinį augimą ir supranta, kad atsakius noro dominuoti, agresijos ar savo emocijų ignoravimo, jiems labiau pasiseks ir jie pasieks tai, ko nori. Santykiai taip veikėjų vyrų dažnai vaizduojami, kaip auginantys, pilnaverčiai ir prasmingi. Veikėjus vyrus dažniausiai skatina asmeniniai tikslai ir noras padėti kitiems, o ne romantiška meilė. Naujuosiuose tyrinėtuose filmuose atsispindėjo tai, kad filmukuose nebėra vaizduojami princai, gelbstintys princesės, o lyčių lygybės kontekste tai leidžia atsispirti nuo stereotipiškos tradicinės priklausomybės romantiškai meilei. Vėlesniuose filmuose piktadariai buvo vaizduojami ne tik su itin vyriškais bruožais, bet žymiai įvairiau. Tai gali skatinti modernesnį požiūrį į itin „vyriškus“ bruožus – anksčiau dažniau manyta, kad itin „vyriški“ bruožai simbolizuoja griežtą ir piktavališką veikėją, tačiau šis požiūris nyksta ir skatinama mąstyti plačiau – ne visada veikėjo išvaizda išduoda apie jo tikslus

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## Introduction

Nowadays, The Walt Disney Company is not only a multinational mass media and entertainment company, but it can also be seen as a cultural phenomenon that reflects and shapes social values, culture narratives and collective imagination. Disney is one of the most popular sources of media involved in children's everyday lives (Giroux and Pollock, 2010). The Walt Disney Company was established in 1923. Founded as an animation studio, it quickly gained recognition with iconic characters, such as Mickey Mouse, and films, such as "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" (1937), which was the first full-length animated feature film. This initial success paved the way for Disney's remarkable journey to becoming a global entertainment powerhouse. In 1955, Disneyland, the world's first modern theme park, opened its gates in Anaheim, California. Today, Disney operates six resort destinations, attracting millions of guests annually, with Walt Disney World Resort in Florida being the most visited theme park complex worldwide. The acquisition of Pixar Animation Studios in 2006, Marvel Entertainment in 2009, and Lucasfilm in 2012 expanded Disney's creative portfolio, leading to blockbuster franchises like "Toy Story," "The Avengers," and "Star Wars." These strategic moves not only boosted Disney's revenue but also solidified its position as a dominant force in popular culture (Sengupta, Bamel, Singh, 2015). According to Walt Disney official website (2023) recently, Disney has made significant strides in the realm of streaming entertainment with the launch of Disney+, which garnered over 100 million subscribers within its first year, reshaping the digital media consumption landscape. The Walt Disney Company's enduring legacy of storytelling, technological advancements, and global influence continues to captivate audiences and shape the world of entertainment for generations to come. has had a profound impact on youth culture because of his ability to appeal to universal human experiences through a diverse portfolio of characters. (Griszbacher, Kemény, Varga, 2022). Walt Disney Company is well-known for its captivating, animated movies, which have evolved from daily fairytales to become more engaging, playful, and influential than those found on other media channels or in other forms. Disney movies are famous for its ability to create unforgettable and relatable characters that appeal to young audiences, for professional animation and captivating storytelling. Disney's narratives are infused with universal themes of love, friendship, and self-discovery that have global appeal, fostering emotional connections with viewers across cultures and generations (Bhadra, 2023).

However, in most old fairytales, as well as in Disney movies, gender roles are often expressed in stereotypical forms (Pawłowska, 2021). Some of the well-known examples would be the beautiful princess waiting for her savior, elderly angry witch with grey hair, the brave prince with a lot of muscles, the wise man taking care of the whole family and so on. These very common examples provide children with a simplified framework for beginning to understand society's expectations and traditional gender roles. The simplicity of the stories in Disney movies makes it easy for children to internalize the messages presented. According to research, Disney animated movies could result in how children understand gender and let them create stereotypical views (Dynes, 2021). The study of Disney fairy tales and films has given considerable attention to the portrayal of female characters, drawing attention to the commonality of stereotypical depictions of princesses. However, there has been less focus on how masculinity is portrayed in these movies. Male characters in Disney films are typically portrayed in a favorable light, but it is crucial to consider how this depiction might influence children's perceptions of the world and their beliefs. While analyzing how children's perspective of the world can be influenced by media, it is important to mention that gender can be seen as social

construct by itself. The concept of gender as a social construct emphasizes that the roles, behaviors, expectations, and characteristics associated with being male or female are not necessarily related to biological differences, but are socially and culturally constructed (Butler, 1990; de Beauvoir, 1949; Walby, 1988; Kimmel, 2011).

Furthermore, the notion of masculinity is rooted in cultural, social, and historical contexts and includes a variety of behaviors, characteristics, and expectations associated with being a man. It is common for growing boys to believe that they are born to be our leaders, our bosses, our heads of households, the masculine men the society wants them to be, and it is important to understand how dangerous it is to construct masculinity in this way (Ford, 2019). Research shows that the presence of toxic masculinity in social environments can affect men's emotional health and every stage of life, especially childhood (Harris, 2021; Ford, 2019). Sociologist Raewyn Connell emphasizes that one of the most common stereotypes about men can be associated with hegemonic masculinity. It is a concept that refers to the dominant or culturally idealized form of masculinity within a given society or culture. (Connell, 2005). Characteristics of hegemonic masculinity often include traits such as dominance, assertiveness, emotional restraint, and control. Men who conform to these ideals are often seen as more socially powerful and enjoy certain privileges within the societal structure. These stereotypes are very common in Disney animated movies as well. The main difference between feminine and masculine stereotypes is that archetypes for women are usually negative (weak, dependent on a man, not self-supporting, naive, emotional, interested on beauty and clothes etc.) and it looks like that stereotypes for men have more positive tone (strong, wise, rich, dominating, interested in business, well-being etc.). The real problem arises when these stereotypes set unreachable standards for men and seek to prescribe a solitary archetype for what it means to be masculine. Failure to conform to these standards can result in a lack of respect and feelings of insufficiency.

In this thesis the main research object is masculinity representation in Disney movies in 30 years' time period. Given that films are typically viewed via television, it's crucial to grasp the extent of television's influence on children's development. Cultivation Theory, developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross, is relevant while talking about the relationship between children and television. The theory suggests that prolonged exposure to specific messages and representations in media, particularly television, can shape and cultivate an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and understanding of the world. (G. Gerbner, L. Gross, 1972). Children absorb information very quickly and are particularly susceptible to implementing and copying things that they see in social life. When talking about children modeling what they see in their social life, it is important to mention social learning theory, developed by psychologist Albert Bandura. Social Learning Theory evolved into Social Cognitive Theory in 1986, with an emphasis on social impact as well as external and internal social reinforcement. Social Cognitive Theory considers the particular way in which people acquire and sustain behavior, as well as the social setting in which they do so (Bandura, 1986, 2001). Cultivation Theory and Social Cognitive Theory are useful tools for comprehending how children perceive gender. According to Cultivation Theory, children's perceptions of gender are shaped by media exposure, including television, which reinforces societal norms and stereotypes. Repeated exposure to gender representations in media content leads children to internalize these norms, making them believe that certain gender roles and behaviors are typical or expected. On the other hand, Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the impact of observational learning and social interactions on

children's understanding of gender. These theories demonstrate the intricate relationship between media exposure and social influences in shaping children's perceptions of gender.

In the modern world, the changes in masculinity concept have been perceptible. As the perception of masculinity undergoes a considerable transformation, it is being impacted by cultural shifts, social movements, and evolving gender norms. Conventional traits linked to masculinity, like dominance and emotional restraint, are being contested as society moves towards a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of what it means to be a “man”. Men are now encouraged to exhibit a broader range of emotions, rather than adhering to the stereotype of unyielding stoicism (Landsberg, 2020). One of the key arguments made by Micheal Kimmel is that conventional forms of masculinity, characterized by dominance, aggression, and stoicism, have become less viable and fulfilling today (2013). It is perceivable that masculinity and its representation is changing. This research examines Disney animated movies between 1990 and 2020 and how masculinity representation in movies evolved during this time period. Studying gender representation in animated movies between 1990 and the 2020s is important because it allows to track progress towards gender equality in these films, which are a major influence on children. By analyzing how characters are portrayed, we can identify stereotypes and biases that may be present. This knowledge can then inform future creative decisions in the animation industry, leading to more diverse and equitable portrayals. Focusing on Disney movies between the 1990s and the the 2020s offers a fascinating lens into how ideas about gender have changed. This era coincides with a rise in feminism and broader cultural conversations about gender roles. By examining how Disney male characters were portrayed during this time, we could see if the studio progressed towards more equal representation. This analysis can reveal how Disney, a big influence on children, reflected or challenged societal norms around gender. By exposing children to a wide range of gender performativity and roles, Disney can break down rigid expectations of masculinity by taking responsibility in educating the younger generations. The question that this research poses is whether Disney movies are trying to challenge dominant gender stereotypes, or they are still holding on to simplified gender framework. Gender stereotypes are very common today, but when they are seen in Disney movies, they impact children’s thinking from a young age and let them create their views of gender more efficiently and often these perspectives are not correct in an ethical way. Examining how masculinity is portrayed in Disney movies is a part of a larger discussion about inclusivity and diversity in the media. Discussing how Disney represents a variety of masculine identities helps advance the conversation on the significance of gender representation in popular culture.

**Research aim:** To analyze masculinity and the representation of male characters in selected Disney animated movies and reveal if portrayal of masculinity has changed in two different periods.

**Research objectives:**

1. To examine how children's perceptions of social gender can be shaped and how cartoons influence this.
2. To analyse how masculinity is represented in Disney animated movies in a selected period.
3. To compare how the representation of masculinity in Disney films changes when comparing two different time periods.
4. Assess whether the representation of masculinity has changed between the different periods.

To better understand how masculinity is portrayed in Disney animated films, this master's thesis compares behavior of male characters in Disney animated movies between movies from 1990-2000 and movies from 2000-202. Content analysis method and comparative analysis will be used in order to complete in-depth analyses. Results of the study will help create a more complex picture of how Disney's animated stories have evolved to reflect representation about masculinity over time.

## **1. Understanding the Conception of Gender and Sex**

To understand how a child's mind can be influenced, it is important to discuss the conception of gender and its understanding. The difference between sex and gender is a primer to start with. Researchers Jayde Pryzgoda and Joan C. Chrisler explored the nuances and complexities surrounding the definitions of gender and sex (Pryzgoda, Chrisler, 2020). The study collected responses from 137 participants to determine their understanding and beliefs about the terms "gender" and "sex." The researchers found that many individuals struggle with differentiating between these terms, leading to ambiguous interpretations. The research discovered that the participants frequently linked "gender" with conventional gender norms and binary notions and faced difficulty distinguishing between "gender" and "sex." The participants' self-ratings for masculinity/femininity showed a weak correlation with their beliefs about gender, suggesting a lack of shared understanding of these concepts. Furthermore, the study uncovered potential confusion and frustration among participants regarding the concept of masculinity or femininity, as some found the Sexual Identity Scale used in the research to be restrictive and not reflective of their self-perceptions. The results highlight the challenges in comprehending and delineating gender, emphasizing the necessity of employing precise language and considering diverse viewpoints in talks about gender and sex (Pryzgoda, Chrisler, 2000, pg. 566).

In everyday language, the terms "sex" and "gender" are often used interchangeably, but in modern academic literature, particularly in feminist interpretations, these terms have different meanings. The common meaning of the term "sex" usually refers to the biological sex of an organism, whereas "gender" usually refers to the social role commonly associated with a person's sex (gender role), or it can refer to any personal identification of inner consciousness (Kaufman, Eschliman, Karver, 2022).

Michael Kimmel, an expert in sociology and gender studies, has been one of the authors whose work has focused on the differences between "sex" and "gender". He distinguishes sex from gender, pointing out that "sex" refers to the biological features, such as chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs, which classify individuals as male, female or intersex. Gender, on the other hand, refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, identities and expectations that society associates with being male or female. Although sex is generally considered a biological factor, gender is a social and cultural construct that varies across societies and historical periods (Kimmel, 2010).

### **1.2. Gender as Social Construct**

As well as Micheal Kimmel, many sociologists agrees that gender is a social construct. The idea of gender as a social construct has its roots in feminist theory and activism, and its exploration can be traced back to various scientists and movements throughout history. Although it's challenging to identify a single individual as the originator of this concept, several scholars and activists played important roles in popularizing and developing it. One of the earliest influential figures is Simone de Beauvoir, whose 1949 work "The Second Sex" (1949) critically examined the social construction of gender and argued that one "is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1949, pg. 283). S. De Beauvoir contends that gender is not inherently linked to biological sex; it is, rather, imposed upon individuals through their social life and cultural norms. The author asserts that gender roles have been constructed throughout history. In the 20th century, S. De Beauvoir was already highlighting the

importance of socially constructed nature of gender, she did encourage individuals to question and challenge traditional gender norms.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the feminist movements, especially the second wave of feminism, focused more on gender roles. In the second half of the 20th century, the concept became even more prominent, and scholars from various disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, psychology and gender studies, explored and developed the idea. One of the most prominent social theorists actively engaged in the social construction of gender is Judith Butler. Her work, particularly her book “Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity” (1990), is often credited with significantly advancing the understanding of gender as performative and socially constructed. Judith Butler explains gender as not a fixed description of an individual, but rather a performance or deviation from socially accepted gender stereotypes. The author states that performing gender involves more than just acting in a particular way - it also entails embracing and adhering to certain gender norms and engaging in practices that align with those norms. The belief that men and women are inherently different is what leads to distinct behaviors between the sexes. Doing gender is fundamentally a social interaction, where individuals perform gender to be perceived in a specific way, either as men, women, or as challenging these categories. Furthermore, gender is considered not comparable, meaning that each person's experience and understanding of gender can be unique, shaped by factors such as culture, society, biology, and personal identity. Societal norms and expectations often dictate how individuals should behave according to their perceived gender. In other words, society tends to attribute certain traits, roles and behaviors to either men or women, and individuals are often judged or judged according to how they conform to these established norms. Such societal judgements can affect how individuals perceive and express their gender identity and can lead to stereotyping and gender discrimination.

