

2 Gender, Disney, and Pixar in Historical Context

“Come on!” I continued, my voice rising. “It’s 2006, not 1950. This is Berkeley, Calif. Does every little girl really have to be a princess?”

My daughter, who was reaching for a Cinderella sticker, looked back and forth between us. “Why are you so mad, Mama?” she asked. “What’s wrong with princesses?”

Peggy Orenstein (2006)

Introduction

We believe as sociolinguists that studying language without knowing its social context just doesn’t work very well. Our field frowns upon imagining language in a vacuum, or spoken by some “ideal speaker.” We want to know things like: Who said it? Who were they with? What parts of their identity were important at that moment? Only after we know those things do we have enough background to properly analyze any variation we see.

A movie is much the same way. While a film obviously doesn’t use language socially in the exact same way that a person does, it still employs language as a social tool. Beyond the movie itself, the people who create and consume the work are also themselves historically and politically specific. As Queen (2015: 21) puts it:

We can consider the scripted media to be fundamentally interesting precisely because of the ways in which *they are of the culture of which they are a part*, even as they play a role in shaping that culture. The primary difference between the scripted media and other sources of information about sociocultural life is that what appears in the media derives from imagination and thus represents a highly edited version of social and cultural life. Thus, the scripted media offer a fairly contained, and edited, microcosm of the places from which their players come. (Queen 2015: 21, emphasis ours)

We agree that scripted media can provide a fascinating look into the culture in which they were created, which is in large part why we’ve done this project. But movies are so much a product of their historical context that to attempt to analyze their linguistic construction of gender without first situating the texts

politically would produce a woefully incomplete analysis. And this feels especially true of Disney and Pixar movies. Because, oh, what a political life they have led! Disney and Pixar aren't just producing any old texts; their movies are some of the most marketed, most consumed, and most discussed pieces of media in our modern world. To examine these particular texts without properly considering when, how, and why they were made would be a disservice to the rich social lives these films have lived.

In this chapter, our primary aim is simply to orient readers to our dataset: we'll introduce the details of which movies we're analyzing, why we chose them, as well as the particular ways we've decided to divide our movies into subsets and why. We also want to situate these movies in the larger story of gender representation on screen in America, with a focus on the impact that feminism in particular has made on how audiences expect masculine and feminine characters to be portrayed. As we discuss each set of films, we'll give a brief overview of the larger political zeitgeist as it pertained to gender in the media at the time of their creation.

Although the movies we analyze in subsequent chapters are produced in equal parts by Disney and Pixar, the bulk of this chapter is going to be spent on the history of the Disney Princesses. We spend extra time on the topic because, in our view, Disney's Princesses are a distinctive bunch in the world of children's media. They're not just movies that have women in them; rather, at their core, they are *about femininity*. Each Princess movie is focused on creating a "role model" heroine – so focused, in fact, that it can feel like Disney's goal isn't to create a great story so much as it is to create a great woman whom they can later market to young girls. The Princesses' deliberate centering of gender representation and performance is unparalleled in any other children's media franchise, and as such bears extra discussion. In fact, this symbolic conflation of "princess" and "ideal" (or "ideally marketable") women is what inspired us (along with many other scholars, we're sure) to begin our analysis of children's media with this set of films in particular (while setting aside other Disney blockbusters such as *The Lion King* or *Wreck-It Ralph*). While the fascination with depicting an ideal femininity is consistently at the heart of Princess movies, what exactly "ideal femininity" means has shifted dramatically over the years due to the growing influence of feminism in popular culture. The historical scope here is pretty grand: Disney Animation has been producing princesses for 85 years at the time of publication, compared to Pixar's mere 27 years. We want to make sure to properly contextualize each era of Disney animation in feminist history, so we can better understand the ways Disney uses language to respond to audiences' demands at any given moment.

Pixar Animation doesn't necessarily have the same hyper-fixation on gender that Disney does, but that doesn't mean that there isn't political context (and political ramifications) to their choices surrounding gender representation.

We'll spend the latter part of this chapter discussing what sets Pixar Animation apart from Disney culturally, and how we expect those differences to emerge in our subsequent analyses.

The Evolution of the Disney Princess

The Cult of the Princess

A definition of terms before we go further: when we say we're analyzing Disney Princess movies, what we mean is that we're looking at every movie that Disney as a company counts as part of their "Disney Princess" brand.

We follow previous literature in splitting the Princess brand films up into three distinct "eras" of movies (Do Rozario 2004; England et al. 2011; Stover 2013; Towbin et al. 2004). The three eras are presented below.

- **The Classic Era (1937–1959)**
 - Snow White (1937)*
 - Cinderella (1950)*
 - Sleeping Beauty (1959)*
- **The Renaissance Era (1989–1997)**
 - The Little Mermaid (1989)*
 - Beauty and the Beast (1991)*
 - Aladdin (1992)*
 - Pocahontas (1995)*
 - Mulan (1997)*
- **The New Age Era (2009–2019)**
 - The Princess and the Frog (2009)*
 - Tangled (2010)*
 - Brave (2012)*
 - Frozen (2013)*
 - Moana (2016)*
 - Frozen II (2019)*

These movies are all touted together as "Princess movies," and often discussed as a single topic. But for all that, the products of the three eras really are quite different. This is certainly true stylistically: there's a huge difference between the crooning jazz songs and sentimental tone of the Classic Era movies and the bombastic musical spectacle of the Renaissance. This may seem like an intuitive fact for people familiar with these films (especially those who, like the second author, grew up in the Renaissance Era and, even as a child, had an alarming amount of Disney song lyrics memorized). These eras are also set apart from one another in their attitude towards gender politics, which we will discuss more in depth below.

But despite their differences these films all have a central thing in common: the concept of “Princess,” Disneyfied. Of course, the Princess as a storytelling archetype was not invented by Walt Disney. Long before *Snow White*, it was already laden with significant ideological baggage about how to be a woman. In America, the princess figure was being used throughout the 1800s and early 1900s as a stand-in for the “ideal girl.” Princesses in older stories were often explicit tools for modeling ideal feminine traits, such as domesticity, sweetness, kindness, and the like; Cinderella and Pocahontas were two particularly popular stories at the turn of the century, the former demonstrating patience, kindness, and resilience, and the latter modeling the renouncement of “barbarous” girlhood (Forman-Brunell & Eaton 2009). It was such an established trope that by the early twentieth century authors were already deconstructing and remixing the princess trope in popular literature like *A Little Princess* (Burnett 1905).

