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Nuclear Families for the Nuclear Age: Disney's Part in Creating Gender Roles in the 1950s

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Abstract

The 1950s was a revolutionary period for American youth culture. The Walt Disney Company played an important role in forming and conveying a new image and set of ideals associated with childhood. My paper examines the Disney Company's messages about growing up, in particular, the gendered expectations surrounding love that revolutionized the way Americans viewed family life. For both ideological and business reasons, Disney promoted an idealized concept of the nuclear family to children. My paper pays close attention to the conversation occurring between Disney and the American public by analyzing both 1950s Disney storylines, disseminated in multiple mediums such as movies, toys, and books, and the public's reactions to them. My paper presents its findings in three main sections: parenting, growing up, and building a family. In each section, I look at the marketing strategies and public's reactions. Previous scholarship about Disney has tended to focus only on Disney movies. By comparing multiple media for their message, my paper allows for a greater understanding of the reciprocal impact of Disney and the American public. And, as anyone with children, or who was one in the twenty-first century knows, the conversation between Disney and the American public is still going strong.

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Introduction

>*"So this is love, so this is what makes life divine."*

<div align="right">– Walt Disney, Cinderella [1]</div>

The ongoing conversation about whether a child wants to become a prince or a princess has become ingrained into society. Disney fairytale stories are known for reaffirming gender identity through characteristics, appearances, and actions. Boys and girls play extremely different roles in these iconic storylines within the family, during play, and in love. The Disney Company is a staple in any middle-class home, especially in the 1950s, with its books, toys, and movies. This paper proposes the following question: what are the messages about gender that these products and their stories underline in their marketing strategies?

To dive further into this subject, questions have been brought to attention by various scholars when researching about Disney's hidden gendered messages. They can be summed up into these main questions about parenting, growing up, and love. For example, what makes a good parent? What is a mother's role, and what is a father's role in the family when it comes to dealing with the children? When discussing the transition phases in growing up, how do children develop and grow into their identity? In focusing on love, scholars have asked how did Disney describe the ways people met their significant other? How they fell in love? Ultimately, some scholars have questioned, what is the conversation between the Disney Company and adolescent environment of teenagers and prepubescent children?[2]

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[1]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Cinderella*. Animated musical fantasy. RKO Radio Pictures, 1950. Film 00:53:11
[2]Nicholas Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland : Walt Disney and the Making of the American Child, 1930-1960* (Durham : Duke University Press, 2005).

Walt Disney is known for his happily ever after creations. He along with his staff embraced the 1950s environment through a strong notion of love. This concept of love included the love for oneself and the love for others such as family or partners. This paper analyzes Disney's marketing and production messages of gender in relation to the dating and romance norms of the United States in the 1950s. It does so by compiling the various mediums Disney used to portray gender expectations. In other words, my project asks how Disney's marketing and production in the 1950s tried to influence children's ideas about "modern dating" and family life. In particular, I will focus on the changing conceptions of romance and gender roles among young people brought about by the fairytale genre that Disney helped to popularize.

Disney combined these issues of identity, gender roles, and family dynamics into the films that were popular in the 1950s. These included *Cinderella*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. The storylines depicted in Disney merchandise, books, and motion pictures can be broken down into various categories that demonstrate changes in popular conceptions of identity, gender roles, and family dynamics. Therefore, the first section of this paper will assess Disney's depictions of parenting.

The second section discusses growing up and coming of age by learning and accepting society's gender expectations. My third and final section looks at teens who try to create their own family dynamics. The paper continues with people's reactions to romantic teenage relationships and looks closer into the gender roles within those relations. Through these various sections I look at the conversation between the Disney Company and the adolescents and teenagers. Disney marketed the different mediums in a new way utilizing multi-variable marketing that expanded how the content of the Disney stories were shaped by the new environment of teens and how Disney then influenced the new generation of children.

Throughout this paper, I rely on evidence from the original motion pictures and movie scripts of *Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Peter Pan*, and *Alice in Wonderland*. I use Disney toys and their advertising in toy catalogs, as well as original Disney books and advertising copies from publisher's catalogs produced for bookstores when analyzing Disney's marketing.

My methods of analysis include the storyline and gestures made by the characters. This includes how they interact with each other such as their first meetings and their relationships. The motion pictures have allowed me to analyze illustrations and appearances. I have observed the songs, moods conveyed in certain scenes, and consistently appearing themes, as well as looking at gestures, or lack thereof between characters, personality traits showcased, and appearance descriptions. I also have looked at many book illustrations, focusing specifically on how they were marketed and their relationships to the other mediums such as records, toys, and music. Through the physical Disney toys and their catalog descriptions, I saw the marketing strategy. Their use of certain pronouns, colors, textures, and facial expressions can be very revealing. All of these different aspects of the 1950s culture in connection with the Walt Disney Company are influenced by their surrounding environment just as Disney influences them.

In my analysis of the movies, books, toys, and reviews, the evidence collectively strengthens my argument on how the implicit messages resonated with children in specific ways. Disney was one of the first companies that utilized differentiated marketing, which dramatically increased their company profits and reach on society. Therefore, Disney's ideas portrayed in their products regarding gender in the 1950s should be studied as a whole rather than as individual components.

My paper engages with three areas of research. First, it speaks to scholarship on gender in relation to Disney, the media, and the nuclear family. The popular opinions surrounding Walt

Disney were the idea of his products as fun and whimsical fairytales full of laughter and love. In the past, historians have had a positive outlook with Disney.[3] In recent years this trend seems to have changed towards more critical research and study. Disney's work has been connected with the forming of the American child and is relevant when analyzing the 'American way of life.'[4] Scholars have done extensive research looking at Disney's dream of perfect childhood.[5] This dream can be connected to the actions and values of teens and how Disney workers saw these actions and responded to them in their storylines. To change future teens, Disney focused on influencing children.

Second, my paper draws on scholarship that looked at the changing definitions of dating in teens from a gender and family analysis. This has been done by analyzing social contexts through the media.[6] Understanding the evolving teen culture of the 1950s allowed for a connection to be made in discussions regarding marketing strategies with the increased interest in the teenage market in the 1950s and the influence the presence of children had in the media. Historians have paid attention to the gender development in adolescence, and how gender roles were portrayed in the various forms of media. Some scholars have taken their analysis a step further by discussing the potential effects of these portrayals on adolescents.[7] Historians have also looked at the marketing of gender roles with a focus on toys. They found that toys led to the development of skills, and set toy categories were put in place so those skills would be

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[3] Tracey Mollet, "'With a Smile and a Song ...'
[4] Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*.
[5] Neal Gabler, "Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination," n.d.
[6] Beth Bailey, "From Front Porch to Back Seat: A History of the Date," *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 4 (2004): 23–26.
[7] Patrick Jamieson and Daniel Romer, *The changing portrayal of adolescents in the media since 1950*, (Oxford University Press, 2008).

proportional to the gender expectations of the children in the future.[8] While I agree with most of

the research that these scholars are conversing about, there seems to be a lack of variation of

evidence in their research. Consequently, I explore the relationship between family and media.

Finally, my paper is in conversation with research on the 1950s family. In particular,

scholars have focused on containment for security and commodities for the 'modern home.'

Domestic containment dealt with the sphere of influence as the home.[9] Americans built and

centered their lives around the home, more specifically the family because they wanted secure

jobs, secure homes, and secure marriages.[10] The commodity gap between what was available in

the 1940s versus the 1950s for the home impacted family life as it created the idea of the modern

home.[11] Many scholars, such as Jamieson and Romer, have indicated that "the media may play a

powerful role in socializing adolescents, making the portrayals important to understand."[12]Media

and its various forms of content is the device that seemed to connect these concepts of family,

Disney, and gender together. This is shown to be true in my analysis.

These various conversations all add a component to the story; by connecting these themes

together in a new manner than what has been done before by going across mediums, this paper

has a better view at the bigger picture with a chance for new insights regarding the gender

expectations in dating and family.

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[8]Carroll W. Jr. Pursell and Martha Moore Trescott, "Toys, Technology and Sex Roles in America, 1920-1940," in *Dynamos & Virgins Revisited: Women & Technological Change in History*, 1979, 252–67.
[9]Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound : American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York : Basic Books, 1988., 1988), 14.
[10]May, 13.
[11]May, *Homeward Bound*.
[12]Patrick E. Jamieson and Daniel Romer, *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 136.

The Nuclear Age

The 1950s was a time of change and uncertainty. This uncertainty was a product of a few major events including the end of World War II, the beginning of the modern Civil Rights Movement, and the tense political climate of the Cold War. The Cold War was complex with the Red Scare and threat of Nuclear War in the minds of the American public. The Red Scare was mass hysteria over the threat of communism infiltration into the U.S. This was combined with the fear of Nuclear War from the creation of the atomic bomb in 1945. Due to this unsteady world environment, an importance on security emerged in America with the first oral contraceptive having been created, a major baby boom, the creation of the credit card, and more. Politics and economic policies were strongly connected to middle class livelihoods, "for Nixon, American superiority rested on the ideal of the suburban home, complete with modern appliances and distinct gender roles for family members."[13]Nixon spoke about this in relation to the Soviet Union comparing the different ways of life, when America and the Soviet Union were competing with values of capitalism versus values of communism.

Which economic system led to a better quality of life for the people, this is the question that prompted the "Kitchen Debate." In other words, men's ability to satisfy their families' consumer wants became the measure of American success in the Cold War. It symbolized the superiority of free-enterprise over Soviet communism; the real race was not an arms race or space race, but a consumer race.[14] This generation of overindulgence with the economic boom of the Western World led to the start of a consumer-led economy going into the 50s. Also during this time in the rise of the middle class, unique fashion trends and a sharp increase in popular culture occurred.

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[13]May, *Homeward Bound*, 16.
[14]Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 197.

Culturally, Americans surrounded themselves with ideas and things that made them feel secure in their everyday lives. Children and building families were another way parents gained a sense of security. Children coming of age into the 1950s enjoyed the feeling of U.S. superiority as the leaders of the free world. The idea of childhood changed in the second half of the twentieth century. This was the first generation that kids were allowed to be kids; the 1940s had to fight WWII, the 1930s had to deal with the Great Depression, and the 1920s just came out of WWI where they had to deal with the awaking of adults with the inventions of the car, plane, and the radio.