The concept of gender as a social construct originates from the broader perspective known as social constructionism. Although the term may have distinct implications in each field where it is used, its core idea is that “social constructionism maintains that humans construct the world through social practices. For example, practices such as encouraging girls to be docile or admonishing boys not to cry help to disseminate and perpetuate constructed “knowledge” about gender.” (May, Mumby, 2005, pg. 36). This understanding largely arises from contemporary views on femininity and masculinity rather than from inherent, innate qualities of humans.

### **1.3. Gender Stereotypes and Impact on Children**

While discussing how perceptions of gender can be constructed it is important to understand what stereotypes are and how they emerge into society. It is common for people to create categories for things, peoples, topics, and other concepts. These categories can clarify the world, but they also oversimplify it. To some extent, this natural oversimplification has become a stereotype. Once individuals become familiar with these categories, it becomes challenging for them to think without relying on them. Consequently, it can become problematic to determine when these categories become barriers rather than aids. Once established, they prove highly resistant to change. L.Monique Ward and Petal Growe describe stereotypes as overly simplistic and fixed ideas or beliefs about a particular group of people, often based on characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, or nationality. These beliefs may be widely accepted in society and may not accurately represent the diversity and complexity of individuals within the group (2020).



It is known that there are differences between men and women in various aspects of life. Gender stereotypes can make it look that these differences reflect the fundamental nature of men and women, but actually these stereotypes stem from societal beliefs about gender. A gender stereotype, according to the United Nations, is a generalized opinion or preconception about the qualities or traits, or the roles, that men and women should or should not have (Cusack, 2013). Understanding the nature and content of gender stereotypes reveals that they not only highlight typical variations between the sexes, but also dictate the qualities and behaviors that men and women should possess in various life domains. According to Gender Equality Law Center there are various common gender stereotypes which are widely used nowadays in society (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Common gender stereotypes

<b>Gender Stereotype for Male</b>	<b>Gender Stereotype for Female</b>
Boys should be directed to colors like blue and green	Girls should be directed to colors like red and pink colors
Boys should play with cars	Girls should play with dolls
Boys are expected to act out	Girls should be well behaved
It is assumed that boys and men will demonstrate their manliness by using violence and hostility.	Women do not require equal compensation because they are supported by their spouses.
Men who spend time with their families tend to be worse at providing for their families and are less manly.	Assertive women are unfeminine and are "bossy," "bitches" or "whores"
Men who are not aggressive and/or assertive are unmanly and likely gay	There is something wrong with a woman who chooses not to want children

Gender is regarded as a fundamental aspect of how individuals are perceived. Children tend to automatically and unconsciously categorize unknown individuals based on their gender, even when this classification is irrelevant to the situation. It is easy to shape childrens' opinions and they are shaped by the closest factors or people in their environment. Louis Althusser, famous Marxist philosopher, in 1970 introduced the concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) to explain how institutions such as family, religion, education, and media function to spreads ideologies that reinforce social hierarchies (Althusser, 2014). In the context of masculinity representation, these ISAs play a significant role in perpetuating gender stereotypes and norms. These "Ideological State Apparatuses" work as by disseminating gender stereotypes and norms that uphold traditional notions of masculinity. Through socialization processes and cultural representations, these institutions contribute to the construction and maintenance of gender identities and power dynamics within society. Among the institutions that can influence on children, school, religion, family and, of course, the media, can be mentioned. For example, in school, textbooks may depict male characters as active and assertive while portraying female characters as passive and nurturing. As well as family, which is often the first and most influential agent of socialization. Traditional family structures may reinforce stereotypical notions of masculinity, with fathers often portrayed as breadwinners and authority figures, while mothers are responsible for caregiving and domestic tasks and so on. These and other institutions works as Ideological State Apparatuses by disseminating gender stereotypes and norms that uphold traditional notions of masculinity.

When children encounter gender stereotypes and biases on a regular basis, they internalize this information, and it shapes their ideas about what it means to be a man or a woman (Ellemers, 2017). Gender categorisation is quickly recognisable and appears relatively stable, which contributes to the formation and perpetuation of gender stereotypes and reinforces perceptions of differences between men and women. The gender-typical role models portrayed in media significantly influence children's perceptions and attitudes. Children tend to adopt prejudiced attitudes and behaviors based on gender that they observe in movies as role models. Many Disney movies depict unrealistic idealizations of male and female figures, which young children often identify with and internalize. These gendered images from Disney films can significantly influence a child's self-realization and shape their beliefs about their future roles in society (Indhumathi, 2019).

## 2. How is Masculinity Perceived?

Masculinity is a collection of traits, behaviors, and roles that are typically associated with males and boys. Masculinity is considered to be a social construct, and there is evidence to suggest that both cultural and biological factors can influence certain masculine behaviors. The degree to which masculinity is influenced by biology or society is a topic of ongoing debate. Standards of masculinity can differ significantly across various cultures and time periods (Kimmel, Aronson, 2004).

Micheal Kimmel, one of the world's foremost experts on men and masculinity, has made an important contribution to the study of masculinity by pioneering research on the social construction of masculinity. Kimmel posits that masculinity is not innate but rather enacted through behaviors and actions that align with societal expectations, often entwined with power dynamics (Kimmel, 2011). Throughout history, the spotlight has been primarily directed towards men's accomplishments, viewpoints, and experiences, while women's contributions and perspectives have been overlooked or understated. As a result, there is insufficient awareness and acknowledgement of how gender plays a role in shaping our lives and impacts social, economic, and political frameworks. He believes that the absence of masculinity in feminist discussions has led to insufficient attention given to men's experiences of gender inequality and the ways in which traditional gender roles can harm both genders (Kimmel, 1993).

The portrayal of female characters in Disney fairy tales and films has been extensively studied, highlighting the prevalence of stereotypical depictions of princesses. However, there hasn't been as much attention given to how masculinity is portrayed in these movies. Male characters in Disney films are often shown in a positive light, but it's important to consider how this portrayal might affect children's perceptions of the world and their beliefs. Kimmel argues that traditional notions of masculinity, which often emphasize dominance, aggression, and emotional stoicism, can be very harmful. The shift towards a more inclusive and equitable form of masculinity that embraces qualities such as empathy, vulnerability, and collaboration is necessary (Kimmel, 1993).

Nevertheless, notable changes in the concept of masculinity have become visible in contemporary society. Masculinity is influenced by cultural changes, social movements, and shifting gender standards. Conventional traits linked to masculinity, like dominance and emotional restraint, are being contested as society moves towards a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of what it means to be a man. Men are now encouraged to exhibit a broader range of emotions, rather than adhering to the stereotype of unyielding stoicism (Landsberg, 2020). Micheal Kimmel, in his recently published book, "Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era" (2013) discusses the evolving notions of manhood. One of the key arguments made by Kimmel is that conventional forms of masculinity, characterized by dominance, aggression, and stoicism, have become less viable and fulfilling today. As women have gained greater opportunities and taken on roles traditionally held by men, and as societal expectations surrounding gender have changed, many men have struggled to adapt to these shifts. This can result in feelings of insecurity, resentment, and anger, particularly among those who feel their traditional roles and identities are under threat. These concepts can be seen as part of the traits of toxic masculinity that will be discussed later.

Masculinity is therefore not only a collection of stereotypes about men, but also a system of power granted to those who embody a masculine identity. It can be difficult to separate power and

masculinity because being a man and being masculine have long been the standard against which gender and social power are judged (Reynolds, 2002). The idea of masculinity has been diverse and complex throughout history and across different cultures. One of the authors, who made a significant contribution to the field of masculinity and gender studies is Raewyn Connell, an Australian sociologist. In the 1980s, she formulated a social theory of gender relations, which she presented in her book "Gender and Power" (1987). This theory assumed that gender is a large-scale social structure rather than a personal identity matter. In her work, she proposed that the term "gender" should be discussed in the context of three structures: power, production or labor, and emotion or sexual relations. Connell explores how society is structured in a way that replicates social inequalities, not only between the genders but also within the genders themselves. Her book "Masculinities" (first released in 1993) has been the most-cited work in this area of study. Instead of a single, all-encompassing definition of masculinity, Raewyn Connell argues for the use of "masculinities" in the plural form to acknowledge the various ways of being masculine. By using the plural form, Connell emphasizes that masculinity is not a fixed or singular concept, but rather a range of behaviors, traits, and identities that can vary greatly. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of gender, challenging the idea that there is only one "correct" way to be masculine. Traditionally, men have gained honor through providing for their families and exhibiting leadership, but these roles and privileges have been labeled as hegemonic masculinity by Connell, as they are encouraged in men and discouraged in women. Her notion of hegemonic masculinity has had a profound impact on thinking about men and masculinity, gender and social hierarchies. (Connell, 2005). The idea of hegemonic masculinity emerged back in the early 1980s, shedding light on how society tends to favor certain kinds of masculinity while downplaying others. Hegemonic masculinity highlights how some types of masculinity are seen as more important, while others are pushed aside. This dominant form of being a man is often associated with traits like power, control, and toughness. Even though not everyone behaves this way, it's seen as the standard that many men feel pressured to follow up. Hegemonic masculinity reflects broader societal attitudes and values toward masculinity. It has the power to affect how males relate to one another, how they view themselves, and even how they engage with the outside world. This may have detrimental effects, such as sustaining gender inequality and feeding preconceptions (Scott, Marshall, 2005).

In 2005, R.W. Connell together with James W. Messerschmidt published "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept", where they analyzed critique of this concept. Concepts and ideas in the social sciences emerge in response to particular intellectual and practical problems. These ideas come wrapped in their own language and style, reflecting the fields they arise from. But often these ideas or concepts can be borrowed from one area to another and during this process they change and grow, sometimes losing the original idea and meaning. Hegemonic masculinity concept started out in gender studies, but now it can be found emerging in a lot of subjects. Critics have raised a multitude of concerns about the vagueness that emerges from the shifted uses of the concept and the ways it has been adjusted to modern contexts. The issue of hegemonic masculinity may be particular to the social sciences and humanities, where theoretical formulations are applied in diverse settings and adapted by various individuals, leading to mutations in the concept. These mutations can take different forms in different environments. These include discussions about the role of patriarchy, the interpretation of hegemony, the roles of entitlement, domination, consent and violence. In addition, broader, comparative and global studies complicate the understanding of hegemonic masculinity (Connell,

Messerschmidt, 2005). Those who support hegemonic masculinity assert that it is a valuable concept for comprehending gender relations and has practical applications in areas such as life-span development, education, criminology, media representations of masculinity, the health of both men and women, and organizational structure (Aboim, Howson, Hearn, 2007). Proponents of the recognition of hegemonic masculinity argue that understanding this concept and its influence on social norms, power structures and cultural expectations is crucial for addressing a wide range of gender-related issues. Recognizing hegemonic masculinity as a key concept allows for a better understanding of how gender operates in a variety of contexts, from interpersonal relations to institutional practices. Such recognition helps to develop more effective strategies to promote gender equality, challenge stereotypes and foster inclusiveness at all levels of society. Educators who take the concept of hegemonic masculinity as an object of analysis can look at how these gender norms are manifested in classrooms, teaching practices and educational policies. They may recognize that boys are often socialized to conform to norms of toughness and stoicism, which can lead to behaviors like being disruptive in the classroom or reluctance to seek help when academic difficulties arise. In contrast, girls may face pressure to prioritize being submissive and passive, which may prevent them from participating in class discussions or taking on leadership roles. By understanding and challenging these manifestations of hegemonic masculinity in the education system, educators can work towards a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

## **2.2. Hegemonic Masculinity in Disney**

Hegemonic masculinity in Disney films traditionally takes the form of male characters being portrayed as dominant, physically strong, and assertive, while female characters are depicted as passive, nurturing, and in need of rescue. This is exemplified by the way male protagonists typically take charge of situations, make decisions without consulting others, and are usually portrayed as the heroes who save the day. Conversely, female characters are often relegated to supporting roles, emphasizing traditional gender roles, and reinforcing the idea that men are supposed to be strong and in control, while women are meant to be dependent and in need of protection. These portrayals not only reflect societal norms and expectations but also perpetuate them, shaping children's perceptions of gender roles from a young age. The portrayal of male characters as the central heroes and leaders in Disney films upholds hegemonic masculinity (Hibbeler, 2009).

