Disney's New Fairytale: An Analysis of Representation in Disney's Live-Action Remakes of Beauty and the Beast and Aladdin

Samantha L. Zirger

Department of Media Studies

College of Media, Communication and Information

University of Colorado Boulder

April 10, 2020

Thesis Advisor

J. Richard Stevens, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Media Studies

Committee Members

Kristie Soares, Ph.D., Assistant Professor of Women and Gender Studies

Steven Frost, Department of Media Studies

Abstract

Fairytales were originally an oral tradition used to communicate past experiences and beliefs. Over time, fairytales were adapted into films, which allowed the producer to exercise great control over the messages. Walt Disney, with animated films such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), revolutionized fairytales as films. The studio's superiority in the production of animated fairytale films allowed it to become legitimized as an educator. Many scholars, however, found issue with some of the messages in the films. Disney's animated films may teach children limiting gender roles or that non-Western cultures are necessarily lesser or evil. Live-action remakes function as guaranteed economic success for companies like Disney. Such commercial endeavors also provide Disney with an opportunity to improve areas of problematic representation. This project seeks to understand how Disney has responded to scholarly critiques. Two live-action remakes – *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) and *Aladdin* (2019) – are used as exemplars. A qualitative textual analysis is completed using previous critiques as a guide. The analysis focuses on the specific scenes, songs, and characters problematized by scholars. The findings of this project suggest Disney has been receptive to criticism of its animated films, although it struggles to consistently improve its messages.

Table of Contents

Abstract ………………………………………………………………………...…………2

Introduction ……………………………………………………………………………….4

Literature Review …………………………………………………………………………5

Disney and Fairytales ……………………………………………………………..5

Representation of the Princess ……………………………………………………8

Representation of Diverse Cultures ……………………………………………..12

Film Remakes …………………………………………………………………...17

Summary ………………………………………………………………………...19

Methods ………………………………………………………………………………….20

Beauty and the Beast (1991) ……………………………………………………22

Aladdin (1992) 25

Findings 28

Beauty and the Beast (2017) 28

Aladdin (2019) 31

Discussion 35

Conclusion 37

References 38

Introduction

On November 12, 2019, Disney launched a new streaming service – Disney Plus. After only one day, ten million users had signed up for the on-demand magical experience (Spangler, 2019). The company has projected that the platform will have 60 to 90 million subscribers worldwide by 2024 (Spangler, 2019). The streaming service provides children, and their families, with a seemingly endless supply of Disney content, including classic films from the "Vault" and original stories. Many of the studio's animated films are based on fairytales. Fairytales teach children what to believe and how to behave. With Disney Plus, it is more important than ever to understand and critique the messages the company delivers to families.

Since Disney's debut in the 1930s, scholars have been critical of the messages Disney may be teaching children. In its live-action remakes, Disney retells some of its most iconic stories. This project compares Disney's animated films to its live-action remakes. Instead of providing additional criticism to Disney, this project seeks to understand how Disney has responded to critiques from scholars.

Literature Review

This chapter will cover literature regarding Disney and fairytales, representation of the princess, representation of diverse cultures, and film remakes.

Disney and Fairytales

Fairytales originated as a means to educate and socialize members of society. Stories were told face-to-face within tribes to share the meaning of everyday life (Zipes, 1995). This oral tradition was used "to explain natural occurrences such as the change of the seasons and shifts in the weather or to celebrate the rites of harvesting, hunting, marriage, and conquest" (Zipes, 1995, p. 22). By telling these stories, members of a tribe created a sense of community and purpose. The themes and details of the stories changed with the adapting beliefs and behaviors of the tribes. However, the oral storytelling tradition underwent incredible changes with the rise of literacy. Stories were no longer limited to face-to-face interactions. Stories could be transferred to paper, and, with the invention of the printing press in the fifteenth century, could be mass-produced. Such stories soon became institutionalized as a literary fairytale genre.

Zipes, a leading scholar on fairytales, discussed the history of fairytales, the role fairytales play in society, and the inextricable connections between fairytales and Disney in his book *Happily Ever After* (1997). He explored the role of literary fairytales and societies' relationships to them through examples like *Puss in Boots*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Pinocchio*. He explained that fairytales became a civilizing agent, used to teach societies the proper ways to think and behave (Zipes, 1997). Literary fairytales taught people appropriate gender roles, power hierarchies, norms, and values. However, the literary fairytale genre experienced additional

modifications as technology changed, and films became an important format for fairytale narratives.

The introduction of fairytales into film changed the way societies could interpret the messages within the tales. When a person heard or read a story, he or she was able to create his or her own interpretations of the characters. The pairing of visuals with a story limits such personal interpretations. According to Zipes (1997), “The pictures deprive the audience of the ability to visualize their own characters, roles and desires” (Zipes, 1997, p. 37). The film industry experienced great advances with sound and color in the 1930s (Zipes, 1997), and these technological advances allowed film producers to have complete control over the ways in which people were represented. As Belle (1995) explained, “animation is not an innocent art form: nothing accidental or serendipitous occurs” (Belle, 1995, as cited in Layng, 2001, p. 2). Viewers are subjected to the producers’ often flattened interpretations of the world. Producers exercised complete control over the messages in the films (Layng, 2001).

Walt Disney revolutionized fairytales as an institution through film (Zipes, 1997). Disney’s reign over fairytales began with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1937. *Snow White* was the first ever animated film based on a fairytale that incorporated color and music. The film was produced with such technological and artistic skill that Disney became a prominent leader in the animated fairytale film market (Zipes, 1997). *Snow White* also allowed Disney to establish a model for other animated fairytale films produced later in the twentieth century.

Zipes (1997) argued there are major key elements of this Disney model. He indicated that since all animators were males, the films carried themes of “boys’ locker-room talk” (Zipes, 1997, p. 71). The films followed the same general storyline: the main protagonist finds his or herself in trouble and in need of rescuing. Whether that rescuing is done by the main protagonist

or another character is dependent on gender. Each film also establishes clear-cut roles for characters. Women are meant to fulfill domestic duties, while men are powerful and develop most of the action. Evil characters are often dark or black, while good characters are fair. This model continues to set the standard for animated fairytale films. Today, Disney is nearly synonymous with "fairytale" (Zipes, 1995). Because of this, Disney occupies a position of educator. The films are credited as "teaching machines," and are given authority to teach roles, values, and beliefs (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). Disney's lessons are legitimized as much as those from public schools, religious institutions, and families. The films utilize enchantment and innocence to teach children who they are and what life is about. The powerful messages are "constructed to mold and guide society toward happiness and away from evil" (Layng, 2001, p. 2). Thus, it is imperative to understand and critique the messages that Disney shares.

Children understand life through Disney's lens. Disney films were originally released every eight years (Layng, 2001). This meant each generation could be exposed to the simplified worldview Disney created. When Disney's films started to be released on video, children could watch its messages over and over. Such availability, combined with the popularity of Disney, made its animated fairytale films an important factor in the socialization of children (Layng, 2001). These films are the primary way children learn about themselves and their relationships to others (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). Children are taught, in part by Disney films, what it means to be "male, female, white, black, gay, straight, citizen, or noncitizen" (Giroux & Pollock, 2010, p. 2). This is why so many scholars have found it necessary to critique Disney and the way it represents groups of people. Giroux and Pollock's book *The Mouse that Roared* (2010) explored the ways in which Disney shapes children. The authors noted, "it is imperative that parents, teachers, and other adults understand how [Disney's] animated films influence the values of the

children who view them" (Giroux & Pollock, 2010 p. 97). Although Disney films have been critiqued along many axes, this project will focus on those related to representations of the princess and diverse cultures. As evidenced in the literary work of scholars, these areas have appeared to be the most problematic.