Children were a major part of the ideas for security and in achieving a "good life" through fulfilled child needs with focus on the future and less on political recoil and matters outside the home.[15] The 1950s at this point became known as the decade of the child.[16] "A home filled with children would create a feeling of warmth and security against the cold forces of disruption and alienation. Children would also be a connection to the future and a means of replenishing a world depleted by war deaths."[17] This was a major concept of the time and could be seen in many works throughout the period. One example being from *Parent's Magazine* on the cover of a 1950 edition, there was the literal interpretation of this with a globe being handed to small child-like hands by bigger god-like hands.[18] This passing on the world to the new generation, brought about by the major baby boom started the prior decade was the beginning of a new way of thinking.

The political and social climate of the country at the time contributed to a huge shift in the way media and marketing conceptualized children and teenagers. Before the 1950s, teenagers

[15]May, *Homeward Bound*, 12.
[16]Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 251.
[17]May, *Homeward Bound*, 23.
[18]Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 251.

were grouped together with either children or adults and treated as such by their parents and the media; they went straight from childhood to adulthood. Social scientists characterize the teenage years as being a time where teens experience adolescent identity crisis, partially due to their emerging sexuality, while they also begin to integrate into adulthood. This leaves them susceptible to accepting new ideas, and in particular, those from the media.[19] Teenagers of the middle class later became an important section of society when politicians and major companies realized they would eventually become voters and consumers.[20] This is clearly shown in popular books that were written at the time. In 2003, an article conducted a study analyzing the Caldecott Medal winners and runner-ups. The Caldecott Medal is one of the most prestigious awards for children's picture books and has been known to guarantee large sales. It found a greater number of girls visible in the books, along with more messages being directed towards them regarding behaviors.[21] Similarly, with movies, there was the creation of "teenpic" a type of movie that has multiple subsets of different genres such as horror, action, and romance.[22] Disney films were not teenpics in a typical sense as seen with other movies at the time, but the storylines did include some of the aspects that teenpics are known for. On the other hand, a reinvigorated new consumerism took off which in turn created jobs, wealth, and growth in families as people settled down. The 1950s new cultural and social environment set up precedents in dating that eventually led to what many consider "normal" practices of dating today.[23]

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[19]T. Doherty, *Teenagers &Teenpics: The Juvenilization of American Movies in the 1950s*, 1988.
[20]Doherty.
[21]Roger Clark et al., "Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: The Presence of Female Characters and Gender Stereotyping in Award-Winning Picture Books Between the 1930s and the 1960s," *Sex Roles* 49, no. 9–10 (November 2003): 439–49.
[22]Doherty, *Teenagers &Teenpics*, 142 and 149.
[23]Ilana Nash, *American Sweethearts : Teenage Girls in Twentieth-Century Popular Culture* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 2006).

Much of the 1950s culture was centered on overindulgence due to the tense environment along with a lack of stability. The major concerns from the past led to a large reversion into conservative thinking and creating an imagined past. The adults of the 1950s were eager to establish secure families with traditional gender roles since gender roles had been threatened during their childhoods in the 1930s.[24] This change in thinking contributed to the perfect environment for Disney to market the concepts Americans subconsciously sought, being love and security. This along with a new target audience of children and teenagers played major roles in Disney's line of thought at the time of the creation of the products. He branched across the mediums as a need to not just have kids watch movies and read books, but also act like them in pretend (i.e. toys).

Disney Enters the 50s

The relationship between Disney and the American public has been highly debated. I understand the relationship as one of influence between the environment of the 1950s and the history of the Walt Disney Company and Walt Disney himself. The interaction between these segments is where my scholarship falls, in the public reactions and marketing of Disney. Scholar Tracey Mollet touches upon some of the difficulties associated with researching Disney and critiquing his products. She mentions the large fan base that is negative towards most criticism along with legal issues and the debates of the relationship between popular opinion and cultural importance. Authors and historians such as Neal Gabler and Nicholas Sammond have focused on analyzing Walt Disney and his company as one entity. Gabler spent a lot of time focusing on the troubled reality of Walt Disney and his company. Although Disney had been held on a pedestal at times, he struggled with communism, red-baiting, and financial concerns, constantly being on

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[24]May, *Homeward Bound*, 53.

the brink of bankruptcy.[25] Similarly, Sammond spoke about the relationship between Walt Disney and the ideal American child and their reliance on one another. Sammond, unlike other scholars that research Disney, did branch out to multiple mediums including newspapers, films, and TV shows.

While the research conducted seems to focus mainly on Disney movies and the entire life of Walt Disney, when speaking about my topic, these are only small parts of the story that has to be analyzed. Sammond seemed to notice this and brought in other aspects outside of Disney films, but he could have established a stronger argument. However, that being said, the Disney films and life of Walt Disney are still necessary to understand to see the bigger picture of the Disney Company's marketing of gender roles. The context of their later actions in the 1950s can only be gathered from full understanding of earlier events and the origins of Disney.

The Walt Disney Company was founded on October 16, 1923, with the distribution of Alice Comedies based on *Alice in Cartoonland*. From the 1920s to the 1930s, Disney had time to perfect their use of animation. After the war in the 1940s, Disney applied all the new technology which created desire in the children for love and family. The desire Disney created for the American public can be shown in the company's achievements. The year 1950 saw big success for the Walt Disney Studios with *Cinderella*.[26] In its first release, the movie made $10,000,000 and in its re-release in 1957 the movie made an additional $6,000,000. *Alice in Wonderland* was released in 1951, followed by *Peter Pan* in 1953. Both movies made $5,232,000 and $40,759,520 in their first releases respectively. Disneyland was opened in July 1955, and *Sleeping Beauty* was released 1959 where it made $36,479,805.[27]

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[25]Gabler, "Walt Disney."
[26]Walt Disney, *Cinderella.* Directed by Clyde Geronimi, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. (Walt Disney Pictures, 1950)
[27]Gabler, "Walt Disney."

Disney's company in the past had created films and stories playing off of the environment and ideas people wanted to see at the time. The 1930s was full of unemployment, hunger, and despair due to the Great Depression. In this atmosphere, many people sought for an escape from their realities, which Disney provided, through his exceptional power of animation and magic.[28] Walt Disney homed in on the environment around him in the 1930s delivering what the people desperately wanted with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and a minstrel Mickey Mouse. He seems to have done this again in his 1950s productions.

Walt Disney was surrounded by all these external influences of the community and the nation with issues of STDs, premarital sex, and the Cold War. To combat this, romance was Disney's answer to the instability in this time period. In *Cinderella*, love was patient and kind;[29] in *Sleeping Beauty* love was better than a dream, someone who fought for you and was there when you were in need.[30] Moreover, Disney created this idea of love for his middle-class audience to become immersed in. The Walt Disney Company offered many reasons to invest in the home by giving America a new concept of romance, as depicted in their products. This would counteract the insecurities of the Cold War Era. The idea of the nuclear family propelled Walt Disney's ideas of romance and love further.

Disney has been known for taking violent or gruesome storylines from the original fairy tales and omitting a lot of those harsh factors. Since kids were encouraged to enjoy their childhood, Disney embraced that by adding romance and playful banter throughout the movies and books. This can be seen in the appearances of the character in the movies, story illustrations,

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[28]Tracey Mollet, "'With a Smile and a Song ...': Walt Disney and the Birth of the American Fairy Tale," *Marvels & Tales*, no. 1 (2013): 109 and 112.

[29]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Cinderella*. Animated musical fantasy. RKO Radio Pictures, 1950. Film.

[30]Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film

and toys manufactured. This can also be highlighted in the new storylines he creates along with songs composed. The original tales created by authors such as Lewis Carroll, the Brothers Grimm, Charles Perrault, and James Matthew Barrie had themes of rape, murder, violence, and horror. Much of these stories were told to scare children from certain actions. Disney flips this around, making the stories include romance, laughter, and fun magic. Through this, the 1950s Disney storylines combine romance and fairytales to create a new category of stories.[31]

The motion picture industry was full of exploitation films such as the "teenpics". Exploitation refers to "the advertising and promotion that entices an audience into a theater and to the way the movie then endears itself to that audience."[32] The films were the object being exploited since they were made to be advertised and marketed. However, the movie was also doing the exploiting by catering to its target audience giving them an interesting and attention-grabbing subject matter. The 1950s exploitation formula included three aspects: (1) subject matter amenable to wide promotion; (2) a big budget; and (3) a young audience (preteens and teenagers). Virtually all movies begin as commodities made for a marketplace. By looking at films as commodities, the history of motion pictures can be also viewed as a commercial history. In other words, businessmen and entertainers trying to gauge the barometer of public taste so they can achieve financial profit. The economic means influence the cultural meaning.[33] This can especially be true for the Disney Company, who was constantly coming up with ways to engage the public while making money.

For the motion picture industry, the 50s was a frightening decade; with the decline in movie attendance and disruption of the industry's institutional structure. These both created the

[31]Gabler, "Walt Disney."
[32]Doherty, *Teenagers &Teenpics*, 9.
[33]Doherty, 8.

financial desperation that led to the emergence of the exploitation teenpic movies.[34] "Since the 1950s, moviemakers have been forced to narrow their focus and attract the one group with the requisite income, leisure, and garrulousness to support a theatrical business."[35] With an industry desperate to make a profit and utilizing the new exploitation films, only Walt Disney films still "struck gold" with the old family trade. Disney structured their storylines in response to the changing teenage culture to children who would eventually take part in the teenage values and norms.