In "The Lion King," (1994) for instance, Simba, the male lion, is the one who is depicted as strong, courageous, and predestined to rule the Pride Lands, while Nala, the female lion, plays a supporting role, relying on Simba to save their kingdom. Similarly, in "Aladdin" (1992), the male character Aladdin is shown to be adventurous and daring, ultimately becoming the savior of Agrabah city, while the female character Jasmine, despite her intelligence and bravery, is confined to the stereotypical role of a damsel in distress, waiting for Aladdin to rescue her. These portrayals perpetuate traditional gender roles, with male characters embodying qualities of dominance and agency, while female characters are often marginalized or relegated to roles that emphasize their vulnerability and dependence on male protagonists. Another great example is the fairy tale of "Snow White" (1937). The depiction of the prince as the idealized hero and the other men as non-threatening dwarves with exaggerated physical features strengthens gender stereotypes and supports hegemonic masculinity. The prince is portrayed as a powerful and courageous savior, while Snow White embodies traditional femininity and helplessness. He is shown as physically strong, handsome, and capable of rescuing

Snow White with a single kiss, which symbolizes his authority and dominance. Snow White, on the other hand, is portrayed as gentle, caring and humble, relying on the prince to wake her up from an enchanted sleep and bring her happiness. Snow White, on the other hand, is portrayed as gentle, caring and humble, relying on the prince to wake her up from an enchanted sleep and bring her happiness. This portrayal reinforces the idea of male superiority and agency, while Snow White's passivity and dependence on the prince perpetuates traditional gender roles and the prevalent hegemonic masculinity in Disney's animated films.

### **2.3. Toxic Masculinity in Disney**

When this concept first emerged, it was usually associated with aggression and violence in men's behavior. A psychiatrist Terry Kupers describes toxic masculinity as "the constellation of socially regressive male traits that serve to foster domination, the devaluation of women, homophobia, and wanton violence" (Kupers, 2005, pg. 714). The author states that toxic masculinity is about the problematic tendencies of men to aggressively compete and dominate over others, which are among the most harmful aspects of this phenomenon (Kupers, 2005). In present society, the term has become slightly more extensive, as it has been used in even wider scientific fields. People often use this term to describe exaggerated masculine traits that many cultures have accepted or glorified. Now, toxic masculinity is associated not only with aggression and violence, but also with other characteristics. According to therapist Kevin Foss (2022) there are three main characteristics that can describe toxic masculinity concept. To fit masculine norms, men are pressured to act:

1. Tough (men should be very strong, muscular, aggressive, and emotionally hardened).
2. Anti-feministic (they should reject "feminine" traits like most emotion, accepting help and domesticity).
3. Powerful (a "real man" is worthy of respect if he has money, power, status, and influence). (Kavin Foss, 2022).

This concept usually arises from societal expectations and norms that prescribe rigid and harmful behaviors and attitudes to men and boys. Australian writer and feminist thinker Clementine Ford analyzed toxic masculinity in her book "Boys Will Be Boys: Power, Patriarchy and Toxic Masculinity" (2018). She states that toxic masculinity is rather a reflection of a society than a man. According to the author, one of the best examples on how society imposes requirements to men, is the settlement that men should be restrained in expressing their emotions. Expressing emotions is considered to be a feminine trait and can make men feel less masculine than the ones, who doesn't show emotions. The author highlights the fact that men's frequent tendency to hide and not expose their emotions has a significant impact on their psychological health. Toxic masculinity can create high pressure on men, which may act in harmful way to fit norms of masculinity. Research has shown that men who feel pressured to conform to traditional masculine roles are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety than men who don't feel the same pressure (Harris, 2021; Ford, 2018). Men may also become isolated from friends and family as they adhere to the rigid gender roles associated with toxic masculinity. This isolation can lead to further psychological problems, such as feelings of loneliness, hopelessness, and worthlessness (Right to equality, 2023).

From a young age, boys often hear phrases like "boys don't cry", "man up" or anything that encourages them to be more "manly" or to hide their emotions and don't look "weak". Phrases like

that enforce rigid stereotypes of masculinity while suppressing vulnerability and emotional expression. When boys think that showing emotions makes them look weak, shame can arise, and it positions anger and rage as the only acceptable emotion for a man (Foss, 2022). Moreover, the harmful behavior of comparing girls to boys as weaker or inferior sustains pernicious gender norms. This conditioning nurtures a harmful ideology where strength is associated with suppressing emotions, displaying aggression, and asserting dominance. As a result, it cultivates a culture of toxic masculinity. “Toxic masculinity is properly defined as such, it is named as toxic because it stifles and prevents a man from being human, from feeling and expressing emotions common to all human beings, and it forces to be constantly strong, even if he eventually needs to be supported or comforted” (Rotundi, 2020, pg. 23). In order to understand how toxic masculinity expands, it is significant to mention some aspects that influence it. Toxic masculinity is deeply interconnected with political ideologies, economic structures, and social dynamics. Political agendas and power dynamics can strengthen traditional gender expectations while economic gaps and social hierarchies can amplify feelings of insecurity and competition among men. Societal expectations and cultural narratives mold perceptions of masculinity, influencing how individuals express and internalize gender roles.

The pressure to conform masculinity expectations can have significant consequences for mental health, relationships, and society. It is essential to challenge these destructive narratives and encourage boys to embrace their full range of emotions and identities, free from harmful gender stereotypes (Ford, 2018). Toxic masculinity discourages seeking mental and physical health support, even in times of injury or emotional distress. Additionally, ignoring mental health concerns like depression, trauma, and anxiety can worsen symptoms, leading to social isolation, ended relationships, unemployment, severed relationships, and self-destruction (Foss, 2022). In 2020, Male Psychology Network researchers published an article “Reactions to Contemporary narratives about masculinity: A pilot study” where they explored the impact of prevailing narratives about masculinity in Western media on men and women. The research focused on 203 men and 52 women with an average age of 46 years. The research aim was to assess opinions on some terms about masculinity, as well as toxic masculinity. The study revealed that “the male archetype itself may be said therefore to breed less societal empathy for the gender that is expected to take risks and provide physical protection” (Barry, Walker, Liddon, Seager, 2020, pg. 18). Authors highlight concerns about how contemporary Western narratives about gender, as reflected in social policies and media representations, may compound rather than challenge traditional views of masculinity. Instead of promoting greater empathy and understanding between genders, these narratives risk reinforcing archetypal differences and stereotypes. Furthermore, even in fields such as mental health, psychology, and social science, the frameworks and concepts are more judgmental. Terms like "male power," "patriarchy," and "toxic masculinity" is used while talking about masculinity concept and it can contribute to lower self-esteem in men (Barry, Walker, Liddon, Seager, 2020).

The behavior demonstrated by male characters in Disney films, seem to profoundly shape children's understanding of suitable behavior, as they use these characters as a standard for evaluating their own actions and aspiring to mirror their heroes. If these characters display characteristics associated with toxic masculinity, boys might mistakenly assume that adopting such behavior is the pathway to achieving similar success and acknowledgment. As a result, children may encounter negative consequences when exposed to portrayals that promote repression, downplaying, or disregard of emotions. Although toxic masculinity is continually associated with suppressing and hiding emotions,

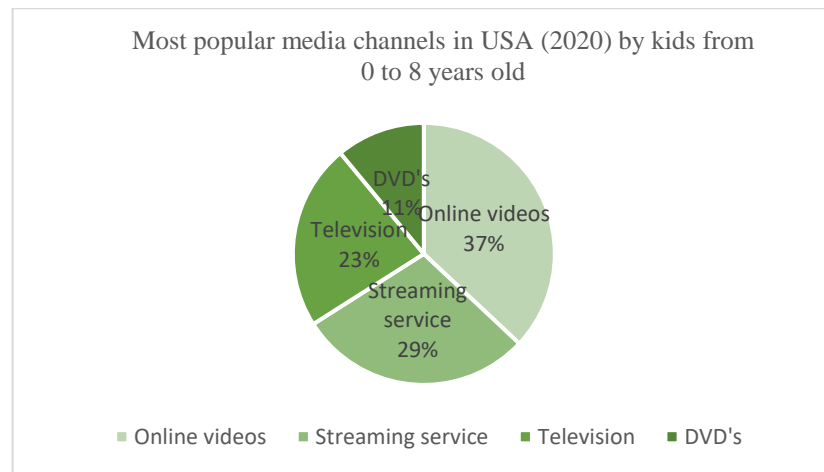
it is important to recognize that Disney films also subtly communicate various other aspects of this phenomenon to young audiences. Another, very important trait, which can be communicated to children is “the right” physical appearance for a man. Physical attractiveness, is related to the aesthetic appearance of the male body that should adhere with the masculinity portrayal, thus, embody masculine traits, in order to be considered as a successful man (Rotundi, 2020). To fit traditional masculine standard, men are expected to be tall, masculine, broad shouldered and slim waisted strong, have a six pack and a perfectly chiseled jawline. Characters who embody above-mentioned traditional masculine ideals are often the most successful ones in Disney films, easily attracting women and Princesses. This leads to the following question: Would boys of shorter stature face psychological difficulties and perceive themselves less successful and inferior upon encountering such portrayals of triumphant masculinity? While talking about toxic masculinity, normalizing aggression and violence is equally significant thing to mention. Teaching boys that bullying and violence are permissible actions can begin at a very young age. This kind of behavior often is justified under the phrase "boys will be boys." This notion validates and sanctions the aggressive tendencies of male children and adolescents, presenting them as natural instincts that cannot be altered. Toxic masculinity can be directly linked to the promotion of violence and aggression as it encourages men, or even boys, to view themselves as dominant and powerful (Rotundi, 2020). Due to the simplistic and stereotypical portrayal of gender roles in Disney films, there is a strong possibility to see male characters portrayed with toxic masculinity traits. For example, dominant handsome men who win the hearts of princesses by defending the kingdom against enemies, or who are even well-liked by the public because of their wealth and so on.



### **3. Television's Influence on Children**

Once it has been examined how gender concepts and children's perceptions of masculinity are formed, it is important to consider how television and other influential media forms shape these perception patterns. Even though children are often subjected to gender role stereotypes through books, songs, television, and movies, recent research on television media and child socialization suggests that television has a significant impact on their lives (Wijethilaka, 2020). Many young children may find television to be their first exposure to events and people outside of their daily routine. Families frequently leave the television on all day long to distract their active children or serve as a distraction that hinders imaginative play (Chira, 1983). According to psychologists (Children's Television Resource Education Center, 1992), children have three sources of reality: the things that they learn at home, at school and on television. With a diverse range of life experiences, adults can help filter out inaccurate or inappropriate TV messages, in contrast, young children perceive a significant amount of what they see on television as authentic (Luke, 1995). "Watching television and videos continues to be the main reason children use screen devices, accounting for nearly three-quarters (73%) of all screen time" (The Common Sense Census: media use by kids age zero to eight, 2020, pg.3). Television holds significant value as a medium, as kids pick their idols and role models to emulate as well. A study by Nancy Luke looked at children's use of television or alternative forms of digital media as a source of role models and for learning. A questionnaire specially designed for this study was presented to about 100 fifth-grade pupils. The results showed that over half (53%) of the children questioned used television as a role model (Luke, 1995). This means that it is very important to pay attention to how the characters are portrayed in the films, the character traits and actions of the characters should be noted because children often view them as role models.

When we talk about children's habits of watching Disney content, we can't forget that Disney, nowadays, is not just about movies on television. Since 2015, Walt Disney company has its own streaming platform Disney+, which has almost 150 million subscribers (as of December 30, 2023) (The Walt Disney Company Reports First Quarter Earnings For Fiscal 2024). The service primarily distributes films and television shows produced by Walt Disney Studios and Disney Television Studios, with dedicated content hubs for Disney's flagship brands. And according to research mentioned before (The Common Sense Census: media use by kids age zero to eight, 2020) streaming platforms is the second most watched by children media channel after Youtube online videos (Youtube online videos takes 37 percent, Streaming platforms – 29 percent and television – 23 percent) (Table 2).



**Fig. 1.** Most popular media channels in USA by kids from 0 to 8 years old

Besides that, Walt Disney company is not only movies, but also a cultural phenomenon. Disney has not only entertained audiences with its movies but has also shaped the collective imagination of generations worldwide (Wilkinson, 2023). Its significance in the animation world is unparalleled, not only due to its groundbreaking technological advancements and iconic characters, but also for its profound impact on global culture. Through timeless classics like "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs", "Beauty and the Beast" or "Frozen," Disney goes beyond geographic borders, languages, and time frames, becoming an integral part of world culture. Its characters have become cultural icons, and Disney's influence extends to everyday life, from Halloween costumes and Cosplay events to wedding venues, theme parties, and Disney academic exchange programs for students. Disney's commitment to storytelling excellence, coupled with its innovative use of animation technology, has set the standard for the industry, inspiring a lot of people around the world.