Representation of the Princess

Many of the concerns expressed by scholars focused on the main protagonist in many Disney films: the princess. The representation of the princess is inextricably linked to representations of the female archetype. Many children idolize Disney princesses, which makes their representation especially important. Belle and Jasmine were both introduced to Disney's princess line in the 90s. *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) tells the story of self-interested Prince Adams who falls under the spell of an enchantress. He is turned into a Beast, and he will remain a Beast until he learns to love and is loved in return. When an inventor from the local village wonders into the Beast's castle, he is imprisoned. Belle, the inventor's daughter, finds her father and takes his place in the Beast's castle. With the help of the Beast's servants, she eventually changes the Beast's cold-hearted attitude. *Aladdin* (1992) follows the adventures of Princess Jasmine and Aladdin, a poor homeless youth. Jasmine, the daughter of the Sultan, wishes to be freed from the palace's traditions. Jafar, the Sultan's power-hungry advisor, coerces Aladdin to help him retrieve a magic lamp. After the plan goes awry, Aladdin frees the genie from the lamp, whom he discovers can grant three wishes. Aladdin uses these wishes to win over the Princess.

In many Disney films, the princess's beauty is regarded as her most valuable quality. This convention was established with Walt Disney's first princess, Snow White. The story centers around Snow White's beauty (Layng, 2001). The Queen's jealousy of Snow White creates the

conflict that drives the plot. It is also Snow White's beauty that ultimately saves her life (Layng, 2001). The Dwarfs are unable to bury someone so beautiful, and the Prince is compelled to kiss the Princess because of her allure. This kiss wakes Snow White from her deep sleep. Furthermore, in *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) the first of three gifts to Princess Aurora from her fairy godmothers is beauty – followed by the gift of song (Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2004). Walt Disney illustrates that a young woman's beauty is far more important than her voice and, in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), her intellect. Belle's beauty is cherished while her passion for reading is mocked. In the song "Belle," fellow villagers praise her looks – "'It's no wonder her name means beauty – her looks have no parallel'" – while they mark her as "odd" for her interest in books – "'I am afraid she's rather odd […] – she's nothing like the rest of us'" (Towbin et al., 2004, p. 30). Belle was the first princess to show high rates of intellectual interest (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011). Instead of encouraging such behavior, Disney portrayed intellectual activity from women as strange and abnormal (Jeffords, 1995).

Despite its family-friendly culture, Disney frequently sexualizes its princesses. Ursula instructs Ariel to use her "body language" to persuade Prince Eric into marriage (O'Brien, 1996). Ariel shows a great deal of skin, as she only wears seashells over her breasts and her tail sits strikingly low on her hips (Putnam, 2012). Pocahontas's one-shouldered mini dress reveals her cleavage and long legs. Similarly, Princess Jasmine is sexualized throughout *Aladdin* (1992). The Princess is depicted with large breasts, a tiny waist, and rounded buttocks, which is emphasized through her scantily clad wardrobe (Layng, 2001). Shaheen (2009) explained that Hollywood commonly eroticizes Arab women. He wrote, "They appear as bosomy bellydancers leering out from diaphanous veils, or as disposable 'knick-knacks,' scantily clad harem maidens with bare midriffs" (Shaheen, 2009, p. 28). Jasmine wears an off-the-shoulder bra and

transparent harem pants, which reveal a large portion of her midriff (Putnam, 2012). Jasmine also uses her body and overt sexuality to help Aladdin (England et al., 2011). She turns into a seductress to distract Jafar, while Aladdin tries to rescue her, the Sultan, and the Genie (Towbin et al., 2004). By representing princesses in this manner, Disney sends the message that sex defines the role of young women.

Rarely do Disney princesses exercise agency in their own stories. They regularly rely on other characters to determine their futures. In other words, “Females do not rescue themselves in Disney films, but they do sing” (Zipes, 1997, p. 71). In *Snow White* (1937), the Princess does little to protect or save herself (Layng, 2001). She depends on the constant aid of other characters, including a huntsman, woodland animals, seven dwarfs, and a Prince. In *The Little Mermaid* (1989), Ariel literally gives up her voice, and consequently the ability to stand up for herself (O’Brien, 1996). Like Snow White, Ariel frequently calls on her animal friends for help, and she counts on Prince Eric and King Triton to save her life. These patterns are also manifested in Disney’s *Aladdin* (1992). After taking food for a hungry child, a merchant threatens to cut Jasmine’s hand off for thieving (Layng, 2001). Defenseless, the Princess needs Aladdin to rescue her from the dangerous situation. Furthermore, although Jasmine wishes for more freedom, she only runs away (Layng, 2001). The Princess is adamant about her progressive beliefs, but she must rely on Aladdin in order to achieve the freedom she desires. The Sultan ultimately allows Jasmine to choose her husband, but only after he approves of Aladdin (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). Because Disney frequently limits the agency of its princesses, the company may be teaching young women they are helpless and their voices are not strong enough.

Hoffman (2007) explained that Angel in the House, a term that originates from a nineteenth-century poem, was used to refer to the ideal woman of that time-period – a “selflessly

devoted and submissive wife and mother" (p. 264). According to Gilbert and Gubar (1984), these women embody the "virtues of modesty, gratefulness, purity, delicacy, civility, compliancy, reticence, chastity, affability, [and] politeness" (as cited in Hoffman, 2007, p. 265). While such qualities could be interpreted as admirable, this idealized role actually works to subordinate women. The wife is confined to the private sphere, where she works to care for the home and the people in it, while the husband is free to enter the public sphere (Hoffman, 2007). The Angel "is pure and innocent but also helpless, weak, and importantly, silenced" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 266). This ideal is reproduced in a multitude of Walt Disney films, including *Cinderella* (1950). The conventional "princess-angel image" is wildly apparent in Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). Belle takes on teaching the Beast the basic skills that a mother would teach a child. She teaches him how to properly use silverware, dance, play with birds, and play in the snow (Jeffords, 1995). Belle also reads to the Beast because he does not know how. The Princess molds the Beast into a "new man" – one who is sensitive, caring, loving, and controls his temper (Giroux & Pollock, 2010).

Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) has time and time again been criticized for romanticizing intimate partner abuse. Belle is portrayed as a compliant victim in the Beast's abusive behaviors. According to Olson (2013), the Beast's behavior is represented as "romantic passion," and withstanding the abuse will lead to a "happily-ever-after love." The Centers for Disease Control explains instances of intimate partner abuse can be categorized as expressive aggression or coercive control (Olson, 2013). These may include "controlling behaviors; quick to anger; wants to know the partner's whereabouts at all times; angry if the partner is late," "quick involvement in the relationship," "isolation; the abuse may cut the partner off from friends, family, and resources," "blaming others for the violent partner's feelings or angry actions,"

"breaking or striking objects when angry," and "overt threats of violence" (Olson, 2013, p. 465). The Beast's abusive actions toward Belle are largely in line with the listed behaviors. The Beast isolates Belle from her father and makes her promise to never leave (Olson, 2013). He also refuses to feed Belle unless she eats with him. When Belle disobeys the Beast and wonders into the west wing, he turns physically violent. Despite this behavior, Belle still falls in love and marries the Beast (Towbin et al., 2004). Furthermore, the adult characters minimize the abusive relationship. According to Olson (2013), "When Belle mourns being imprisoned with 'I've lost my father, my dreams, everything,' Mrs. Potts urges her stay and hope for a happy ending" (Olson, 2013, p. 472). Mrs. Potts says, "Cheer up, child. It'll turn out all right in the end. You'll see" (Olson, 2013, p. 472). By romanticizing intimate partner abuse, Disney may be teaching young women that violent behavior should be tolerated and it is a normal aspect of finding love.

Representation of Diverse Cultures

Disney's representation of princesses impacts how society sees young women and how young women see themselves. Similarly, the studio's oversimplified worldview compromises understanding and appreciating diverse cultures. Disney frequently uses stereotypes to distinguish characters of color as different. Meanwhile, Whiteness becomes invisible. White characters remain unmarked; they are assumed to be White simply because no stereotypes are used to signal to the viewer otherwise. Barnd (2012) explained, "race is applied to clearly marked Others, while the central characters remain presumably free of marking, thus pointing to their presumed and invisible Whiteness" (p. 69). Many characters of color lack complex representations, meaning their experiences and cultures are simplified. This creates a flattened

understanding of who they are (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). Often, these characters are portrayed using negative stereotypes which stem from racist attitudes fixed in American culture.

Over many decades, Disney has unfavorably represented numerous people of color. In *Dumbo* (1941), the crows – who have African American accents – are portrayed as poor, unintelligent, and naïve (Towbin et al., 2004). The association of these qualities with characters coded as Black sends the message that people within this culture are poor, unintelligent, and naïve. The Siamese cats, Si and Am, in *Lady and the Tramp* (1955) also possess stereotypical Asian characteristics. The pair have slanted eyes, buck-teeth, and heavy accents (Akita & Kennedy, 2012). They also speak in broken English, as they make numerous grammar and syntax errors in the song "The Siamese Cat Song." Akita and Kenney (2012) provided a list of all the mischief Si and Am cause. The list details eight acts, including terrorizing a fish, damaging a piano and drapes, and stealing milk from a baby. The cats then frame Lady as the sole troublemaker. By villainizing Si and Am, Disney sends the message that these Asian characteristics make a character "bad," and therefore only Western characteristics make a character "good." Tito from *Oliver and Company* (1988) is coded as Latino. The Chihuahua has a Chicano accent and frequently uses Spanish phrases (Barnd, 2012). Tito perpetuates Western stereotypes of Latin culture. He is alarmed by the word "aliens," and he assumes any sizeable home must house "'at least two hundred people'" (Culhan, 1988, as cited in Barnd, 2012, p. 75). Additionally, Tito has very negative qualities. He is violence-prone and frequently engages in criminal activities like pick-pocketing, burglary, and robbery (Barnd, 2012). He also has sexually predatory qualities. He forces kisses upon Georgette. Although the kisses are clearly unwanted, he says, "'Ooohhh … I think she likes me, man!'" (Barnd, 2012, p. 76). Because Tito is the only

character in the group engaging in these activities, Disney is attaching these negative qualities to Latino men.

In his 1978 book *Orientalism*, Said used the term “Orientalism” to describe the way the “West” refers to the “East.” Said’s arguments further contextualize Western stereotypes of the Middle East, which are perpetuated in Disney’s *Aladdin* (1992). The concept of the Orient developed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Said, 1978). The term was used to refer to the region of people from China to the Mediterranean. Orientalism both justified and was perpetuated by colonialization. Said (1978) explained that such efforts were driven by “widespread interest in the alien and unusual” (pp. 39-40). Europeans believed all Orients were part of an inferior race and needed to be rescued by a superior race that knew what was best (Said, 1978). European colonial rule over the Orient entailed occupation of their lands and control over their internal affairs and resources. This type of political vision promoted an “us” versus “them” dichotomy. The former was Europe, or the “West,” the latter was the static, all-encompassing Orient, or the “East.” Westerners were regarded as “rational, peaceful, liberal, logical, capable of holding real values” (Said, 1978, p. 49). Arab-Orientals, on the other hand, manifested none of these qualities. The Arab American National Museum (2011) explained Orientalism “often involves seeing Arab culture as exotic, backwards, uncivilized, and at times dangerous” (para. 1). Said (1978) noted that this distinction has been normalized to the point of being regarded as scientific truth.

Scholars, such as Shaheen, have applied Said’s idea of Orientalism to further work. Shaheen is a leading scholar on the media images of Arabs and Muslims. His book *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Villifies a People* was first published in 2001. An accompanying documentary film was released in 2006. Both the book and documentary film addressed the

limiting, and often negative, representation of Arabs in Hollywood films. In the second edition of his book, Shaheen analyzed nearly 1,100 films. Shaheen also actively worked to promote complex representations of Arabs (Marble, 2017). He counselled studio executives, directors, and actors around the world. Most notably, he is credited for Disney's lyrical change to the song "Arabian Nights" in *Aladdin* (1992).

Similar to Said, Shaheen explained that centuries ago, the British and French conjured up an image of the Arab as the Oriental Other (Jhally, 2006). The Europeans reduced the vast region to a singular colony, represented using "images of desolate deserts, corrupt palaces, and slimy souks inhabited by […] the lazy, bearded heathen Arab Muslim" (Shaheen, 2009, p. 13). Shaheen referred to this repeated, uniform image as "Arab-land." He was primarily concerned with how Hollywood studios vilify Arabs. He explained that the issue is not that Arabs are occasionally the villain, but that "almost *all* Hollywood depictions of Arabs are *bad* ones" (Shaheen, 2009, p. 17). He explained that these images have become so prevalent that viewers may come to perceive reel Arabs, meaning those on the screen, as real ones.

Many scholars, including Shaheen (2009) and Giroux and Pollock (2010), have found issue with the opening song of *Aladdin* (1992) titled "Arabian Nights." The song introduces the film by describing Arab culture. The opening lines of the song in the theatrical release of the film were "'Oh I come from a land/From a faraway place/Where the caravan camels roam/Where they cut off your ear/If they don't like your face/It's barbaric, but hey, it's home'" (Giroux & Pollock, 2010, p. 109). In his documentary, Shaheen commented, "how could a producer, with a modicum of intelligence, just a modicum of sensitivity let a song such as that open the film" (Jhally, 2006). The lyrics paint a picture of a culture in which officials have extreme physical punishments for negligible offenses. The words "'Where they cut off your ear/If they don't like

your face'" were eventually replaced with the line "'Where it's flat and immense/And the heat is intense'" when *Aladdin* was released on video (Giroux & Pollock, 2010, p. 110). The song, however, still refers to Arab culture as "barbaric." Shaheen (2009) explained that by refusing to erase the "barbaric" line, Disney is failing to adequately change the message. The representation of the Middle East as violent continues far beyond one song. Both Aladdin and Jasmine are faced with threats of dismemberment throughout the film.