It is important to understand Walt Disney's personal background and beliefs to get a clearer picture of what may have influenced some of his decisions regarding the movie messages about family relationships and romance. Walt Disney was a trend setting filmmaker. He was born in Chicago in 1901; a time when Chicago was undergoing a large population boom making it one of the fastest growing and biggest cities in the world for a short time. It was a place of mass creativity and innovation as it flourished economically.[36] Walt's creativity from his upbringing and family was strongly reflected in many aspects of his life. He strove for greatness, to do the impossible, and was a huge supporter of capitalism with self-perseverance. Walt Disney had strong religious ties growing up due to his father, a Congregational Christian.[37]

Walt Disney was also a conservative and extreme right-wing Republican at the start of the 1950s. Walt became part of the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals as vice president where he advocated for censorship of films.[38] The MPAPAI were an organization of high profile, politically conservative members from Hollywood who came

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[34]Doherty, 18.
[35]Doherty, 3.
[36]"A Brief History of Chicago," accessed April 5, 2019, http://www.localhistories.org/chicago.html.
[37]Gabler, "Walt Disney," 8.
[38]Gabler, 450.

together to defend the film industry against communist and fascist infiltration. It was founded in California in 1944 and included many prominent actors and film directors, including Ward Bond, George Murphy, Ronald Reagan, Clarence Brown, John Wayne, and Sam Wood. Walt Disney opposed communism; he became a witness before Congress where he testified regarding communism presence in the film industry.[39] In the MPAPAI's Statement of Principles they noted first and foremost their belief in "the American way of life", an aspect that the Disney Company later became closely tied to.[40] It is in these descriptions that we can form an idea regarding the attitudes of his company.

The Walt Disney Company used a new business concept of differentiated marketing by bringing in books and toy characters based on the movies. Later it created Disneyland, a whole world centered on bringing the stories to life. In 1949, the Character Merchandising Division was formed to deal with the merchandising of the stories; it soon changed its name and became known as Disney Consumer Products. The toy sales at this time made great strides as there was a much wider range of products following the economic boom. Toys became more gender oriented in their designs with dolls, baby carriages, dressmaking, and cooking for girls, and cowboys and Indians, cars, and construction sets for boys.[41] While Disney toys did not outright have messages of romance and love, these messages were implied in the push towards marriage, descriptions of homemakers, and set gender categories for many of its products.

In fact, Roy Disney, Walt Disney's older brother, split the merchandising division from Walt Disney productions and named Jimmy Johnson as head of the merchandising division's publication department in 1950. Jimmy Johnson was in charge of the entire division along with

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[39]Gabler, 453.
[40]Gabler, 451.
[41]Kay S. Hymowitz, *Ready or Not: Why Treating Children as Small Adults Endangers Their Future-and Ours,* (The free press, 1999)

managing all affairs for the Walt Disney Music Company. Once this change occurred in management, there was a slight shift seen in the Disney toys that reflect the continued categorizing of gender, seen within other major toy companies such as Mattel with Barbie in 1959 and Hasbro with Mr. Potato Head in 1952.[42]

The character merchandising division of the Disney Company had the job of marketing Mickey and other Disney characters. According to Mr. Harold Heisser, manager of the merchandising division in 1951, the purpose of this division was to keep the various Disney characters alive. They also took this a step further by using mass licensing to various family friendly companies for products that would be connected back to their target audience, children. They had licenses with the United States Time Corporation, The National Biscuit Company, Decca Records, Louis Marx & Co, RCA Victor Records, and the International Shoe Company.[43] These different licenses helped to create their differentiated marketing strategy. The marketing form "piggybacked" off of other products and companies while guaranteeing the Disney Company a wider reach into the lives of children. Children were surrounded by the various products in multiple forms. Disney not only received payment from these companies, but also increased visibility of their stories.

An example of book advertising is from the *Los Angeles Times* in 1959 with a Christmas advertisement for Golden Books shows this marketing style. On the list of books that can be ordered there is *Cinderella*, *Peter Pan*, and *Alice in Wonderland*.[44] This advertisement made it easy for people to access these books. It is important to note is the fact that these books are being advertised by a company that Disney made a deal with from licensing and not through Disney

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[42]Pamela Rector, "Cold War Toys at the Strong Museum," *Historian* 57, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 285.
[43]James J. Nagle, "News of the Advertising and Marketing Fields," *New York Times*, 1953, sec. Business Financial.
[44]"Display Ad 24 -- No Title," *Los Angeles Times (1923-1995); Los Angeles, Calif.*, December 7, 1959.

itself. That type of marketing was not seen often at the time. Disney branched out its storylines into everyday products giving companies permission to utilize them to sell their own products which in turn promoted Disney and their stories benefiting both companies.

To make the new marketing strategy work, Disney decided to capitalize on the new target audience of children and teenagers. Prior to the 1950s, movies were the medium of choice for the general population as their images captured the interest of diverse audiences. It was based on the idea of universal entertainment for the whole family to enjoy.[45] However, a change occurred because of the new technology of the TV which brought the movies into the home, changing cultural norms. When this changed, Disney had to figure out a way to continue to market their products leading to the change in the company's marketing. Walt Disney ventured into television shows and promoted his big screen movies and toys on television utilizing both mediums to his benefit. Roy Disney said in a 1951 interview: "I think Disney has found the answer to using television both to entertain and to sell his product."[46] This is a prime example of Disney capitalizing upon new technology avenues to further promote the companies' stories and increase its reach into the home. During this time, each household had only one television in which the whole family would watch as a unit. Disney exploited this by finding ways to take the characters and stories out of the movie theaters and into the interior of the home, ensuring his presence. Linking the use of the television with the movies, Disney started differentiated marketing that his company is still known for today.

Disney Takes on the Changing Landscape

Not just America, but specifically the Disney Company was extremely unstable in the 1940s. However, in the 1950s Disney recovered from turmoil created by the riots in 1941 that

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[45]Doherty, *Teenagers &Teenpics*.
[46]Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 317.

went on for five weeks by the animators for the inclusion of unions such as the screen cartoonist's guild. The screen cartoonist's guild was a professional guild and labor union of cartoonists and animators. With the end of WWII, Disney tried to help Americans recover and create a sense of stability. "Walt had emerged from the war as something else: a corporate burgher and the embodiment of the new imposing, powerful America, helping to transmit its values around the globe or a central figure in the corporate reclamation of the national mythology, the redefinition of the American Way of Life from a vague populism to an equally murky notion of free enterprise."[47] Americans, especially the middle class, quickly grasped upon the idea of the nuclear family in the suburbs. Disney had a profound sense of what the public wanted, and so family life was then reflected in the animation productions the company created.

The 1950s saw a drastic decline in attendance at movie theaters due to the rise of television. To counter this was the development of the widescreen and 3D movies, along with increasing use of color.[48] Movies had two main aspects known for being better than TV at the time: the size of the film and the color. This decade was known for conformity in films and television shows, they tended to provide reassuring messages while not delving too deeply into issues according to scholars such as Jennings and Allison Bryant. More specifically, they indicated the implicit versus explicit messages in Disney films. Due to anti-communism sentiments at this time, controversial topics or new ideas were usually avoided and motion pictures were conservative as a way to secure American values. Many people felt American superiority rested on a secure abundant family life.[49] To protect this idea, "the list of prohibited content included such elements as 'sex perversion', 'scenes of childbirth', 'seduction or rape',

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[47] Neal Gabler, *Walt Disney: the triumph of the American Imagination*, (Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2007) Pg. 441
[48]Jennings Bryant and Alison Bryant, *Television and the American Family,* (Taylor and Francis, 2001)
[49]May, *Homeward Bound*, 17.

'venereal diseases', as well as 'complete nudity', references to genital sexuality, and 'indecent or undue exposure'…kissing was the only potentially sexual act in films during this era."[50] This can be seen in the storylines for the company's movies where the young girls never go beyond kissing a man, such as in *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty*.

To further compete with television, the Disney Company capitalized on incorporating music into the films. Music was heavily tied to the development of new ideas and was not only used to help convey emotions, but also used to influence an atmosphere and mood. The music choices Disney made were strongly tailored to younger audiences in both lyrics and beat. The songs became so catchy, that children sang them in the home. Disney gains free marketing in a sense through the music making Disney even more prominent in the home. By adding music, Disney created a way to bring the diverse mediums together. Music included in the films gave the other products a chance to simulate the movies connection to the audience such as adding records that could be listened to with books when reading. Music could also be added to toys and merchandise to connect back to the feelings created when watching the movies.

The Disney Company had a keen sense of when it could take advantage of a good opportunity. Similar to how the company exploited new technology, they also sought a new strong audience. Children in the 1950s were given the opportunity to learn, grow, and play more than ever before. A child culture emerged that Disney capitalized on. "Adolescents continue to learn about gender by observing those around them, and by drawing from models, both real and fictional, to help construct their norms and beliefs."[51] With American middle class families trying to come together for security and stability, there was also the issue of personal identity. During WWII gender identity in some respects was blurred more than ever, with the encouragement of

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[50]Jamieson and Romer, *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950*, 132–36.
[51]Jamieson and Romer, 133.

females to go into the work force, the rising cases of schizophrenia, and homosexuality, according to many concerned psychologists, academics, and politicians.[52] As men came back, the need to reaffirm set gender expectations to the younger generation was growing.

This proposes the following question: what do the messages say about the marketing of Disney as a company in terms of gender created through family dynamics, emphasized by concepts of love throughout these iconic Disney stories? A noteworthy aspect to keep in mind is the idea that the main pioneers behind these movies were all relatively young male animators. Disney's nine old men as they are commonly referred to were all starting out their own families and some had young children. The stage in life they were at in terms of manhood for the 1950s was the role of protector, financial security, and stable partner. This idea is reflected in many of the male characters of the 1950s storylines such as with Prince Charming and Prince Philip. Walt Disney personally mentions that he gets inspiration from his own daughters and wife in regard to learning how to portray women.

Diverse forms of media have been shown to be influential on Disney's audience. Scholars Alison and Jennings Bryant have done extensive research on the TV and its relationship with the family. They focused on the attitudes towards TV families and the effect TV has on families. In their examination they use more scientific analysis in their discussion and argument with statistics and empirical data, which is something different from a lot of their counterparts doing similar research. Author Ilana Nash analyzed the position of "the teenage girl" in popular American narratives. She discussed the evolving definition and presence of young women as teenagers from the representation in the world around them. In a similar topic, Doherty looked at movies marketing to the younger generations in the 1950s paying attention to the historical background and the formulation of the teenpic movie genre.