However, while Walt Disney didn’t invent the princess, he did raise her to a new level of importance in American culture. When *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* debuted in 1937, it was not only Walt Disney’s first full-length movie, but the first-ever animated film with a feature-length run time. Adjusted for inflation, it’s still one of the top ten highest earning movies in cinema history; it also earned Disney an honorary Oscar for “a significant screen innovation which has charmed millions and pioneered a great new entertainment field.”¹

Disney’s name remained closely tied with princesses for the rest of his career, and later creatives built on his foundation to create a full-blown fairytale empire. It was princesses who revitalized Disney animation when it was near bankruptcy, not once, but twice (with *The Little Mermaid* in 1989 and *The Princess and the Frog* in 2009). And then there’s the merchandising: the Disney Princess product line makes \$4 billion per year according to 2014 figures, an amount that’s second only to Mickey Mouse himself (Backman 2014). As Elizabeth Bell put it, “With the Logo ‘Walt Disney Pictures,’ Disney wrote his name and ownership on the folk stories of women, creating indelible images of the feminine” (1995: 108).

The Classic Era: Walt’s Girls

The Classic Era of Disney is what often comes to mind first when thinking about the Disney Princess: the tiaras, the gowns, the sparkles, the singing to birds, and all the rest of it. While iconic, these films also have a reputation for being extremely problematic in their representation of gender roles, and to that end they’ve been heavily criticized by modern audiences and scholars alike.

¹ Fun fact: the Oscar statue he was awarded was custom-made to be one full-sized golden statue surrounded by seven miniature statuettes, which is pretty adorable.

It's important to note that at the time these movies came out, feminism hadn't yet had any reckoning with the world of mass media. In fact, moral panic over Hollywood's culture was pushing gender politics on screen in the opposite direction. All three films were made during the era of the Hays Code, a production code enforced in Hollywood 1934–1968. Its *raison d'être* was that “no picture shall be produced which will lower the moral standards of those who see it” (Motion Picture Association of America 1930). The “moral standards” in question were rather conservative, particularly in regard to gender; the effect was that female characters at the time were less empowered, less brave, less sexual, and more likely to be a tragic victim than in older movies made before the code's enforcement (Dicker 2016).

On top of these standards, mass media in the 1940s and 1950s often had an openly propagandistic agenda to depict women as domestic and servile. This trend was a response to World War II, during which women had joined the workforce during the war to make up for the lack of working men in the country. After soldiers returned, postwar media switched to extremely regressive models of femininity in an explicit effort to convince women to return to the home. As Andi Zeisler writes:

The media forces that had hurried women into the factories were now herding them back into the home to make room for men – for whom, it was understood, the workforce was their rightful place. Women were no longer wooed with images of themselves as competent welders or military nurses; instead the postwar era of advertising ushered in a new set of representations of women as either dutiful wives and mothers or childlike sex kittens. (Zeisler 2008: 28)

The consistent depiction of women in this time period was, in sum, a product of conservative backlash against women. No thought was given to how to depict women as empowered; if anything, the opposite was true.

Even in this already repressive environment, Disney fostered a reputation as a conservative, “upstanding moral organization” (Griffin 2000). As early as the 1930s, Hollywood had nicknamed the studio as “Mickey's Monastery” thanks to their sentimental, ‘wholesome’ portrayal of romance and sexuality (Griffin 2000). It perhaps goes without saying that at this point in history, Disney's team of writers and animators were all men; women were only employed for the grunt work of inking and coloring animation. The princesses that resulted from these teams were the very picture of femininity as defined by the time period. One review called Snow White “the classical ingenue” (Nugent 1938). Cinderella was similarly praised for her femininity; one review delighted in the fact she had “a voluptuous face and form – not to mention an eager disposition” (Crowther 1950). Historical interviews reveal the lengths to which the animation and story teams worked to make Snow White and her cohort convincingly and traditionally feminine, “not a neuter to which a few crude

symbols of femininity had been attached, as with Minnie Mouse's skirt and eyelashes, but a character that was female at her core" (Barrier 2003: 194).

It's clear in hindsight that the princesses themselves have remarkable similarities of character. In Disney's earnest and uncritical attempts to make a woman "female at her core," his team ended up making three characters who embody an extremely conservative version of hegemonic white femininity. While these traits aren't inherently bad (there is certainly value in resilience, flexibility, beauty, domestic know-how, and other feminized traits modeled by the Classic Era princesses), the formulaic portrayal of these traits sends a rigid message of acceptable femininity to viewers. Traditional or sentimental ideologies also manifested in much of what we consider key elements of the Disney Princess formula today: the innocent woman pitted against an older female villain, the twirling reveal of a beautiful gown, the sentimental love songs, the soft voice and affinity for animals, and so forth. Many of these elements repeated almost formulaically in these three movies, and in doing so, entrenched the aesthetic we associate with Princesses today.²

Much ink has been spilled about these older Princesses and their representation of femininity on screen. Their iconic nature and conservative ideals have made them low-hanging fruit for mainstream feminist media, especially in the 1990s and 2000s (a topic covered at length in subsequent sections). The primary criticism has been the passivity and submissiveness apparent in the behavior of the three Classic Era princesses. As author Peggy Orenstein says to her princess-obsessed daughter in her influential essay *What's wrong with Cinderella*, "It's just, honey, Cinderella doesn't really do anything" (Orenstein 2006). Other pop culture critics have noted that the early princesses are valued for their beauty over other character traits and that they're overly reliant on their male love interests, among a laundry list of other criticisms.

Scholars, too, have pointed out regressive or conservative values at play in these early films. Bell (1995) describes this trio as "ingenues" and notes that physically, they look and move like young classical dancers, which codes them as beautiful, feminine, and "politically innocent." Behaviorally, England et al. (2011) showed that princesses in these early years were more likely than other princesses to only engage in stereotypically feminine actions and emotions (such as being affectionate, fearful, nurturing, tentative, and submissive). Wiersma (2000) also observes that early Disney movies (princesses among them) show women disproportionately attending to domestic and maternal tasks, like cleaning and cooking. In sum, the Classic Era princesses feel

² Even critics at the time picked up on the sameness of the first three Princess movies. When *Sleeping Beauty* was released in 1959, one New York Times reviewer said that it was "more than a little reminiscent of his first and most memorable features, *Snow White*. Evidently, Mr. Disney is sentimental in his remembrance of things past" (Crowther 1959).

extremely “of their time”: a product of a company (and a creative team) committed to a normative, unquestioned presentation of traditional gender roles.