It's important to highlight the significance of cartoons themselves. Disney movies, like fairytales, commonly incorporate magical elements, heroic quests, moral lessons, and satisfying conclusions that leave viewers with a sense of contentment. They also convey timeless messages and themes that cross cultural boundaries, much like the enduring appeal of fairytales, which is important part of every child's lives. Moreover, Kids can now enjoy their preferred cartoons on a variety of devices, including tablets, smartphones, and computers. Children's behavior and attitudes can be shaped by their exposure to cartoons, which includes what they like or dislike, their attitude towards friends, how they speak, and the way they dress (Atabey, 2021). In order to understand the impact of watching cartoons, 57 children aged 6 to 12 were interviewed (Uswatun Hasanah, Cindy Kurnia Octaviyanti, 2018). Based on this study, most children engage in watching cartoons regularly and often copy what they see, such as the interactions between characters. This replication even includes adverse actions, like the characters' display of violence and the use of mocking remarks (Uswatun Hasanah, Cindy Kurnia Octaviyanti, 2018).

### 3.1. Can Television Shape a Child's Perception of Gender?

To understand mass communication and media better, in 1973, journalist George Gerbner, formulated a paradigm which was called Cultivation Theory. It was created with the purpose of examining how viewers perceive the television medium. Larry Gross, an American screenwriter, continued and expanded Gerbner's work in later years and in 1976 they published article "Living With Television: The Violence profile". Back then, television appeared to be the most impactful, transformative, and groundbreaking medium, but now with the advent of the internet, it seems the authors were correct by stating that "television is likely to remain for a long time the chief source of repetitive and ritualized symbol systems cultivating the common consciousness of the most far-flung and heterogenous mass publics in history"(Gross, Gerbner, 1976, pg.174). As mentioned before, television still has a big impact on people (children included) and still has power to shape public opinion and perceptions.

According to definition, Cultivation Analysis (or Cultivation Theory), a significant sociological and communications theoretical framework, is based on the idea that individuals who spend more time watching television tend to perceive reality through a lens that aligns with the dominant representations in television messages, in contrast to their peers who have lower television viewership but share similar demographic characteristics (Gross, Gebner, 1976).

The central idea of Cultivation Theory is the notion of "Mean World Syndrome". It's primarily focused on individuals who watch television excessively and believe that the world is more dangerous and violent than it actually is. Television's focus on crime, violence and conflict reinforces this perception, and regular audiences of violent content might have experienced more fear, pessimism, increased anxiety and greater vigilance to imagined threats (Perera, 2023). Accordingly, being constantly exposed to such issues can cause audiences and critics to overestimate the prevalence of such tragedies in society itself, resulting in greater feelings or fears. With the growing popularity of Cultivation Theory, Gerbner introduced the concepts of mainstreaming and resonance to further develop the theory. Mainstreaming is the process, where media consistently portrays certain groups, behaviors, and ideologies and influence individual perceptions or social reality and their interactions with others. This process of cultivation takes place gradually and unconsciously, as viewers absorb media messages and incorporate them into their worldview (Perera, 2023). People from different demographic groups, including those based on education, income, and political orientation, often have varying perspectives on the world, assuming all other factors remain constant (Shrum, 2017). This emphasizes the significance of cultivating critical media literacy and awareness of the potential consequences of media consumption. In the context of animated movies, mainstreaming implies that repeated exposure to gender stereotypes and portrayals can normalize and reinforce traditional gender roles, shaping viewers' perceptions of masculinity and femininity. Another concept, resonance, suggests that viewers whose life experiences match the TV portraits will be most influenced by TV watching. Images of a subject should particularly 'resonate' with those who have experienced the same thing directly in their own lives, successfully doubling the TV message and significantly increasing the cultivation (Shrum, 2017). In the case of gender portrayal, resonance occurs when viewers, especially children, identify with characters whose gender roles align with their own lived experiences or societal expectations. This identification can reinforce existing gender norms and stereotypes.

This theory is relevant to the study because it helps to understand and consolidate the fact that television, where Disney films are mostly watched, influences children's perception of the world. "Most infants are exposed to television long before reading. By the time a child reaches school, television will have occupied more time than would be spent in a college classroom." (Gross, Gebner, 1976, pg. 176)

### **3.2. Children Learn by Modeling Others**

Cultivation Theory, together with Social Learning and Social Cognitive theories explains what effect media has on children. It is common for children to copy the behavior or other characteristics of people they see in their environment. With television playing such a large part in children's lives, it is natural that they start to mimic the behavior they see on television. It is also notable that children at young age are very easily influenced, so it is a critical period for a child's gender identity, and it has been found that exposure to gender stereotypes in movies can be extremely detrimental to a child's development (Lachman, 2023).

Social Cognitive Theory is an integrated framework developed by psychologist Albert Bandura. This theory emphasizes the mutual exchange between an individual's behavior, personal factors such as thoughts and emotions, and environmental influences. This theory posits that individuals learn through observation and modeling of others' behaviors, and that the environment around them can shape future behaviors (Bandura, 1971). According to social cognitive theory, part of an individual's acquired knowledge can be directly linked to the observation of other people in the context of social interactions, experiences and exposure to external media. Bandura together with other scholars conducted the famous "Bobo doll" experiments in the early 1960s, which demonstrated that children learn behaviors by observing others, challenging behaviorist principles. Mentioned experiment aimed to investigate the role of social learning and aggression in children. In this experiment, 36 boys and 36 girls from age 3 to 6 were exposed to a video of an adult model behaving aggressively towards a doll. In this experiment different groups of children, saw different treatment of dolls. One group watched an individual behaving aggressively towards doll. For example, adults used a hammer or were throwing the doll in the air, shouting at it. Another group of children were exposed to a non-aggressive individual who played in a gently and calmly way. And one more group was used as a control group and not exposed to any model at all (Mcleod, 2024). The children's behaviors were observed when they were given the opportunity to play with the doll themselves.

The results of the experiment demonstrated that children who had observed the aggressive behavior of the adult model were more likely to imitate the same aggressive actions towards the doll compared to children who had not been exposed to the aggressive model. This indicated that children learn through observation and modeling, and that exposure to aggressive behavior can increase the likelihood of aggressive behavior in children. It's mentionable that in this experiment it was observed that children's behavior also differed between the sexes. Boys were more likely to copy same-sex models than girls and boys imitated more physically aggressive acts than girls (Mcleod, 2024). It also raised important ethical considerations regarding the effects of media violence on children and the potential influence of role models on behavior.

Bandura conducted an experiment to determine if movies would have the same effect as live modeling. He allowed some children to observe the model in person, while others watched a video or

a cartoon animation. Since all three groups exhibited similar reactions, Bandura concluded that children tend to imitate others, regardless of the medium through which they observe the behavior (Koblin, 2022).

Social Cognitive Theory helps to evaluate how children learn gendered behaviors through the process of modeling and direct tuition. Direct modeling takes place when a child is reinforced for exhibiting behaviors typically linked with their gender, which may happen via parental guidance, interactions with peers, and exposure to media (Lachman, 2023).

In examining masculinity representation in Disney movies, Cultivation Theory suggests that repeated exposure to media shapes individuals' perceptions of reality. By analyzing Disney movies through this theory, it is possible to investigate how the portrayal of masculine traits and behaviors in these movies influences children's beliefs about masculinity in society. Applying Social Cognitive theory to this study allows the exploration of how characters' actions and characteristics are perceived and internalized by audiences, potentially influencing their understanding of gender roles and norms. By employing Cultivation theory and Social Cognitive theory, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how Disney movies contribute to the construction and reinforcement of masculinity ideals in popular culture.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. Samples

The main corpus of research consists of 18 Walt Disney movies which were gathered from two different time periods. For the first part of analysis, selection of films was drawn from 1990 to 2000. This period in history is marked by significant societal changes, including the ongoing feminist movements and heightened discussions on gender equality. Through the analysis of films from this period, the study's aim is to gain a deeper understanding of the prevailing views on masculinity at the end of 20th century. The second period that follows in this analysis extends for two decades, from 2000 to 2020. This more modern timeframe presents an opportunity to analyze the masculinity representation in movies produced during the earlier part of the 21st century.

“Box Office Mojo by IMDbPro” website was used to select films that matched the criteria. Disney animated films are dominant in this below-mentioned ranking table, holding 7 out of 10 first spots, including the top four. Animated films were chosen because they are among the best known Disney content, and the Disney industry has grown in importance because of its animated films. Whereas animated films are the most popular and have the greatest impact on audiences. This domination shows that Disney animated movies, being widely popular, might have had a significant impact on emerging culture and the children who watched television.

**Table 2.** Amount of films analysed

Time period	Number of analyzed movies
1990-2000	6
2000-2020	12
<b>Total</b>	18

Several criteria were applied while selecting the movies.

**1) Lifetime Gross (the highest and no less than 90 million dollars)** - this criterion allows to assess which films were the most successful. Most commercially successful movies could have a significant influence on popular culture and may offer valuable insights into prevailing norms and stereotypes of masculinity during specific periods. In the case of money earned, this criterion is also complemented by the requirement that the film should not have earned less than 90 million dollars.

**2) The protagonist is a male figure and is a human being** - to narrow down the sample, this criterion was chosen to allow a more targeted study of the appearance of men in animated movies.

**3) Release date** – this criterion allows to choose movies from selected time periods.

**4) Distributor** – this criterion allows to choose movies that have been released by Walt Disney Company.

**Table 3.** Chosen movies from 1990-2000

Movie title	Lifetime Gross	Release date
Toy Story 2	\$245,852,179	1999 November

Aladdin	\$217,350,219	1992 November
Toy Story	\$191,796,233	1995 November
Tarzan	\$171,091,819	1999 June
The Hunchback of Notre Dame	\$100,138,851	1996 June
Hercules	\$99,112,101	1997 June

**Table 4.** Chosen movies from 2000-2020

Movie title	Lifetime Gross	Release date
The Incredibles 2	\$608,581,744	2018 June
Toy Story 4	\$434,038,008	2019 June
Toy Story 3	\$415,004,880	2010 June
Up	\$293,004,164	2009 May
The Incredibles	\$261,441,092	2004 November
Big Hero 6	\$222,527,828	2014 November
Soul	\$121,903,885	2020 December
Coco	\$210,460,015	2017 November
Ralph Breaks the Internet	\$201,091,711	2018 November
Wreck-It Ralph	\$189,422,889	2012 November
A Christmas Carol	\$137,855,863	2009 November 6
Meet the Robinsons	\$97,822,171	2007 March

## 4.2. Methods of Analysis

Several methods are used for the study. The 4 highest-grossing films (highlighted in green in Table 3 and Table 4) from each period will be analysed in depth (8 in total). The films will be evaluated by analysing certain moments from the films in a sequential way, by highlighting quotes or certain actions, by examining the characteristics of the characters and their interactions with each other. An attempt will be made to analyse what implications the observed actions in the films may have for the research. This will allow deeper insights to be made and an evaluation of how masculinity was portrayed in the most popular Disney films of the above-mentioned period.

A **content analysis** method will be used to study the deeper layers of the underlying meanings embedded within studied discourse. Content analysis is a method used to quantify the occurrence of specific words, concepts, or subjects in a set of content, including text, photographs, social media, and television. It can be used either qualitatively or quantitatively to systematically analyze the chosen media or documentation. Researchers use content analysis method to understand the purposes, messages, and effects of communication content, as well as to make inferences about the producers and audience of the media that is being analysed (Wilson, 2011). In this research, qualitative analysis will be used in order to get deeper insights.

Once the existing values in the films have been analysed and the data compiled, the different time periods will be compared using a **comparative analysis** method. A comparison will be made between

how masculinity was portrayed in animated films in the 20th and in the 21st centuries. This approach will allow to identify patterns, differences, and similarities in the construction and performance of masculinity, norms, and identities across different time periods. Studying how masculinity has been portrayed in the 20th and 21st centuries will allow us to reach conclusions about whether the masculinity representations has changed and to suggest what impact may it have had on children.

For comparative analysis all the films in the tables (Table 3 and Table 4) will also be analysed to extract more quantitative insights (18 films in total). All films will be analysed by answering the questions displayed in Table 5. This will give an insight into the percentage of the characters that display one or another characteristic. The questions will indicate whether the character displays toxic masculinity and whether it conforms to gender stereotypes, and this will lead to stronger conclusions, which will indicate how masculinity was portrayed in films at the time.

**Table 5.** Questions for analysis

	Questions
1.	Are there two complementary male characters in the film?
2.	Are stereotypical masculine traits are expressed more clearly in the protagonist appearance?
3.	Are stereotypical masculine traits expressed more clearly in the protagonist behavior?
4.	Are stereotypical masculine traits are expressed more clearly in the antagonist appearance?
5.	Are stereotypical masculine traits are expressed more clearly in the antagonist behavior?
6.	Does the protagonist's primary motivation come from his love for the female figure?
7.	Is there a significant emotional growth of the protagonist at the end of the film?



## **5. Findings and Analysis**

All films are analyzed using content analysis method, however, a more detailed and deeper analysis is conducted on four films from each period that achieved the highest gross (see Table 4) and likely have had the greatest cultural influence. The films analyzed from the late 20th century, specifically from 1990 to 2000, include “Toy Story 2” (1999), “Aladdin” (1992), “Toy Story” (1995) and “Tarzan” (1999) (see Table 3). In this chapter, all four films will be analyzed based on the same issues, which will allow us to understand whether the films portray traits of toxic masculinity and hegemonic masculinity.

### **5.1. Masculine Representations in Disney Movies from 1990 to 2000**

#### **“Toy Story” (1995)**

“Toy Story” is the first entirely computer-animated feature film created by Pixar Animation Studios and distributed by Walt Disney Pictures. The movie was directed by John Lasseter. “Toy Story” revolves around the dynamic between a traditional pull string cowboy doll named Woody and a futuristic space cadet action figure named Buzz Lightyear. Throughout the film Woody develops jealousy towards Buzz when he becomes their owner Andy's favorite toy.