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[52]May, *Homeward Bound*.

Moreover, historians Daniel Romer and Patrick Jamieson also looked at movies and how they portrayed adolescents similar to Nash and Doherty. However, they analyzed the increased interest in the teenage market with immediate gratification and questioned if the trends in media portrayals should be a concern to public policy. From these various scholars I have concluded that the 1950s were a time of drastic change for the media with the addition of the television that affected other media sectors and the audience of said media. I have used these findings in my analysis on Disney media by expanding upon what they have said in terms of how the public reacted with the new media.

While a lot of my media research focused on portrayals of teens, children, and families as a whole in films and television done by Disney, media also includes books and toys. Scholars Roger Clark and Jessica Guilmain researched female presence in picture books and the stereotyping that occurred. They included many charts that broke down different personality traits in males versus females seen in the books for each year. Then they analyzed the history surrounding the time of the books both political and social and how that impacted the trends they noticed. Kay Hymowitz focused on gender roles through toys and advertising. More specifically, she analyzed the involvement of TV and toys in the 1950s and how they contribute to the evolving ideas of childhood over time. She talks about the rise of toy companies such as Mattel and changes in advertising as the child's role as the consumer changed. Hymowitz also mentions fairy tale books and the messages they share to children that shape their identity and role in American culture. It is their questioning with a further focus on gender that I will be conversing with.

All of these scholars have brought different ideas to the larger conversation of gender seen in the various types of media. I will be contributing to this by narrowing their broad

contexts of media to only Disney in hopes to have a better insight into the responses Disney and the middle class Americans had towards one another in terms of the evolving gender expectations.

All of these different mediums have become connected through Disney's marketing. The motion picture uses its ability to create a mood with music and colors which help the audience (children) connect further with the actions on the screen. The books use the storyline from a complete third person narrative to focus mainly on what has happened in terms of actions versus how it makes them feel. The merchandise and toys seem to try and bridge the gap between the motion pictures and the books. This is seen with the records that can be played while reading the book to make it feel similar to the movie. The children then can feel a part of the story through the various toys and other merchandise. "Through play, toys, and consumption, children could locate their natural aptitudes, begin to determine their course in life, and practice social behaviors." [53] This illustrates how parents could give their children the right toys to help them develop and keep them on track.

With the pressure on parents to make sure their children become productive members of society, Disney stories and products were a source of safe understanding of what children and families should model. "What Disney offered was what chroniclers of American character suggested children sorely needed: a natural understanding of themselves that would allow them to compete in a highly rationalized and rapidly changing democratic capitalist society without sacrificing their individuality and humanity."[54] The Disney Company perfected their target market making sure to have a foolproof way to reach them.

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[53]Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 280.
[54]Sammond, 21.

Many parents try to control what children are exposed to, by taking from child rearing

books at the time and what they recommended to parents, Disney made certain that their stories

and products would be something that parents would encourage their children to interact with.

"Disney offered up products that recapitulated popular understandings of the child's role of

mediating between nature and culture, of remedying excesses of conformity and potential

failings of democratic action through the very process of its enculturation."[55] The Walt Disney

Company made sure its fairytale stories summarized the main points that they felt were

necessary in understanding children's behavior and societies expectations for them. The postwar

years brought a new perspective towards the conformity of people and some of the risks to their

democratic policies from the Cold War. By ensuring children learned their perspective roles in

society, it would fix the conformity and prevent democracy from failing.

Disney marketed various types to mediums to promote their stories to the American

public, including children and the parents of said children. By utilizing various formats including

the television, books, toys, movies, and records, the Disney Company spread their messages of

gender expectations in the 1950s. Since Disney was always on the forefront of technology, the

rise of the TV was used to both market their products and generate brand awareness.

The Creation of the Teenage Years

Disney was influenced by the building teen culture for their storylines. They saw the new

ideas forming regarding dating and marriage, then responded to this environment with their own

ideas that they marketed to children as they were becoming part of the new teenage values and

norms. As the authors of The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media stated, they were

working with "the baby boom generation, the largest cohort of adolescents in the country's

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[55]Sammond, 21.

history to that point, came of age and had helped fuel the new culture."[56] Teen culture and actions influenced Disney stories just as much as Disney influenced them and their actions.

The 1950s culture focused largely on the teenage market and consumption. Teens were a market segment with disposable income, easily influenced by outside parties, and susceptible to new cultural norms. Television helped transform an army of babies into an army of buyers and consumers.[57] The building teen culture centered on social appearances focused on the connection teenagers had with people inside and outside the home. Children grew up in an atmosphere of abundance centered on the family. As children became teens, they began to date and experience life outside the home.

The beginning of the changes surrounding dating and romance seemed to be in line with Disney's products and messages. This emergence into the new idea of modern dating gained popularity and expanded quickly, creating with it a whole new culture with roles and norms to follow to achieve a Disney worthy "happily ever after" ending. The 1950s had strict rituals of courtship that included rules like: the man should always ask the woman for the date; a man should always use tons of flattery to woo a woman; and young adults should only date one person at a time.[58] The idea of going steady gave young couples engaged in what can be called a "play-marriage", the chance to strengthen their relationship with one another. This helped promote the responsibility that was ultimately tied to a marital status. The idea was to pick your date up at her house and come to the door which allowed the family the chance to approve of the suitor; parental approval was of the utmost importance. There was still an old-fashioned concept

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[56]Jamieson and Romer, *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950*, 7.
[57]Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 196.
[58] Beth Bailey, "From Front Porch to Back Seat: A History of the Date," *OAH Magazine of History* 18, no. 4 (2004): 23–26.

tied into this new system such as no kissing on the first date. And the strong emphasis on gender role such as the men ultimately paid for everything.[59]

The scarcity of young men made quality more emphasized than quantity; young women wanted a loyal partner. "Women confronted a new fear after World War II. For the first time in American history, there were more woman than men."[60] This led to women being less concerned with status and marriage rates rose while average ages of married couples declines. The average age for women to marry at this time dropped down to twenty years old. While the new ratios of men to women played a large role in the decreasing age for marriage among young couples, it is also important to note that this can be due to the changing ideas regarding masculinity, tying manhood to fatherhood. The concept of going steady was all about social awareness, a type of label for the relationship. This was prompted by gifts visible to those around them such as class rings, jackets, and a certain amount of dates each week. The security that came with this change in the relationships led to a higher probability of premarital sex and sexual behaviors; a point that Disney seems to have mixed messages about in many of his products.

Disney stories seemed to challenge the very messages they were trying to convey. It challenged it because it did not secure the home, but potentially did the opposite in some cases as premarital sex did happen. The stories went against the feeling most adults were striving for, security. The backlash of premarital sex tightened the societal constraints in regard to this behavior; it was outside the bounds of appropriate behavior. The messages Disney stories were trying to emphasize in the movies and books leave much unsaid in terms of what should or shouldn't occur between young couples. This gap seems to have led to more risky behavior when dating versus preventing sexual relationships from occurring.

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[59] Bailey.
[60] Bailey, 114.

Parenting

In order to understand how Disney's messages were received by children, it is important to also important to explore parenting in addition to analyzing the media. The role a parent played in a child's life at the time of their transitioning into a teenager was important not only to the development of said child, but to the future of society. "…the process of natural child-rearing included the inevitable process of gendering as the young moved from childhood into adolescence."[61] The Disney Company understood this connection between parent and child extremely well. The American child of the 1950s was no longer product of its macrosocial environment, but instead the work of individual parents.[62] The separate actions made by parents and their child as well as the effects they had on each other can be seen throughout the storylines as a main component to the plot and overall ending of the story.

In *Cinderella*, there are clear outlines of how to not be a good parent with the evil step mother known as Lady Tremaine. She shows favoritism towards her own children encouraging her daughters in their pursuits and not Cinderella's. An interesting point here is the fact of why she was made to be the evil character. There is a different family dynamic with the remarrying by a parent and the addition of step sisters. It is also important to note that in terms of work identity, Lady Tremaine passes off what would be the servant's responsibilities in the time period of the story, France in mid/late 1800s, onto Cinderella including the cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the needs of those living in the house including her step sisters, the animals, and her stepmother. She even wears an apron in her daily outfit.[63] However, in the 1950s these actions were part of the mother's responsibility, with the help of commodities. The work

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[61]Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 287.
[62]Sammond, 122.
[63]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Cinderella*. Animated musical fantasy. RKO Radio Pictures, 1950. Film.00:19:00

introduction to Cinderella's character immediately puts her below everyone else in the home. This tended to cause the audience to be sympathetic to her character because the 1950s idea of the home was to "create a home that would fulfill virtually all its members' personal needs."[64] Cinderella did not seem to mind the duties too much but also wanted to go out and join the party, like many teens. She wanted a place outside of the home. Lady Tremaine rejects Cinderella's identity of teen and growing up.

In *Cinderella* there is also the Prince's father (the King) and his interactions with his son and the others around him. In one scene, the King discussed with the Duke that his son (Prince Charming) was grown up and it was time he got married and had children.[65] This was representative of the thoughts of those in the 1950s. The family, and more importantly children were extremely important as they thought to bring security. In a later scene, the King's dreams are shown with the King playing with his future grandson and granddaughter.[66] The King reiterates the need for family multiple times throughout the storyline. In another example when looking at all the women who showed up to the ball and noticing his son did not seem interested in any due to Prince Charming's constant yawning and eye rolling, the King exclaims "There must be at least one who would make a suitable mother!"[67] Here the King again connects the reason for falling in love and finding a wife to having a family with multiple children, thoughts that line up well with the 1950s values and norms.

There is also Cinderella's father who died, which left her to suffer at the hands of her stepmother (his wife, Lady Tremaine). It seems like the father figure in *Cinderella* is supposed to

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[64]May, *Homeward Bound*, 11.

