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The quirky princess and the ice-olated queen: an analysis of Disney's Frozen

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The Quirky Princess and the Ice-olated Queen:
An Analysis of Disney's *Frozen*

An Honors Thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for Honors Studies in
Communication

By

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J. William Fulbright College of Arts and Sciences

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Introduction

In June 2014, *The New Yorker* magazine reported that the film *Frozen* had “taken over the world” (Konnikova). The blockbuster, *Frozen*, is one of the most highly successful films, receiving both financial and critical acclaim. It is the fifth highest grossing film of all time, earning over a billion dollars at the box office (“Frozen Becomes”). The film won a British Academy of Film and Television Arts Award (BAFTA), a Golden Globe, as well as two Academy Awards in 2013, including Best Animated Feature Film and Best Original Song for “Let It Go” (Gioia). The outstanding original music is a key element in this film’s success and popularity. “Let It Go” still receives airplay nearly a year after hitting number five on the Billboard Hot 100 singles in the week of May 3, 2014 (“The Hot 100”). It became the first Disney movie song to hit the Top 10 since 1995 when the song “Colors of the Wind” from *Pocahontas* (“Vanessa Williams”) enjoyed this recognition. “Let It Go” stands to become a classic along the lines of “Zipadeedoodah” or “Hakuna Matata.” Countless translations and covers have been performed of this song. A Google video search for “let it go cover” shows 86.5 million results, including an animated male vocal version featuring Nate Smith (Jess the Dragoon). The Walt Disney Animation Studios YouTube channel clip of “Disney's *Frozen* ‘Let It Go’ Sequence Performed by Idina Menzel” has received over 400 million views so far. The complete *Frozen* soundtrack was the number one album on the Billboard 200 chart for 13 non-consecutive weeks (Caulfield, “Now 50”) making it the longest selling number one animated soundtrack by surpassing Lion King’s 19 year claim to this honor (Caulfield, “Frozen’ Earns”).

Frozen's appeal continues to garner tremendous media and popular culture attention with high demand merchandise, numerous articles and countless memes. Tourism trips to Norway, the country which inspired the film's settings, has risen notably since *Frozen*'s release. In the first quarter of 2014 alone, the country reported a 37% increase in hotel bookings (Stampler). *Frozen*'s continuing popularity and success define it as a cultural product that has struck a resounding chord with audiences and critics alike. Investigations into key films such as *Frozen* offer a deep look into the underlying values of American culture. The continuities and discontinuities between it and previous Disney films illustrate *Frozen*'s historical importance. Films are not merely reflective objects; they also have formative power. Indeed, as media scholar Douglas Kellner argues, "products of media culture provide materials about which we forge our very identities" (9). A film such as *Frozen* can have deep impacts at an individual level. Therefore, this film analysis hopes to offer insight into both American culture and American audiences.

Because this film is so new, there is little scholarship on *Frozen*. With this thesis, I hope to begin building critical scholarship on this important film. My primary objective is to provide an in depth analysis of *Frozen*'s main characters, the sister princesses Anna and Elsa. I focus on plots and themes from their story versus previous princess films to show how and where *Frozen* deviates from the long standing traditions of fairy tale films. My first chapter compares Anna's characteristics and storyline to previous Disney Princesses and Disney Princess movies. In particular, I discuss how Anna's romantic storyline deviates from earlier Disney Princess films. In the second chapter, I focus on Elsa, detailing the manner in which she resembles combined aspects of both Disney villains and princesses. I delve into Elsa as a misunderstood protagonist and not as the

villain of the “Snow Queen” fairy tale from which her character is derived. In addition, I explore how her mental disability links with her self-actualization. This reading takes into account not only the film itself, but also *Frozen*’s acclaimed soundtrack and the importance of what each sister vocalizes in song. I also consider the stylistic choices made for the animated characters including: wardrobe, body posture and movement, facial expressions, and voices.

Finally, I conclude by outlining the implications of my findings, including what this film might indicate about American contemporary culture and viewers. I engage feminist media studies scholarship as a lens through which to critique the film. I discuss how women and women’s bodies serve as commodified objects. To do this, I compare the sisters’ journey to Sarah Banet-Weiser’s idea of the commodification of authenticity, where authenticity is utilized for branding purposes (Jacobson 673). I explore this concept in relation to the characters Anna and Elsa. Some critics view *Frozen* as a pro-feminist, progressive film. For instance, Todd McCarthy’s review for the *Hollywood Reporter* noted that *Frozen* contains “contemporary attitudes and female-empowerment.” *Frozen* is the first Disney film that has a woman co-director, with screenwriter Jennifer Lee at the helm, which suggests a progressive representation of women. Having women in prominent positions behind the camera has been shown to statistically improve and increase the representation of women on screen (Lauzen). In fact, *Frozen* is receiving backlash from the Christian right for having too rebellious motifs and being seen as advocating “a gay agenda” (Skaggs) that will “indoctrinate” children to be lesbians (“Disney’s ‘Frozen’”). The LGBTQA community also views *Frozen* as an allegory for coming out but in a much more positive light (Diaz). I explore the notion that *Frozen* is a

feminist film and gauge the progressiveness of the movie in the context of its depiction of the female leads, showing how *Frozen* represents women as multi-dimensional characters, and importantly, as driving their own stories.

Summary of the Film

Because my film analysis relies on understanding nuanced character development and complicated plot shifts, I have included a rather extensive summary of the film for ease of reference. This summary lays the groundwork for understanding the greater context behind subtle character relationships and interactions. In addition, this summary also makes this analysis legible to readers who have not recently screened the film.

Frozen is about two sister princesses of Norwegian styled Arendelle: Elsa and Anna. Elsa is the elder, in line to be queen, and possesses ice magic powers. The importance of music in this film is immediately emphasized as Norwegian styled chanting plays behind the brief opening credits and transforms into a deep-voiced, hearty work song of men cutting ice. In the mountains, a young boy frolics with his reindeer calf and emulates the ice cutters. The scene shifts to the Castle of Arendelle where the two princesses are young girls. Little Anna wakes Elsa and convinces her to sneak into the ballroom to play with Elsa's ice magic. Things go awry when Anna enthusiastically jumps off a large pile of snow faster than Elsa can produce a soft landing for her; Elsa accidentally hits her sister in the head with an icy blast of magic. As Elsa reacts with fear, her fun magic changes to a brief, wild-spreading freeze through the floor and walls. Their parents rush in and take them to the rock trolls, magical creatures of the forest and mountains. The young boy with the reindeer follows the royal family without being noticed by them and observes what happens next. The leader of the trolls, Grand Pabbie,

cures Anna and takes away her memories of Elsa's magic, implying that hiding the magic is necessary. Grand Pabbie warns that Elsa's magic will grow stronger and needs to be controlled. He adds that fear is Elsa's greatest enemy.

The King overreacts, exhibiting the very fear Grand Pabbie just warned him about, and though the Queen appears calmer, she tacitly goes along with her husband's wishes. Elsa's father orders the castle closed, and teaches Elsa to "conceal, don't feel," imploring her to hide her powers (*Frozen*). Elsa becomes afraid of harming anyone else and is isolated to ensure that everyone is safe. Thus, Elsa begins her estrangement from her sister and the external world and Anna ends up lonely, missing her sister's companionship. Meanwhile, the young boy is adopted by the rock trolls.

A montage in which Anna sings "Do You Wanna Build a Snowman?" depicts Elsa and Anna growing up separately, both feeling sad and alone. When Elsa is eighteen and Anna fifteen, their parents leave for a journey overseas that ends with the ship capsizing, drowning the King and Queen. Elsa and Anna are orphaned, separated from one another, and isolated from Arendelle at large.

Three years pass and it is Elsa's official coronation day now that she is twenty-one. Arendelle is happily preparing. The visiting foreign dignitaries that are featured are only men. The excitable Duke of Weselton, a small hyperactive man, is accompanied by two hulking henchmen. Hans, a Prince of the Southern Isles, is mentioned as having twelve older brothers. Anna wakes and sings "For the First Time in Forever," excited at the prospect of finally opening the palace for the ceremony, meeting new people, and possibly making a romantic connection. In contrast, Elsa is dreading the audience and afraid the secret of her magic will be exposed. Anna's dreams are realized when she

literally bumps into the horse of a potential love interest, Prince Hans, just before the coronation. Elsa dons gloves to assist in keeping her magic under control, and her best hopes are realized when she handles her coronation without revealing her magic. Elsa even happily connects with Anna at the ball following the ceremony. However, their fragile connection is swiftly broken when Elsa emphatically tells Anna they cannot continue to have visitors and refuses to explain further. Anna excuses herself, trips, and Hans catches her. In her innocence, Anna proceeds to sing “Love is an Open Door,” a declaration of love, with Hans. After the song ends, the two become engaged.

Anna and Hans return to the ball to ask Elsa to bless their union. However, Elsa refuses to do so, stating “you can’t marry a man you just met” (*Frozen*). She and Anna argue, and Elsa declares the ball over and begins to leave. Anna continues to harangue Elsa and pulls off one of Elsa’s gloves. Elsa becomes angry and accidentally casts icicles at the crowd. She then becomes scared about having revealed her secret. The Duke of Weselton shouts out that she is a monster. Her magic bursting out of control, Elsa runs away from the castle inadvertently leaving a huge snowstorm that engulfs Arendelle in her wake. Once free from Arendelle, Elsa sings the hit “Let It Go” about finding freedom to practice her magic and be herself now that she is alone beyond the bounds of society. She creates an ice castle on a mountaintop as her new home.

Anna decides to find her sister, bring her home, and convince her to end the deep freeze that has paralyzed Arendelle. She leaves Hans in charge of Arendelle. Seeking warmth and supplies at a trade shop in the woods, Anna meets Kristoff. He, at first, seems gruff but is revealed to be the grownup young boy, now a good-natured ice salesman. Kristoff questions Anna’s judgement when he learns of her rapid engagement,

and cautiously does not tell her what he saw as a boy, but does agree to help find Elsa. Anna, Kristoff, and Sven the reindeer are chased by wolves, escape, and befriend Olaf, a plucky animate snowman inadvertently created by Elsa's magic. The four of them reach Elsa's ice castle where Anna approaches Elsa. Their conversation turns into the song "For the First Time in Forever (reprise)." Elsa becomes upset, her fear sets off the wild magic, and she accidentally hits Anna in the chest with it. Elsa, not realizing she has fatally injured her sister, creates a giant snow monster to chase Anna and her companions away. Anna's hair develops streaks of white as a result of Elsa's magic blast. This troubles Kristoff, and he takes her to see the rock trolls who might be able to help with their magic.