Renaissance: Girl Power and Protest Proofing

Fast-Forward 30 Years. *The Little Mermaid*, Disney’s fourth Princess film, was released in 1989 and marked the beginning of a series of blockbusters that are now known as the Disney Renaissance. In the 30 years between Aurora and Ariel, the landscape of gender politics in the media shifted drastically, thanks in large part to the second-wave feminist movement. In the 1970s feminists began to sound alarms about the way women were portrayed in TV and movies, and mass media evolved in the public consciousness into a political battleground for gender representation. By the time the 1990s rolled around, making movies and advertisements that at least acknowledged feminist ideas, even shallowly, helped sell things to the increasingly large population of women who identified with feminist views (Zeisler 2008).

The pressure to make feminist role models further increased in the 1990s. In the early part of the decade, a sudden swell of concern emerged in the national consciousness for the psychological well-being of young girls growing up in a patriarchal society (Zaslow 2009). The issue was first popularized in Mary Pipher’s best-seller *Reviving Ophelia* (1994). In it, Pipher summarized the growing body of research on the poor mental state of girls in America: “In early adolescence, studies show that girls’ IQ scores drop and their math and science scores plummet. They lose their resilience and optimism and become less curious and inclined to take risks. They lose their assertive, energetic and ‘tomboyish’ personalities and become more deferential, self-critical and depressed” (Pipher 1994: 2).

The news of girlhood-in-crisis spawned a years-long wave of articles and self-help books about how to raise more confident girls.³ Relevantly for us, many of these titles pointed a finger at mass media for keeping antiquated versions of femininity in circulation, thus damaging the modern girls’ self-image.⁴ In response, a trend developed in the mass media of trying to

³ Zaslow (2009) has compiled an extensive list of these titles. To give you a brief sense, they include: *Growing a Girl: Seven Strategies for Raising a Strong Spirited Daughter* (1996), *Any Girl Can Rule the World* (1998), *Deal with It! A Whole New Approach to Your Body, Brain, and Life as a gURL* (1999), *200 Ways to Raise a Girl’s Self Esteem: An Indispensable Guide for Parents, Teachers, and Other Concerned Caregivers* (1999), and literally dozens more.

⁴ In fact, it was at this time that the first major critical works about Disney first began appearing: books such as *From Mouse to Mermaid* (Bell et al. 1995) and *The Mouse that Roared* (Giroux 1999) were the first of a flood of Disney criticism that continues to . . . well . . . right now, in this chapter.

model what the public imagined to be “empowered girlhood.” By the late 1990s, the slogan “Girl Power!” had become somewhat of a rallying cry for mainstream feminism, propelled by the countercultural Riot Grrrl movement and later by popular celebrities like the Spice Girls. TV shows featuring badass, take-no-shit women had a heyday in this era: shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), *Xena, Warrior Princess* (1995–2001), or kid’s cartoons like *The Powerpuff Girls* (1998–2005) and *Sailor Moon* (1992–1997) were common fare.

Disney had certainly caught on to the cultural hunger for more feminist figures by the time they began to produce *The Little Mermaid*. There’s a stark difference between the way Walt Disney and his team talked about their heroines – “wholesome,” “feminine to the core,” the “ideal American girl” – and the way the creative teams in the 1990s talked about their creations. The discourse of the latter belied a concerted effort to make the princesses as “empowered” and “real” as possible. Ariel’s supervising animator, for example, said of Ariel that “she’s not a sugar-coated princess. Whenever we had a choice, we wanted real rather than what is pretty” (Jarvey 1989). Linda Woolverton, who wrote *Beauty and the Beast*, said in an interview: “Belle is a feminist. I’m not critical of Snow White, Cinderella . . . they reflected the values of their time. But it wasn’t in me to write a throwback. I wanted a woman of the 90s, someone who wanted to do something other than wait for her prince to come” (Dutka 1992).

Importantly, Linda Woolverton was also the first woman to have a major role in the creation of a Disney Princess movie. In that same interview, she hints at the fact that Disney hired her specifically to help the political image of the film. She says: “There was no mandate from on-high to counteract the finger-pointing . . . but I think the studio felt confident that, as a woman, I wouldn’t write a sexist character” (Dutka 1992).

The finger-pointing here refers to some negative feedback Disney received after releasing *The Little Mermaid*. Although many praised it as a political triumph compared to the Classic Era, feminist critics were quick to point out its shortcomings as well as the all-male creative team. The *LA Times* reported after Mermaid’s release:

At a USC screening of “The Little Mermaid” the other night, a young woman asked the co-authors and co-directors, in a tone that could be characterized as civilly indignant, whether a woman had been consulted in the creation of the script. Was what she called the “Some-Day-My-Prince-Will-Come” Syndrome (in which the answer to any mermaid’s prayer is simply to find a good man) their work solely or a coeducational enterprise? (Champlin 1989)

And indeed, it does seem like Woolverton contributed some painstaking efforts towards creating a more progressive figure. She describes how she

had written a draft of the script that had Belle pushing pins onto a map of places she wanted to visit, which was unexpectedly changed by male co-writers into Belle baking a cake. The team eventually arrived at the book-reading we actually see on screen, which seemed to the studio to strike the right balance of femininity and . . . empoweredness. Later Renaissance movies also had female co-writers and story contributors,⁵ which we take to be some kind of progress for Disney, even if it's only so they could sell the story of being "better" to their audiences. This only went so far, though, since Linda Woolverton was the one solo female writer in this Era, and Disney employed no female directors despite their dedication to making "empowered" female characters.

Interestingly, one of the defining characteristics of the Renaissance princesses is how much the texts themselves call attention to their new, shiny, feminist talking points. Their consistent move is to do so by placing the princess in a patriarchal structure that is usually cartoonishly oppressive in some way, and having them struggle against it to gain freedom. Interestingly, the exaggerated patriarchies of the 1990s films are in themselves a callback to the sentimental sexism of the Classic Era, which made Disney famous in the first place. Stover (2013) explains:

Disney utilizes [postfeminist] ideology to buoy the narrative conflict, creating a world where heroines are trapped and breakout signifies a happily-ever-after. Jasmine explicitly states this feeling, and [the other Renaissance princesses] all express a desire to escape from their surroundings. In tune with post-feminism strategies, Disney often appropriated the rhetoric of feminism with quips like when Jasmine states that "I am not a prize to be won," or when Belle sings "I want so much more than they've got planned." This sense of powerful spirit coupled with a longing for change positions these new Disney princesses as a representation of the prefeminist woman, constrained by society through marriage pressure, royal status, or even having fins instead of legs. The situations of these princesses are, in effect, a criticism of the very situations with which Disney began its princess empire. (Stover 2013: 4)

Stover points out that the plots of the Renaissance princess movies are, in some ways, direct criticisms of the ideologies that influenced the first three films, further underlining Disney's desire to sell their new brand as suitably progressive for the audiences of the 1990s.