[65]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. "*Cinderella*." Film Script, 1950. Reel 2A Pgs 12-15

[66]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Cinderella*. Animated musical fantasy. RKO Radio Pictures, 1950. Film. 00:24:10

[67]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Cinderella*. Animated musical fantasy. RKO Radio Pictures, 1950. Film 00:49:25

be the reality check on life that pushed their children towards the norms and values of society, so they can thrive. Cinderella's father remarries to Lady Tremaine in hopes of supplying Cinderella with a mother's care.[68] "Disney coyly policed masculinity and femininity in both humans and nonhumans by suggesting that in this instance, males who were in charge of child-rearing weren't truly masculine, and women who abrogated that responsibility weren't truly feminine."[69] Fathers were breadwinners who provided financially for the family. They were shown to be unable to take over and contribute to a mother's role. Griswold mentioned Barnard sociologist Willard Waller supported the restoration of traditional patriarchal relationships where "women must bear and rear children; husbands must support them."[70] These reaffirmed gender boundaries, claiming they could not be crossed, such as seen with Cinderella's father.

Another window into the public's view of the stories was in the *New York Times* from 1950 with an article from the Schools Motion Picture Committee of the National Board of Review, a voluntary organization of teachers and parents in elementary and high schools. They made a list of movies being shown throughout the week at different areas for ages 8 through 14 which included over thirteen different viewings of *Cinderella* in the many school districts of New York State.[71] From the amount of showings, all approved by parents and teachers, it can be inferred that adults encouraged children to not only watch the movie, but also brought the stories directly into their everyday lives by connecting it to school. The organization must have thought that watching the movie was a good idea and potentially beneficial for the children to see.

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[68]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Cinderella*. Animated musical fantasy. RKO Radio Pictures, 1950. Film.
[69]Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 286.
[70]Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 187.
[71]"Films Recommended for Young," *New York Times*, 1950.

The Disney Company had a lot of success in their differentiated marketing. At the same time the company was selling all of these different products, they found ways in which they could bundle the products together. For example, in an article from 1955, there was a discussion regarding the purchasing of records for children to provide education and entertainment that was aimed at parents who were concerned about children watching too much television. The posing of this argument in the article was towards parents specifying that this was a universal product good for all the different ages of children in their home. It then went into different companies and the benefits that come from listening to different music genres. What is important to notice is that a whole section focuses on Disney. Not only is the Disney Company marketing the movies and products, but they used their licensing to take the songs from the movies combined with the record products to further market their storylines to children. This specific article mentions the songs and narration of the story lines are available for *Cinderella* and *Alice in Wonderland*.[72] This is a chance to combine the uses of the books with the narrations with the record products.

While family interactions in *Cinderella* were shown as dysfunctional, Disney portrayed family interactions in *Peter Pan* as structured. *Peter Pan* provides a lot of insight when it comes to how Disney portrayed family interactions and the ideas of the nuclear family. In the very first introductions to the Darling family, it is immediately made clear that the family upholds the representation of the nuclear family with a subservient but caring mother, a breadwinning father that provides for the family, and then three children. This family was the ideal middle-class family, where everyone had a role to perform. In the very first scenes of the motion picture, the children are playing together before their mother and father enter the room. As soon as they enter you have relaxing music indicating a dream-like state which immediately conflicts with the voice

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[72] Beatrice Landeck, "New Records for Children : Disks for Young People Provide Both Education And Entertainment Fun and Learning," *New York Times*, 1955, sec. Records High Fidelity.

of Mr. Darling who unlike the music and the rest in the household, is frustrated and rushed for time to make it to a party. The father immediately trips making a mess, then when his family did not make sure he was okay, he became extremely mad, taking out his emotions on the children and ultimately Nana the dog.[73]

This display of anger and frustration of the father in only the first scene of the movie, lays out the general points the Disney Company was trying to make regarding the father figure of the family in the eyes of the children. The idea of fatherhood was changing in the postwar era; the authoritarian personality was a threat to democratic society. Research bore out the importance of family nurture and fatherly love and affection.[74] The children do not want to grow up and anyone who has grown up or is trying to make them is seen as the enemy such as Mr. Darling and the pirates. Movies and television promoted manhood and fatherhood; "fatherhood became the center of a man's identity."[75] The mother instantly tries to sooth the situation over by helping her husband, trying to calm him down while being an intermediary between her children and her husband. This makes sense as she is not seen as a bad person from the children's perspective because she was not trying to force Wendy to grow up. Mothers also had more interactions with the kids, so they were closer.

The father more involved in the working world and the mother more involved in the home represents a lot of the traditional households in the 1950s. Theorist's basic hope was that men would play a more central role in the psychological development of their children. Child expert Dorothy Koehring said father had a special place in the nursery as a model of

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[73]Geronimi, Clyde, and Wilfred Jackson. *Peter Pan*. Animated fantasy adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1953. Film 00:07:48
[74]Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 208.
[75]May, *Homeward Bound*.

"responsibility, faithfulness, and, more simply, a well-loved presence."[76] You also get the mother figure not just through the children's mother, but hint of this in Peter Pan's mother as she is brought up along with Captain Hook's mother.

Looking further into the mother's role in *Peter Pan*, the mother's role is portrayed in the actions of Wendy between her brothers and the other lost boys along with her handling of Peter. In the song "Your Mother and Mine," Wendy sang to the lost boys and her brothers about what she thought the role of a good mother was.[77] In the song there are specific lines such as "Kisses your cheek, whispers sleep tight" and "The helping hand that guides you along" both hint at this role of caretaker and the person the children have the most contact with in their daily lives.

Wendy and Mrs. Darling are the only mother figures seen in action however both Peter's and Captain Hook's mothers are mentioned in passing. It seems to be implied that Peter's mother was neglecting from Peter's perspective and Hook's mother was strict with high standards from Hook's perspective. This is reflected in their actions and personalities throughout the story. This difference in parenting style was a major concern in the 1950s that brought about big debates among psychologists and parents as the image of childhood changed. Child management of the 1920s and 1930s had acted as a preventative against uncertainty and instability during the Depression. The 1950s new natural child served a similar function, in regards to postwar American mass culture and society.[78]

At the same time Disney was using books and television, they were also producing toys and other merchandise to connect to their storylines. In the *Washington Post* there was an article from 1954 that discussed the different products Disney came out with in relation to the *Peter Pan*

[76] Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 194.
[77] Geronimi, Clyde, and Wilfred Jackson. *Peter Pan*. Animated fantasy adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1953. Film 00:58:49
[78] Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 111.

story. These products similar to the books brought the story into the home and surrounded the children. These included toys, accessories, and children's apparel such as Peter Pan toy television sets, an inflatable jingle ball that jingles like Tinkerbelle, and plastic drapes with pictures of the story characters.[79] These were available in local department stores, toy stores, and novelty stores, all of which were places that middle class citizens would frequent at this time insuring its success in further advertising the storyline. Parents bought their children toys as it was believed if they bought the right toys, it could help their children become more beneficial members of society.

In *Cinderella* gender is shown mainly in relation to romance and interactions of dating, while in *Peter Pan* gender is tied mostly to family roles and interactions between family members. *Sleeping Beauty* gender roles are shown in a combination of both family and romance. Because of the combination in the portrayal of gender roles, *Sleeping Beauty* has strong images of gender throughout the story. For instance, Aurora's parents send her away to live with the three fairies. For Aurora's parents, it is their identity as the king and queen that puts Aurora in danger from Maleficent when they invited the good fairies to celebrate her birth and not Maleficent. "Their most precious possession, their only child disappeared into the night."[80]

The fairies then take on this parental role as mother for Aurora. The three fairies Merryweather, Flora, and Fauna are happy at the prospect of motherhood when they get the chance to raise Aurora for her protection. They get excited at the prospect of a baby when Fauna realizes she can feed it, wash it, dress it, and rock it to sleep. She exclaims "I'd love it!"[81] It further perpetuates the 1950s notion that women can only find happiness through motherhood.

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[79]"Disney Does It Again!," *The Washington Post (1923-1954); Washington, D.C.*, February 15, 1953.
[80]Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film 00:15:04
[81]Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film 00:13:56

However, the Fairies ultimately fail domestically when they can't cook, clean, or sew. The issue of work identity versus being a parent is shown, as the fairy's resort to magic, but it was the use of magic caused Aurora to be found. Later on, it is their work as fairies that they use to save her and they abandon the parental role.[82] This is reminiscent of the time where you have the switch for mothers who have left the workplace because the men came home from WWII. For the fairies when they decide to take on their true identity and begin using magic again, Aurora is found and put in danger. However, it is that same magic later on that helps Prince Philip save her. When a mother's identity includes something outside of that of mother (in this case queen or fairy), their position as a mother is in jeopardy.

The most powerful woman in the storyline was Maleficent, who was made to be evil and quite literally at times like a monster or devil: She has big horns on her head, she breathes fire, and then transforms into a dragon.[83] As previously stated, Maleficent cursed Aurora to die when she pricks her finger on a spinning wheel spindle at the time of her 16th birthday. It was this curse that prompted the plan to be made for how the good fairies can try and help Aurora. In the fairies planning, they talk about Maleficent's character and how she did not know anything about love, kindness, or the joy of helping others. Then fauna remark that she did not think Maleficent is very happy Maleficent. These conclusions regarding Maleficent's character led the fairies to believe Maleficent can't understand and won't expect "their idea to take care of the baby and raise it." In other words Maleficent cannot understand motherhood.[84]

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[82]Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film

[83]Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film

[84]Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film 00:13:00

The story then pokes fun at their ability to not do domestic work without magic.[85] This might have to do with the fairies trying to take on the role of motherhood but ultimately cannot. Most of the women in *Sleeping Beauty* are shown as powerful, but not capable of performing domestic duties. This is seen when the fairies try and give up their magic and position as fairies to protect Aurora and focus on raising her. The message *Sleeping Beauty* is presenting here is that women are safe if they abandon their professional work and labor. If women try to be something outside the home and take on roles outside of their gender, then they cannot be proper mothers. To help save Aurora and Prince Philip, the fairies take on their magical persona, so you cannot be a mother while also working. "Many wives who said they abandoned a career were quick to minimize its importance and to state that they "preferred marriage," which suggests that the pursuit of both was not viable."[86]

The father's role can be seen in Aurora's father, King Stefan, and in Prince Philip's father, King Hubert. Aurora's father seems to be the protector of sorts going out of his way to use his work and power, through his identity as the king, to get rid of all the spinning wheels that were fated to hurt his daughter.[87] This is different from the other father figures previously discussed in the other stories because you see a combining of work and parental roles to strengthen the personal identity and better support the child. Prince Philip's father seems to play a similar role to Prince Charming's father in *Cinderella* where he pushes his son for marriage and starting a family.