Meanwhile, Hans leaves Arendelle with a party of men to find Anna whose horse has returned riderless. The search party finds Elsa's ice castle after Anna and her companions have left. The Duke of Weselton's henchmen attempt to kill Elsa. She defends herself but is knocked out by a falling ice chandelier. She wakes up chained in a prison cell in her Arendelle castle; Hans tells her Anna has not returned.

Deep in the mountains, the rock trolls perform an elaborate musical number, "Fixer Upper," in an attempt to kindle romance between Anna and Kristoff; Anna collapses as the song ends. Grand Pabbie diagnoses Anna as having a Frozen Heart that can only be cured by an act of true love. Thinking Hans must be her true love, Anna and Kristoff rush back to Arendelle.

At the castle, just as he is about to kiss her, Hans pulls away and reveals his true evil nature. After telling her she should have known a thirteenth son would only be after her kingdom, Hans leaves the weakening Anna in a locked room to die. To the courtiers

and visiting dignitaries, Hans declares Anna dead as a result of Elsa's magic, but not before they said their marriage vows. As King, he sentences Queen Elsa to death.

Elsa escapes the prison using her magic, which conjures an even more intense ice storm than before. Kristoff is returning to the mountains when he sees the new storm and realizes that he might be Anna's true love. Snowman Olaf rescues Anna from the locked room motivated in part by seeing Kristoff and Sven racing towards the castle. Though Anna is becoming more frozen by the minute, she and Olaf escape toward Kristoff for a second potential true love's kiss.

In the storm, Hans catches up with Elsa and lies to her that Anna is dead. Elsa collapses in despair and the wild snowstorm pauses, every snowflake suspended motionless. Before reaching Kristoff, Anna spots Elsa as Hans draws a sword to strike her. With her last strength, Anna runs in front of Elsa and becomes completely frozen just as Hans strikes. The blade shatters, Anna has saved Elsa.

Elsa is devastated and clasps her ice sculpture sister while she cries. Happily, Anna unfreezes. By saving her sister, Anna's act of true love also saves herself. Elsa realizes the way to control and direct her magic is with love. Arendelle is relieved of the deep freeze. Once unfrozen, Anna punches Hans in the face and sends him back to the Southern Isles to face the judgement of his brothers. The Duke of Weselton is sent away with all trade relations ended. Kristoff asks Anna if he can kiss her and she says yes. Elsa is reinstated as Queen, gives Olaf his own personal snowstorm to keep him from melting, and creates a rink for an ice skating party for the whole kingdom.

Princess Films: A Brief Historical Generic Comparison

Now that the film's plot is clear, the next step is to contextualize the film within the genre in which it appeared, to understand the film as part of a well-established collection of Disney Princess films. This section of my thesis relies on generic criticism as a method to analyze *Frozen*, investigating how the princess genre has changed over time. Generic criticism allows the researcher to understand the larger connection of media to society because categories used in the process reflect society's beliefs, attitudes, and values. Sonja Foss defines rhetorical generic criticism as an "attempt to understand rhetorical practices in different time periods and in different places by discerning the similarities in rhetorical situations and the rhetoric constructed in response to them" (Foss 233). The rhetorical situation behind the princess film genre is the role of women in society in general and the role of love and men in the lives of women in specific. In this project, I use a variant of generic criticism called "generic application," defined by Foss as a method for analyzing the content and form of a genre to compare the artifact to those generic requirements for evaluative and/or interpretive purposes. While I do discuss the central organizing plot structures of the films and individual motivations of the characters, I do not separate out the characteristics of the princess film genre or the film itself into "substantive" and "stylistic" categories, as Foss suggests, as it is difficult to separate out content and form in cinema. Rather, I view them as overlapping constructs that are often best discussed simultaneously. Therefore, this section first historicizes the princess genre and then briefly details how *Frozen* both conforms to and breaks with those historical generic conventions, thereby previewing the arguments made in more detail in the subsequent film analysis.

Frozen is clearly a princess film: it features a princess. *Frozen*'s plot begins with standard princess film conventions but, by the end, it has twisted these conventions into new forms. First, princess films are traditionally centered on romantic love, meaning the plots revolve around a princess finding love and the plot is resolved when the princess finds the love, usually a prince. While *Frozen*'s plot still includes romantic love, audience expectations about romance in princess films lead them to expect Hans to be the prince charming. He is, conversely, the villain. An additional innovation is that the film's plot centers on familial love, specifically the relationship between the two sister princesses. Though the sisters are separated by their parents' misguided attempt to shield Anna from Elsa's powers, their love for each other abides and ultimately resolves the plot conflict.

There is no standard way of dividing up Disney's animated feature films across time. However, scholars do generally categorize them into three time periods: "the earlier movies, the middle movies, and the most current film[s]" (England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek 555). For the purpose of my study, and in keeping with popular culture, I will call these three film periods: Classic Disney, Renaissance Disney, and Revival Disney.

The Classic Disney era contains three princess films that Walt Disney worked on himself: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*. These films are typified by heroines who are "innocent, naïve, passive, beautiful, domestic, and submissive" (Wasko 116). The Classic princesses are "good, simple, and kind" (Davis 19) and only perform prosocial actions (Hoerrner 221).

Next, the Renaissance Disney era has five popular princess films made while Michael Eisner was CEO of Disney: *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*,

Pocahontas, and *Mulan*. The heroines of these films have increased agency but are still highly complicit participants of patriarchal societies (Wasko 116). They are more complex characters than Classic princesses; they take mostly prosocial actions and some antisocial actions (Hoerrner 224-225).

The third era, Revival Disney, refers to Disney's most recent animated films under Bob Iger as CEO and with John Lasseter as Chief Creative Officer of Pixar Animation Studios and Disney Animation Studios. So far, Revival films featuring princesses are *The Princess and the Frog*, *Tangled*, *Brave*, and perhaps, *Frozen*. Revival Disney princesses are depicted as having greater agency, actually achieving the goals they set outside of marriage, and not necessarily needing a love interest at all (Rome 177). Anna and Elsa may be categorized as Revival princesses or may be categorized as the beginning of a new era of Disney Princesses since they depict departures from previous Disney films.

Throughout these eras, music is a key element. Disney songs mark important character definitions and plot developments (Wasko 115). Princesses and supporting cast members express their feelings, their life circumstances, as well as their dreams of future accomplishments in song (Sells 183; Hoerrner 217; Henke, Umble, and Smith 235). According to Don Hahn, Disney producer, songs "express the major turning points in the story" (13). *Frozen* follows suit with the traditions of the musical genre, the soundtrack emphasizes key transitions and evokes important emotional states.

Feminist media scholars have long studied the Disney Princess genre and they agree overwhelmingly that Disney tends to frame "women's lives through a male discourse" (Zipes 89). In other words, the desires and actions of the female protagonists

are set within the parameters of a patriarchal society. Thus, women have less agency than men. While this may be true of Classic and Renaissance Disney, these accounts do not thoroughly consider Revival Disney princess films. The lead female characters in these films show that Disney has shifted away from the previous princess tropes. Renaissance era films begin this shift but do not entirely relinquish patriarchal traditions. For instance, *The Little Mermaid* is more about disobeying a father than challenging a patriarchy. Yet, although Ariel is primarily a rebellious mermaid princess, she still conforms to patriarchal values by shaping her life around gaining the love, and hand in marriage, of Prince Eric.

As I demonstrate below in more detail, Anna conforms closely with the typical Disney Princess of any given era. Despite years of being shunned by her sister and being overshadowed by the deaths of their parents, Anna still manages to be an optimist. Optimism is a perennial Disney Princess characteristic, but Anna is developed beyond this tradition. Anna is the most klutzy Disney Princess, which highlights her plucky character and actually gives her some appeal. Rapunzel in *Tangled* premieres this portrayal of more klutzy princesses, but Anna embodies klutziness at a new level throughout *Frozen*. Perhaps the most interesting nuance of Anna is her love story. *Frozen*'s plot is unique in that Anna's initial love interest turns out to be a villain. These aspects make Anna not just a readily acceptable protagonist and innovative character, but also an interesting foil to Elsa.

While *Frozen* is defined as a princess film by featuring Anna as the protagonist, the depiction of Elsa as an additional princess, and later queen, makes the film unique for

Disney. All previous films have only one leading princess, or a leading lady.¹ In fact, *Frozen*'s greatest departure from Disney Classics is Elsa's complex character, not just her presence in the cast. Elsa often seems more similar to Disney villains than princesses, in large part because she suffers from mental illness. Rather than following the typical character tropes for a princess from any era, Elsa is portrayed as a misunderstood character. Mental illness often appears in Disney Princess films. One study found eighty-five percent of Disney films contain references to characters as mentally ill (Lawson & Fouts 312). Characters are referred to as "crazy," "mad," or "nutty" in order to alienate them (Lawson & Fouts 312). Characters that are mentally ill are usually portrayed as objects of "derision, amusement, or fear" (Lawson & Fouts 313). While mental illness is common in the princess genre, the princesses themselves are not mentally ill despite the hardships they may endure. New in *Frozen*, Elsa suffers from depression and anxiety and is ostracized from society. Below, I explore in more detail to what extent Elsa's character stigmatizes or destigmatizes mental illness and how she may appear to be villainous in her attempts to be virtuous.

¹ Mulan is listed here as a "leading lady" because she is technically not a princess, although she is a part of the official Disney Princess franchise (Orenstein).

Chapter 1: Anna, the Quirky Princess

Comparison of Anna to Disney Princesses

Understanding the periodization of the Disney Princess film genre is essential to understanding *Frozen*, its aesthetics, its representations, and its role as a market object and a potential social actor. In this chapter, I focus in depth on Anna, referring to princess portrayals from the different eras and the plot summary above. I compare her character traits, her relationships with other characters, as well as the way she is drawn and animated, to other Disney Princesses.