The resulting set of films does, in some ways, seem to succeed at rejecting the ideologies of their predecessors. As Stover comments, "If Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, and Cinderella exemplified the traditional Disney female as docile, beautiful objects waiting for their prince to come, then Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Meg, Mulan, and Tiana are exactly the opposite: focused,

⁵ Susannah Grant co-wrote *Pocahontas*; Rita Hsiao and Eugenia Bostwick-Singer helped write *Mulan*.

ambitious, and in the case of Pocahontas and Mulan, literally heroic as they perform the traditional prince role and save the day” (2013: 3). Content analysis by England et al. (2011) shows that the proportion of stereotypically feminine behaviors demonstrated by Renaissance princesses is much lower than the ones from the Classic Era, and the proportion of masculine-coded behaviors – like being assertive, athletic, brave, or independent – is much higher.

Audiences at the time of the films’ releases also seemed to respond positively to this perceived shift away from the Classic Era’s gender ideology. For example, Roger Ebert’s review of *The Little Mermaid* reads: “Ariel is a fully realized female character who thinks and acts independently, even rebelliously, instead of hanging around passively while the fates decide her destiny” (Ebert 1989). Linda Larkin, the voice of Jasmine, commented on her audiences’ reaction at one point as well: “When I see the way little girls respond to Jasmine, I know what’s exciting about her to them. She’s not a victim. She’s not sheltered. She’s got spirit and she has power. And I think it’s really great to be the voice to this character that is strong” (Boothe 1989).

However, these films are far from perfect feminist triumphs. Again, the modern viewer with 20–30 years of perspective on these movies can probably easily see plenty of issues. The princesses, for example, may exclaim that they are worth more than their appearance, but at the same time are drawn as both more mature and more sexually alluring than their earlier counterparts.⁶ There are also troubled relationship politics that worry scholars and audiences alike, for example that Ariel gives up her life and livelihood for the sake of a man (Stover 2013), or that Belle may or may not have Stockholm Syndrome (Grady 2017).

Many of these concerns are particularly evident in the Renaissance movies that take place in non-Western cultures. Scholars have pointed out that setting woman-versus-patriarchy plots in historical, non-white spaces allows a white, Western audience to feel smug about a feminist-sounding message without having to engage in their own participation in oppressive structures, at the expense of a fair portrayal of non-Western histories (e.g. Yin 2011). In addition, the portrayal of the female characters in these films as tough and physically skilled can reinforce stereotypes that other and exoticize women of color, as can the tendency to make them sexually alluring that we noted above.

⁶ *A Diamond in the Rough: The Making of Aladdin* describes how Aladdin actually had to be redesigned because they had accidentally made Jasmine so hot that her being with Aladdin was no longer believable. John Musker related the feedback his team got from motion picture head Jeffrey Katzenberg: “Jeffrey was like, ‘Guys, you got Julia Roberts and Michael J. Fox. They don’t fit together. You need Tom Cruise and Julia Roberts. They fit together. You need more Tom Cruise.’” (Boothe 1992).

Géliga Vargas (1999) discusses the history of scripting roles for Latinas, for example, as both tough and hypersexualized. Even though we are dealing with children's movies here, we do find women of color being hypersexualized in Disney to the extent that such is possible. Jasmine (*Aladdin*), for example, was the first princess to combine physicality and overt sexuality. She pole vaults alongside Aladdin over the rooftops, but then uses feigned sexual advances to seduce and distract the villain, Jafar. With Pocahontas, these elements are taken to extremes: her physical actions when she meets John Smith include an unsettling animal-like crouching, as well as paddling a canoe and diving off a cliff; she does all of this while clad in the skimpiest outfit of all the princesses. So while these portrayals of characters intended to be women of color do break with the passivity of e.g. Snow White, they do so while reinforcing other harmful stereotypes.

On top of that, Disney played pretty fast and loose with the cultural portrayals themselves, despite the research they purport to have done.⁷ *Pocahontas* was the most egregious example of this, as Disney aged up the heroine considerably and rewrote the history of Pocahontas to ignore the more violent and racist elements of the story (Tunzelmann 2008). *Mulan* and *Aladdin* both have their own demons, too, from *Aladdin*'s racist lyrics to *Mulan*'s use of oriental tropes to make ancient China seem more regressive than it actually was (King et al. 2010; Yin 2011). And on top of all of *that*, it's difficult to ignore the selective white-washing of the characters themselves. Lippi-Green (1997) shows the problematic tendency of Disney to cast heroines of color with actors who are white⁸ and/or who speak in Mainstream US English, whereas villains and background characters are typecast with non-standard English varieties.

Beside these issues (or perhaps beneath them) lies a more fundamental problem in the Princess formula of the 1990s. The studio made changes that were visible on the surface, but has never dealt with the fact that the Princess archetype exists to idealize one single version of femininity. Essentially, the newer Princess films still show an ideal woman. It's just that the ideal woman is a sporty hottie now, instead of a demure ballerina. She says cool things! She can do physical exercise! She's basically a badass! Unfortunately, without much significant deviation from this model, the new Girl Power princess amounts to a "replacement for one set of stereotypes for another" rather than genuine progress (Ross 2010, cited in Stover 2013). Additionally, a good number of Classic Era behaviors and choices (like giving everything up for

⁷ Granted, the research wasn't necessarily for the purpose of authenticity or respect, but to avoid negative publicity. One news article from 1995 called the research process on Pocahontas "protest-proofing" (Bruni 1995).

⁸ Linda Larkin, quoted earlier about what a powerful experience it was to voice Jasmine, is a white woman from Los Angeles.

love at first sight) persisted. So did much of the aesthetic qualities of earlier movies: affinities with animals, beautiful ball gowns, unrealistic body types, and soaring love songs are all still present. All told, there's enough to keep the new Girl Power princess still recognizable (and marketable) as "Princess," despite some new empowered window dressing.