Evil characters, including Jafar and the Royal Guards, are portrayed with stereotypical Arab characteristics. These "bad guys" have thick beards, bulbous noses, turbans, and heavy accents (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). However, the main protagonists – Aladdin and Jasmine – both speak with American accents. Barnd (2012) described Rosina Lippi-Green's study of language that covered fifty years of Disney films. The study found that characters who used non-standard American English dialect disproportionately function as the villain. Only those characters who used a "mainstream" American dialect served as the protagonist. Furthermore, Aladdin is not drawn with a thick beard, large nose, or turban. Salem, a former spokesperson for the South Bay Islamic Association, explained, "What makes [Aladdin] nice is they've given him this American character…I have a daughter who says she's ashamed to call herself an Arab, and it's because of things like this" (as cited in Giroux & Pollock, 2010, p. 109). Repetitious portrayals of Arab characters as evil characters tells the viewer that all Arab are bad Arabs.

Instead of teaching young children that there are many ways to be human, Disney sends the message that anyone who is outside of White culture is inferior. Children are taught to understand non-Western cultures in flattened ways. They are not exposed to the complex histories and identities that construct these cultures. They only see the Westernized versions. Furthermore, young children of color are unable to find themselves in Disney films. Willetts

(2012) explained, “Growing up I searched for characters who mirrored the people in my community and reflected the values and aesthetics of the Other […]. Instead, Disney gave me caricatured representations of the diversity of my world” (p. 9). The author, along with many others, still longed “to see diverse representations of diverse people” (Willetts, 2012, p. 20). Disney creates a world in which to be White is to be good, and characters of color are villainized. This is problematic because it teaches children that difference is wicked.

Film Remakes

Limited research exists that analyzes movie remakes, especially related to Disney’s live-action remakes. In his book *Film Remakes* (2005), Verevis offered an introduction to the practice of film remaking. Verevis serves as an Associate Professor at Monash University’s School of Media, Film and Journalism. The first section of the book discussed the industrial motivations behind film remaking, which is where Disney’s live-action remakes can be situated.

Remakes of successful films are regarded as more of a financial guarantee than original narratives (Verevis, 2005). Hollywood is primarily commercially interested, and will therefore prioritize work that will lead to sure profit. By pursuing movie remakes, Hollywood studios are attempting “to duplicate past successes and minimise risk by emphasizing the familiar” (Verevis, 2005, p. 4). This pattern is incredibly evident in Disney’s practices. According to *Digital Spy* writer Sandwell (2019), Disney’s live-action remakes such as *Alice and Wonderland* (2010) and *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) have done exceptionally well in the box office, earning more than $1 billion. However, original films have struggled, including *A Wrinkle in Time* (2018) and *The Nutcracker and the Four Realms* (2018) which only earned $132.7 million and $173.9 million, respectively (Sandwell, 2019). There is, however, a “commercial paradox” in remaking films

(Verevis, 2005). While remakes are necessarily “motivated by an economic imperative to repeat proven successes” they must also include variation and developments to remain economically viable (Stern, 2000, as cited in Verevis, 2005, p. 4). In other words, the remake must be both reliable, through repetition, and novel, through innovation.

In the first chapter of Verevis’s book, he identified two commercial strategies for tele-series remakes. The family entertainment movie, the first strategy, aims to bring together two generations of viewers (Verevis, 2005). The first generation watched the tele-series as it aired or during its reruns. The second generation – primarily the children or grandchildren of the first generation – build their knowledge of the narrative when they are introduced to the film. The second strategy, the high-concept blockbuster, is an opportunity for the production studio to have a “big budget, high concept remake” and focus on aspects like production design, special effects, and star talent (Verevis, 2005, p. 48). Although Verevis identified these strategies in relation to tele-series remakes, they are both applicable to Disney’s approach to its live-action remakes.

Disney has ensured that the remakes of its classic tales would be high-concept blockbusters. For example, Disney’s *The Lion King* (2019) featured the voices of Donald Glover, Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, and Seth Rogan (Rubin, 2019). The technology used to create the film was also incredibly advanced. According to *Wired* writer Ruben (2019), the film “rides an atomically thin line between CGI animation and live action” (para. 3). The sets existed inside a 360-degree virtual environment that was full of digitized animals, where director Jon Favreau and his crew could shoot scenes using the traditional dollies and cranes (Ruben, 2019). Furthermore, it is apparent Disney hopes to bring together generations over new family entertainment movies – like *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992). However, in order

to appeal to a new generation of film viewers, Disney must make efforts to change the patterns of negative representation apparent in its original films.

Summary

Media companies like Disney exercise a certain power over the narratives in children's lives. These narratives are central to the values that children learn from a young age. There has been a significant amount of research that critiqued the representations of princesses and diverse cultures in Disney's animated films. An analysis of the live-action *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) and *Aladdin* (2019) will demonstrate how Disney has responded to the criticism.

Methods

A qualitative textual analysis was used to analyze representation in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) and *Aladdin* (2019). Findings in qualitative research can be ambiguous, as the focus is not "objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted" (Kvale, 1996, as cited in Brennen, 2017, p. 3). More specifically, a textual analysis was chosen in order to understand the latent meanings in the texts. Texts can include anything from films, books, and music to games, advertisements, and fashions (Brennen, 2017). Such analysis helps researchers understand some of the relationships between media and the world. As in qualitative analyses, textual analyses have "no objective truth; instead, possible interpretations and tendencies are revealed" (Damme & Bauwel, 2010, p. 21). Therefore, these findings are simply one possible interpretation of the texts and may be embedded with personal values.

The original films that will be referenced in this project are *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992), both of which belong to the collection of Disney films referred to as the Disney Renaissance. Also included in this period are the films *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *The Rescuers Down Under* (1990), *The Lion King* (1994), *Pocahontas* (1995), *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1996), *Hercules* (1997), *Mulan* (1998), and *Tarzan* (1999) (Pallant, 2011). Prior to the Renaissance, Disney experience a period of underperformance at the box office. The combined domestic grosses of *The Black Cauldron* (1985), *The Great Mouse Detective* (1986), and *Oliver and Company* (1988) barely surpassed *The Little Mermaid* (1989). The Disney Renaissance reflected a return to the studio's artistic ideology of the Disney-Formalist period. Beginning with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) and ending with *Bambi* (1942), the "ideology prioritized artistic sophistication, 'realism' in characters and contexts, and, above all, believability," (Pallant, 2011, p. 35). This period of film utilized new technology – including a

Computer Animated Production System for the bubbles and water movement in *The Little Mermaid*, animated 3-D environments used to enhance the ballroom scene in *Beauty and the Beast*, and behavioral modelling for the herd of wildebeests in *The Lion King*. Disney also hired star performers such as Robin Williams, who played the Genie in *Aladdin*.

The Disney Renaissance represented "an amazing string of films that were both artistically and commercially successful and became instant classics," (Harris, 1998, as cited in Pallant, 2011, p. 89). On average, the movies of this period grossed $140 million domestically (Pallant, 2011). Many films were also highly acclaimed. *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992) were both recognized as the top G-rated films (Pallant, 2011). The unprecedented success of these films signify their popularity – and consequentially how pervasive their messages became. The films from this time-period that were reproduced into live-action remakes include *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), *Aladdin* (2019), and *The Lion King* (2019). Ultimately, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin* were chosen for analysis because they both have mostly human characters, which makes analyzing the princess and diverse cultures more feasible.