Ruth Tasch concluded that "father is a companion, child rearer, guide and teacher, disciplinarian, example of masculinity, and economic provider. In a creative sense, father is a

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[85]Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film

[86]May, *Homeward Bound*, 29.

[87]Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film

contributor to the species and its advancement."[88] This is indicative to the time period and values surrounding the idea that a family brings security against the outside world. However, in the storyline, this is due to the alliance between their kingdoms for an heir. In *Sleeping Beauty* family represents not only safety for those in the family but because of Aurora and Prince Philips' status, safety for the people in the Kingdoms as well. Men saw it as their responsibility to bring their children to adulthood by emphasizing their desire to become closer to their children and to instill desirable character traits and moral value in their offspring.[89]

Coming of Age

The gender roles shown by the parents are strongly tied to the gender roles shown by their children as they grow up. "In the child-centered model, the infant was gendered from birth, and its proper development depended on its parents' ability to guide it to a harmonious relationship between its biological sex and its corresponding social role."[90] Gender is a social construct and society has perpetuated specific guidelines of what it is acceptable or unacceptable behavior based on one's gender. Thus, society, including media and parents, help mold a child's notion of identity as they age.

Moving into the 1950s, "Researchers have identified adolescence as a period during which there is extreme pressure to conform to traditional gender roles."[91] Disney recognized this transition period in his pursuit towards a more children centered audience, since they were proven to be the most at risk to stray from gender norms. Along with a younger audience, Disney

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[88]Ruth Jacobson Tasch, "The Role of the Father in the Family (Father's Expressed Attitudes and Opinions with Regard to Their Role in Family Life and the Responsibilities, Satisfactions and Perplexities Which Fatherhood Entails)," *The Journal of Experimental Education* 20, no. 4 (1952): 319.
[89]Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 208.
[90]Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 288.
[91]Jamieson and Romer, *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950*, 136.

used young characters in his stories to help represent the journey that children go through to eventually conform to their expected gender roles.

A coming of age idea is backed by Disney's push to incorporate romance into its movies and books. At this time, the idea of growing up was tied to men making money, getting a job, getting married, and protecting their family. In other words, becoming the breadwinner and securing their future. Women were tied to getting married, taking care of children, and taking care of the home. The structured idea of gender roles for adults are reflected in the Disney stories portrayal of growing up with concepts of romance and dating that have heavily contributed to the children growing up.

Child psychologist, pediatrician, and physician, Dr. Benjamin Spock, wrote *The Common Sense of Baby and Child Care* in 1946. His work became extremely popular among parents winning multiple awards. He advocated for parents to take a more passive role in parenting allowing their children to grow and develop more on their own than through their parents.[92] Dr. Spock and Disney both presented the world as "highly and naturally gendered."[93]At the same time Dr. Spock introduced parents to their children's sexuality and development, Mickey Mouse turned twenty-one and Donald Duck took the stage. Unlike Mickey, Donald was childish, anxious, narcissistic, and known to be a "skirt chaser", characteristics that highlighted the changing childhood and teenage culture.[94] The rise of Donald Duck coincided with the embracing of childhood and rise in the presence of childhood sexuality that was seen in prepubescent children.

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[92]Sammond, 20.
[93]Sammond, 20.
[94]Sammond, 20.

Disney's animation stories reflected a similar story to Mickey and Donald, taking on similar themes of analyzing childhood sexuality, the differences between children, teenager, and adults, and confirming set gender standards of womanhood and manhood. Disney depicted Cinderella as kind, always helping out and stepping up despite her difficult situation. She can be described as mainly obedient and domestic, traits associated with women as mothers and wives. Originally, she tried to go to the ball the nice way, with her family, but that didn't work. Then she was encouraged to go by the only good mother figure she had, her fairy godmother. She rebelled against her step-mother and went to the ball anyway which led to her new life.[95] This action reflected the teenage rebelliousness as Cinderella is growing up. Cinderella seems to resonate with a type of resilience of no matter how hard life gets keep believing, this is illustrated in the song "A Dream is a Wish Your Heart Makes" in the motion pictures.[96] Cinderella shows she is growing up and is mature by not letting the circumstances she was put into defeat and ruin her dreams of a better life. This concept strongly resonated with the American public. The American Dream aspect in society was prominent at this point, especially in Cold War where America was constantly trying to prove their superiority over the Soviet Union through the American way of life and values.

There is also this notion of to have a better life and get away from hers. Cinderella went to experience life, not with the intensions to find and marry the Prince. However, it is this action and their love that does ultimately set her free from her family. But, this binds the woman's identity to that of the man's identity in the world.

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[95]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Cinderella*. Animated musical fantasy. RKO Radio Pictures, 1950. Film 00:43:26
[96]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Cinderella*. Animated musical fantasy. RKO Radio Pictures, 1950. Film 00:04:24

Moving away from *Cinderella* and looking at *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice is brought to Wonderland where all her conceptions about society are flipped and tested. She undergoes multiple transitions in size showing the process of growing up, and this is combined with the extremely confused and scared emotions she feels that reflect a lot of young children at the early stages of puberty. She continuously questions what she sees with childlike curiosity. The white rabbit is constantly worrying about the time and being late to things, like much of the adults of the world. Towards the end of the story you see this transformation as she matures both emotionally and mentally throughout this series of adventures. "Adolescence is a time of biological, cognitive, social and emotional changes, making it a primary transition point during which gendered behaviors may be enacted, questioned, changed, or solidified."[97]

Alice in Wonderland female gender expectations for growing up are a bit hazy like the storyline itself with not much of a clear plot line. Alice is an ordinary girl going through the steps involved in growing up both physically and mentally, which makes her at times easier to relate to versus a princess. This is due to the process of growing up she undergoes what every women must go through, as well as the different storyline with the lack of title she received through marriage with a dreamy prince, as none of this occurs. Instead, Alice's story is pushed along through her questioning of Wonderland and those around her. However, Alice is deviating from her gender role because women are supposed to remain stagnant in the home. In conclusion, she is rebelling against societal conceptions and expectations because they conflict with her exploration in finding her identity.

The problem that continues through the entire storyline is Alice was not just battling with the identity that society gave her versus her own, but that she didn't truly know her own identity yet. This is seen through the constant questions of "Who in the world am I?" and the song with

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[97]Jamieson and Romer, *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950*, 133.

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the caterpillar asking "Who are you."[98] Moreover, it becomes apparent that "By the 1950s, self-control was more often described as deriving from a process in which the child gained control by first developing an understanding of its own feelings, then learning how to express those feelings in a socially acceptable manner."[99] Alice was swaying back and forth in the storyline between following "womanly duties" such as serving and caring for a man as with the Rabbit where she immediately at his order fetches him his gloves from his home and more "masculine" actions such as adventure and exploration.[100]

In one scene, the visual representations of Alice going through puberty can be seen. Alice stumbles upon some of the Queen's cards painting roses in the garden red. The white roses that were painted red are reminiscent of a young girl transitioning into an adult through her period.[101] Another visual representation of Alice going through puberty was the items she ate and drank that made her grow and shrink physically making her frightened and uncomfortable. "…puberty serves as the signal to socialization sources that the adolescent is becoming an adult should begin to act in line with stereotypical female and male roles."[102]As Alice was shown going through puberty in the story, she was also trying to figure out her purpose or role in life.

Male gender expectations are also like the female ones, slightly hazy. Since women filled all leadership roles/positions, the brain behind their actions rested in men's hands. This is seen with the Queen of Hearts. The film seems to associate success in adults with masculine characteristics such as the 1950s men were successful because they could support the home by

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[98]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Alice in Wonderland*. Animated musical fantasy-adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1951. Film 00:27:13

[99]Sammond, *Babes in Tomorrowland*, 271.

[100]Geronimi, Clyde, and Wilfred Jackson. *Peter Pan*. Animated fantasy adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1953. Film 00:17:52

[101]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Alice in Wonderland*. Animated musical fantasy-adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1951. Film 00:48:15

[102]Jamieson and Romer, *The Changing Portrayal of Adolescents in the Media since 1950*, 133.

making enough money (power). Similarly, the King in the film is depicted with feminine characteristic due to his lack of power in comparison to the Queen of Hearts, his wife. Women could be in power, but will not succeed without the help of men.[103] Similar to the *Peter Pan* film, *Alice in Wonderland* argues that there are consequences when people deviate from their gender roles, which forces people to try to conform to them.

Female gender expectations for growing up in *Peter Pan* are more visible versus some of the other Disney movies discussed in this essay because the idea of whether to grow up or not is a major theme throughout the story. Mrs. Darling is a maternal character and she instructs the children, Wendy, Michael, and John. She has power in terms of parenting, but when it comes to her husband Mr. Darling, she is subservient and does not go against him, as seen in the growing up discussion of Wendy and later punishing Nana. This is an example of a woman's place in the family. Similarly, with Wendy who is brought to Neverland to become the mother for all the Lost Boys. She voices her opinion and instructs the boys, but when it comes to Peter, he has the final say. Looking at parallels between Mrs. Darling and Wendy, there is the reoccurring idea that a woman's primary role in life is ultimately to be a mother once they grow up. Another example of female gender expectation is when the lost boys, Peter, the Indians, and Wendy's brothers are dancing and singing the song "What makes the red man red" after saving Tiger Lily. Wendy is stopped from dancing with everyone by one of the Indian women who is holding a baby and instructed to get fire wood since she is a women.[104] The instructions given to Wendy reflect the idea that it is a woman's responsibility to care for the home or in this case in Neverland, Wendy should care for the fire.