The New Age: Postfeminist Princess

Finally, we come to the era of Princess movies that we are currently living in. The New Age of movies started in 2009 with *The Princess and the Frog*, and continues up to more or less the time of publication. In fact, one of the things we did to kick off the writing of this book was to sit down with a bottle of wine and watch the newly released *Frozen II*. (It was OK.)

The quiet period between the Renaissance and the New Age was much shorter than the 30-year span that separated *Sleeping Beauty* and *The Little Mermaid*. Nevertheless, the shifts in societal discourse were substantial, accelerated by the explosion of internet culture in the 2000s. Blogging and social media created an array of new spaces for feminist discussion that had previously been limited to physical meet-ups, zines, and the like. This culture led to the rapid evolution of online feminist criticism, and its dissemination to a newly wide audience. It's also led to a new level of accountability (or rather, nervousness) for mass media creators, whose work is now subject to the social/political/entertainment engine that is social media.

Disney Princesses have also expanded their presence since the 1990s, due to the creation of the official Disney Princess brand in 1999, which gathered all the princesses of the Classic and Renaissance Eras together and slapped them on tiaras, bedsheets, backpacks, T-shirts, and every other object under the sun, all in trademark pinks, purples, and powder blues. In Disney's own words, the Disney Princess has expanded beyond a simple merchandise line to become a "powerful lifestyle brand that touches every aspect of girls' lives" (Foster et al. 2005). Peggy Orenstein (2006) writes that "princess culture" had become so pervasive in the mid-2000s that she couldn't seem to go anywhere with her toddler without running into princesses, up to and including her dentist asking her whether she'd like to "sit in my special princess throne so I can sparkle your teeth" (Orenstein 2006). Princesses have grown into a more powerful pop-cultural force than ever before, and so the pressure for them to be feminine role models has also become more urgent.

The interesting twist is that there's no longer a single, mainstream target of ideal feminism for Disney to hit. Third-wave feminism was also evolving during this time period, and has become part of the mass online conversations. We don't have time to go into the history of feminism, per se, but we'll highlight a couple of important evolutions.

First, third-wave activists have worked to decenter white feminism as the only form of feminism. There's a push for more intersectional understandings of femininity and for more room in mainstream discourse for discussions about how race, queerness, trans and nonbinary identities, class, disability, and other identities shape the experience of gender-based oppression. We can't speak to how successful this push has been, because as two white, cis, straight women, it's a little out of our lane. But we hope that newer Disney movies may respond to this by taking, for example, the portrayal of non-white cultures (especially their princesses) more seriously than when they wrote that *Aladdin* lyric about how Middle Eastern people will "cut off your ear if they don't like your face." Interestingly, *Moana* received both positive and negative reviews of its portrayals of Pacific Island culture, but the reviews of Moana herself, as a female lead, were very positive. Herman, in a review for the Smithsonian Magazine, for example, has a number of specific critiques about cultural concerns in *Moana*, but he takes the unambiguous position that "[t]he Moana character is strong and her voice (portrayed by Auli'i Cravalho) is clear and powerful" (Herman 2016).

Some of the third wave also rejects the second-wave notion that "empowerment" means disavowing traditionally feminine traits. Feminists of the 2000s and 2010s have attempted to reclaim the trappings of traditional femininity and sexuality, such as makeup, formal feminine clothing, and high heels. This, however, isn't an unchallenged idea; contemporary feminist thinkers also question whether this is true empowerment, or whether it's just repackaged self-objectification for the male gaze. Modern advertisers also have a distinct interest in blurring these lines, since it allows them to capitalize on the third-wave embrace of femininity to push traditional and even regressive feminine behaviors back onto women under the guise of "celebrating" feminine stereotypes (Lazar 2009). Online culture has fostered an environment where feminist communities proliferate and form their own subcommunities online, producing discourses of feminism that have become both more accessible and more variant than ever before. When it comes to Disney, the political expectations audiences have of new releases become more numerous, more complicated, and *louder*.

The immediacy and intensity of audience response can be seen in the discourse surrounding *The Princess and the Frog* (2009). While earlier Princess films had some controversy during marketing and release, the response to *Frog* cycled through several full-blown scandals before the movie was even released. Activists pushed back on many new details that were leaked about the film, which were often met with some course correction from the studio, even as they were finishing the film. For example, Princess Tiana's name was originally going to be Maddy, but was changed due to online criticism that her name (and her planned role in the film) would be too close to the racist and sexist "mammy" archetype (Breux 2010). Disney altered

course in response to this feedback, demonstrating their interest in being respectful enough to at least be “protest-proof.”⁹ This instance also shows a new variety of viewpoints in mainstream feminist discourse.

In response to this more fractured atmosphere, the New Age princesses are a less cohesive bunch than the princesses of the two previous eras. To their credit, they seem to have increased the diversity of gender role representation far beyond the Renaissance princesses. Disney is beginning to play with plot structure more, for example. Instead of all being romances, some movies skip the romances in favor of hero’s journey adventure stories (*Moana*) or heart-warming mother–daughter dramas (*Brave*). *Frozen* stands out particularly in this way by not only subverting plot expectations from earlier movies, but actively mocking them (see the hero Kristoff asking Anna incredulously, “You were going to marry a man you just met *that day?*,” something that Cinderella, Aurora, and Snow White all in fact did.) More quantitative analyses of Disney also seem to show some kind of progress: Hine et al. 2018 found that the princesses since 2009 showed less traditionally feminine traits than all older princesses, and “suggest that Disney is indeed presenting more diverse . . . balanced characters to viewers” (Hine et al. 2018: 1).

Still, Disney works to remind its audience that no matter how diverse these movies seem, either from each other or from earlier eras, they’re very much still Princess movies. Sometimes they like to do this in a kind of tongue-in-cheek way. In *The Princess and the Frog*, for example, Tiana’s friend Charlotte is comically obsessed with the idea of princesses, something that is juxtaposed with the more down-to-earth Tiana. Charlotte also wears a dress clearly inspired by Cinderella’s classic ball gown. In *Moana*, Moana argues with her co-star Maui that she is “not a princess, I’m the daughter of a chief,” to which Maui responds “if you wear a dress and have an animal sidekick, you’re a princess.” These meta-discursive texts are charming to watch because it feels like Disney is in on the joke about how absurd the whole princess culture thing is. But even as it winks and nods at its own ethos, these texts also help to cement the princesses even further as a single entity of which these modern entries are very much a part.