The protagonist of the movie, Woody, embodies many traits of traditional masculinity. He embodies such a traits as leadership, bravery, and protectiveness. As a leader of Andy's toys, Woody consistently demonstrates his leadership by organizing the toys and making strategic decisions, such as when he devises a plan to rescue another character, Buzz Lightyear, from other kids house. His bravery is evident in various scenes, for example, when he risks his own safety to save Buzz from the rocket or when he faces the prospect of being left behind to ensure his friends' safety. Woody's protectiveness can be seen in his relationship with the other toys and his owner, Andy, where he takes on a paternal role, ensuring that the toys are always there for Andy. These traits are great examples of traditional masculinity, where a male figure often takes charge, shows courage in the face of danger, and looks out for the well-being of others. Woody is tall and slim, which gives him a distinctive silhouette that stands out among the other toys. His height can be seen as a physical representation of his status and command, while his lean build suggests agility and quickness, important traits for a leader in adventurous situations. On the other hand, we could say that Woody does not fully embody the archetype of a "manly" man. Traditional male stereotypes frequently depict male leaders as having a highly muscular physique, whereas Woody, with his slender build, initially appears less strong, that leader could be expected to be.

In this film, one of the most significant elements for evaluating the representations of masculinity is the dynamic relationship between the protagonist, Woody, and another character, futuristic action figure, Buzz Lightyear. From the very first scenes in which Buzz appears, we notice the difference in appearance between him and Woody. Buzz is introduced as a hyper-masculine figure. His suit features various buttons and gadgets, emphasizing his advanced, high-tech capabilities. Buzz has a strong, muscular physique, as well as chiseled jawline, broad shoulders and a powerful stance that convey strength and confidence. His whole appearance from his suit to his muscular body makes him visually captivating and makes him seem like a fearless protector, aligning with traditional masculine ideals of strength and bravery. He is made of strong, durable material suggesting notions of toughness, in

comparison to Woody's soft, slim physique. He is repeating a phrase "to infinity and beyond" and allows Buzz to attribute the qualities that are imposed on men: ambitious, successful, invincible, and persistent. It is notable that both protagonists fit the rather stereotypical boy's career aspirations of being astronauts and sheriffs. Even the other toys, who considered Woody to be the leader, are beginning to question whether this newcomer, an extra masculine character, is more qualified to lead the group than Woody. Other toys admire Buzz's "lasers" and speaker and compare him to Woody's inferior abilities. This assumes that in a society, which in this case is the toy community, a highly masculine figure can evoke a sense of confidence in the individuals, even when this figure is not well known to them, but only perceived once. The toy community, when they first see Buzz, do not even notice that he is not very clever. Buzz has no idea that he is a toy, that he cannot shoot real lasers, and that his rocket from outer space isn't real. Meanwhile, Woody is obviously more reasonable, but at this point, the toy community is fascinated by Buzz at first sight. He fascinates them by the extra masculine qualities, such as his strong physique, physical abilities and self-confidence, and do not even pay attention to his ideas.



**Fig. 2.** Woody and Buzz from "Toy Story"

Woody's greatest fear seems to be that he is going to be replaced by Buzz. Buzz becomes Andy's favorite toy, while other toys repel Woody as well. This anxiety is rooted in his strong attachment to his role as Andy's favorite toy, a position that gives him a sense of purpose and identity. The arrival of Buzz threatens Woody's status and the affection he has always received from Andy. Woody's fear is illustrated in scenes where he struggles with feelings of jealousy and insecurity, such as when he attempts to push Buzz behind a desk to reclaim his place on Andy's bed. These parts suggest that the protagonist, who is going through intense emotional moments, tries to hide them and does not talk about them out loud, assuming that Woody doesn't want to look even less masculine, since Buzz has already diminished Woody's masculinity. It seems that Woody understands that he cannot compete with Buzz's masculinity and realizes that he will not appear better than Buzz, so he tries to humiliate

Buzz by mentioning that he is also made of plastic, his lasers are fake and etc. The tension between Woody and Buzz highlights the competitive nature of hegemonic masculinity, where maintaining dominance and control is crucial. Woody's fear of being replaced by Buzz underscores his need to uphold his position of power.

One interesting scene in the film occurs when Buzz realizes that he is not a powerful space ranger who can fly, but just a toy. He turns up in a girl's room and is used as a doll: he is dressed in women's clothes and drinks tea with other toys. This scene is portrayed as extremely humiliating for Buzz, and in this scene, we already hear that Buzz does not want to go anywhere or to save himself, he even asks to be left here. Buzz's feelings of humiliation and confusion during the tea party highlight the rigid boundaries of toxic masculinity, which often devalues activities and roles associated with femininity. His discomfort reveals the societal pressures that discourage men from engaging in or appreciating such activities, reinforcing gender norms that segregate masculine and feminine behaviors. This scene is specifically chosen to represent Buzz's crucial moment, intended to depict the given-up character.



**Fig. 3.** Dressed up Buzz in "Toy story"

Furthermore, in this part of “Toy Story”, a crucial aspect is the characters' development throughout the film. The relationship between Woody and Buzz evolves into a partnership based on mutual respect and teamwork. This shift mirrors a broader cultural change in the movie that prioritizes collaboration over competition in the understanding of masculinity. Their friendship oversteps the initial conflict and showcases a form of masculinity that is inclusive, supportive, and adaptive, even between characters who have previously been at odds with each other. The relationship between Woody and Buzz symbolizes changing pattern of male bonding.

The events that take place in the film make it obvious to the characters that they cannot survive without each other. Woody is ready to sacrifice himself to save Buzz, he becomes caring and condescending towards the other man, despite their competition for attention and the desire to be better than each other. Woody's journey throughout the film demonstrates a growth in his character, suggesting that true leadership and masculinity involve understanding and cooperation rather than mere authority. Furthermore, Buzz finds a value in being a toy and experiences the fulfilment that comes from being owned and loved. This moment of self-realization and subsequent humility adds

depth to Buzz's character, emphasizing that strength lies in self-awareness and acceptance. The characters' fight for the position of leader and favorite toy seems to end and they find meaning when they push aside the desire to be alpha males and dominate.

### **“Toy Story 2” (1999)**

After examining masculinity, the first part of the sequel, we proceed to the analysis of the subsequent film “Toy Story 2”. This movie was also directed by John Lasseter and released in November, 1999. In the second part, we will focus more on the behaviour of the characters, as the appearance of the characters remains unchanged, and we have already analysed it.

In “Toy Story 2”, Woody is stolen by a toy collector, who plans to sell him to a museum in Japan. Buzz Lightyear and the other toys embark on a daring rescue mission to save Woody. During his captivity, Woody learns about his past as the star of a popular TV show and meets other characters from his show, including Jessie, Bullseye, and Stinky Pete. As Woody grapples with the choice between returning to Andy or living in a museum, he ultimately realizes the importance of being loved and played with by a child. With the help of his friends, Woody escapes and returns home, bringing new friends with him.

At the very beginning of the film, we can see that Woody is going through an emotional crisis because he thinks that if he is torn, he will no longer be useful to his owner, Andy. At this point, Woody does not seem to fit the characteristics of toxic masculinity or other masculine stereotypes, as he is shown to be quite sensitive and having a hard time with emotions. It is clearly shown that Woody's aspiration is to feel loved and needed. When it comes to Woody's emotions, they are very significant throughout the film. Woody is going through a lot of emotions, and that is the main message of the film. When Woody is found by the collector, he feels relevant again, for the collector Woody is the most important toy because he is the missing piece.

In this part, Buzz is still fearless, heroic and has many extra masculine qualities. When Buzz and the other toys notice that a collector is stealing Woody, he immediately takes the initiative and organises a rescue operation for Woody. Remarkably, the rescue operation involves only male characters. Interestingly, the women in this toy company are portrayed in a very traditional female gender roles - Bo Peep is portrayed as very fragile girl, dressed in pink, taking care of the sheep and passive, while Mrs. Potato Head is portrayed in an overbearing maternal role, putting her husband's things together for the journey and telling him not to talk to strangers. Therefore, only the male toys go on the rescue operation and Buzz is the absolute leader of the group. The group of masculine toys participating in the rescue operation represent a rather friendly relationship, where they do not seek to dominate or compete with each other, but are all driven by a common goal, and by exposing their own strengths and weaknesses, they move towards it.

There are several significant scenes in the film about how men encounter and accept feminine manifestations in a positive way. In this movie, Woody and Buzz express emotions about fashion accessories, which would stereotypically be encrypted as a female behavior. Woody is deeply concerned about finding his lost hat because he fears that without it he wouldn't be able to go to cowboy camp with Andy. However, the cowboy hat is stereotypically associated with the traits of rugged masculinity, so the character does not deviate entirely from the traditional notion of

masculinity. But Woody expresses clear emotions and a fear that would not be acceptable to a very "tough" man. There is also a scene, where Buzz notices and admires belt on other Buzz Lightyear toy.

When Woody loses his hat, Buzz arranges a search for it because Woody is too ashamed to do so. Stereotypical gender roles are replaced by Bo Peep, one of the few female toys, who reassures Woody by telling him that it will be all right if he doesn't find his hat. These scenes communicate the message that it is accepted for men to pay attention to fashion accessories and be emotionally attached to them.

### **“Tarzan” (1999)**

“Tarzan” (1999) is the popular story about a man raised by gorillas in the African jungle. The movie is based on the 1912 story “Tarzan of the Apes” by Edgar Rice Burroughs. The 1999 movie was directed by Kevin Lima and Chris Buck. In the movie version, after an accident baby Tarzan and his parents are the only survivors but later on leopard kills his parents and a mother gorilla rescues him. She decides to raise him, the gorilla’s leader refuses to ever accept him as one of their own. When Tarzan grows up, he meets people for the first time.

In this film, the exploration of masculinity extends beyond the character of Tarzan himself, his relationships with other characters also present interesting details worthy of discussion. Firstly, Tarzan's appearance is actually portrayed in an extra masculine way. Tarzan is very muscular and has a very strong and athletic body. Tarzan's facial features are also portrayed as a handsome man, he has a chiseled jawline and sharp facial features, and his eyes are a very vivid blue color. As a human being, with this physique, he appears very strong, athletic and unique, but in the environment in which he grew up, among the gorillas, he is considered one of the weakest. As far as the male leaders are portrayed, in this environment, the leader is Kerchak, whose physique is portrayed as the strongest of all the apes, with the darkest fur and the lowest voice, these features immediately suggest that the character is depicted as being the most serious and in a position of leadership. Tarzan's character also shows traditional masculine qualities - he is very adventurous, protective and defensive of his family, and eager to prove himself worthy of approval from the group leader. He tries to show his dominance through physical power by puffing his chest out and shouting, he uses his strength to show his masculinity and to serve as the classical male symbol of the protector. Despite the fact that these qualities are quite stereotypical, he also has qualities that challenges the stereotypical behavior of a traditional man. He shows respect for his leader and his mother, he is quite sensitive and gentle with other people he meets, and he is not afraid to show his emotions when he learns a lot about the world from others or when he learns the truth about his parents.



**Fig. 4.** Tarzan

Just like in “Toy Story” movie, relationships with other characters are very significant in this film. The valuation of the other characters allows us to compare Tarzan's behaviors and to focus on the representations of masculinity. There is one important character in the film that allows a comparative analysis of two different types of masculinity.

One of the main antagonists, the English hunter and guide Clayton, who portrays a toxic masculinity, is like the opposite of Tarzan, who in this context portrays more qualities that challenge stereotypes. Both of them are big muscular men who express themselves very physically to show their dominance, but Tarzan’s actions are motivated by love for his family, which he is trying to protect. Clayton’s is motivated by greed, rage or violence and acts very miserly, he is ruthless, manipulative and willing to go very far only to achieve his selfish goals and he solves all his problems with a gun. His character has a deep-seated obsession for hunting and capturing gorillas for his own f or its own benefit and for the desire to make a profit. Tarzan, when he encounters a different culture and lifestyle than what he is accustomed to, takes it upon himself to learn about them and communicate with them. Clayton typically resorts to shouting, shooting, and threatening. When Tarzan and Clayton are fighting, Tarzan takes away Clayton’s gun, in response Clayton sneers and tells him to fire it and “to be a man” but Tarzan responds “not a man like you” and smashes gun. In comparison with Clayton, Tarzan knows how to be gentle, shows respect to others, never uses violence, unless it’s for protecting his family, Clayton always seemed to be brutal, violent and selfish. There is also a big difference in the way they communicate with women - Tarzan had respect and care for Jane, while Clayton looked down on her and considered her foolish because she was a woman.