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[103]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Alice in Wonderland*. Animated musical fantasy-adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1951. Film

[104]Geronimi, Clyde, and Wilfred Jackson. *Peter Pan*. Animated fantasy adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1953. Film 00:51:13

Similarly, male gender expectations in the story line of *Peter Pan* are clearly defined. Mr. Darling is the family breadwinner who demands respect and obedience from his wife, children, and even Nana the dog. He represents this stereotypical male figure. Peter is the leader of the Lost Boys as well as their provider and protector. Like to Mr. Darling he tends to be sure of himself and set in his ways. Although Peter did not want to grow up, he does seem to take on responsibilities that come with growing up in society in some scenes such as his discipline towards and ensuring the safety of the lost boys and Tinkerbelle.

Similar to the usage of the television, Disney capitalized on books to promote the storylines. In the *New York Times* Children's Best Seller list for 1953, they did an analysis based on 33 different cities in the US and on the list included Disney's book of *Peter Pan* which came out earlier that year. They were 12th on the list of the top 16 books.[105] This shows that children did not just watch the movie, but they were also consuming the books that went along with the movie story line. This provided another avenue for the Disney Company to get into the home.

There have been a lot of reviews written about the Disney Company and their stories; this can provide good insight into how effective their marketing strategies have been in shaping gender for children. A good example of this is in the review about *Peter Pan* in an article from the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1953, comparing the original stories to that of Disney's work, noting the changes were made due to the different audience as the generation's needs and wants changed. "Mr. Disney's version is aimed at a modern group…"[106] It then ends with the fact that they believe that the changes made to better suit the new environment were not only successful but deemed as the right choice to make. Since Peter Pan is full of messages directed to concepts of gender relations within the family dynamics, it can be said that the critics agree that Disney's

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[105]"Children's Best Sellers," *New York Times*, 1953, sec. BOOK REVIEW.
[106]Mae Tinee, "Disney's 'Peter Pan' Tailored for the Modern Generation: "PETER PAN"," *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963); Chicago, Ill.*, February 5, 1953, sec. Part 3.

interpretation of the roles for the different members of the family were an accurate representation for the new ideas surrounding the nuclear family.

In *Peter Pan* and *Sleeping Beauty*, both stories have someone trying to stop the female lead from growing up. Peter figuratively and mentally with Wendy and Maleficent literally with the death of Aurora. However, both leads Wendy and Aurora ultimately do grow up. Aurora is kept hidden and away from society. When the fairies know that she met a boy they do not approve at first and immediately get defensive and reprimand her; where as Prince Philip is given free rein to explore the forest away from home. The good fairies later encourage the relationship when they realize that Prince Philip can provide Aurora safety and save her. This set standard is what allowed children to grow into society's ideas of adulthood; women were supposed to stay at home until they found a partner and then stay with their partner in a new home. Men were supposed to be adventurous and brave while offering security from the outside world. This hero complex was brought forth by the waves of western movies of the 1950s where men fought the dangerous villains and ended up saving and getting the girl.

Female gender expectations for growing up in the *Sleeping Beauty* storyline are strong. The fairies watching over Aurora give her gifts at her birth that they feel will be useful to her as she grows up and throughout her life. The first two gifts of beauty and song show that these are qualities females believe are important to have as they mature, which is why they make sure Aurora has these qualities as well.[107] Aurora ventures from home and rules which causes her to be vulnerable to Maleficent. This event indicates that if women venture away from the safety of their home and parental figures, some bad things may happen to them, just like Aurora.

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[107] Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film (00:09:27)

In *Sleeping Beauty*, male gender expectations for growing up are seen through Prince Philip, King Stephen (Aurora's father), and Prince Philip's father (the other King). Prince Philip gets captured by a woman, Maleficent (a devil figure), gets rescued by three women, the good fairies, and then fights a dragon with them, ending with saving Princess Aurora and getting married.[108] The masculinity is fulfilled with rescuing the damsel in distress, but the interesting factor is the women involved in both creating the danger and saving/helping him from it.

An article reviewed the film *Sleeping Beauty*, in the *Washington Post* and the *Times Herald* in 1959. The title of the article claims the story was cloying – disgusting from too much sweetness or sentiment – but despite that the children love it. It goes on to discuss a comparison between *Sleeping Beauty* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the new technology being used in the film, and then continues with the kid's responses while watching the film such as squealing and quickly settling down to see multiple screenings.[109] Although the author of the article seems to dislike the film, they did note the merits and, that despite their dislike, it was successful in capturing the attention of the film's target audience, children. This shows that children connected with the story so it can be inferred that they also enjoyed the messages that came with it. The difference between the reviewer and the audience reaction is due to the changing values between generations. Disney's stories were constructed for the emerging children and their preferences, not those of the older generations.

In another example of marketing multiple products together, the *Daily Boston Globe* wrote an advertisement in 1959 for Christmas promoting RCA Victor records and stereo with an added promotion for free Golden Books. The ad makes sure to mention in multiple places the

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[108]Geronimi, Clyde, Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, and Eric Larson. *Sleeping Beauty*. Animated drama fantasy. Buena Vista Distribution, 1959. Film
[109]"Sleeping Beauty Cloys, But Kiddies Love Her," *The Washington Post and Times Herald (1954-1959); Washington, D.C.*, February 20, 1959, sec. For And About Women.

aspect "for complete family entertainment" and marketing "for the children" with cartoon drawings all over the advertisement.[110] In this ad, Disney markets almost all of their product categories with the movies, TV, records, and books all through the use of two companies. In every advertisement incorporating Disney stories and characters, Disney is a main component in the ad to encourage other people to associate the brand of Disney with the brand of the company advertising their product. Similarly to the previous example, Disney focused more on the younger generation's values and wants.

Building a family

Once the children grew up and accepted their roles in society, the next stage in life that was expected of them was building a family of their own. Marriage was seen as the only individual vehicle for achieving certain physical and psychic rewards. Throughout the 1950 Disney stories, the characters go through journeys in the process of growing up where some do not finishing growing up and some end in marriage, taking the next step leading them to their happily ever after endings.

The atmosphere that the teens were moving into as they grew up changed in the 1950s. "Before WWII, long-term commitments lay in the future for youth…dating was not about marriage. Dating was about competition."[111] After the war, youth turned to "going steady" because the system provided a measure of security and escape from the pressures of the postwar world.[112] "Demographic indicators show that in this period, Americans were more eager than

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[110]"Display Ad 80 -- No Title," *Daily Boston Globe (1928-1960); Boston, Mass.*, December 13, 1959.
[111]Bailey, "From Front Porch to Back Seat," 25.
[112]Bailey, 26.

ever to establish families."[113] Marriage and building a family was one of the ways people found security from issues like premarital sex.

A study conducted by Alfred Kinsey looked at sexual behaviors of white American men and women in the late 1940s and early 1950s. It was discovered that an increasing number of Americans ignored ideas of abstaining from sex before marriage. Many responded to these findings calling for an effort to bring behavior into conformity with prevailing codes.[114] Disney does not incorporate issues of premarital sex in his movies, which plays off the sexually conservative culture of the 1950s. However, this is disillusioning for young girls because they now see sex and romance as separate things. At times Disney even deliberately takes out notions about sex in the original stories. However, he does leave some bits of it somewhat tapping around the issue instead of outright showcasing it like the original stories did.

Disney perpetuates the idea that women should constantly be feminine and impress men by all means necessary. This is evident in *Cinderella,* after changing her appearance Prince Charming and Cinderella fall in love when dancing and once they meet again, they quickly get married. This can be illustrated by the iconic scene in the motion picture where they are dancing through the ball room and into the gardens by the balcony, with tons of pinks and purples present, the music in the background creating a soft and light atmosphere, both the color and mood created provided a good picture as to the nature of their relationship being loving, gentle, and simple.[115] This can also be seen in products such as a dancing Cinderella and Prince Charming wind-up toy, which freezes this moment of time in the story emphasizing it as

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[113]May, *Homeward Bound*, 3.
[114]May, 115.
[115]Geronimi, Clyde, Hamilton Luske, and Wilfred Jackson. *Cinderella*. Animated musical fantasy. RKO Radio Pictures, 1950. Film 00:51:28

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important and beautiful.[116] Both mediums are trying to depict the iconic storyline moment relying on color, sound, and movement (animation).

In terms of love, dating, marriage, and romance in *Cinderella*, she does not know anything about him except he is the prince and he knows nothing about her except her beauty and fashion sense, the glass slipper. They meet in a situation where Cinderella is getting her first taste of freedom away from her family and Prince Charming is being forced to find a bride. It makes sense that both would seek each other out to solve the other's problem. Most young girls at this time with the new forms of dating were without family supervision or any chaperon, so the atmosphere created is one very relatable to many children of the 1950s as they grow up and start dating. They both end up falling in love while dancing, a scene reflecting a school dance of sorts. "Virtually everyone portrayed the system dating replaced as infinitely simpler, sweeter, more innocent, and more graceful."[117]

Cinderella and Prince Charming go against the norm of rotating partners which was common practice at dances pre-1950; this sparks awe and wonder in the audience, similar to the changing times and new practices of "modern" dating. The new dating norms changing from the previous generation's norms can be illustrated in an article from *Woman's Home Companion*, the conversation between a young girl, Emmie, and her uncle Cam, when discussing how the girl's school dance went. She informed her uncle about how she danced with her date Jim the entire time. To her uncle's bewilderment of the new dating and dancing customs, he thought she was stuck, meaning not getting cut in on, which before this time was sign of social failure. She tried to explain it to her uncle by responding, "Everybody danced every dance with their dates – I

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[116]"Antique Toy Archive - the Antique Toy Collector's Online Resource for Vintage Toys," accessed September 23, 2018, http://antiquetoycollections.info/pages/catalogs.asp.
[117]Bailey, "From Front Porch to Back Seat," 14.

mean, see, that you just dance with your date, is all."[118] The concept of cutting in was based

mainly on the society where men outnumbered women, as a way to share access to women. But

this changed in the 1950s, where women began to outnumber men, and Cinderella's dancing

with Prince Charming reflects this cultural change.

There was a rush to fatherhood in the postwar years. To marry and have children was

mature, responsible, and a sign of adulthood; while remaining a bachelor signified immaturity,

irresponsibility, and perhaps even homosexuality.[119] The willingness to start a family and be a

breadwinner was the indicator of mature manhood in the 1950s.