The analysis completed in this project reflects the most prominent critiques discussed by the scholars referenced in the literature review. Prior to analyzing the live-action remakes, *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992) were viewed in order to draw greater detail from the problematic areas mentioned by the scholars. The analysis of both *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) and *Aladdin* (2019) are guided by the specific critiques. Particular attention is given to areas of direct similarity or contrast to the original films. In order to optimize understanding the latent messages in the remakes, the critiques and analyses are organized by film.

Beauty and the Beast (1991)

The following descriptions detail the specific areas of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) that will guide the analysis for *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). England et al. (2011), Giroux and Pollock (2010), and Jeffords (1995) each critiqued Disney for emphasizing Belle's beauty over her intelligence. More specifically, in the film the villagers repeatedly express how strange they believe Belle is as they sing the song "Belle." Towbin et al. criticized the lyrics in 2004. Belle walks through the village early one morning, just as the daily activities begin. As she wonders through the streets, the villagers sing, "Never part of any crowd / 'Cause her head's up on some cloud / No denying she's a funny girl that Belle." They make it apparent that their judgement of Belle comes from her enjoyment of reading. They sing, "With a dreamy, far off look / And her nose stuck in a book / What a puzzle to the rest of us is Belle."

The villagers agree that Belle is beautiful, which is highly valued; however, her passion for reading makes her a social pariah. A group of women sing, "Now it's no wonder that her name means beauty / Her looks have got no parallel / But behind that fair façade / I'm afraid she's rather odd" and "She's nothing like the rest of us." Furthermore, Gaston gushes over Belle's appearance when he tells LeFou Belle is "The most beautiful girl in town" and "That makes her the best." Yet, he tries to persuade Belle to forego her interests in order to fulfill the role of his wife. As Belle begins to walk home after the song ends, she is stopped by Gaston. He takes her book and tells her "it's about time you got your head out of those books and paid attention to more important things. Like me." "The whole town's talking about it. It's not right for a woman to read. Soon she starts getting ideas and thinking," he says.

Numerous authors criticized Belle's character for perpetuating what Hoffman (2007) calls the princess-angel image. Giroux and Pollock (2010), Jeffords (1995), and Olson (2013)

explained that Belle teaches the Beast basic skills. She shows the Beast how to properly eat, ballroom dance, play in the snow, and feed birds. She also reads to him, because he – presumably – does not know how. Belle also transforms the Beast. He becomes sensitive, caring, loving, and learns to control his temper, as explained by Giroux and Pollock (2010), Jeffords (1995), Olson (2013), and Towbin et al. (2004). After the Beast saves Belle from a pack of wolves, she offers to take care of his wounds. They argue back and forth about who is at fault. He says, “Well, if you hadn’t have run away, this wouldn’t have happened.” She says, “Well, you should learn to control your temper.” Even though the Beast’s enchanted servants have tried to teach him to control his temper, it is Belle that finally convinces him to do so. The Beast ultimately falls in love with Belle and allows her to return home to her father. The household servants learn the Beast cares about Belle enough to put her needs above his own. Mrs. Potts explains to the others, “After all this time, he’s finally learned to love.”

Beauty and the Beast (1991) tells the story of a young woman who endures abuse in order to find love. Towbin et al. (2004) and Olson (2013) described some of the Beast’s abusive actions. The Beast imprisons Belle, separates her form her father, rages at her, and refuses to feed her unless she eats with him. When the Beast catches Belle with her father in the castle, he shouts “What are you doing here?” and grabs her arm. This forces her to face him and drop her light. When she asks if he guarantees her father’s freedom if she takes his place, he responds, “Yes. But you must promise to stay here forever.” For the majority of the film, the Beast has an aggressive demeanor toward Belle. He raises his voice, shows his teeth, growls, and makes demands like “You will join me for dinner. That’s not a request.” When Belle does not join the Beast, he stomps upstairs and knocks violently on her door. He shouts, “I thought I told you to come down for dinner.” Lumiere, Cogsworth, and Mrs. Potts tell the Beast to be more gentle.

When Belle continues to refuse his demands, the Beast says "You can't stay in there forever." After Belle's final refusal, the Beast yells "Fine! Then go ahead and starve! If she doesn't eat with me, then she doesn't eat at all." When the Beast catches Belle in the west wing, despite his orders to never go there, he quickly becomes angry – raising his voice and growling. Fearful, Bell begins to back away from the Beast. He destroys furniture around the room, even as Bell begs him to stop. He screams "Get out!" and Belle runs into the night.

Despite the Beast's many abusive behaviors, Belle still falls in love with him – as explained by England et al. (2011), Giroux and Pollock (2010), Olson (2013), and Towbin et al. (2004). She is fearful of the Beast – demonstrated through her sobbing, pleading, and running away. After dancing with the Beast to "Beauty and the Beast," the Beast asks Belle, "Belle? Are you happy here with me?" She responds by saying "Yes," but she looks away worriedly and admits how much she misses her father. She is afraid to stand up for herself. However, she defends the Beast in front of angry villagers. When Belle returns to the village from the castle, a woman asks if the Beast is dangerous. Belle says, "No, no, he'd never hurt anyone. Please, I know he looks vicious, but he's really kind and gentle. He's my friend." Gaston suggests, "If I didn't know better, I'd think you had feelings for this monster." Belle is quick to reply – "He's no monster, Gaston. You are!" Belle then follows the mob of villagers to the castle and begs Gaston to spare the Beast. After the Beast is shot, Belle rushes to his side. When she thinks he has died, she confesses her love – "No. No. Please. Please. Please don't leave me. I love you." This is what ultimately breaks the spell cast on the castle.

Most troubling to authors like Olson (2013) is the adult characters' normalization of the abuse. The Beast's servants are afraid of the Beast and recognize he needs to learn to control his temper. However, they condone the relationship between him and Belle. Shortly after Belle is

imprisoned, Mrs. Potts brings her a cup of tea. She suggests Belle should ignore the Beast's abusive behavior. When Belle says, "But I've lost my father, my dreams, everything," Mrs. Potts replies, "Cheer up, child. It'll turn out all right in the end. You'll see."

Aladdin (1992)

The following descriptions delineate the specific areas of *Aladdin* (1992) that will guide the analysis for *Aladdin* (2019). Layng (2001) critiqued Disney for sexualizing Jasmine's character. She is portrayed with large breasts, a tiny waist, and rounded buttocks. Both Layng (2001) and Shaheen (2009) problematized Jasmine's clothing. Shaheen (2009) likened the Princess's appearance to that of the stereotypical harem maiden. Jasmine wears an off-the-shoulder top – which reveals her stomach and cleavage – and transparent harem pants. Jasmine also acts as a sexual agent – as explained by England et al. (2011), Layng (2001), and Towbin et al. (2004). After Jafar becomes Sultan, he captures Jasmine and her father. When Aladdin returns to save the two, Jasmine turns into a seductress to distract Jafar. She traces her body with her fingers and approaches Jafar. She says, "Jafar. I never realized how incredibly handsome you are." "That's better. Now, pussycat, tell me more about myself," he replies. Jasmine continues to compliment Jafar. She places her hands on his shoulders and says "You've stolen my heart." She runs her fingers under his chin and moves her face closer to his, eventually kissing him.