Language in the Royal Kingdom

The common element tying almost all criticism on the Disney Princess movies together is the Princess herself. Our eyes have been fixed on the appearance

⁹ We barely want to give Disney this much credit. It seems like true respect would have started with handing the creation of this movie over to people who are from the cultures being represented. But alas, *The Princess and the Frog* and later *Moana* were both written and directed by teams of white men.

and behavior of the central characters of this set of films, and for good reason. As an archetype, the Princess looms large in our culture, especially in the modern ages thanks to Disney's impeccable marketing and their creative team's efforts to evolve the traditional princess to be palatable to modern audiences. One thing that we hope to do with the analysis of the rest of the book is add a fresh perspective to the already long conversation around how the Princesses model femininity. But personally, we see the fixation on the choices and behavior of the princesses (to the exclusion of other characters in the film) to be a response that reifies the Princess's place as a feminine role model. Furthermore, although this extra scrutiny of this archetype comes from wanting the best for young girls, we also want to consider the possibility that criticizing *only* the main female character is in and of itself a reflection of the high expectations and gender policing that plague femininity in other contexts.¹⁰ In any case, we hope that our approaches, which consider patterns across multiple characters and films instead of single characters, can add some thinking around these popular film franchises as a whole.

In particular, depiction of masculinity in Disney is a drastically understudied subject, despite the fact that princes (especially beginning in the Renaissance Era) are arguably at least as much a main character as the princess. So, whatever we can provide in terms of describing how masculinity is depicted, and how it is constructed in relation to femininity, will certainly be helpful in filling out a fuller picture of gender in Disney.

There's also the issue of progress: can we use language to show, in any way, that the Disney Princess movies have gotten "better," quantitatively speaking? This is a question we're asked a lot, and one we want to push back on a bit, as "progress" is heavily subjective and laden with moral implications. We don't want to tell you which ones are "good" or "bad."

However, we are interested in asking a related question, which is how the language in Disney constructs a portrayal of gender roles in ways specific to the Era they were created in. We will explore how the more traditional/regressive gender politics of the Classic Era are reflected in speech – particularly, how the female characters reflect feminine-coded stances and speech stereotypes, such as polite language, complimenting strategies, and avoidance of conflict and impoliteness. Concerning the Renaissance movies, we will explore the ways in which these stereotypes are updated, subverted, or just upheld in the face of the Girl Power ideology permeating the films. And concerning the New Age, we consider the ramifications of the heightened attention and criticism of the time period and how those may impact the

¹⁰ It's always "Belle has Stockholm Syndrome," and never "Beast is a whiny man baby who had a whole castle of servants and multiple decades of time and still couldn't figure out basic human decency," you know?

construction of femininity on screen. Lastly, we hope to quantitatively compare these three Eras, and in doing so piece together an understanding of how Disney's linguistic constructions of gender have changed through the decades.

Pixar and the Boys' Club

Pixar is the other gear in Disney's massive family-friendly engine. Pixar entered the public consciousness in 1995 with the release of the first-ever feature-length computer-animated film *Toy Story*. *Toy Story*, like *Snow White*, revolutionized the industry and had a lasting impact that is hard to overstate. Director John Lasseter, like Walt Disney before him, earned an honorary award at the Oscars for his contribution to cinema. *Toy Story* kicked off Pixar's hot streak of critically acclaimed films throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, and their studio remains immensely popular through to this day. This book examines Pixar's full filmography from 1995–2017. This includes a total of 18 films, as listed below:¹¹

Toy Story (1995)
A Bug's Life (1998)
Toy Story 2 (1999)
Monsters, Inc. (2001)
Finding Nemo (2003)
The Incredibles (2004)
Cars (2006)
Ratatouille (2007)
Up (2009)
Toy Story 3 (2010)
Cars 2 (2011)
*Brave (2012)*¹²
Monsters University (2013)
Inside Out (2015)
The Good Dinosaur (2015)
Finding Dory (2016)
Cars 3 (2017)
Coco (2017)

Princess movies are conveniently separated into historical eras, but there are no comparable divisions for the Pixar films. Pixar Studio release dates run continuously from 1995 to the present with basically no breathing room in

¹¹ *WALL-E* (2008) is the only exception. More details on this decision in Chapter 3.

¹² *Brave* is listed both here and in the Disney canon. Again, more details on this decision in Chapter 3.

between. But if we were to place them chronologically alongside the Princesses, they would overlap in equal parts with the Renaissance and the New Age films, as well as breach the time in between. For context, *Toy Story* debuted in the same year as *Pocahontas*; Pixar's ninth film, *Up*, debuted the same year as *The Princess and the Frog*.

In addition to Pixar being historically synchronous with later Princess movies, they are, as a point of order, technically in the same company as Disney Animation. Pixar and Disney have worked closely together since Pixar's inception, and Disney formally acquired Pixar in 2006. Since the merger, top talent has also mingled somewhat. John Lasseter and Ed Catmull (both from Pixar studios) were installed as Creative Officer and President, respectively, of Disney Animation when the two studios merged, and it was actually John Lasseter who led the creative effort on *The Princess and the Frog* and revitalized Princess movie-making in the land of Disney. Given these various synchronicities it's tempting to stop writing right now, and just say "look at what we wrote in the Princess sections; that, again, but for these movies."

Mais non. We cannot do that. Firstly, although Pixar and Disney Animation are both owned by Disney, we cannot reasonably lump them creatively together. Pixar was insistent during their acquisition that the two studios keep their own separate brand identities and creative processes. Despite similar leadership, each studio creates their movies entirely on their own, with little to no input or staffing help from the other. The resulting style difference is probably obvious to even the casual viewer: *Toy Story 3* and *Tangled* were made in the same year, and we're guessing nobody would mix up which one came from Pixar and which from Disney.

But more importantly for us, Pixar and Disney are two separate entities politically, and they have very different relationships to mainstream discourses of gender. We've taken the stance that the Disney Princess brand is unique in how symbolically feminine it is, and how overtly it attempts to produce "role models." That relationship has made it a lightning rod of sorts for feminist critique (present company included). Pixar doesn't have the same relationship to feminine representation.

Quite the contrary, actually: the vast majority of Pixar's movies are about men. In fact, we chose to study Pixar not only because its popularity rivals Disney, but because, given their male-heavy franchises, they were honestly the closest we could get to a set of children's movies that feature lessons about masculinity. But the comparison to Disney Princess is fundamentally asymmetrical. Pixar's brand is heavy on male characters, sure, but it doesn't position itself to be movies that are *about men* or *about masculinity*. On the contrary, Pixar's reputation is for making "human stories" that are universally

relatable. So while Disney and Pixar may occupy similar moments in history, they don't have the same orientation to the feminist conversations *du jour*.