Alice in Wonderland focuses more on finding oneself to be able to grow up versus the

product that comes out of that transformation. Thus, love in Alice's storyline is not about

romance between two characters, but instead about finding love for yourself in who you are. In

other words, it is embracing who you will become as you grow up and experience new

adventures and trials in life. In terms of adventures and trials, in Alice's story they are meant

literally as she falls into Wonderland and explores the land around her questioning and letting

her curiosity take over, as well as in the trial she undergoes by the Queen of Hearts. The curiosity

and constant questions asked seem to challenge gender roles as this was not seen as a good

quality for women to have, especially in relation to dating and finding a man. However, in the

1950s, children began to explore and were encouraged to let their imaginations guide them at

times. This is reflected in Alice's character as she is still a child only beginning to go through the

stages of puberty and coming of age.

Both *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan* struggle with concepts of growing up leading

them to not be ready to make a family yet. On one hand, Alice is at the stage of exploring her

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[118]Bailey, 32.
[119]Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 189.

own identity before she goes looking to have a family of her own. On the other hand, Peter and Wendy are focused on growing up in terms of family and dating, but ultimately do not end up together. These stories depict two stages of growing up; one with the involvement of others, externally, and the other focusing on one-self, internally.

Peter's journey towards building a family focuses on his masculinity constantly being reaffirmed by the women throughout the storyline, such as seeking Wendy out to be a mother figure. Peter defeats the pirates and ultimately saves Wendy, representing the damsel in distress idea. He also does this with Tiger Lily who was going to be drowned by Captain Hook and Mr. Smee.[120] However, manhood is tied to maturity and the willingness towards fatherhood in the 1950s. Peter does not follow this idea, stopping him from growing up and creating a real family.

The main characters in the storyline slowly came to the realization that they must go back to society and grow up. Mrs. Darling is already an adult and a mother on her own with a family. On the contrary, Wendy is a young girl succumbing to the societal pressure to grow up, as shown in the scene where her father wants her to move out of the nursery and into her own bedroom. Moreover, in Neverland, she comes to the conclusion that everyone will eventually mature and succumb to their rigid gender role.

Another aspect to look into is Captain Hook and his lack growing up in a 1950s sense with the idea of having a family has a time limit connected with death. Captain Hook didn't build a family and instead focused on capturing Peter, so now time is running out as he grows old. Not getting married as a man becomes older is seen as a failure to society in the 1950s. The crocodile in the storyline swallowed a clock, so the ticking can be heard by Hook emphasizing his time is

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[120]Geronimi, Clyde, and Wilfred Jackson. *Peter Pan*. Animated fantasy adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1953. Film 00:45:45

running out.[121] The crocodile, named tick-tock after he swallowed an alarm clock, was fed Captain Hook's hand in a battle between Hook and Peter Pan. References are made when the Crocodile is near to Captain Hook being a "codfish" and in moments in the storyline the Crocodile imagines this appearance for Hook and his Pirates. The codfish comments hit at Hook's pride and are an insult to his masculinity.

Wendy and Peter had a romantic relationship at times, but we also saw Peter's romantic relationships with Tiger Lily and the mermaids. This dynamic was very reminiscent of the time, as it showed multiple girls pursuing one guy versus competition between men for one girl. The mermaids flirt with Peter and he forgets all about Wendy for a little bit. When they realize she is there the mermaids tried drowning her.[122] Peter found these actions by the mermaids as funny and a joke as they splashed her and pulled at her. It can be said Peter's response was immature as he did not turn down the mermaid's affections and stop them. "Definitions of social success as promiscuous popularity based on strenuous competition had given way to new definitions, which located success in the security of a dependable escort."[123] This seemed to challenge the idea that Disney reinforced the 1950s dating rules, but it must be made clear that Peter in many aspects is still a boy and not a man because he stopped at his awkward transition stage. Many actions he took tried to show him as a man, but here is an example where he showed his youth to Wendy that he wouldn't make a good partner. This is reiterated again when Wendy left him and did not stay to be a mother to his lost boys.

[121]Geronimi, Clyde, and Wilfred Jackson. *Peter Pan*. Animated fantasy adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1953. Film 00:44:04
[122]Geronimi, Clyde, and Wilfred Jackson. *Peter Pan*. Animated fantasy adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1953. Film 00:37:14
[123]Bailey, "From Front Porch to Back Seat," 32.

Tiger Lily kisses Peter as a reward for him saving her.[124] This reflects the idea that woman who are indebted to men should reward them with sexual acts. This is very relevant for the 1950s in the changing ideas of dating. The dating system promoted sexual experimentation with the lack of chaperone and the sense of obligation it fostered. "Dating was an unequal relationship: the man paid for everything and the woman was thus indebted to him… the more money the man spent, the more petting the woman owed him."[125]

In both *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* there are concepts challenging the foundations of society and question against it. However, in the end of both movies, the main characters come to the realization that society although has parts they ultimately don't like or don't understand, is better than living without the rules of society when in its absence. All of these 1950s Disney movies have young adult main characters. And most of the endings result in marriage, which many viewers would have seen as a good byproduct of agreeing to grow up and become an adult in society.

However, in *Sleeping Beauty*, Aurora was beautiful and her singing attracted Prince Philip; these were the gifts that the fairies originally blessed her with at birth. Aurora waited for Prince Philip letting him pursue her, fall in love, and save her from eternal sleep. Women of the 1950s were encouraged to value security and dependability, and that's what Prince Philip provided Aurora in Sleeping Beauty. An example of this is when Prince Philip protects Aurora from Maleficent by fighting her when she took the form of a dragon. After the defeat of Maleficent, Prince Philip awakens Aurora by breaking her curse. When Prince Philip is told about her unfortunate state, he immediately goes to save her emphasizing his loyalty to her. These qualities would immediately be seen by the audience as positive.

[124]Geronimi, Clyde, and Wilfred Jackson. *Peter Pan*. Animated fantasy adventure. RKO Radio Pictures, 1953. Film 00:51:51
[125]Bailey, "From Front Porch to Back Seat," 81.

Disney embodied the rising teen culture and increased childhood sexuality in his romance scenes such as seen in sleeping beauty. "American society increasingly became obsessed with defining 'masculine' and 'feminine' behaviors-acts that demonstrated and reinforced a 'traditional' difference between men and women. Nowhere is this obsession clearer than in the etiquette that governed relations between the sexes-especially the courtship of youth."[126] Both Aurora and Prince Philip had set roles they fulfill in the relationship that demonstrate society's conceptions on the differences between genders. As noted previously, Aurora sings and looks beautiful. She does not much else in terms of roles, and is known for being the Disney Princess with the least amount of lines in the entire story. Prince Philip was the hero who pursued Aurora; he battled Maleficent, and eventually saved Aurora for eternal sleep. In the end Prince Philip defeated the villain and got the girl.

Love, dating, marriage, and romance in *Sleeping Beauty* also includes when Aurora meets Prince Philip and immediately falls in love. After saving her she gets married to him immediately. I specify immediately twice because it was common for women to marry young once they found a desirable partner. "By 1959, fully 47% of all brides married before the turned 19, and the percent of girls between 14-17 who were married had jumped one-third since 1940."[127]Men reflected a similar trend, rushing into marriage and fatherhood younger than in previous years to prove their manhood and maturity.[128]

Thus, by getting married and having children, people are safer from the outside world securing their future and place in society. "The self-contained home held out the promise of

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[126]Bailey, 98.
[127]Bailey, 43.
[128]Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 195.

security in an insecure world."[129] As shown in *Sleeping Beauty,* Aurora and Prince Philip get together leading Aurora to become safer and move back into society. Similarly, with Cinderella and Prince Charming, they get married leading Cinderella to become safe from her stepmother and stepsisters while also moving up in society.

Conclusion

Altogether, the main findings can be summed up in a few points. Disney seems to claim that being a good parent means protecting your children, keeping them safe, and preparing them for their future. A good mother's role revolves entirely around the caring for the children and her husband. She guides them in a positive way as she can identify with the children through the home. The father's role, involves being strong, keeping the family together, and supporting them in all ways possible through work. He identifies with the children through his work identity.

Disney breaks down children's development as they seek their own identity between male and female. In terms of females, Disney seems to claim they develop through falling in love, starting a family, and accepting society's rules. In terms of males, they develop through being heroic while saving the female, starting a family, and being strong. The Disney storylines show romance between significant others as pure and delicate; a concept that is light and beautiful, as it's the start of life. It is both a new life for the couple and the creation of life in terms of children and starting a family.

A central part to Disney stories are the danger and turmoil where the women are in danger due to their appearance, status, or love interest. Women or men who do not conform to the national identity by following the standards set for their respective gender and go against societies norms are seen as evil such as The Queen of Hearts, Maleficent, or Captain Hook.

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[129]May, *Homeward Bound*, 3.

How has Disney's marketing and production in the 1950s tried to influence young adults in the sense of the term "modern dating?" Disney pushed the formation of the nuclear family to middle class Americans. He created dating as innocent and life changing to young adults. The company solidified gender roles showing children how they should act as they grow up and go on to create their own families within society.

The Disney Company encouraged children to explore and question what they know in productive ways that ultimately should lead them back to become contributing members of society. Being a member of society was conforming to the national identity by following the standards set for their respective gender; this being women ultimately getting married and starting a family and men getting a job and supporting their family.

To bring this full circle, The Disney Company idealized the concept of the nuclear family in the 1950s to children to promote messages of growing up through identifying set gender roles and expectations that revolutionized the way Americans viewed family life.

Disney is a major staple in the lives of children and preteens and some of their renowned classics are still childhood favorites. Through this work, I have gotten a better understanding of the possible influences of Disney messages seen integrated into his company's products. This paper isn't a criticism of Disney, as Disney was also a victim of societal expectations on gender. The Walt Disney Company still produces a lot of content for children and preteens, but their messages and ideas have been changing with the time. While this new content is very popular, the old classics of Disney's are still watched and read. These classics are many of the first exposures to romance and relationships to young children. This is an important idea of research due to its prevalent content and popular topic of debate.

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