Numerous authors problematized Jasmine's lack of agency. Layng (2001) noted that the Princess wants to be free to choose a husband, but only runs away. After she rejects yet another suitor, the Sultan pleads "Dearest, you've got to stop rejecting every suitor who comes to call. The law says you must be married to a prince by your next birthday." Jasmine insists "The law is wrong," and says "Father, I hate being forced into this. If I do marry, I want it to be for love."

That night, Jasmine sneaks away and whispers to Rajah "I can't stay here and have my life lived for me." While on her own, she runs into trouble with a street merchant. Layng (2001) explained that she is unable to defend herself and must be saved by Aladdin. He intervenes only just in time to stop the man from cutting Jasmine's hand off. He grabs the man's wrist and takes the sword from him. Aladdin then proceeds to pretend Jasmine is his sister and she is not in the right state of mind. At the resolution of the story, Jasmine still requires a man to attain the freedom she wants. This is heavily critiqued by Giroux and Pollock (2010), Layng (2001), and Towbin et al. (2004). After Jafar is defeated and Jasmine and Aladdin reunite, Jamine expresses how badly she wishes she could marry Aladdin. The Sultan reflects, and then tells Aladdin, "You've certainly proven your worth as far as I'm concerned. It's that law that's the problem." He then proclaims, "From this day forth, the princess shall marry whomever she deems worthy." She chooses to marry Aladdin, and – although this is exactly what she has desired all along – her life is still dictated by the men around her.

Many authors have been critical of Disney's representation of Arabs in *Aladdin* (1992). Giroux and Pollock (2010) and Shaheen (2009) found particular issue with the line "It's barbaric, but hey, it's home," in the song "Arabian Nights." Authors like Giroux and Pollock (2010) and Shaheen (2009) problematized the representation of the "bad" Arabs. They are portrayed with thick beards, large bulbous noses, sinister eyes, heavy accents, and are constantly wielding swords. These characteristics are manifested in the Royal Guards, whom respond to Jafar. These guards threaten extreme violence for negligible offenses, as explained by Shaheen (2009). Aladdin steals a loaf of bread to feed himself and Abu. The Royal Guards chase Aladdin down the streets of Agrabah while carrying swords. One shouts, "Stop! Thief! I'll have your hands for a trophy, street rat." Later in the film, Jasmine takes an apple from a merchant for a hungry boy.

The merchant becomes angry. “You’d better be able to pay for that,” he says. He grabs her arm and pulls her toward his cart. “Do you know what the penalty is for stealing?” he shouts. He holds her wrist against a cutting board and raises his sword. Meanwhile, Jasmine and Aladdin – the main protagonists – are represented completely differently. Salem – as referenced in Giroux and Pollock (2010) – critiqued Disney for disparaging Arab qualities by only attributing them to villains. Aladdin lacks the large nose, thick beard, and turban that the other men are depicted with. Furthermore, neither Aladdin or Jasmine have accents.

Findings

The findings are organized by film. Attention is given both to areas that remained the same and those that changed. More focus is given to the aspects of the films that were altered in the live-action remakes. This will not only demonstrate Disney's effort to address misrepresentation, but will also serve to illustrate the areas of critique Disney found most important to change.

Beauty and the Beast (2017)

Many of the areas critiqued by scholars remained unchanged in the live-action remake of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991). The villagers, including Gaston, still cherish Belle's beauty but condemn her interest in reading. They sing the same lyrics to the song "Belle" as she walks through the streets carrying a book. Gaston, once again, confesses to LeFou, "Look at her, LeFou. My future wife. Belle is the most beautiful girl in the village. That makes her the best." Yet, he suggests she should not pursue her own passions. After trying to teach a young girl to read, Gaston tells Belle, "The only children you should concern yourself with…are your own." He tries to convince Belle that she should marry him and have his children. He warns her that spinsters without fathers – i.e. without a man in their lives – end up poor and begging. The Beast, however, disagrees with the villagers' judgement of Belle in this version of the film. Belle confides in the Beast – "The villagers say that I'm a funny girl…but I'm not sure they mean it as a compliment." He responds, "I'm sorry. Your village sounds terrible." "Almost as lonely as your castle," she says.

Intimate partner abuse is perpetuated in *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). The Beast has the same aggressive demeanor toward Belle – growling, roaring, and snarling. He, however, is not

physically violent in this version of the film. He does not grab her arm when he catches her with her father, nor does he break furniture when he finds Belle in the west wing. The adult characters, specifically Mrs. Potts, continue to normalize the Beast's abusive behaviors. Mrs. Potts catches Belle attempting to sneak out a window. She recognizes that Belle is trying to leave, but decides to console her instead of helping her escape. She tells Belle, "Cheer up, my poppet. Things will turn out in the end. You'll feel a lot better after dinner." Mrs. Potts even tries to justify the Beast's behavior. Belle asks Cogsworth, Lumiere, and Mrs. Potts why they care so much about the Beast. Mrs. Potts responds, "We've looked after him all his life." "But he's cursed you somehow. Why? You did nothing!" Belle asks. Mrs. Potts then explains to Belle "You're quite right there, dear. You see, when the master lost his mother and his cruel father took that sweet, innocent lad and twisted him up to be just like him we did nothing." Belle experiences a change of heart, and she returns to the Beast's bed to take care of him. Toward the end of the film, Belle ultimately defends the Beast in front of the villagers, and she still falls in love with him which breaks the spell.

Similar to *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Belle teaches the Beast basic skills, like how to dance and gently pet a horse. She also inspires him to become a better man. He learns to control his temper and allows Belle to return home to her father. However, in this version of the film, the Beast is more versed in literature. The pair share a connection to reading. The Beast finishes Belle's sentence when she recites a line from a Shakespeare play. "I had an expensive education.," he admits. He then takes Belle to his elaborate library where he tells her, "Well, if you like it so much, then it's yours." She asks him, "Have you really read every one of these books?" He sarcastically replies, "Well, not all of them. Some of them are in Greek." They spend time in the library together organizing books. Belle even catches the Beast reading *King Arthur*

and the Knights of the Round Table – which she calls a romance. He, presumably, has found a new enjoyment in reading by being with Belle. This is much different from the original version of the film in which Belle had to read to the Beast because he could not read himself.

In *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), Belle is interested in more than reading. She wants to teach, create, and push for societal changes. Belle teaches a young girl in the village to read a story book. When the headmaster sees this, he asks, “What on earth are you doing? Teaching another girl to read? Isn’t one enough?” A group of villagers dump Belle’s clean laundry onto the ground as punishment. Gaston approaches Belle and advises, “They’re never going to trust the kind of change you’re trying to bring.” Belle also helps her father fix a music box and invents a washing machine using a barrel and a mule. She asks her father if he thinks she is odd. He questions her – “Odd? My daughter? Odd? Where did you get an idea like that?” “I don’t know. People talk,” she explains. Maurice then tells Belle, “This is a small village, you know. Small minded as well. But small also means safe. Even back in Paris, I knew a girl like you, who was so…ahead of her time. So different. People mocked her. Until the day they all found themselves imitating her.”