**Fig. 5.** Antagonist Clayton from "Tarzan"

The representation of women in films can also shape boys' misconceptions about male and female roles. Two female figures are significant in the film - Tarzan's mother, Kala, and Tarzan's love interest, Jane. Both are portrayed in a very stereotypical way and as characters are not very important in the film. Jane is portrayed in a rather stereotypical way. She relies on others to save her from sticky situations, romance affects her emotions. Jane is often shown to be in danger and Tarzan or Clayton always saves her. The one time Jane leaves on her own into jungle, she gets chased by baboons. Subliminal message of this could be that it's dangerous for women to pursue things on their own and they always end up needing help from men. Despite the fact that Jane is an explorer and goes on journeys into the Jungle, she is still portrayed wearing a brightly colored long skirt, which is clearly not an adequate outfit for such expeditions. Because Jane is portrayed as vulnerable and fragile, Tarzan wants to take care of her and is always ready to help her. This portrayal of the couple's relationship allows children to understand that the man is supposed to be the woman's protector, while the woman is weak and fragile.

Tarzan's mother Kala is only important for a mother role, she is loving and caring, but it is always the father's love and respect that children yearn to earn. Kala's unconditional love isn't enough to satisfy Tarzan.

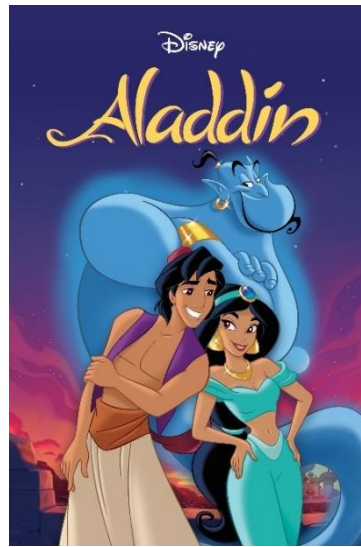
### **“Aladdin“ (1992)**

The movie Aladdin is based on an Arabic folktale of the same name - Aladdin, from “One Thousand and One Nights.” The film was produced and directed by John Musker and Ron Clements and was released in 1992, November. The main protagonist, Aladdin, is not wealthy and is a thief. He dreams of a better life and one day he discovers a genie lamp that can make his dreams come true. With the genie's help, Aladdin becomes a prince and tries to win the heart of the princess Jasmine, who is only allowed to marry a noble prince. Along the way, the protagonist also has to face difficulties and protect the genie's lamp from the antagonist Jafar, who has evil plans with the lamp.

Aladdin is depicted as a young, fit, and agile man. He has a lean and athletic physique, which is more realistic than other characters in Disney, like “Tarzan” (1999) or “Hercules” (1997). Aladdin is the only character in this movie who is not fully clothed, he always wears a vest unbuttoned that shows his muscular body (except for the genie, who is completely unclothed). Remarkably, there is no other male character in the film who is portrayed as having such a good physique, all the other male characters are either very stocky and short, like the princess's father, Sultan, or tall and too skinny, like the villain Jafar. Aladdin is portrayed as a brave, intelligent and resourceful guy, he uses his sharp mind to outsmart opponents and survive in the streets. Aladdin as a character is emotional and not afraid to express his emotions, he expresses fear, insecurity, and love, challenging the stereotype that men should not show their emotions. In the end of the movie, he confesses that he is not the prince he pretended to be and acknowledges having fooled the princess and her father. He takes full responsibility for his actions, recognizing the harm his lies caused and expressing his remorse. In a sincere conversation with the genie, he openly acknowledges his selfishness in postponing his promise to release the genie and ultimately decides to keep his word, but by addressing these feelings, he demonstrates that he is fully aware of what it means to behave ethically and what it means to keep his word. Aladdin becomes a hero at the end of the film and his character suggests that heroism isn't only about physical strength alone but also about intelligence and quick thinking. The Middle Eastern



narrative significantly influences the movie Aladdin in several ways, shaping its setting, characters, themes, and overall story. Such cultures are typically characterised by fine clothing and accessories. This is also seen in this film. We notice that the male characters are often dressed up with accessories such as brooches, various gemstones, expressive headdresses, etc. For instance, Aladdin, who wore no accessories as a commoner, dons these luxurious items upon becoming a prince. This film portrays men with accessories as symbols of high status, reinforcing their prestige through their attire. It challenges the stereotype that only women should wear accessories, and it rejects the notion that men who dress ornately are homosexual.



**Fig. 6.** "Aladdin" movie poster

One of the most important elements in this film is the representation of society and its principles. Social hierarchies are clearly expressed ; the Sultan and his court represent the elite while Aladdin symbolizes the lower social classes. Jasmine is fighting for independence, and she doesn't agree to a traditional marriage in which she is expected to become a noble prince's wife. Expectations emphasize the tension between personal desires and societal norms, providing insight into gender roles within a patriarchal structure. Although these elements are inspired by cultural archetypes and historical contexts, they create an idealized depiction of Middle Eastern society, shaping the audience's perception of the society. Wealth and status are highly valued in such a society, as they offer many more opportunities, as we can see in Aladdin's purpose as well. The protagonist seem to think he is worthy only if he has status and wealth. He doesn't believe that Jasmine could ever love him without status. The antagonist, Jafar, sees himself as worthy only if he has dominance and power among others, he wants to ask genie to make him Sultan, so he could have the highest status.

In this film, the status of women and societal expectations placed on them is also highly relevant to masculinity analysis, and there are many references to hegemonic masculinity. The film highlights gender roles within a patriarchal context, where men are seen as protectors and decision-makers, while women like Jasmine resist these constraints. The first notable moment where we notice only male dominance is in the moments when Sultan tells his daughter that she cannot have the highest status until she is married to a rich prince and that she will never become a leader and take over the role of a father herself. Arranged marriage is a form of male domination over a woman. Existing



patriarchy makes Jasmine lose the opportunity to become the leader of her country. Throughout the film, Princess Jasmine is like a trophy or a person without a decision, because the men around her want to decide for her who she should marry. The patriarchal hegemony shown in this movie dictates Jasmine to accept her condition as a woman. They are seen as the second class which does not have as many rights as men.

The protagonist shows emotional vulnerability, admitting his mistakes and wanting to be honest and true to himself and others. His journey is highlighted by self-improvement and heroism motivated by a desire to help others rather than dominate or control them. Unlike the antagonist, Jafar, who embodies toxic masculinity through manipulation, violence, and a desire for power, Aladdin's actions are motivated by love and honesty. Although the movie itself displays expressions of hegemonic masculinity in society and other stereotypes.

## **5.2. Masculine Representations in Disney Movies from 2000 to 2020**

Society's attitudes towards gender have changed in the 21st century, with increasing awareness of the misuse of stereotypes and of gender as a social construct, as well as recognition that people's perceptions of gender are shaped by environmental factors. In this century, the availability of television in the world has also changed significantly, the internet has become very widespread and it has become more popular to watch fairy tales in digital form rather than reading them in books. In this century, the availability of television in the world has also changed significantly, the 'consumption' of fairy tales in digital form has become more widespread than the reading of books, and the internet has become increasingly popular. Along with the internet came the ability to watch television online, to watch the films you want to watch without waiting for them to be scheduled on programmes and so on. Movies have become more and more influential in shaping opinion.

### **“The Incredibles 2” (2018)**

Starting with an analysis of Disney films released between 2000 and 2020, first movie to analyze is the most popular film of this period, “The Incredibles 2” (2018) (see table 4). "Incredibles 2" is the sequel to the 2004 animated superhero film "The Incredibles," both directed by Brad Bird. The movie continues the story of the superheroes Parr family, focusing on their attempts to balance ordinary life and duties with their superpowers. The story picks up right after the first film, with Elastigirl (Helen) becoming the face of a campaign to legalize superheroes, leaving the protagonist of the movie, Mr. Incredible (Bob) to handle household challenges, including their son's emerging powers. Family faces the villain, Screenslaver, who manipulates technology to control minds, aiming to make all superheroes illegal forever,

The protagonist is Bob Parr, also known as superhero Mr. Incredible. His physique is very unrealistic, he is very large, broad-shouldered, tall and muscular man. The film even highlights his abnormal size in several scenes, such as when he is sitting in a normal car, he is shown barely fitting in it and sitting leaning on the ceiling of the car, and he looks awkward when doing some household chores because he is too big for them.



**Fig. 7.** Mr. Incredible

His character is loving and dedicated husband and father, who wants to protect his family, but his own frustration and unhappiness in this particular life moment stops him from being a good parent. At the beginning of the film, the main idea revolves around how he struggles with the reversal of traditional gender roles when his wife, Helen, also known as superhero Elastigirl, takes on the primary superhero role, leaving him to do chores at home and challenging his sense of male identity and pride. The hardest thing for Bob to accept is that his life seems worthless when he must do household chores and can't help people himself, but Bob's reluctance to show vulnerability and his need to prove himself lead him to take on household responsibilities and parenting duties without seeking help, even when he is overwhelmed. Although in this part Bob avoids expressing his feelings and hides them from his wife, in the first part of the saga (2004) it was clear that Bob is honest, unafraid to admit his mistakes and to apologise for them. He does not show much toxic masculinity traits, but in the second part of the film saga, toxic masculinity is more evident in terms of the roles in the family and the character's reactions to it.

Certainly, within the family gender roles in the film, stereotypes are very visible, depicting expected attitudes and behaviors, even when the woman is shown working and achieving more than the man, the film shows the male character's dissatisfaction with this and how unhappy he is about that. However, as in most of the films analysed, there is a fundamental change in the toxic character of the protagonist. Bob learns to appreciate his wife, he starts to understand his children better and he doesn't mind sharing his responsibilities at home, he expresses vulnerability and it is noticeable that his character improves throughout the movie. Bob's character growth symbolises a shift away from stereotypical masculinity: he learns to appreciate and support his wife's career, becomes more involved in his children's lives, and finally becomes a father who can play the role of a stay-at-home dad.

In this analysis, it is also worth mentioning Syndrome, the antagonist of the first film in this saga, "The Incredibles" (2004), who has a very clear expression of toxic masculinity. His fixation on becoming a superhero leads him to adopt a ruthless and manipulative demeanor. Syndrome's actions are driven by a deep-seated need for recognition and admiration. There are scenes in the film where Syndrome even mocks Bob for his "feminine" gestures. At one point, Syndrome mimics Bob's call for help and speaks in a higher-pitched voice, as if to make his voice more feminine. Syndrome sees the possibility of a man needing to ask for help as negative and a sign of weakness.

It is common in Disney films to have two males in the film whose behavior seems to contradict each other, and who seem to represent two different manifestations of masculinity. We have already seen this in films such as "Toy Story" (1995) with Woody and Buzz, "Aladdin" (1992) with Aladdin and Jafar (1999). It has also been seen in other Disney films like in the movie "The Emperor's New Groove" (2000) with characters Kuzco and Pacha, who are more like the friend duo from Toy Story, and in "The Lion King" (1994), where the brothers Mufasa and Scar have completely opposite characters. In many films, the toxic masculinity is represented by the antagonist. The protagonist, even if he expresses toxic qualities at the beginning of the film, usually improves over the movie and becomes a better role model.

### **„Toy Story 3“ (2010)**

Since the “Toy Story” saga films dominate the highest grossing films also in this selected period, going back to the analysis of the same characters will be useful to see if the behavior of the same characters has changed, since there is a gap of about 10 years between the release of the films. “Toy Story 3” is the third installment in the “Toy Story” series, it was directed by Lee Unkrich and released in 2010 June.

In this part two main protagonists Woody and Buzz with the rest of the toys face reality, when their owner Andy leaves for collage. The toys are donated to daycare and when they believe they found a home, where they could make other children happy, they meet the antagonist of the movie Bear Lotso who controls the toys with fear and manipulation. The film reaches a tense and emotional climax as the toys escape from bad events and eventually find a new, loving home with a young girl named Bonnie.

The appearance and personalities of the main characters do not change much, but once again the two protagonists, Woody and Buzz, grow emotionally, do not hide their emotions and are open to change. Woody learns to adapt and let go, understanding that their purpose as toys is to bring joy to children, even if it means moving on from Andy. Also, Woody learns to rely more on his friends and trust their abilities. This means that Woody is shifting even further away from the toxic leadership qualities that were more noticeable in the first part of the film series, and he is becoming more open-minded and no longer seeking to control the whole group. This shift from a solo problem-solver to a collaborative team member highlights his development in building trust and valuing teamwork. Buzz demonstrates greater humility and supportiveness, prioritizing the group's well-being over his own needs. When Woody insists on returning to Andy, Buzz supports him, even if he has doubts. This demonstrates his willingness to prioritize the group's well-being over his own opinions.

Since the main characters in the “Toy Story” saga do not show much toxic masculinity, “Toy Story 3” introduces more interesting characters that allow us to delve deeper into the masculinity represented in the film. The classic villain model is again seen in this film, where the protagonist has more positive qualities and the antagonist looks like an example of toxic masculinity. The main villain in this film is Lotso, a pink and strawberry-scented teddy bear who is not very masculine in appearance but has a very strong presence of hegemonic masculinity in his character. In nearly all the films analysed before, it was obvious from the first sight that the character would be a villain because of his appearance. In the majority of films, villains are often portrayed with exaggerated

masculine features, with a tough or even creepy appearance, oddly proportioned or not particularly handsome (Jafar from “Aladdin” (1992), Clayton from “Tarzan” (1999), Syndrome from “The Incredibles” (2004), Hades from “Hercules” (1997), Gaston from “Beauty and the Beast” (1991) etc. In this film, we see that the villain can be not only an unattractive or unpleasant person, but also a seemingly nice-looking individual and outward appearances can be deceiving. With this character appearance filmmakers challenge stereotypes and surprise the audience. Thus, while Lotso does not look like a stereotypical representation of toxic masculinity, his actions and behavior place him in that role. He demonstrates harmful and dominant masculinity traits while he controls and manipulates other toys at the daycare. He forms a hierarchical system that revolves around his power and uses manipulation and violence to maintain it. Lotso's refusal to show vulnerability, driven by his fear of betrayal, exemplifies toxic masculinity's dismissal of any perceived weakness.