Anna's personality and mannerisms are in keeping with the Disney Princess trend to depict increasingly capable and proactive princesses, seen most recently in *The Princess and the Frog* (Tiana), *Tangled* (Rapunzel), and *Brave* (Merida). The princesses of these Revival Disney films all demonstrate increased agency in their stories. Anna, in many ways, reflects and embodies recent Disney Princesses while advancing their portrayals to an even higher level of empowerment. Few Disney Princesses have siblings, but unlike Ariel and Merida, Anna has only one. Anna is not engaged or married by the end of her film, only Pocahontas, Mulan, and Merida share this characteristic. Anna is also one of the few Disney Princesses to save herself, a feat that not even the strongly enabled Rapunzel managed. Uniquely, Anna is the only Disney Princess to have her prince turn out to be evil in that he is willing to let her die and attempts to kill her sister.

Classic Disney

As mentioned in the periodization, the Classic Disney princesses are relatively simple characters (Wasko 116). Physically, they appear beautiful, young and graceful. Elizabeth Bell, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of

Southern Florida and Gender Studies Scholar, notes that artists sketched the Classic Disney princesses based on “popular images of feminine beauty and youth” (109). Cinderella looks “cultured and stately even in her work clothes,” following Disney’s edict to his animators that princesses must look pretty in all circumstances (Bell 109). Many Disney Princess proportions are exaggerated. For example, Jasmine from *Aladdin* has eyes “bigger than her waist” (Dill 135). Sociology Professor, Philip Cohen, notes that either of Anna’s eyes is bigger than her wrist, stating that “large eyes and small wrists” are often part of the Disney femininity. Despite advances in overall characterization, the princesses of *Frozen* still depict a definition of beauty unattainable in reality.

To argue that Disney Princesses are physically pretty and graceful is not to argue that their bodies are weak. The tradition of drawing princess bodies based on ballerinas continues in *Frozen* and thus, they all have strong posture and muscle tone. Bell notes that Disney Princesses “have back-bone” (112), even when their personalities do not, which strengthens their overall character.

Anna’s posture is strong and erect, yet she is klutzy, contradicting the Classic Disney princesses who are shown to be “at the idealized height of puberty’s graceful promenade,” following Disney’s animation edict that princesses must look pretty (Bell 108). Though she runs into things, trips, and falls throughout the film, she does recover smoothly from her clumsiest moves. She exhibits excellent aim throwing whatever is at hand at the wolves and the ice monster, and coldcocks Hans squarely on the jaw. Although Anna’s body shape is in keeping with previous princess models, her movements do not always reflect the strong body postures or grace of ballerinas. For example, she almost falls while dancing at the ball. When searching for her sister, she

knocks into a tree, causing snow to fall on her, tumbles downhill and plunges into an icy river. She even slips on the ice rink at the end. Despite her often awkward and stumbling movements, Anna has her fair share of strong physical actions. She unwaveringly fights off wolves alongside Kristoff. Anna attempts to climb the steep rocks to reach Elsa's ice castle, albeit her feet keep slipping. She has great difficulty in accomplishing this task and is saved from the grueling climb by Olaf, who discovers an icy staircase. She demonstrates her coordination when she hits Marshmallow with a snowball. During the falling action, she angrily punches Hans in the face for almost killing her and her sister, let alone betraying her feelings for him.

While she is beautiful in many of the same "ballerina" ways as her predecessors, it is important to note that Anna is shown as a drooling mess with unruly hair on the morning of the coronation. This scene is a marked deviation from Disney precedents in which princesses almost always look lovely (Wasko 111). Even though it is brief, Disney decided to depict a princess as less than beautiful, like an average person, thus increasing sympathy for her character. Granted this is when Anna has just woken up, when most people do not look their best, but it may open the door to other depictions of positive female characters shown as less than perfect in appearance. Thus, Anna's physicality is complicated. She is both physically similar and dissimilar from Classic Disney princesses, both beautiful and klutzy, graceful and not.

In keeping with her physical clumsiness, Anna is often shown as anxious or awkward in her interactions with other people. For example, when she encounters Hans for the first time she stumbles not just into his horse, but also over her words. She is even nervous when speaking to her sister at the Coronation Ball. When she alternately entreats

and commands Kristoff to help her find Elsa, her arms are awkwardly placed, matching her awkward speech. Given Anna's relative isolation growing up, her fumbling behavior and uncertainty are understandable. However, Anna also has her confident, undaunted moments in the film. When she confronts her sister in the ice castle, and when she confronts Hans near the end of the film, she is direct and eloquent in her manner. She does not trip over her words and has a dignified posture as she sings to Elsa in the castle and later to Hans as she saves the day. Despite her power to have Hans executed, she shows a noble rationality and grace by having him sent back to his brothers instead.

Similarly, her personality also demonstrates both continuity and discontinuity with her predecessors. She is innocent and lacking in experience outside of the castle. Her naïveté is evident in her quick trust of Hans and her rushed engagement. However, despite her youth and inexperience, Anna is quite capable of independent action and of driving the plot through her own desires. She decides to leave Arendelle to search for her sister and no one tells her to stay in the castle like a good little princess. She valiantly helps Kristoff fend off the wolves and throws a snowball at Marshmallow, the giant snow monster, despite Kristoff's protests in both events. In contrast, Cinderella's agency is extremely restricted; what happens to her is a result of circumstances rather than her own actions. After her father dies, Cinderella is at the beck and call of her stepmother and stepsisters. In addition, Cinderella is unable to attend the ball without the help of her animal friends and Fairy Godmother. While Anna is good and kind, she is not simple. She proves throughout the film that she is intelligent. Anna uses her complex thinking skills in her steadfast determination to save her sister and the kingdom from perpetual

winter. Anna seeks appropriate tools from the shop that she happens upon. She drives the plot, enlisting the help of Kristoff, Sven, and Olaf in her search for Elsa.

Renaissance Disney

Anna's behavior resembles that of the Renaissance Disney princesses: Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan. Renaissance Disney princesses are more intelligent and independent than Classic Disney princesses, however, their lives are still determined by men (Wasko 116). Renaissance Disney princess story plots are largely dictated by the pursuit of love and marriage to a prince.

In addition to the stylized poise of Classic Disney princesses, Renaissance Disney heroines incorporate teasing, burlesque style body movements (Bell 114). For instance, in *The Little Mermaid* during the "Under the Sea" song sequence, Ariel makes sultry moves when several fish swim close by. Although Anna does not move as suggestively as Ariel, she does move with considerable fluidity, despite her tendency to bump into things. During a moment in the song "For the First Time in Forever," her movement is clearly seductive when she leans against the wall covered in a window drape. However, her sexuality is undermined when she whaps herself in the face with the curtain cord. A similar moment follows when she coyly flutters her fan and immediately greedily stuffs chocolate in her mouth.

While the Renaissance Disney princesses are stronger characters than Classic Disney princesses, they still lack in agency. Despite grandiose dreams, they ultimately find happiness in marriage. Although Belle, from *Beauty and the Beast*, initially sings of seeing the world, she abandons that goal to become a princess and wife (Murphy 133;

Henke, Umble, and Smith 246). Similarly, Ariel, from *The Little Mermaid*, initially dreams of exploring the fascinating and relatively unknown human world. However, Ariel's desire quickly becomes focused on her love, Prince Eric, rather than the human world in general (Sells 176). Yet, this is not true for the titular characters of Pocahontas and Mulan; their culturally diverse backgrounds seem to provide them with greater agency, and both save the day. Their films depict cultural issues of female representation within male dominated societies. Both characters are based on real people and historic events, and this may explain their more direct guidance of their stories (Henke, Umble, and Smith 247). Ariel and Belle, despite being less crucial in their own salvations, do at least save their respective princes at least once within their films (Davis 9). That said, the men must fight the ultimate battles: the Beast saves Belle from the wolves, and Eric saves Ariel from Ursula.

On the one hand, men determine the shape of Anna's life in many ways. Her father allows a male rock troll to erase her memory. Hans takes power over Arendelle for much of the film, although he is ultimately thwarted. On the other hand, Anna shapes the lives of men around her. Kristoff mostly defers to Anna. Kristoff tells Anna that he will fend off the wolf pack but Anna pitches in. It is clear that Kristoff has no control over Anna's actions. For example, when he tells her not to upset Marshmallow by throwing a snowball at him, she does it anyway. Kristoff even steps aside at Anna's prompting to allow her to deal with Hans on her own at the end.

Revival Disney

Anna is most akin to Rapunzel, from *Tangled*, in that despite spending much of her time alone, she remains optimistic, friendly, and inherently trusting. Rapunzel is

clumsy, although Anna is much more so. This clumsy image helps the audience relate to Anna more easily than to the unattainably perfect Disney Princess standard. Anna is also similar to Merida in that she ultimately saves the day and is the central driver of her story (Rome 178). Anna's love plot is like Rapunzel's in that both show the men assisting the women towards destinations chosen by the women. Unlike Anna, Rapunzel is engaged by the end of her film and has an additional short film, *Tangled Ever After* (2012) that depicts her marriage. Dissimilar to Rapunzel, Anna is betrayed by her initial love interest. Thus, Anna continues the recent traditions of Revival Disney but takes the movement to another level.

Anna's Story Arc

Frozen's story arc upsets the typical woman vs. woman dynamic of many Disney Princess films. Previous Disney Princess films of all periods rarely show women supporting women. Instead, a woman is in opposition to another woman and/or a woman is almost completely surrounded by men. For example, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty* all have young female protagonists targeted by older woman. In *Mulan*, Mulan spends the majority of the movie with male companions and is not seen as having relationships with women outside her family. This pattern also extends to male-male interactions, meaning the male villains are often seeking power in opposition to other males. In *Aladdin*, Jafar is trying to take power from the Sultan, and in *Mulan*, Shan-Yu is trying to bring down the Emperor. Female same-sex collaboration does not often occur in these films. However, in *Frozen*, instead of fighting over power and beauty, Elsa and Anna contend over what is best for each other and Arendelle. Anna is constantly trying to show support for her sister which her sister consistently rejects on

the basis of trying to protect her. Thus, *Frozen* is a story of two women who, despite their arguments, ultimately work together in support of each other.

Anna Seeks Love

Many of Anna's personal characteristics—including her klutziness and her naïve optimism—are revealed through song. For example, one scene depicts the townspeople being excited about the coronation and seeing the princesses. A man says, "I'll bet they are absolutely lovely" (*Frozen*), referring to the princesses. Humorously, the film cuts to Anna looking very messy as she wakes. This is the lead-in to the song "For the First Time in Forever" which features a montage sequence of a now beautified Anna running and jumping all around the castle with joy, exuberance, and a little klutziness. She is not the perfectly-poised Cinderella, a depiction likely designed to induce kinship with the character and endear her to the audience. This musical number invites the audience to think of their own quirky and klutzy moments, to share in Anna's joy at an opening world, to feel anticipation along with a girl who longs for company. From the lyrics, we hear her tremendous excitement about having guests for the first time that she can really remember. By watching her movements, we also learn she was so bored for years that she actually memorized the poses in each painting within the castle. She sings about "the one," the love interest fantasy shared by most Disney Princesses in their songs. This song establishes who Anna is three years after her parents' death. The song also sets up the audience to expect a love interest, playing up the genre tradition of having a leading "prince charming" to match the "princess charming." Without this priming, the audience might be more skeptical of Hans, who Anna meets at the end of the song when she comes face to face with him right as she sings the lyric: "Nothing is in my way" (*Frozen*). Hans

is physically in her way, playing on the lyric, but this also subtly foreshadows that he will actually be in her way as the plot thickens.

The song “Love is an Open Door” exhibits Anna’s impulsiveness and naïveté, but it simultaneously leads the audience to further trust Hans. This song centers on the compatibility between Anna and Hans. Hans sings, “We finish each other’s...” “Sandwiches,” Anna pipes in. Hans’ eyebrows briefly go up in surprise, but he states “that’s what I was gonna say” (*Frozen*). His blatant willingness to be so agreeable at this point in the film could be read as indicative of their status as soul mates or indicative that Hans has his own agenda. Because of the genre conventions and because audiences are primed from the previous song, “First Time in Forever,” the audience is likely to accept Hans as authentic and a soul mate. With subsequent viewings, however, viewers will note the ways this song foreshadows Hans’ villainy, including a moment when he sneaks up and grabs her from behind. At the end of the song, Hans proposes to Anna. She naively and impulsively agrees to marry a man that she has just met.

Personal Boundaries and Agency

Kristoff is Anna’s second love interest, which is unique for the princess genre.² When Kristoff first appears as an adult, his face is obscured, and he is covered in snow from head to toe. He behaves in a gruff manner that makes him seem intimidating and villainous. However, it quickly becomes clear his behavior is mostly bravado. He is not a prince and has been raised by the rock trolls. His character is down to earth, exemplified by his close connection to his reindeer, Sven. His earthiness is also depicted in the weird

² This has only occurred in one other instance in the Disney world. In the film, *Enchanted* (2007), Giselle has two love interests, but neither are evil in nature.

bodily jokes made about him, like his propensity to pee in the woods—pointed out by a rock troll—and his body odor—which he notes himself in song.

Kristoff is initially presented as unfriendly and verbally confrontational. Though he does not seem to like people, demonstrated most clearly by his song “Reindeer(s) are Better Than People,” he is willing to help Anna. Like Elsa, Kristoff questions Anna’s decision to marry Hans so soon after meeting him. Importantly, Kristoff is portrayed as being respectful of Anna’s physical space. When Anna complains about feeling cold, he makes a move to put his arm around her, thinks better of it, and instead finds a warm steam vent they can stand over. He listens to Anna when she says she can deal with Hans herself. Very significantly, he asks Anna’s permission to kiss her. These actions are in keeping with a respect for bodily autonomy. Hans, the villain, does not observe these behaviors, most noticeably by acting duplicitously when he leans forward to kiss Anna. Anti-Bullying Program Director, James Utt, cites the importance of masculinity transformation over the patriarchal dominated traditions to promote pro-feminism ideology. Kristoff demonstrates the masculinity transformation with his respect for Anna’s agency and is actually a good role model for young boys to emulate.

However, the song “Fixer Upper” actually violates many of these respectful behaviors. The trolls have no regard for honoring engagements, let alone Anna’s or Kristoff’s opinions on a potential relationship between the two of them. This can be seen as the musical number sets up a wedding ceremony for the two without asking consent. Also, the trolls seem to care more about trying to unite the couple than listening to Kristoff’s story about Anna having been hit by ice magic. Although the song functions as comedic relief and a sort of love song between Kristoff and Anna, it may be viewed as

foreshadowing the conclusion of the movie as it speaks to “love” helping those who are “mad or scared or stressed” which is how Elsa is presently feeling (*Frozen*).

Anna Transformed

Anna changes and grows throughout the movie. In many ways Anna’s story arc provides Anna with experiences that mirror Elsa’s, leading Anna toward a better understanding and more empathy for Elsa. At the beginning, while Anna definitely feels lonely and isolated, it does not cause her severe anxiety or depression. Anna grows up similarly to Elsa, however she has more freedom than Elsa to move about the castle. Later, when Anna is betrayed by Hans, she is finally given a taste of what Elsa has felt for years. Anna is physically imprisoned in a room, her hopes crushed, much like Elsa is physically imprisoned in the dungeon. Anna is unable to act because she is slowly freezing to death. Anna must be feeling abandoned by Elsa, who refused to come home with her from the ice castle, unaware that Anna’s heart is unintentionally and slowly freezing. The camera angle emphasizes Anna looking forlorn sitting on the floor, which mimics a scene earlier in the film of a younger Elsa sitting sadly against the door of her room after hearing about their parents’ death. Frost covers the room and wisps of snowflake float in the air; younger Anna sits on the other side of the door looking equally upset. Now, as the action of the climax begins, Olaf unlocks the door with the carrot nose Anna gave him, kindles a fire and bolsters Anna’s hope with the realization of Kristoff’s love for her. When Olaf saves Anna from freezing, it is almost as if Elsa is indirectly saving her since Olaf is an extension of Elsa’s magic, but the carrot nose given by Anna becomes the actual key.

Anna freezing can be best described as a representation of the trauma caused by her family suppressing Elsa's magic. Anna's physical state embodies Elsa's emotional state. Interestingly, when Anna is first hit in the head as a child by Elsa's powers, Grand Pabbie states "that the head can be persuaded" (*Frozen*). This is significant as the head is the seat of human logic and reason. Thus, the head can be persuaded because as long as one is using logic and reason, one is apt to be swayed by a rational and logical argument. Grand Pabbie goes on to warn that "the heart is not so easily changed" (*Frozen*). The heart is symbolic of human emotion. It is much harder to persuade someone on a subject when they have deeply held feelings about political or religious beliefs and values. Only actions and reasoning based on strong and true emotions can change how someone deeply feels. Elsa tries hard to repress her feelings throughout the film, in contrast to Anna who is emotionally open and expressive. For their characters to grow, Elsa needs to learn to let her feelings flow and Anna needs to learn to be reserved. By being cursed with a frozen heart, Anna is able to understand better what it was like for Elsa growing up. Through Anna rescuing her, Elsa realizes she needs to express and share love in order to control her magic. An act of true love is an incredibly persuasive emotional argument to sway Elsa as Anna freezes and closes to the world, Elsa thaws and opens up.

Not only does having her heart frozen give Anna an inkling of what it is like to be Elsa, it also provides the vehicle to a major twist on the classic role of a Disney prince. Every prince, starting with Snow White's Prince Charming all the way through Rapunzel's Eugene Fitzherbert aka Flynn Rider, heroically defeats the story's villain. However, in *Frozen*, the prince does not defeat the villain; the prince is the villain. Hans' turn to evil is sudden and largely unexpected, due to the audience genre expectations and

only subtle foreshadowing. Previous heroes—such as the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*—behave poorly, a plot device that creates conflict. However, the Beast is redeemed by Belle’s love and turns out to be a handsome prince who is generally charming. In previous princess stories, a woman’s love makes a man a good person. Hans, in contrast, has no avenue for redemption, regardless of whether he receives a woman’s love. *Frozen*, unlike *Beauty and the Beast*, suggests that not only does love not always contain redemptive power, but also that love may be untrue or disingenuously offered. False professions of love may be a strategy for manipulation.

In summary, although Anna begins her story as innocent and naïve, she is not pristine and perfect. Her slim, feminine ballerina figure, so similar to all previous princesses, is mitigated by her perpetual clumsiness and the uniquely slovenly glimpse of her waking up. Anna is not weak, passive, submissive, pristine, or incapable of independent action. She is a natural leader who is willing to take risks to reach her desired goal. Her character gains experience primarily through her own initiative. She prioritizes her sister and family issues over her search for a man. She shows character growth by taking her relationship with Kristoff slowly and in her decisive, fair-minded handling of Hans. She shows compassion when Hans is banished instead of sentenced to death. In these complex representations, Anna draws on Classic, Renaissance, and Revival princess traditions while also expanding them into new territories. Indeed, the film provides one of its most interesting plot twists by tapping audience expectations of princess films, in particular the expectation that prince charming will save the day.

Chapter 2: Elsa, The Ice-olated Queen

Villain-like Elsa

While Elsa shares some commonalities with previous Disney Princesses, she also has commonalities with past female Disney villains. Through Elsa, *Frozen* depicts the greatest departure to date from the Classic Disney films. In an interview with Metro Newspaper, co-director and writer, Jennifer Lee stated: “Originally, Elsa was a villain” (Ivan-Zadeh). Her character’s origins stem from the Hans Christian Anderson fairy tale in which the Snow Queen is an embodiment of evil and is not a member of the royal family.

Elsa has powerful magic, a villainous trait established by the Evil Queen in the very first Disney feature, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and propagated throughout the Disney eras by *Cinderella*’s Lady Tremaine, *Sleeping Beauty*’s Maleficent, *The Little Mermaid*’s Ursula, and *Tangled*’s Mother Gothel. Elsa separates her sister from her love interest, Hans, a type of action reflected by several Disney villains. In addition, Elsa curses “the entire society from which [she] is excluded” (Bell 117; Henke, Umble, and Smith 244). However, unlike a villain, Elsa performs these actions without malice. Elsa has the Classic Disney villain privilege of being the only character in a given film to directly address the camera; this type of shot usually ends with a close up of the villain’s eyes as the screen fades to black (Bell 116). However, Elsa’s direct facial shot at the end of “Let It Go” does not fade. In fact, the scene ends showing Elsa’s impressively conjured ice castle rather than her. In this way, Elsa is shown as similar to a traditional Disney villain but not completely visually equated with one. She also does not meet an untimely “literal or social death” as female Disney villains traditionally do for using their power (Henke, Umble, and Smith 244). Thus, though Elsa is somewhat villainously

stylized, she joins the Beast and Flynn Rider (*Rapunzel*) as the character type of a misunderstood protagonist. She is the first woman so portrayed in a Disney Princess movie.

Elsa is similar to a villain in that she hides her true self and her powers, like the Evil Queen who disguises herself to visit Snow White. Elsa exhibits traits that Disney feminist scholar Elizabeth Bell describes as the *femme fatale* characteristics of Disney female villains (115-118). Bell quotes Mary Anna Doane as summarizing a *femme fatale* as never being ““what she seems to be”” and as threatening in a way that is not ““legible, predictable, or manageable”” (115). Bell states that Disney *femme fatales* are “beautiful and shapely” women with “power and authority,” wearing “clinging black dresses,” and “thinking only for themselves” (Bell 115-116). Internalized sexism can occur with *femme fatales* because they are “regularly looked at [and] evaluated on the basis of their appearance” by society (Bearman, Korobov, and Thorne 16). She is subject to the male gaze as *femme fatales* purposely are. The male gaze is when women in film “connote [a] *to-be-looked-at-ness*” which objectifies them and often freezes “the flow of action” (Mulvey 62).

Femme fatales are often, but not always, villains in the wide pantheon of Disney films. One example of a non-villain *femme fatale* is Jessica Rabbit in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*. However, in Disney Princess films, the *femme fatale* character has always been a villain, which scholars have argued indicates internalized sexism. In this model, Steve Bearman, Neill Korobov, and Avril Thorne argue that in the:

omnipresence of media images of women, and through the direct gazes of men, women are immersed in social environments in which they and other women are ... treated as if their bodies and looks represent something essential about their personhood (16).

Disney female villains' "excess of sexuality and agency is drawn as evil" (Bell 117). Thus, a traditional link between sexualized beauty and malice is broken by *Frozen*. Elsa becomes a *femme fatale* villain in appearance, but not intention. When Elsa embraces her magical power during the song "Let It Go," her appearance transforms into the sexualized *femme fatale* style that female Disney villains often sport (Do Rozario 43). Elsa's subdued dress becomes sparkly and sexy, and her light make-up becomes heavier. Elsa subverts Disney's *femme fatale* villain because she embodies many traits of the *femme fatale*, but does not act intentionally evil. Although Elsa's character type of the misunderstood protagonist is not necessarily new, the context in which she is placed is different for the princess film genre. Disney villains are usually very black and white, both in the colors used to draw them and their character depth. In contrast, Elsa is a much more colorful character in inks, personality, and motivations. Elsa is depicted as an extremely sympathetic, engaging, and complex character.

Comparison to Disney Princesses

Elsa stands out from most Disney Princesses in part because she has much in common with past Disney villains. She is also one of the only princesses whom we see crowned queen.³ Even Disney Princesses who become implied queens, like Cinderella and Snow White, have to be married to royalty in order to become a queen. Lacking an axis of power themselves, previous Disney Princesses entice a prince to marry them to gain full royal authority.

³ The only other princess that has a similar story is Kida from *Atlantis: The Lost Empire*.

Classic Disney

Elsa is not as naïve as most Disney Princesses, especially those of the Classic era. While she does live a sequestered life much like Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty, she does not share their inherent belief in the goodness of the world (Wasko 117). Instead, Elsa fears her secret being revealed, which leads her to be cold and distant, but polite. Her worst fears are realized when the people learn of her magic and are afraid of her. She reacts to their fear by running away as a means to protect her people from her power. In her behavior, she is a far cry from the warm, sometimes domestic, figures of the Classic Disney princesses (Wasko 117). She and Anna are never once shown cooking, cleaning, or in peasant clothes as both Snow White and Cinderella are depicted.

Elsa is unique among princesses in the way she suffers emotional problems stemming from an inability to control her physical powers. Elsa continues to seclude herself after her parents' death and seems to agree with them that she should stay away from Anna and others. Since Elsa is a child when this decision is made, it is difficult to correlate that the isolation is truly her own choice even in adulthood. She internalizes the fears her parents emphatically express. According to scholars Jill Birnie Henke, Diane Umble, and Nancy J. Smith, Cinderella exhibits clear signs of "external and internalized oppression" in that "she only reacts to those around her" and "does not act" on her own (236). Similarly, Elsa runs away partially in reaction to being called a monster. Unlike Cinderella, Elsa does not remain "the perfect girl" despite her oppression (Henke, Umble, and Smith 236). Instead of secluding Elsa, her parents could have handled the situation in a different manner. After all, Grand Pabbie explicitly warned against fear and called for learning to control the magic. The King and Queen could have sought advice to help Elsa

master her magic so that she could safely play with her sibling and find constructive ways to use her power. Obviously, this would have removed the central conflict of the story so we have to accept it as a plot device and a simple lesson for the audience. In Arendelle, magic is not condemned, but dangerous magic is feared. As young children, Anna and Elsa sneak off to play with her magic, which is presented as fun and enjoyable. There is no indication they have been expressly forbidden to do so. The rock trolls practice magic and Elsa's parents believe them to be beneficent and wise. However, Grand Pabbie expresses grave concerns regarding Elsa's ice magic that are strongly conveyed to her parents. In addition, after Elsa uses her powers in public, everyone appears shocked, if not horrified, by its potential danger. Although clearly present, magic is not shown as a prominent feature of Arendelle society. A lack of understanding influences Elsa's decision to flee the kingdom along with her fear of hurting others. Given Elsa's long separation from others and the internalization of her parent's wishes, Elsa's freedom to use her powers once she leaves Arendelle feels liberating, a sentiment that bursts forth in the song "Let It Go." Classic princesses shift the opposite way in their story arcs, from marginalization or containment to public participation. It is in joining (or leading) society that the Classic princess finds resolution. Of course, Elsa finds social acceptance and inclusion in the end, but her initial self-actualization occurs when she discovers freedom and safety in the private expressions of her power. Also, unlike Classic princesses Elsa does not need a man to bring her back into society.

Renaissance Disney

As noted earlier, Renaissance Disney princesses often move with a burlesque style, which aligns with Elsa's somewhat more sexualized transformation of appearance

(Bell 114). Elsa is also similar to Renaissance princesses in that she has greater agency than Classic princesses. She demonstrates this when she retracts her winter storm and saves Arendelle. However, she does not learn to control her magic without the help of Anna's unconditional love. Not only does Anna save Elsa's life from Hans, but she also inspires her sister's realization that love is the force which can channel her magic in a positive direction. Elsa's experience is similar to *The Little Mermaid's*, Ariel, when she tries to assist Prince Eric who is wrestling her father's trident from Ursula, the evil Sea Witch, but is thwarted. She does help keep Eric afloat but Ursula grows giant-sized and separates them. Ultimately, Eric plays a much bigger role than Ariel in that he is the one who kills Ursula while Ariel helplessly watches. In contrast, Mulan has greater ability to control her situation than Ariel and is not at the mercy of her assailant. Mulan saves herself and her country with her own creative planning and skillful action to destroy her nemesis, Shan-Yu. In some ways, Elsa's depiction is not as progressive as Mulan's, but is advanced beyond Ariel's. In the end, both Elsa and Mulan are strong agents in their own stories and have autonomy in their actions. Yet, Elsa is nearly killed by Hans and does require Anna's assistance. Deviating most directly from almost all princess genre films, neither Anna nor Elsa is saved by a man.

Revival Disney

Elsa's character is in keeping with the Revival line of self-empowered Disney Princesses. Like Tiana, Rapunzel, and Merida, Elsa has strong self-agency throughout *Frozen* (Rome 177). Initially, her parents heavily influence her and she internalizes their instruction to shelter others by remaining apart even after reaching adulthood. Despite Anna and others offering advice, Elsa decides for herself what she deems best. Although

fear triggers her unintentionally dangerous magic, she acts without ill intentions. Her continued isolation deepens the damage her father inadvertently inflicted upon her psyche by instructing her to hide her power and her person.

By running away, Elsa hopes to create a new, authentic self, similar to what Merida does in *Brave* (Rome 178). Merida determinedly fights the constructs of her traditional patriarchy by refusing to marry or to stop being a tomboy (Rome 178). Similarly, Elsa is subject to male power at the start of the film. The King controls her actions in his mistaken reaction to the advice from Grand Pabbie. The facial reactions of the Queen suggest her mother disagrees with her father's actions, but her mother appears subject to the same male domination and does not speak. To say that her father controls Elsa and her mother is not to say that he wishes them ill will. On the contrary, he wishes the best for them but fear is clouding his judgement. The fact remains that the King does not ask the Queen what she thinks would be best for Elsa. It is not implied that the Queen's opinions are even expressed off screen. Although Elsa is initially subject to male power, she does not remain so. Arendelle is prepared to crown her queen without a king, and even immediately accepts Anna's rule when Elsa runs away. Suitors from the other kingdoms are emphasized as guests at her Coronation Ball, but the Classic Disney wedding is not required for Elsa to claim power. This emphasizes that Elsa is not dependent on a man to give her status and power or reinstate her into society. She possesses these traits by her own rights as recognized by all supporting characters; there is no question of her as a leader just because she is female as often seen in our society.

Whereas *Frozen's* central conflict focuses on two sisters, *Brave* focuses on a mother versus daughter conflict. In both movies, the women attempt to reach an

understanding rather than tear each other down. This is important because in previous Disney films when there is conflict between two female characters, they are diametrically opposed. Prime examples include Snow White and the Evil Queen, Maleficent and Aurora, The Wicked Stepmother and Cinderella, all directly at odds with each other. Before Revival Disney, more than one prominent woman rarely appeared in a film. If they did, the plot generally kept the women separate. Feminist media critiques often focus on “how women are ‘spoken for’ or ‘spoken about’” (Gallagher 25). For example, the Bechdel Test evaluates bias in media (Scheiner-Fisher & Russell 222). The test determines if a movie has two named female characters who talk to each other about topics other than men (Bechdel). The percentage of films that pass this test indicates the cultural trending between films in which men dominate narratives, even those purportedly about women, and reveals films that emphasize thoroughly developed female characters. Classic and Renaissance Disney princess films rate low in this test because they depict, at best, basic female friendship, and something to do with a prince is predominantly the crux of the relationship. Beauty and power under a patriarchal system are the defining sources of conflict between the sets of princesses and their female oppressors. However, *Frozen* rates highly on the Bechdel Test, a testimony to progress made.

In another breakthrough, Elsa is shown to suffer from anxiety and depression stemming from her forced isolation. No other princesses show these mental health problems. Even Rapunzel from *Tangled*, who is more cut-off from society than Elsa, has a chipper, outgoing personality. Rapunzel does have her chameleon friend, Pascal, for emotional support, but the only other human she even glimpses for eighteen years is

Mother Gothel. Even though Mother Gothel is manipulative and cares more about Rapunzel's hair than Rapunzel, she does provide Rapunzel with some sense of being cared for. Elsa, especially after her parents' deaths, has no one that she feels is safe for her to come in contact with. She believes she must keep everyone at arm's length, including her only sibling, for fear she will hurt them. This is the only way she knows to express her care and it prevents her from directly experiencing care from others. Growing up, she probably only has brief contact with castle servants and administrators at best. In contrast, in *The Princess and the Frog*, Tiana has friends and family that love her very much and give her a much greater sense of belonging than Elsa initially has. At the beginning of *Brave*, Merida feels emotionally isolated from her mother who invalidates her free spirited nature and her wish to remain single. Merida's mother insists that Merida must marry. Despite her mother, Merida is unafraid to chart her own destiny. Elsa, however, is drawn into an opportunity for self-discovery by her sister's actions rather than creating her own chance to learn.

Elsa and the Depiction of Anxiety and Depression

Childhood Trauma

Scholars point out that Disney films predominantly depict mentally ill characters as violent and unstable, like the villain Jafar from *Aladdin*, or as Belle's isolated and othered father, Maurice, in *Beauty and the Beast* (Lawson & Fouts 312-313; Stuart 102; Stout, Villegas, and Jennings 552). Othering is a term coined to mean what happens to a person or a group of people who are "treated in exclusionary ways" by society because they do not fit the dominant values held in that society (Andersen & Hill Collins 8). This scholarship argues that media depictions of mental illness affects viewers, especially

young viewers, who have little or no experience with people who are actually mentally ill (Lawson & Founts 311; Stuart 102; Stout, Villegas, and Jennings 553). *Frozen* contains verbal references to mental illness. For example, Olaf calls Kristoff “crazy” when Kristoff introduces his troll family, who just look like rocks at first. Kristoff’s sanity is further mocked because his best friend is the reindeer Sven. He even does an answering voice for Sven when he talks to him. Anna and Kristoff are labeled “crazy” for going out in the snowstorm by Oaken, the owner of the trade shop. However, neither Anna nor Kristoff exhibit true mental disorders as described in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*. The Disney characters from any movie that are called crazy, insane, or nutty would not be classified as actually having diagnosable mental disorders found in the *DSM-5*. These characters are often eventually deemed rational in the resolution of their films.

The trauma of isolation stemming from her powers and the erasure of Anna’s memories causes Elsa’s mental illness. As the film starts, Elsa seems to be happy and content in her life. We do not know the origin of Elsa’s ice magic, but do know her parents and sister do not have it. At this point, her gift has not been demonized and she is in control of it. Then, Elsa is frightened by accidentally blasting her sister. Elsa’s parents do not cope well and hide behind fear of Elsa’s ice powers instead of helping her work through it. They decide that controlling her ice magic means suppressing it. Her parents severely invalidate their daughter by not only telling her to hide her talents, but also by dangerously isolating her. Her parents admonish her to remember to “Conceal it ... don’t let it show” (*Frozen*). One of the most heartbreaking moments of the film depicts Elsa telling her parents to stay away from her because she is afraid of hurting them with her

power. Elsa's love and concern for their well-being further isolates her. Elsa believes isolating herself is the best way to protect others from her ice magic.

Elsa follows her parents' wishes by keeping her powers concealed and by isolating herself until the day of her Coronation Ball. Rachel Simmons, Director of the Girl's Leadership Institute and Rhodes Scholar, notes that the good girl goal promoted in princess films of "being absolutely kind and selfless is impossible" (6). Simmons continues that focusing on being a good girl diminishes the ability to cope with stress (6). Thus, the good girl stereotype is not a healthy one to emulate and may lead to depression. Elsa's imperative need for isolation and the resulting withdrawal are classic symptoms of depression (DSM-IV).

Although Elsa's mental illness is readily apparent, it is never explicitly talked about in the film. In a response to a twitter comment, Jennifer Lee, the co-director of *Frozen*, tweeted Elsa's characterization "was intentional to show anxiety and depression." Therefore, it is not a stretch to say she deals with the mental disorders of anxiety and depression, largely brought on by her parents' unintentional emotional abuse. In this case, Elsa's father is the key player as Elsa's mother silently stands by and watches. Her father's role in shaping Elsa's identity is similar to the influence of many previous Disney fathers. After Mulan has failed at the matchmaker's test, her father sagely tells Mulan that the flower that blooms late, is the most beautiful (Rome 179). Thus, Mulan is shaped by her father's advice in a more positive way than Elsa. Yet, Elsa's father remains idealized given his prominence in imagery during "First Time in Forever" as Elsa stands before his coronation portrait as she sings and practices holding the scepter and orb prior to her Coronation Ball. *Frozen's* depiction of mental disorder is

ultimately mixed as Anna does show support for her sister despite Elsa's anxiety and this demonstrates a positive view of mental disorders (Stout, Villegas, and Jennings 553). On the other hand, Elsa is also depicted as isolated, unstable, wild, and dangerous with uncontrolled magic, exemplified when she throws icicles at the ball guests and accidentally freezes a fountain as she flees the palace. The lack of control of her emotions and powers is also seen both times Elsa accidentally harms Anna.

While Elsa's emotional problems are not necessarily a result of the genetic wiring of her brain, Elsa has been under the stress of fear for most of her life. In reality, this would cause her biology to react and create chemical imbalances. Elsa's recovery in reality would take longer because correcting long-standing imbalances takes some time. Thus, Elsa's mental illness is oversimplified compared to the reality of depression and anxiety. Unlike typical recoveries from depression, Elsa recovers exceedingly quickly at the end of the movie when she achieves control of her powers with love. However, with strong support from her family and community, Elsa is not shown to struggle with lingering anxiety and fear issues.

Truthfully, mental disorders are often a lifelong struggle though they can be managed. Despite the oversimplification, I believe it is a good message to convey to never give up on an individual just as Anna never gives up on her sister despite the years of isolation between them. However, the reality of never giving up on someone may be taxing especially if your loved one can never, or will never, fully integrate in society. Anna's unconditional acceptance of Elsa helps Elsa feel empowered to take action. However, on a larger scale *Frozen* relates that though it may sometimes be difficult to act or express yourself as you would desire, never give up. *Frozen* also encourages troubled

people to allow those who love you to help. The film's stance on mental disorders may be hazy, but at least its universal message of hope and the power of familial love is clear.

This depiction of mental illness may be socially harmful. Heather Stuart, the Bell Mental Health and Anti-Stigma Research Chair at Queens' College in Canada, studies the negative depictions of mental illness in animated Disney films, showing that they can stigmatize mental illness (100). In other words, these depictions villainized or othered people perceived to be mentally ill, and compared to reality, provide an unrealistic depiction of mental illness.

However, this depiction might also have pro-social effects. Viewers of all ages are provided with an important opportunity to empathize with an emotionally disturbed Elsa. According to feminist media scholar Julie Elman, society believes that stories about sad situations, such as teens with cancer, may increase empathy and social awareness in teen citizens (96). This opportunity for learning is ideal because of the stigma still associated with mental illness, although degrading opinions about depression are recently on the decline (Corrigan xi). Despite the oversimplification of Elsa's issues with anxiety and depression, *Frozen*, at least, creates a depiction that may open up dialogues between friends and family. It may be a starting point for young kids who may see some of their feelings reflected in Elsa, and perhaps give them a feeling of validation that there are other people in the world who feel similarly.

Elsa's Coping Mechanisms

On Coronation Day, whilst Anna runs freely around the castle, Elsa is stuck in a room, alone, as usual. Unlike Anna, who uses big, sometimes flailing gestures, Elsa's shoulders are hunched up and her hands shaking as she stands in the shadow of her

father's portrait repeating the repressive mantra he taught her. This scene shows the lasting impact of her father's influence on Elsa, which most people would deem emotionally abusive. Also, unlike Anna, who sings in excitement of the possibility of seeing other people, Elsa worries and sings in a manner that conveys how relieved she is that people will be coming to the castle for only one day. She looks nervously out from her balcony at the people coming in. This shot depicts Elsa as physically isolated from her people in contrast to Anna who rushes out amongst them once the gate is open. The opening of the gate is another moment where Elsa's anxiety can be seen in her eyes and tense posture as she leaves her room, seeming diminished in comparison to the large doors.

At the coronation, Elsa has to be reminded to take her gloves off. The reason for this is not apparent, but might be assumed to have to do with proper ceremony. As soon as her gloves come off, her hands shake. Frost begins to appear on the scepter and orb she is holding. This moment underlines Elsa's dependence on wearing the gloves for the emotional security that she is in control of her powers. Later at the ball, Elsa appears a little bit more at ease, perhaps because she managed to make it through the ceremony without revealing her powers. She is free to wear her gloves for the rest of the night. Elsa is able to share a warm sister-bonding moment with Anna, and even pulls some sibling hijinks by forcing her sister to dance with the Duke of Weselton. Elsa even agrees that she wishes they could have guests more often, which indicates that she longs for human connections despite her fear of the consequences. Of course, she quickly retracts her statement, and Anna leaves upset. At some level, Elsa must know that companionship would help heal her depression.

When Anna asks Elsa for her blessing in marrying Hans, Elsa sensibly withholds her approval and tells Anna to leave if this makes her unhappy. The statement hints at Elsa's own desire to escape from the power that she possesses. After Elsa's powers are exposed, she is the one who leaves because she is scared and unhappy. Anna is the one who has the love and courage to go after her.

Elsa Transformed

The song at the heart of this film—"Let It Go"—is about transformation, about accepting yourself for who you are and letting your power shine. This is Elsa's new mantra. As she sings, it is one of the rare times after accidentally hurting Anna that we see Elsa smile. Her body finally relaxes. Along with her internal emotional transition, Elsa demonstratively flings off her gloves, cloak, and tiara to express her new-found freedom of self-expression. She lets down her hair and changes her clothes to an off the shoulders dress with a knee-high slit down the front. This not only represents her self-actualization and, perhaps, adulthood, but it also makes her body available to the audience as a sexual object. Disney heroines have a long history of being sexualized (Bell 114). The changes are visual signifiers that she is comfortable with herself now that she is "alone and free" (*Frozen*). Of note is that the dress does not have a particularly low bust line or squeezed cleavage like traditional *femme fatale* attire. The transformations primarily indicate Elsa's newfound inner freedom, but may also express her sexuality because the dress is somewhat revealing and her movements are less uptight. Since no other characters are around, Elsa is clearly doing this for positive self-expression. However, it could be argued that Elsa has become subject to the "male gaze," as the camera focuses on her more revealing form. Because this is a Disney film aimed at an audience of all ages, this

male gaze subjectivity is subtler than in other genres, which often feature objectifying shots focusing on “close-ups of legs” or “face” (Mulvey 62). Instead, we see mostly full body shots that emphasize her large, powerful gestures. Perhaps the most obvious invitation to the male gaze occurs when, with her ice castle raised, Elsa walks out on a balcony and the camera pans up from her legs to her head and steadies as a close-up of Elsa’s face looking directly at the camera. This brings the audience closer to a character that has been held away, making her seem powerful and certainly attractive, but not overtly sexual. Elsa retains this dress combined with a sheer cape for the rest of the movie appearing more grownup, empowered, regal, sexy, and confident.

Love is the Answer

Elsa’s mental illness and issues are metaphorically addressed by the rock trolls in their song “Fixer Upper.” This song subtly foreshadows the film’s resolution and positions the rock trolls as therapists or shaman guiding Anna and Kristoff. By using Kristoff as a foil (and the butt of jokes), the rock trolls are actually teaching Anna to cope with Elsa’s situation. For example, when they sing, “His isolation is confirmation/Of his desperation for healing hugs” they are also referring to Elsa. The lines “People make bad choices if they’re mad/or scared, or stressed” seem to be specifically targeted at Elsa (*Frozen*). The lines recall that Elsa’s sense of peace and freedom is short lived, cut off by Anna informing her that Arendelle is buried in snow. Elsa does not know how to fix the problem and reacts badly, creating a snow monster. The rock trolls sing that the solution to anyone’s problems is to “throw a little love their way/and you’ll bring out their best” (*Frozen*). The rock troll lyrics advocate not giving up on those in need, advice which Anna and Kristoff ultimately follow. Though “Fixer Upper” is something of a comedic

interlude, it also underscores the film's basic message: that familial love can lead to healing, and "raise us up and round us out" (*Frozen*).

To sum up, Elsa is a bridge character between princesses and villains, a quality unique to the Disney Princess genre. With her *femme fatale* aspects, she bridges these different stock characterizations, making her attractive, dangerous, and also powerful. Elsa suffers from mental illness brought on by her uncontrolled powers and her parents' reaction to them. In the end, Elsa's sudden realization that love is the answer is a gross oversimplification of someone with a mental disorder becoming healed. Still, control of her magical powers is positive. *Frozen* makes strides in addressing depression and anxiety. Yet, the film never explicitly states a diagnosis for Elsa's disorder, nor does it adequately depict a realistic recovery from depression and anxiety. Thus, *Frozen* is a good starting point to talk about these issues, but it by no means fairly encompasses the entire issue at hand. The film maybe at least be viewed as a small step for people with anxiety and depression to see they are being recognized in children's films.

Conclusion

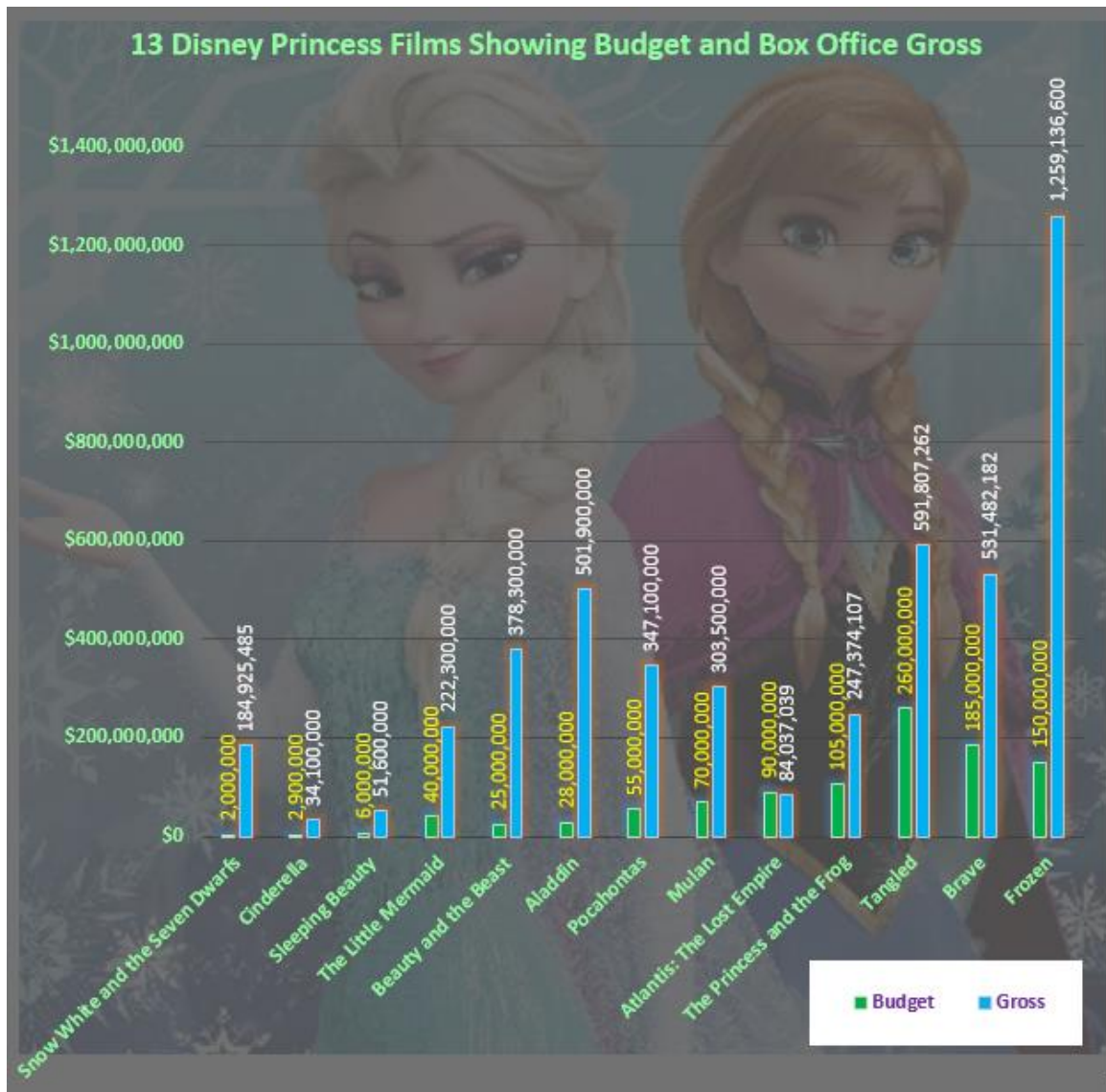


Figure 1 Data Source Internet Movie Data Base (IMDb) Picture Source “Elsa the Snow Queen”

Figure 1 chart shows that *Frozen* is twice as successful at the box office as the next leading Disney Princess film, *Tangled*. *Frozen*'s success surpasses *Brave* and *Tangled* despite a lower budget than both films. The tremendous growth in box office gross within the past seven years indicates the deep interest in Revival Disney films.

Quotes from reviewers:

Disney's *Frozen* debunks outdated tropes like love at first sight and damsels in distress, slyly showing us how not to make a princess movie. (Leon)

Anna is another strong woman role model who is independent, adventurous, and brave. (Jafar)

It features bold female lead characters in princesses Elsa (voiced by Broadway great Idina Menzel) and Anna (Kristen Bell), bombastic music that works on multiple levels and a plot that subverts every Disney convention you've come to know and love. (O'Keeffe)

But is *Frozen* the first feminist Disney movie? Perhaps it's more accurate to call it a step in the right direction of the first feminist princess Disney movie. (Felicelli)

I believe this because *Frozen* may just be the most feminist animated film Disney has ever produced. (White)

Figure 2 Quotes from Reviewers

This thesis has analyzed the film *Frozen* in relation to the Disney Princess film genre. I focused on the main characters, the princesses, their bodies, their relationships to each other and their characters, and the ways they had or did not have agency within the plots. I also illustrated the ways this film capitalized on genre conventions to set up audience expectations. In this conclusion, I discuss why this might matter to viewers or society as a whole. I also discuss whether media reports about the film as a feminist text play out under generic scrutiny. Figure 2 above shows the strong interest reviewers have in *Frozen*, and show reviewers characterizing *Frozen* as feminist.

According to social psychology and media effects scholar, Karen E. Dill, media can have a powerful effect in shaping stereotypes, but can also be used to break stereotypes and create positive messages about minority groups (7). Many people may dismiss these effects as happening to others but not to themselves which is known as the "third person effect" (Dill 10). In fact, viewing film and television representations, especially repeatedly or habitually, can affect how viewers perceive reality. For example,

Dill has shown that mass media has perpetuated a body image that is “an unreachable ideal” (131) and thus, American women have “around a 95%” rate of body dissatisfaction (134). Along these lines, because *Frozen* is so popular, and particularly because it is viewed repeatedly by children, this film has the potential to greatly influence its wide audience in positive, negative, or both directions. Dawn England, Laura Descartes, and Melissa Collier-Meek quote Sheryll Graves:

Thus, children’s media influences a child’s socialization process and the gendered information children view may have a direct effect on their cognitive understanding of gender and their behavior (557).

Because media show images “of [how girls] are supposed to be . . . females experience greater self-image problems” (Dill 180). These feelings can lead to self-esteem problems and even clinically defined eating disorders (Dill 180). Since what they watch and listen to has a strong impact on children’s perception of gender and appropriate behavior, Disney films such as *Frozen* should strive to have positive gender messages.

Anna saves herself, her sister, and all of Arendelle. This makes her unusual in the princess film genre. Showing Anna save the day models an important subject position for young girls, demonstrating that they can be heroes. Dill notes that she grew up with “heroes in media who were primarily boys” (114). Even in depictions of superhero women, the female action characters show “increased aggressive behavior” (Greenwood 730) and can be seen as “tantalizing, if elusive, fantasies” (Greenwood 731). Creating new portrayals of women on the screen can produce values which are more feminist in nature and advance the society towards equality (Delphy 8).

It is possible to argue *Frozen* is a proponent of postfeminism which is characterized by the “assumption that feminism’s work is done” (Maddux 86). Other than

overcoming their father's initial disenfranchisement, Anna and Elsa are not questioned as powerful leaders. Yet, it could be argued that portraying a world with greater equality is important for current feminists to envision in order to affect change. Postfeminism also encompasses the use of "girl power" for economic gains (Harris). Corporations use "girl power" to "gain access to potential consumers" and to sell young women "their politics ... back to them" (Harris). However, *Frozen* merchandising does play into the notions of girl power. Even the strong message of family and friends cooperating is focused on sales to girls through product lines such as the "Sisters Forever" merchandise sold at the Disney Store.

Frozen also focuses on "individual agency" which can be seen as a part of the third wave feminism which believes everyone needs to have agency (Maddux 90). Producing a more collective message about problem solving, *Frozen* is not entirely beholden to the values of postfeminism which can be seen as undermining the importance of "collective action" to create "systemic change" characteristic of third wave feminism (Maddux 86). The film has roots in third wave feminism in that it emphasizes cooperation and support between women and illustrates team effort between genders (Walker).

Some of the evidence presented in this thesis suggests *Frozen* does present empowering messages. In Anna's case, she saves the day with an act of true love. This speaks to the idea that not all saving has to be violent but can be caring. In this, *Frozen* models a type of feminine power that stems not from seeking male approval nor male assistance, and which does not dominate other women or men, but instead grows from collaboration among a variety of people. Dr. Jocelyn Elders, the first African American

and second woman to serve as the U.S. Surgeon General, famously said, “You can’t be what you can’t see” (Dreifus). This film models a progressive, empowering vision of female power, leadership, and interaction for all children and adults who watch it.

In addition, although this film perpetuates a Disney Princess image of women with anatomically impossible bodies, *Frozen* at least complicates this tradition of unrealistic perfection. Anna is shown as awkward, fallible, and imperfect and as a character in transition. This is a tremendous stride because it opens doors for even more realistic representations of princesses. Young girls can be reassured that it is okay to be real and human, and not have to look artificial or behave as if they are perfect. This could help unravel the social pressures historically dominating media aimed at girls and demanding that they work on their bodies to attain perfection (Brumberg 102). The perfect princess characterization has a potentially negative implication for young viewers who could associate “standards of beauty and standards of goodness” (Henke, Umble, and Smith 231). Simmons indicates that the idealized princesses and their perfect behaviors and natures are unrealistic and come at a cost (7). Simmons states that “the Curse of the Good Girl ...diminishes girls’ resilience or ability to cope with stress” (6). Since perfection is impossible to attain, Simmons argues that these films set up self-limiting experiences that encourage girls to avoid healthy risk taking and situations that may result in failure (6), which hinders them from becoming strong leaders and restricts emotional intelligence (16). My hope is that the widespread success of *Frozen* will lead to production of more films depicting women who are supportive of each other using multidimensional characters that empower women.

Anna is also a positive role model because she learns through mistakes and experience. She rises above her mistake of becoming hastily engaged to Hans. This shows a breach from the princess myth characterized by princesses “who are interested only in clothes, jewelry and cadging the handsome prince” (Orenstein) and are “designed to seduce women into marriage and passivity” (Wolf). However, Anna openly defies this tradition by not only finding love with her first suave prince whom she ditches, but also finds the less than perfect man in Kristoff whom she shows no intentions of marrying any time soon. With experience, she learns that true love at first sight is not realistic. In contrast, previous Disney Princess characters exhibit innocence and show little character growth (Murphy 134). Anna models determination and active agency as she pursues her goals of saving Arendelle and her sister. Despite the difficulty of the time spent alone during her childhood, she conveys that the choice to remain positive and hopeful is possible. To her credit, Anna is able to voice her hurt and sadness about growing up estranged from her sister. In this, she demonstrates complexity, not just joyful optimism.

Elsa’s character is also an important role model for young children. In contrast to other Disney Princess films, Elsa breaks the princess myth in having no love interest at all, sending an empowering message that happiness can be found without the need of a love interest. In addition, Elsa has the potential to teach children self-acceptance with the message that it is okay to stand out and be different and demonstrates that positive results may be gained from addressing issues. Although her anxiety and depression is resolved in an overly utopian manner and with unlikely speed, she does provide representation of the emotional trauma that results from repressing feelings and avoiding major life issues. Perhaps it will even help younger children understand older relatives who deal with

anxiety and depression. Elsa also may serve as a hopeful figure for children who deal with anxiety and depression because she is ultimately able to transcend these feelings, finally accepts herself, and is willing to take reasonable risks by practicing her magic in public. For the first time in forever, Elsa feels validated in her identity and not just scared of who she is and what she might do. At the least, her character may serve as a place to begin the discussion of anxiety and depression with children. Whether audiences will take that opportunity, it is hard to say. This film makes that conversation possible in a way other princess films do not.

The lead female characters in *Frozen* are strong decision makers who overcome the trauma of being disempowered at a young age. Although the portrayal of Elsa's recovery from anxiety and depression is unrealistically brief, it may give hope of recovery to those who suffer emotionally. *Frozen* catches the popular imagination and forges innovation in the animated movie world for depicting mental health issues and for depicting strong female leads who support each other and work together to resolve problems. This is refreshing as there is a lack of animated films that show either of these themes.

Whether the *Frozen* brand that Disney has created will affect audience opinions is hard to measure. However, its effect on consumer behavior of audiences is clear. Like the princess genre films before it, *Frozen* has served Disney's corporate interests. Former CEO, Andy Mooney, created the Disney Princess line in 2001 to target advertising to young girls (Orenstein). In 2006, there were over 25,000 Disney Princess products available for sale (Orenstein). Since the inception of the Disney Princess franchise, sales went from \$300 million in 2001 to \$4 billion in 2007 (Brooks). Much of the profits from

Frozen came from merchandise. Even though Elsa has far less screen time than Anna, she has caught the popular imagination based on the merchandising sales for each character (Byron & Ziobro). Elsa was the most popular Halloween costume in 2014 (O'Connor).

Marketers hypersexualize Elsa's and Anna's figures because that is what is believed to sell better. Elsa's gaze even becomes more alluring on merchandise than it ever was in the movie. Both follow the common Disney Princess trope noted by scholar Celeste Lacroix of having "porcelain skin ...tiny waists, small breasts, slender wrists, legs, and arms... and overly large almond shaped eyes" (220). Huffington post writer, Cavan Sieczkowski stresses that Disney Princesses are drawn with insane proportions similar to Barbie when compared to real life women. Artist Loryn Brantz exposes how ridiculous these body distortions are by depicting Elsa with a normal sized waist to prove that she is realistically beautiful this way. Brantz points out that Disney Princesses often have necks that are bigger than their waists. Brantz relates that "media outlets [have] the opportunity to change the way women are viewed and view themselves [and] should start taking responsibility" (Sieczkowski). Overall, Elsa and Anna are positive role models for young children based on their actions, but not on their body proportions.

Frozen's message of personal empowerment and girl power is a part of a shift in brand culture where "commodity activism" works to make the consumer feel self-empowered by purchasing the product (Banet-Weiser 16-17). This type of perceived empowerment focuses on individual, not collective, action and is a way of making consumers feel like they are working toward cultural change with their purchases (Banet-Weiser 18). Clearly, "Let It Go" is an anthem for this type of brand culture by empowering the individual to let go of fears and proceed boldly toward goals and self-

improvement. The movie also sells this kind of message through the character of Anna, who starts out athletic but awkward and unsure of herself and ends up still somewhat awkward physically but much more comfortable in her own skin and certainly speaking more easily and directly. Elsa, as well, embodies the repressed character who comes into her own. Thus, anytime a child wants an Elsa dress or Olaf plushy, marketers may hope parents will feel better about buying it because of the positive self-empowerment message attached to the product.

As this thesis has illustrated, *Frozen* shows progress in the princess movie genre, but the genre does not yet offer an inclusive feminist social model. This film does not offer leading characters or princesses in diverse body shapes and instead relies on the traditional shapes dating back to the Classic Disney princess films. This reliance is likely because of the market imperative discussed by Sarah Banet-Weiser. Empowerment is a relatively new marketing strategy to attract young female audiences and their parents. Selling sex and sexuality, however, is the market-standard. The film also lacks representation of diverse racial groups and sexualities beyond some racial differences in the Coronation guests and an intriguing reference to Oaken's family that does not seem to include a woman, just two men and four children.

The film's immense popularity supports the argument that films with strong female leads and about connections between women are valued. *Frozen* marks a great step towards progressive views of women and men within the Disney Princess genre. This thesis has begun to study these important themes, but further exploration is warranted. More studies about the manner in which *Frozen* specifically compares to the most recent Disney Princess films should be done to gain increased understanding of the

cultural shift. Emphasizing and studying these important changes will augment the continued development of deeper and more meaningful media representations of girls and women. *Frozen* scholarship can help activists document what is happening in our culture. Research needs to be done to determine exactly what influences *Frozen* has had on audiences young and old. I can only hypothesize about potential effects. Experimental media effects research is necessary to see what cultural ripples develop in response to this movie. Given *Frozen*'s vast international impact, it would certainly be beneficial to do these types of studies. Definitively determining if *Frozen* marks a new Disney Princess era will require further study of future Disney films.

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