In this version of the film, Belle also stands up for herself more. Instead of crying, apologizing, and pleading, Belle confronts the Beast. When the Beast demands Belle to join him for dinner, she responds with, “You’ve taken me as your prisoner and now you want to have dinner with me? Are you insane?” He grunts, and Cogsworth, Lumiere, Mrs. Potts, and Plumette become frightened. The Beast knocks sternly on Belle’s door. He shouts, “I told you to join me for dinner.” “And I told you no,” she replies, “I’d starve before I ever ate with you.” The Beast stumps away and yells, “Well, be my guest. Go ahead and starve. If she doesn’t eat with me, then she doesn’t eat at all.” Even near the end of the film, when the Beast has learned to control his

temper, Belle refuses to succumb to the Beast. The Beast suggests, "It's foolish, I suppose for a creature like me to hope that one day he might earn your affection." He asks Belle, "You think you could be happy here?" She responds by questioning "Can anybody be happy if they aren't free?"

Aladdin (2019)

Disney made many changes to the live-action remake of *Aladdin* (1992). Although Princess Jasmine has the same curvy figure, she is not as overtly sexualized. The Princess's signature turquoise outfit is much more modest. The altered neckline covers Jasmine's shoulders and cleavage. Her flowing pants sit higher on her hips and her midriff remains covered by a flesh-covered bodice. She also dresses in many outfits from a whole new wardrobe. Such a variety allows Jasmine to deviate from the stereotypical harem maiden image. She wears a number of bright, colorful gowns, all of which cover her shoulders and stomach. Most notably, Disney removed the scene in which Jasmine seduces Jafar to distract him.

The Princess has a greater voice in *Aladdin* (2019). When Jasmine runs into trouble in the marketplace, Aladdin still comes to her rescue, but she stands up for herself more. Jasmine takes bread from a merchant and gives it to two hungry children. Jamal, the merchant's brother, confronts her – "Hey! Hey! You steal from my brother." She is taken off-guard, and responds, "Stealing? No, I..." "You pay, or I take bracelet," Jamal warns. He grabs her wrist, and she demands, "Let go of me!" Aladdin intervenes, but Jasmine continues to justify her actions. She explains, "Those children were hungry." Aladdin then tricks Jamal long enough for him and Jasmine to escape. In the first film, Jasmine begs for mercy and must wait for Aladdin to rescue her. In this version, Aladdin still intervenes, but Jasmine stands up for herself more.

Furthermore, the song "Speechless" allows Jasmine to resist her character's history of passivity. The new Princess Jasmine is headstrong, and is, literally, refusing to be silent. There are two moments in the film in which Jasmine sings the song. The first is after the Sultan and Jafar dismiss her from their discussion of international relations. Jafar tells Jasmine, "Life will be kinder to you, Princess, once you accept these traditions and understand it's better for you to be seen and not heard." She sings, "My voice drowned out in the thunder / But I can't cry / And I can't start to crumble / Whenever they try / To shut me or cut me down / I can't stay silent." The second time Jasmine sings the song is after Jafar becomes Sultan. He tells her to stay silent and orders the guards to remove her. This time, she sings "Written in stone / Ev'ry rule, ev'ry word / Centuries old and unbending / 'Stay in your place / 'Better seen and not heard' / Well, now that story is ending / 'Cause I / I cannot start to crumble / So come on and try / Try to shut me and cut me down / I won't be silent / You can't keep me quiet / Won't tremble when you try it." She warns, "Don't you underestimate me / 'Cause I know that I won't go speechless."

In this film, Jasmine is also interested in more than choosing a suitor. She dreams of becoming sultan. She overhears Jafar and her father discussing Shirabad – an old ally. Jafar expresses his concerns that Shirabad is growing more powerful. A marriage between Jasmine and Prince Anders would bring not only a strong military alliance, but a new ruler to Agrabah. The Sultan explains to Jasmine, "My dear, I am not getting any younger. We must find you a husband, and we are running out of kingdoms." Jasmines replies, "What foreign prince could care for our people as I do? I could lead if only…" Jasmine is interrupted by the Sultan, who says, "My dear, you cannot be sultan because it has never been done in the 1,000-year history of our kingdom." Jasmine argues, "I have been preparing for this my whole life. I have read…" She is interrupted again. Jafar says, "Books? But you cannot read experience. Inexperience is

dangerous. People left unchecked will revolt. Walls and borders unguarded will be attacked." The Sultan agrees with Jafar and tells Jasmine "One day you will understand." Here, Jasmine is not arguing that she does not want to marry Prince Anders as much as she is trying to convince her father that the foreign prince would not make a great sultan. She believes she is the best option.

Ultimately, Jasmine is able to marry Aladdin – even though he is not a prince. However, this is achieved differently in *Aladdin* (2019). Jasmine is given the power to change the law, the law is not changed for her. She becomes Sultan. At the end of the film, her father explains why he has been so protective. "I feared losing you. Like I lost your mother," he says, "All I saw was my little girl, not the woman you have become." He then tells Jasmine, "You have shown me courage and strength. You are the future of Agrabah. You shall be the next Sultan." "And as Sultan, you may change the law. He is a good man," he says.

The representation of Arabs was greatly altered in *Aladdin* (2019). The opening scene is in direct opposition to that of the original version. Instead of a desolate desert, two ships sail in the ocean. On one ship, there is a family – the Genie, Dalia, and their two children. The Genie tells his children the story of Aladdin. The most noticeable adjustment to the representation of the Middle East was in the song "Arabian Nights." Disney removed the lyrics "It's barbaric / But hey, it's home." The new version of the song also describes the diversity within Middle Eastern cultures. The Genie sings, "Where you wander among / Ev'ry culture and tongue/ It's chaotic / But hey, it's home."

There is still a disparity in the portrayal of the villains and protagonists in this story. Jamal speaks with an accent and broken English. He also has a thick beard and wears a turban. However, Aladdin, too, wears a headdress and has facial stubble. Furthermore, since this film is

not animated, the differences in representation are not as exaggerated. For example, none of the characters have bulbous noses. The “bad” characters are also not as violent. When Aladdin is chased by the Royal Guards, they do not wield swords or threaten dismemberment. When Jamal confronts Jasmine for taking a piece of bread, he does not threaten to cut off her hand.

Discussion

This project seeks to understand how Disney has responded to critiques of its animated films – specifically *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Aladdin* (1992). A textual analysis is used to compare issues of representation in the original animated films and their live-action remakes. While both films experienced alterations, Disney was much more successful in improving representations of the princess and diverse cultures in *Aladdin* (2019).

In *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), Belle's and the Beast's relationship is more complicated than it was in 1991. Belle's pursuit of intellectual and creative challenges goes far beyond storybooks. She resists societal norms, she innovates, and even teaches a young girl to read. This presents Belle with even more challenges in the village, as the townspeople are afraid of change. While Belle is used to this life, she finds commonality with the Beast. He, too, has a strong interest in reading. He does not think Belle is strange. The Beast understands Belle. These new layers introduced by Disney work to justify Belle's and the Beast's relationship. However, the Beast is still verbally abusive. While Belle is more defiant toward the Beast, she still ultimately falls in love with him.