**Fig. 8.** Antagonist Lotso from "Toy Story 3"

Another character who deserves a tip is Ken the doll, who challenges traditional gender norms and stereotypes associated with masculinity. Ken is characterized by his love for fashion, his extensive wardrobe, and his sensitivity. He enjoys activities that are traditionally seen as feminine, such as dressing up and decorating, and takes great pride in his appearance. Despite having so many feminine qualities, Ken is Lotso's partner and helps him with the patriarchal regime in the daycare. Ken desires to fit in with the dominant male figure, although his soft side shows up in relationship with Barbie. This duality in Ken's character highlights the possibility of a more inclusive and multifaceted representation of masculinity, where men can show more wide range of behavior, including sensitivity, love for fashion and also dominance. Similar behavior challenging traditional gender norms and stereotypes can be found in other Disney movies like “Frozen” (2013), where character Kristoff shown to be in touch with his emotions and caring. He doesn't conform to the stoic and dominating male stereotype, in fact he plays supportive role to female character Anna. Just like Ken in "Toy Story 3", both characters show that masculinity can be different and include such a traits as sensitivity, empathy, and emotional openness.

### **“Toy Story 4” (2019)**

One of the most recent films analysed in this work. „Toy story 4“ was directed by Josh Cooley and released in 2019 June. The movie's plot follows the group of toys as they adjust to life with their new

owner, Bonnie. When Bonnie creates a new toy named Forky, Woody takes it upon himself to take care of Forky and ensure he understands his role as a toy. During a road trip, Forky gets lost and Woody seeks to rescue him. Along the way, Woody encounter old friends from Andy's room, who now live as "lost toys." Woody grapples with his sense of purpose and loyalty, ultimately deciding to stay with them and help other lost toys find their way. As noted in the previous analyses of the film saga, the experiences of the protagonists in this part of the story remain very similar, the film focuses on the multifaceted and evolving masculinity, showcasing that strength lies in emotional openness and in genuine, supportive relationships. However, the characters still exhibit the same character traits that could be classified as highly masculine: Woody feels responsible for ensuring the safety and happiness of the other toys and this aligns with the traditional masculine role of the protector and caretaker. Also, his initial resistance to stepping aside for other toys underscores the pressure on men to constantly prove their worth. Buzz Lightyear continues to embody traits associated with traditional masculine heroism, such as bravery, strength, and a sense of duty. It is also worth mentioning the portrayal of a new male character in the film. Forky is portrayed as weak, feckless and someone who always needs to be saved. This is a very ambiguous portrayal, on the one hand it may seem that less persistent and weaker men always have to have a stronger man around to save them, but on the other hand, Forky's character challenges the notion that male characters must be strong, knowledgeable, and in control.

In both the third and the fourth part of the saga, the villain is not portrayed as a creepy or unflattering individual. In this part, the role of the villain is played by Gabby-Gabby, a sweet-looking doll. Gabby Gabby's character in "Toy Story 4" offers a nuanced portrayal of an antagonist who is driven by deep-seated desires for acceptance and love. This subverts the traditional passive female role and portrays her as a strong, decisive figure, even though her methods are initially bad. In this film, the villain looks a slightly different from what is usually seen, as she is given a path of redemption, emphasizing the importance of empathy, understanding and the universal need to connect. The film does not portray any male dominance, so no hegemonic masculinity can be observed.



**Fig. 9.** Antagonist Gabby-Gabby from "Toy Story 4"

Another important character in the film, who shapes opinions not only about masculinity but also about gender roles in general, is Bo Peep, a doll from Andy's room, whom Woody meets, now living a separate life. In the first parts, she was portrayed as a delicate, fragile girl in a pink dress. The girl

begins to live an independent life only when she is left alone in the circumstances in which she must survive. The character, who has been portrayed as fragile and vulnerable, is now on an equal footing with the protagonist Woody. Their partnership signifies a balanced relationship where both characters contribute equally, challenging conventional power dynamics often seen in traditional masculinity. The portrayal of this character also uses one clothing stereotype: as long as the character was "feminine", she wore a skirt. Now the character demonstrates more of a 'masculine' courage and assertiveness, and her transformation is symbolised by the fact that she is wearing trousers.



**Fig. 10.** Bo-Peep transformation in "Toy Story" saga

While there are traces of toxic masculinity in "Toy Story 4," they are largely challenged and redefined throughout the film. The narrative promotes a more inclusive and emotionally open representation of masculinity, emphasizing empathy, adaptability, and equal partnerships over traditional masculinity norms.

### **“Up” (2009)**

Movie “Up” was directed by Pete Docter and released in 2009 May. “Up” follows the story of Carl Fredricksen, a widowed and retired balloon salesman, who embarks on an adventure to fulfill a promise to his late wife, Ellie. Carl attaches thousands of balloons to his house, lifting it off the ground to fly to Paradise Falls, a remote location in South America that he and Ellie had dreamed of visiting. Unexpectedly, he is joined by Russell, a young and enthusiastic wild life explorer, who joins Carl on his Journey. Along the way, they meet a talking dog Dug and encounter a giant bird Kevin, who is being hunted by the traveler, antagonist, Charles Muntz, whom Carl had idolized in his childhood. Together, they face numerous challenges and uncover the true meaning of adventure, friendship, and letting go of the past to embrace new beginnings. A very similar protagonist is also featured in the Disney film “A Christmas Carol” (2009).





**Fig. 11.** Carl and Russell from "Up"

The protagonist of the movie is an elderly man Carl whose appearance reflects his age the most. He is short and despite his age he has stocky and solid build which suggests that he is a physically strong and robust individual, reinforcing the image of traditional male strength. Carl is represented with grey and sparse hair which accentuates his age. At first sight, he appears to be a slightly grumpy old man, but in the opening of the film we realise that he is going through a difficult emotional experience, as the town councilors want to evict him from his and his late wife's home, to which he is emotionally attached. Carl's emotional development in "Up" is central to the film's narrative and provides a rich exploration of grief, healing, and personal growth. The most important scenes that symbolise Carl's emotional growth occur when he meets the odd boy, Russell. At first, Carl is very passive and reluctant to accept him into his company, but over time they develop a strong bond, and the film once again shows the two men's psychological journey in which their interaction is the main key to character's growth (Ebrahim, 2014).

The most toxic masculinity traits in this film can be seen in the antagonist once again. Charles Muntz is introduced as a celebrated adventurer and explorer. His appearance embodies traditional ideals of strength, authority, and toughness. He has a physically fit and imposing figure, with a square jaw, piercing gaze, and confident posture that exudes dominance and control. Muntz's problems begins when he claims to have discovered a giant, exotic bird species, but the scientific community accuses him of lying and his reputation is tarnished. His aim is to prove them wrong and he tries to capture the exotic bird at any cost. This obsessive quest becomes his life's mission. His self-worth is tied to his accomplishments, which reflects a common aspect of toxic masculinity where success and validation are paramount. He uses threats and violence to maintain control, Muntz's aggressive behavior and need to dominate are visible in his treatment of others, including Carl and Russell. This character also shows lack of empathy and refusal to accept defeat.

The romantic relationship between the protagonist Carl and his wife Ellie is a poignant and heartwarming portrayal of love, partnership, and shared dreams. Their romance challenges traditional gender roles by depicting a partnership built on equality, shared aspirations, and emotional vulnerability. A few stereotypical manifestations may be noticed, for example, that Carl assumes the role of the protector and provider, while Ellie embodies traits associated with nurturing and emotional support. On the other hand, the sensitive portrayal of relationships and Carl's longing for them could be an exemplary representation of healthy gender representation.

At the end of the movie we see him more family-oriented with his ongoing involvement in Russell's life. When they return home, Carl fulfills a paternal role for Russell by going with him to a wilderness explorer ceremony. Carl transforms from a grumpy, solitary old man into a kinder, involved paternal figure and proves that protagonist in Disney movies usually ends up transformed into more exemplary masculinity role.

### **Complementary Films in for Examination**

An examination of other Disney films reveals both commendable expressions of masculinity and more detrimental, toxic portrayals. For example in the film "Coco" (2017) the male protagonist Miguel doesn't remind a typical masculine hero, who is trying to save the princess and marry her. He is motivated by his hobby and interest in music, which could even be stereotyped as "feminine", and by his desire to reunite his family. He doesn't have an excessively muscular physique or a desire to dominate or prove their superiority. It offers a different representation of what a male hero can look like and what could motivate him.

Another good example of progressive masculinity is protagonist Joe Gardner's character in movie "Soul" (2020). This character neither in appearance nor in behavior displays any of the qualities of toxic masculinity. He focuses on personal growth, his emotions and meaningful connections, he is caring, and he is very passionate about music. The main topic of the movie is exploration of the meaning and purpose of life, film delves into themes of passion, identity, and what truly makes life worth living.

If we look at the period of 1990-2000, we could say that the protagonist in "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" (1996) also has more open and empathetic qualities, but he also has some overly masculine qualities - for example, the film emphasizes his strength.

The film "Ralph Breaks the Internet" (2018) could be used as an example of a movie that has an extra-masculine protagonist who, both in appearance and behavior, fits the traits of toxic masculinity, like the protagonist's Ralph insecurities, controlling behavior, and reluctance to show vulnerability. His overprotectiveness of his friend Vanellope, fear of losing her friendship, and jealousy of her new interests illustrate traditional masculine norms that prioritize dominance and control. Ralph's appearance also represents extra-masculine features, he has a sturdy and muscular build, broad shoulders and disproportionately large hands and square jawline. His size and strength visually convey masculine traits like power, dominance, and physical prowess. As in all analysed films, the protagonist also goes through a stage of emotional growth, but Ralph's appearance and behavior have a very strong masculine character.

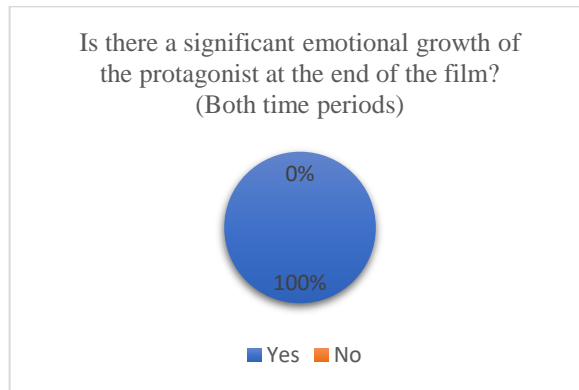
A movie where the main character's motivation is even the notion of toxic masculinity is "Hercules" (1997) the main motivation of the protagonist, Hercules, is to prove himself as a true hero and regain his place among the gods on Mount Olympus. Ultimately, Hercules' main motivation is rooted in a desire for acceptance, belonging, and self-discovery. Hercules embarks on a quest to become a hero worthy of rejoining his family among the gods.



### 5.3. Comparative analysis: How Masculine Representations Changed in 30 Years

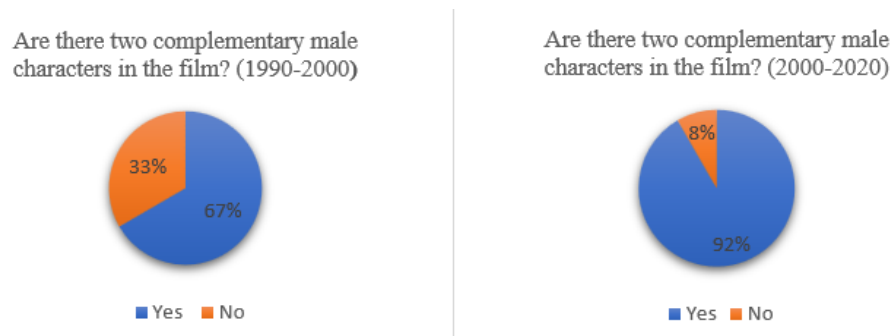
The aim of the study is to compare how the portrayal of masculinity in Disney movies has changed over a period of 30 years and at certain centuries that have been influenced by different environmental factors.

As mentioned before, the importance of the friendship between two male characters is often featured in Disney films. In all the films analysed, the protagonist undergoes an emotional growth over the course of the film (see Table 11) and, in many cases, this growth is supported by another male character.



**Fig. 12.** Is there a significant emotional growth of the protagonist at the end of the film?

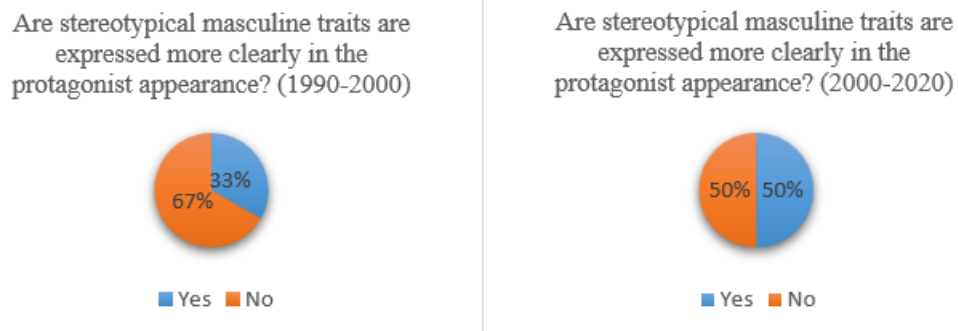
This occurrence increased in the second period which was studied (see Table 12). It symbolises that the male relationship is not always portrayed as competitive. This noticeable shift is very positive, as children are not led to believe that men must compete for positions of power, but that they can develop together. It also challenges the stereotype that close male friendships are not analogous to homosexual relationships.