The Nonissue of Pixar's Gender Representation

Writing about Pixar's relationship with gender in the public sphere is actually kind of difficult. That's because there barely *is* one, or at least, that's what you'd think based on the way most of their films were received by the public. For the first 10–15 years of Pixar's existence, there was little to no discussion of their gender representation at all. Partially, we can attribute this to the "technical marvel" angle of Pixar's history. *Toy Story* was the first-ever full-length CGI film, which was revolutionary at the time; so a lot of the stories about the creation and subsequent release of the early Pixar movies were focused on the mythos of Lasseter and his dream, not totally unlike the nation's earlier obsession with Walt Disney. Secondly, Pixar movies (deservedly) stood out among other family-friendly movies for their emotionally complex stories and witty dialogue, which won them positive press, great box office numbers, and no small amount of awards. Professional reviews generally focused on these artistic qualities, rather than any political commentary.

We suspect, though, that the real reason the studio has also been the focus of so little political commentary is that most of their stories are about men. Popular culture has been focused on the crisis of girlhood and the issue of feminine representation for decades now, but critical examination of male role models has been much slower to catch on in popular discourse (Wooden & Gillam 2014). Pixar's first 12 films – the first 17 years of their filmmaking – were created by male directors, written by (mostly) male writers, and featured exclusively male protagonists.¹³ We honestly think the manliness of it all allowed them to mostly slip under the radar of feminist criticism. In fact, making movies starring men probably facilitated their brand reputation at the time: their stories were lauded as exploring relatable, universal struggles, a narrative that was likely enabled by telling stories only through the default male point of view.

Pixar's movies also floated above the fray of academic critique for many years. In fact, they are *still* understudied considering the studio's prestige and reach, especially compared to the veritable mountain of literature that's been written about Disney Animation. The relatively small handful of Pixar studies that do exist paint a comparatively rosier picture of gender representation, especially when it comes to masculinity. Scholars have pointed out that Pixar's

¹³ Only three women contributed to writing the first 12 Pixar movies. Rita Hsiao co-wrote *Toy Story 2*, Jill Culton worked on the story for *Monsters, Inc.*, and Kiel Murray helped write *Cars*.

male characters are emotionally driven (Finklea 2016) and even somewhat maternal (Brydon 2009), two traditionally feminine traits. Decker's (2010) content analysis of Pixar films found that there were no significant differences between the male and female characters' bodies, social roles, amount of authority, or personality traits.

Perhaps most notably, Gillam and Wooden (2008) pointed out that Pixar's male characters tend to be much more sensitive and community-oriented than other male heroes in children's media. They wrote:

Unlike many of the princesses, who remain relatively static even through their own adventures, these male leads are actual protagonists; their characters develop and change over the course of the film, rendering the plot. Ultimately these various developing characters ... experience a common narrative trajectory, culminating in ... a kinder, gentler understanding of what it means to be a man. (Gillam & Wooden 2008: 3)

This particular scholarly team ended up walking back that claim in a subsequent book, which we will return to shortly (Wooden & Gillam 2014). However, their initial analysis reflected the general acceptance, or at least lack of strong critique, with which the Pixar protagonists were met, especially compared to criticism of Disney films.

Feminine Representation and the "Boys' Club"

Pixar's female characters have also not met with much political commentary compared to the Princesses. Again, though, these movies weren't *about* the female characters. They were about men, and so the female characters don't claim any symbolic role-model power,¹⁴ either in the texts or in the advertising surrounding them, and weren't critiqued as such. Even academics who were hypercritical of Disney Animation don't have much to say of these characters. Stover (2013), for example, throws out casual praise for Pixar while smack dab in the middle of skewering gender politics at Disney Animation:

Disney's entertainment partner Pixar has proven that it is possible to make profound, quality narratives for children, and still produce iconic, marketable images. It is time for Disney to invest in female-driven narratives that have staying-power with consumers, to create female protagonists with the cultural endurance and profitability that lie in the character and personality of Pixar's male heroes. (Stover 2013: 8)

In fact, it seems as if the first time gender politics became salient for Pixar at all was in the second half of the 2000s, as the online public began to notice and

¹⁴ Throughout this book, we will be inventing words like "role-modely" and "evility" as needed. We are authorized to do this, because we are professional linguists. Use caution with this technique at home.

comment on the studios' increasingly long streak of making movies starring exclusively male protagonists. Pieces like "Pixar's Gender Problem" (Hopkins 2008), "Pixar: No Chicks Allowed" (Kottke 2009) and "Is Pixar a 'boys only' club?" (Hanscom 2006) began to crop up. But where Disney Animation films tend to get impassioned criticism, this slate of think pieces and blog posts were less critical and more along the lines of a polite request. A popular NPR op-ed at the time literally opened with "I'm not complaining; I'm asking. I'm asking because I think so highly of you. Please make a movie about a girl who is not a princess" (Holmes 2009).

Indeed, *Brave* (2012) – Pixar's first movie starring a female protagonist and only Princess movie – is the exception that proves the rule of Pixar's gender nonissue. Because Pixar had held off for so long making a movie starring female characters, *Brave*'s Merida had the tense responsibility of being a thesis statement of sorts on what Pixar thought female protagonists could be. On top of that, the fact that *Brave* was going to be a princess movie immediately gave Pixar just a taste of the chaotic gender storm that swirls around the Disney Princess brand constantly. In this movie alone among Pixar's films, the main character was in the cross-hairs of critique. And the fact that she was a princess among Pixar's otherwise "deeply human" characters was a failure to many. As one writer put it:

This wouldn't feel so vaguely unsatisfying if *Brave* were just one of many Pixar movies that featured a strong female lead. It's the absence of others that turns the spotlight on *Brave*. And having a princess protagonist isn't inherently bad. It's just that she is so chapter one of what girls can be – and so many other Pixar movies skipped most known chapters and moved on to whole new volumes. (Pols 2012)

Concerns that *Brave* would potentially be sexist were amped up when, mid-production, Pixar fired director Brenda Chapman – the first (and to this day, only) female director at the studio – and replaced her with Mark Andrews. The disappointment in the film fed further into the growing awareness of the problems with Pixar's company culture, which now has a reputation for being a hostile work environment for female employees (Desta 2017). The narrative arose that if Chapman hadn't been replaced, then *Brave* might have stood up to the Pixar giants that came before it, and might have even been a "human" Pixar story despite its princess premise. As it was, it received mediocre reviews, considered lukewarm both artistically and politically. We think it's telling that, although Pixar's culture had apparently been hostile for quite some time, attention didn't turn to it until we had a female character – a princess – to scrutinize.

In some ways, *Brave* seemed like a wake-up call for Pixar. In the following years, Pixar released two more films with female leads (*Inside Out* in 2015 and *Finding Dory* in 2016). They also seemed to be putting a more intentional foot

forward with the representation of ethnically diverse characters, something that had been lacking in their previous years. *Coco*, for example, was the “the first film with a nine-figure budget to feature an all-Latino principal cast” (Coyle 2017). Following Disney’s example, Pixar spent a lot of resources on research and consultation to ensure the film was authentic and respectful (Lang 2016).

However, it turns out that the scrutiny that rose so sharply during *Brave*’s production was less a permanent rise in temperature for Pixar and more like a flash in the pan. *Inside Out* and *Finding Dory* were positively reviewed, but neither drew the focus on critiquing gender representation that was present with *Brave*. *Inside Out* starred three different female characters, but most reviews were devoid of discourse around whether or not Joy, Sadness, and Riley are strong role models. The closest thing anyone made to a political commentary in the mainstream focused on the relative accuracy of the depiction of the psychology of emotions, and how the film might be a good teaching tool for young children learning about emotion (Keltner & Ekman 2015). *Finding Dory*’s critiques centered more on the depiction of disability than of gender (Robinson 2016; Scott 2016). No additional attention has been brought to the fact that Pixar has not hired a single female director since *Brave*, either. Although its reputation is not quite so politically golden as it once was, Pixar still seems to elude much negative attention from critics.

Critique Beyond the Bird’s-Eye View

The interesting thing about the criticism that Pixar has received about gender (*Brave* excluded) is that the problem was almost always framed in aggregate, not as a critique of individual films. Individual characters are fine, if not great, in the public eye. Scholarly work, too, has generally praised representation of gender in Pixar through the lens of individual character behavior (e.g. Brydon 2009; Decker 2010; Finklea 2016). The gender problem for most audiences is only in the bird’s-eye view. As blogger Matt DeButts put it: “It is only when Pixar’s films are viewed in aggregate, and the lack of female protagonists becomes systemic, that my scruples begin to arise. Or to put it in the rarefied speech of Generation Y: it’s a thing because you made it a thing” (DeButts 2012).

Even in cases where femininity is scrutinized in Pixar, depictions of male characters seem to be above (or, depending on the opinion of the scholar, below) serious consideration. Wooden and Gillam (2014) are one of the only major exceptions to this rule. Their analysis of Pixar male characters was initially optimistic (Gillam & Wooden 2008); however, their subsequent book, *Pixar’s Boy Stories* (2014), points out patterns in Pixar’s depictions of masculinity that are hyper-traditional and harmful to male and female viewers alike. They comment in this work on the double standard applied to gender analysis of Pixar films:

Though nearly every review of *Brave* – dozens of them – refers to its protagonist’s gender, for example, and many explicitly consider her interpretation of femininity in pedagogical relation to young female viewers, virtually no one mentions that Lightning McQueen, Buzz Lightyear, and James P. Sullivan are male, and virtually no one has discussed whether these representations of maleness might too have ramifications for boy viewers learning how to define themselves as men . . . Indeed, *Brave*’s depiction of men as buffoonish thugs, amid its supposedly bold stride forward toward gender equality in children’s film, reveals one contemporary attitude toward masculinity that merits some serious attention. (Wooden & Gillam 2014: xii)

We’re hopeful that as linguists we can contribute a more in-depth critical analysis of Pixar’s gender representation. Of course (a quick spoiler here), we can (and will) add credence to the “boys’ club” concept. Men truly are everywhere in Pixar – we’ll present our receipts in Chapter 3. But beyond that, we aim to linguistically interrogate how Pixar ideologically constructs masculinity and femininity through language with more detail than just “too many men.”

Because there is so little scholarship on Pixar and masculinity, and so few external pressures for Pixar to present masculinity in any particular way, we are very curious about how masculine language will appear in these films. How do movies that center male characters and male homosocial relationships construct masculine language behavior? Do male characters in largely same-sex environments exaggerate their masculinity through language? Or is part of the appeal of these films that the characters are presented as complex individuals with nuanced language behaviors that defy easy categorization?

Similarly, we are intrigued by the paucity of female characters in Pixar and the implications that may have for language. Will the “boys’ club” of writers and directors produce female characters being written poorly and/or stereotypically? Or will the female characters be so varied that they don’t show any patterns of gendered language? Also, the general apathy towards Pixar’s female characters by scholars and critics makes us raise our eyebrows. We hear that people mostly like them. But we also see that they aren’t paying as much attention as they do with Disney. Are the ladies as good as they seem? If so, how is this reflected in their language? Or are there damaging linguistic stereotypes hidden just below the surface?

Conclusion

Through the course of this chapter, we have hoped to show that Disney and Pixar, though under the same umbrella company, hold very different public relationships with the politics of the content they produce. Disney Animation, the ostensible originator and maintainer of the modern Princess symbol, is an enduring lightning rod for gender critique. Disney has cultivated and

maintained the Princess as a feminine icon for over 80 years now, and in doing so, has engaged with mainstream feminist concepts as they've evolved over the decades. While their "progress" hasn't always been straightforward, Princess films have at least managed to respond to the political zeitgeist of their creation enough to stay relevant to an increasingly critical media landscape. On the other hand, Pixar, whose prominence in the box office and the awards circuit is just as prominent, doesn't have much of a political footprint. Pixar's audiences, popular and academic alike, have by and large not examined the gender politics of their movies beyond noting the underrepresentation of female characters, and Pixar in turn doesn't push their movies as "feminist" or "progressive" innovations.

We will return throughout the book to the various ways that the different political orientation of the two studios (and the different time eras within Disney) may end up having significant explanatory power in our analyses. As we explore how language is used as a tool in gender construction from various angles, we will document how each feature of speech may reflect some of the information presented in this chapter, often in interesting and unexpected ways. We begin these linguistic explorations in the following chapter with perhaps the most basic linguistic question we can ask: How much do characters actually talk? By considering this question in light of historical context, we can begin to understand just how much (or how little) Disney and Pixar have changed to fit the times.