In *Aladdin* (2019), Disney adjusted or removed entire scenes, rewrote songs, and changed the film's ending. Jasmine has agency in her own story. The headstrong Princess is fighting for more than choosing her husband, she is fighting for her country. She resists societal norms and stands up to the establishment. Jasmine becomes the first female sultan of Agrabah. As Sultan, she can change the law. She does not rely on men to achieve her goals. This version of the story also works to dismantle the notion that the Middle East is simply hot, sandy, and ridden with evil. Although Disney resisted major changes to "Arabian Nights" in the early 90s, the company

greatly revised the lyrics for the 2019 live-action remake. The new song describes the Middle East as a place of diversity and wonder.

Based off these findings, Disney has been listening to scholars' concerns about representation – and, therefore, the messages Disney may send to children – in its animated films. When comparing the two remakes, the changes Disney made to *Aladdin* (1992) were far more significant. *Aladdin* (2019) teaches young women to fight for what they believe in. It also inspires children to accept and value many cultures.

It is hard to know the reason why Disney was much more successful with *Aladdin* (2019) than *Beauty and the Beast* (2017). It could be that *Aladdin* was released two years after *Beauty and the Beast* and time has allowed Disney to become more sensitive to the representation of groups of people. It could also be that Disney hired consultants for the production of *Aladdin*. This knowledge is beyond the scope of this project. This project also only analyzes two live-action remakes, so it is difficult to know whether Disney has consistently responded to scholarly critiques of its films. However, Disney has the opportunity to incorporate similar improvements in upcoming live-action remakes – such as *The Little Mermaid*.

Conclusion

Walt Disney has a critical role in the education and socialization of children. Because of this, it is imperative to understand the messages latent in its films. Disney has been criticized for its representations of princesses and diverse cultures, and, consequently, what the company may be teaching children about young women and non-Western cultures. Using scholarly critiques to guide the analysis, this project seeks to understand whether Disney has listened to criticism and improved representation in the live-action remakes of its animated fairytales.

A qualitative textual analysis is used to reveal the changes Disney made to *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) and *Aladdin* (2019). These two movies come from a period of incredible aesthetic and industrial growth for Disney. Their widespread success represents the reach of the films, and therefore the number of children exposed to their messages. This project found that Disney is working to improve representation within its films, although the company has been more successful with some films – *Aladdin* – than others – *Beauty and the Beast*. Continued analyses of future live-action remakes could help to better understand Disney's response to scholarly critiques. Potential adjustments made to *The Little Mermaid* or *Mulan*, for example, may uncover a pattern of the representation Disney finds most important to improve.

References

Akita, K., & Kennedy, R. (2012). A "vexing implication": Siamese cats and orientalist mischief-making. In J. Cheu (Ed.), *Diversity in Disney films: Critical essays on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability* (pp. 50-66). McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

Arab American National Museum. (2011). *What is Orientalism?* Reclaiming identity: Dismantling Arab stereotypes. http://arabstereotypes.org/why-stereotypes/what-orientalism.

Barnd, N. B. (2012). White man's best friend: Race and privilege in Oliver and Company. In J. Cheu (Ed.), *Diversity in Disney films: Critical essays on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability* (pp. 67-82). McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

Brennen, B. S. (2017). *Qualitative research methods for media studies.* Routledge.

Clements, R. & Musker, J. (Directors). (1992). Aladdin. [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures.

Condon, B. (Director). (2017). Beauty and the Beast. [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures.

Damme, E. V. & Bauwel, S. V. (2010). 'I don't wanna be anything other than me': A case study on gender representations of teenagers in American teen drama series One Tree Hill. *Ghent University, 2*, 17-33.

England, D. E., Descartes, L., & Collier-Meek, M. A. (2011). Gender role portrayal and the Disney princess. *Social Science Premium Collection, 64*, 555-567.

Giroux, H. A., & Pollock, G. (2010). *The mouse that roared: Disney and the end of innocence*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Hoffman, J. M. (2007). "She loves with a love that cannot tire": The image of the angel in the house across cultures and across time. *Pacific Coast Philology, 42*, 263-271.

Jeffords, S. (1995). The curse of masculinity: Disney's Beauty and the Beast. In E. Bell, L. Haas & L. Sells (Eds.), *From mouse to mermaid: The politics of film, gender, and culture* (pp. 161-172). Indiana University Press.

Jhally, S. (Director). (2006). Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Villifies a People. [Film]. Media Education Foundation.

Layng, J. M. (2001). The animated woman: The powerless beauty if Disney heroines from Snow White to Jasmine. *The American Journal of Semiotics, 17*, 197-215.

Marble, S. (2017, July 13). *Jack Shaheen dies; Scholar persuaded Disney to alter 'Aladdin' as he fought Hollywood's racial stereotypes*. Los Angeles Times. https://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-jack-shaheen-20170713-story.html

O'Brien, P. C. (1996). The happiest films on Earth: A textual and contextual analysis of Walt Disney's Cinderella and The Little Mermaid. *Women's Studies in Communication, 19*, 155-183.

Olson, K. M. (2013). An epideictic dimension of symbolic violence in Disney's Beauty and the Beast: Inter-generational lessons in romanticizing and tolerating intimate partner violence. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 99*, 448-480.

Pallant, C. (2011). *Demystifying Disney: A history of Disney feature animation.* The Continuum International Publishing Group.

Putnam, A. (2012). Mean ladies: Transgendered villains in Disney films. In J. Cheu (Ed.), *Diversity in Disney films: Critical essays on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability* (pp. 147-162). McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

Ritchie, G. (Director). (2019). Aladdin. [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures.

Rubin, P. (2019, July 18). Disney's new Lion King is the vr-fueled future of cinema. *Wired.* https://www.wired.com/story/disney-new-lion-king-vr-fueled-future-cinema/.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.

Sandwell, I. (2019, March 29). Why Disney is making live-action remakes of everything. *Digital Spy*. https://www.digitalspy.com/movies/a26982936/disney-remakes-why/.

Shaheen, J. G. (2009). *Reel bad Arabs: How Hollywood vilifies a people*. Olive Branch Press.

Spangler, T. (2019). Disney says Disney Plus has over 10 million sign-ups after launch day. https://variety.com/2019/digital/news/disney-says-disney-plus-has-over-10-million-signups-1203403515/.

Towbin, M. A., Haddock, S. A., Zimmerman, T. S., Lund, L. K., & Tanner, L. R. (2008). Images of gender, race, age, and sexual orientation in Disney feature-length animated films. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 15*, 19-44.

Trousdale, G. & Wise, K. (Directors). (1991). Beauty and the Beast. [Film]. Walt Disney Pictures.

Verevis, C. (2005). *Film remakes*. Edinburgh University Press.

Willetts, K. R. (2012). Cannibals and coons: Blackness in the early days of Walt Disney. In J. Cheu (Ed.), *Diversity in Disney films: Critical essays on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and disability* (pp. 9-22). McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers.

Zipes, J. (1995). Breaking the Disney spell. In E. Bell, L. Haas & L. Sells (Eds.), *From mouse to mermaid: The politics of film, gender, and culture* (pp. 21-42). Indiana University Press.

Zipes, J. (1997). *Happily ever after: Fairy tales, children, and the culture industry.* Rutledge.