**Fig. 13.** Are there two complementary male characters in the film? (Comparison between two time periods)

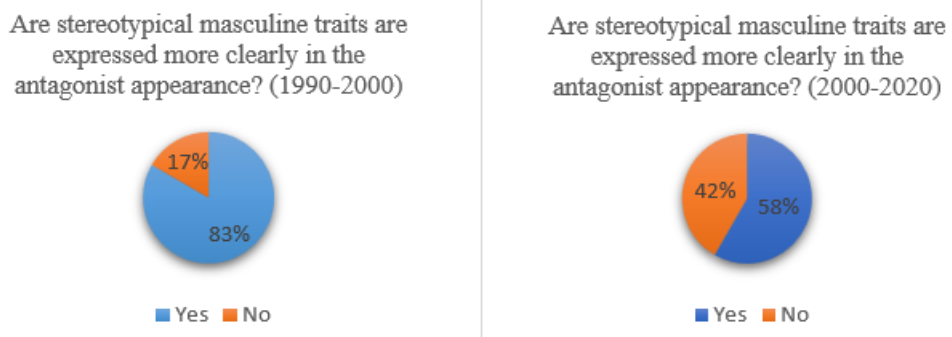
One of the most notable things about the films is that the main protagonists are not always portrayed with a lot of toxic or stereotypical masculine traits. In the case of the protagonists' appearance, in the period 1990-2000, only 33% of the protagonists had toxic or stereotypical traits, while in the period 2000-2020, toxic traits were more visible in the protagonists' appearances, in this case as much as 50% of the protagonists had toxic or stereotypical traits (see Table 13). The most common stereotypical traits portrayed in the male protagonists are an extra-muscular body, a tall height, exaggerated power, and bigger facial features. Among the films studied from 2000-2020 were

protagonists such as Mr. Incredible in "The Incredibles" and "The Incredibles 2, Ralph in "Wreck-It Ralph" and "Ralph Brakes the Internet" and so on.



**Fig. 14.** Are stereotypical masculine traits are expressed more clearly in the protagonist appearance? (Comparison between two time periods)

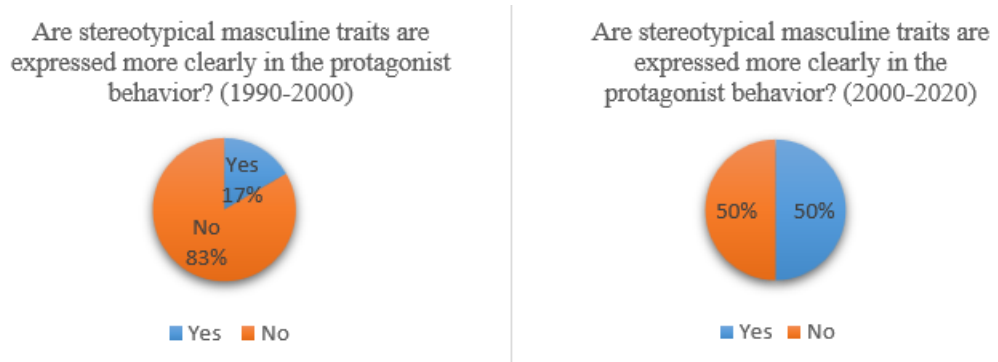
When it comes to the portrayal of the characters' appearance, the antagonists' appearance is almost always present, with stereotypical or toxic masculine traits appearing in 83% of films between 1990 and 2000, and a slight decrease to 58% of films between 2000 and 2020 (see Table 14). More recently, women have also started to be portrayed as antagonists (Evelyn Deavor in "The Incredibles 2", Gabby-Gabby in "Toy Story 4"). There have also been cases where the villain in the film was generally quite pleasant-looking and did not conform to any stereotypical masculine traits (Bear Lotso in "Toy Story 4"). This is a positive development in children's opinion-forming, as it shows them that even individuals who are pleasant or nice-looking can have evil intentions. If villains in films are always portrayed as having angry, stern features, children may develop the idea that a person's appearance is always the basis for judging whether he or she is bad. And at the same time, children may be led to believe that individuals who display strong masculine features in their appearance (muscular, tall, strong, angry facial features, etc.) are always bad. In this case, in the 21st century, it has come to be seen that strong masculine features do not always indicate that a person should be bad.



**Fig. 15.** Are stereotypical masculine traits are expressed more clearly in the antagonist appearance? (Comparison between two time periods)

It is common for protagonists to show persistence and determination to achieve certain goals, sometimes with a dominant role or a desire to rescue someone, and these traits alone can be considered to make a character more stereotypical, even if their appearance doesn't symbolise it. On the other hand, it is more unusual than usual for protagonists to display stereotypical or toxic masculine traits

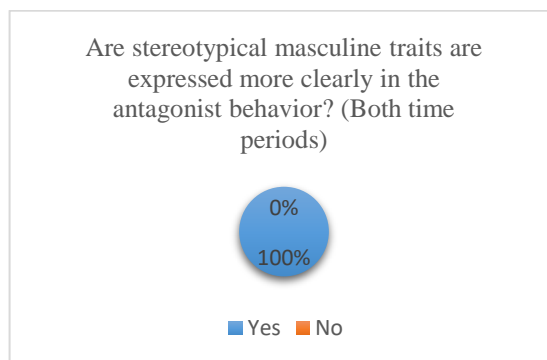
in their behaviour (see Table 15), but even if they are expressed at the beginning of the film, they often change over the course of the film, as the characters in all the films analysed develop and grow emotionally. In Disney animated films there is always an educational moral, so it is quite common for characters in an animated film who displayed toxic or stereotypical masculine qualities to lose them by the end of the film, or to become more emotionally available, more open, more accepting of their mistakes, etc. In such a way, the audience is told that such toxic qualities are worth changing and can change through certain life events, and that when the characters become more open-minded, they often achieve everything they want.



**Fig. 16.** Are stereotypical masculine traits are expressed more clearly in the protagonist behavior? (Comparison between two time periods).

In the more recent period, there has been an increase in the portrayal of protagonists with stereotypical or toxic masculine characteristics, but at the same time it is worth noting that there were characters who did not display them at all and who could be considered as examples of non-stereotypical masculinity (the characters in the films "Soul" and "Coco", which we mentioned before).

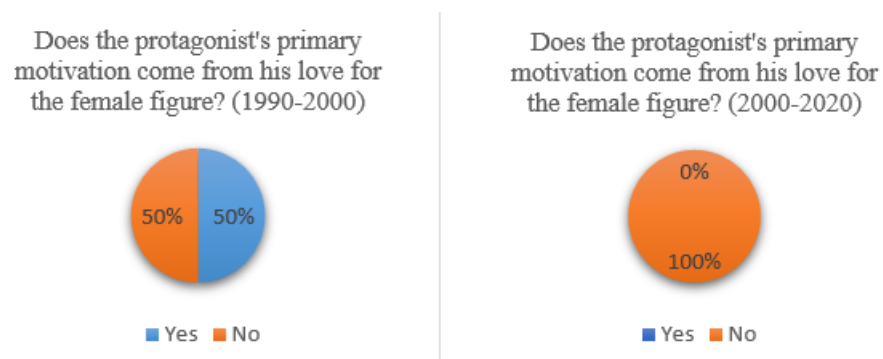
Without exception, all the antagonists in both time periods displayed stereotypical or toxic masculinity behaviors (see Table 17). We can observe that toxic masculinity is considered to be a bad trait that is only attributed to villains. This can lead children to believe that stereotypical masculine characteristics such as the desire to dominate, violence, humiliation of others, etc. are not good and can lead to bad consequences. Toxic masculinity is associated with villains.



**Fig. 17.** Are stereotypical masculine traits are expressed more clearly in the antagonist behavior? (Both time periods)

Another noted change in the representation of masculinity in the different time periods is that in the period 1990-2000, half of the characters were motivated by love for the female figure, but in 2000-

2020, in none of the films analysed were the characters motivated by love, instead they were mostly motivated by the desire to help others, to achieve their goals and so on (see Table 18).



**Fig. 18.** Does the protagonist's primary motivation come from his love for the female figure? (Comparison between two time periods)

The fact that women are not portrayed as men's motivation to achieve challenges a certain stereotype that all men are incapable of controlling themselves for women or passion and this is increasingly noticeable in the more recent period, 2000-2020.

## Conclusions

1. Children's perceptions of social gender are influenced by a variety of environmental factors, with cartoons being one of the most important and available media these days. Specifically, gender in cartoons is portrayed in a simplistic and often stereotypical way, so it is not difficult to shape children's opinions. Animated Disney movies frequently display characters that exemplify traditional masculine traits like strength, bravery, and emotional restraint. These traits are often portrayed as the ideal or expected characteristics of men, and children who frequently watch these cartoons may come to view them as such. As gender is represented in films in a very straightforward way, and the same elements are often repeated, it is very easy for children to interpret and apply them to their own lives. Feminist theories help to clarify the important issue that gender can be seen as a social construct, while other theories help to clarify how television affects children. Cultivation Theory posits that prolonged exposure to specific messages and representations in media, particularly television, shapes and cultivates an individual's beliefs and understanding of the world and Social Cognitive Theory posits that children observe and imitate behaviors presented in media, especially in animated movies. What children acquire and learn from watching animated movies in childhood can have a profound impact on a whole generation's sense of social gender.
2. All the Disney films examined share a few common features. In all the films, the antagonistic villains are portrayed with stereotypical masculine character traits, while the protagonists are portrayed in the opposite way - some of them have these traits, but they are undermining the protagonist in their path. In all the films analysed, the protagonist goes through a path of emotional growth and at the end of the film he seems to realise that if he abandons stereotypical masculine traits (such as the desire to dominate, aggression or emotional detachment), he will achieve his goal and make friends. Stereotypical masculinity seems to be associated with villains and bad people. In some analysed films, male friendship is seen as fulfilling and nurturing and meaningful. It is possible to say that male characters are usually not motivated by love for a woman but are motivated by their own goals or the desire to help others.
3. The main shifts in masculinity that have been observed to have changed over 30 years are that films in general have become more innovative in terms of characters, in the 21st century it seems that among the animated movies analysed there is not a single film left where the main character is a prince rescuing a princess or fighting for her. It is possible to assume that the relationship between princes and princesses and their dependence on each other is no longer such an interesting concept in films. It is also worth noting that, as of 2020, of the films studied, there has not been a single one in which the protagonist is motivated by romantic love for a woman. It is interesting that women have started to be portrayed as villains when between 1990 and 2000 there were no such cases, so it is not only extra-masculine characters that can be bad, but also women or characters that do not resemble extra-masculine ones. It's not just toxic masculinity that is associated with villains after all. There has also been an increase in the number of friendly relationships between male characters that lead each other towards

emotional and spiritual growth. It has also been observed that since 2000, there have been cases of male protagonists starting to be portrayed as having an interest in art, which used to be a stereotypically feminine hobby, while men were more concerned with power and dominance.

4. It is difficult to assess that the representation of masculinity itself has categorically changed - it is inaccurate to claim that in 30 years masculinity has become more truthful or more stereotyped. However, as mentioned in Conclusion 3, we can observe changes in male relationships, which are becoming richer and more important for the growth of the characters. It can be seen that extra-masculine traits in later films started to be further diminished and seen as a barrier to achieving goals. Despite the fact that more recent films have introduced a few protagonists who do not express stereotypical masculine traits in their appearance, there has not been a strong change in the overall appearance of the characters, as male protagonists are still often portrayed in stereotypical ways. "Disney should continue to attempt to represent gender in a more diverse way and not to have a rigid view of what the 'correct' portrayal of gender should look like.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Analysis of movies from the 1990-2000 period

	Question no. 1	Question no. 2	Question no. 3	Question no. 4	Question no. 5	Question no. 6	Question no. 7
<b>Toy Story 2 (1999)</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Aladdin (1992)</b>	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Toy Story (1995)</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Tarzan (1999)</b>	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>The Hunchback of Notre Dame (1996)</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Hercules (1997)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes

## Appendix 2. Analysis of movies from the 1990-2000 period

	Question no. 1	Question no. 2	Question no. 3	Question no. 4	Question no. 5	Question no. 6	Question no. 7
<b>The Incredibles 2 (2018)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Toy Story 4 (2019)</b>	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Toy Story 3 (2010)</b>	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Up (2009)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>The Incredibles (2004)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Big Hero 6 (2014)</b>	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Soul (2020)</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Coco (2017)</b>	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Ralph Brakes the Internet (2018)</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Wreck-It Ralph (2012)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>A Christmas Carol (2009)</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Meet the Robinsons (2007)</b>	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes