

New Dreams, Old Endings:
Searching for “A Whole New World” in Disney
Second-Wave Animated Romance Films

by

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Introduction

While watching *The Little Mermaid* at my job as a teaching assistant during the summer of 2008, one of my five-year-old students, Madeleine, proclaimed, “I want to be just like Ariel!” With this project brewing in my mind, and wanting to better understand her desire, I asked her why. She smiled, looked at the screen and then back at me, and responded: “Because then I would be a mermaid and marry Prince Eric and live happily ever after.”

Many sociocultural factors are at play in Madeleine’s dream for her own happily-ever-after. Even as a five-year-old, Madeleine demonstrated her acute understanding of the deeply ingrained hetero- and gender- normative models that exist within society. Using Disney’s Ariel as a model, Madeleine dreamed of becoming a mermaid so that she could marry a prince, become a princess, and live happily-ever-after, fulfilling what she believed to be her ideal life course as a girl. Although exposure to media is likely not the only avenue from which she learned this narrative, Madeleine’s desire to model her life after the animated young woman she saw on the screen demonstrates the importance of media-based influences in a child’s understanding of normative social roles and structures.

A wide range of scholarly discourse deconstructs Disney films to uncover social messages, including those regarding gender, sexuality, race, age, class, and crime (Bell, Haas, and Sells 1995; Budd and Kirsch 2005; Byrne and McQuillan 1999; Do Rozario 2004; Dorfman 1983; Griffin 2000; Herbozo et al. 2004; Rabison 2008; Sammond 2005; Towbin et al. 2003). Still, the Disney industry has managed to overcome this criticism and remain an important part of American childhood. Due in

part to Disney's cyclical re-releasing of its films, as well as its emphasis on marketing apparel and accessories to young children, Disney films and characters remain perpetually new to young generations. The personal and cultural significance of these films is furthermore heightened in the technological age in which one can own copies of the films and watch them repeatedly. Thus despite scholarly criticism, Disney films remain an important part of American culture.

Many scholars theorize that the general public's difficulty in criticizing Disney arises from a culture of innocence that surrounds the Disney Company (Bell, Haas, and Sells 1995; Budd and Kirsch 2005; Dorfman 1983; Giroux 1995). Bell, Haas, and Sells (1995) write of their college students' "pleasurable participation in Disney film and its apolitical agendas" categorizing their students' reluctance to criticize Disney into "four easy pardons" (4). These pardons, "it's only for children, it's only fantasy, it's only a cartoon, and it's just good business" (Bell et al. 4), illustrate the obstacles to understanding fantasy and cartoons as vessels for serious and legitimate socially sustained messages. Unwillingness to critically analyze children's films stems from the adult's difficulty in overcoming subjective perceptions of an object that relates to childhood in order to objectively view the same object as a product of a corporation. Deeming a product "for children" often strips it of its accepted ability to be critically analyzed, an idea elaborated upon by Argentinean playwright and academic Ariel Dorfman (1983). Dorfman argues that the overwhelming influence of constructed fictions for children "has been increasingly recognized, and yet there has also been a tendency to avoid scrutinizing

these mass media products too closely, to avoid asking the sort of hard questions that can yield disquieting answers” (Dorfman ix).

In an attempt to begin asking these “hard questions” of children’s fictions in search for what might be “disquieting answers,” this essay centralizes on the Disney princess and how she represents a changing construction of femininity as reflected through her interactions with heroes and villains. It additionally focuses on how these relationships construct positive and negative portrayals of feminine and masculine identity¹. While the values contained in Disney films are a topic often considered by both average viewer and scholar, the ways in which these films have evolved to reflect changing times and a changing audience is a less common area of discourse deserving of further investigation.

This paper argues that there is a marked difference in the creation of the second-wave—post 1989—versus first-wave²—pre 1960—Disney princess³, reflecting the evolving, feminist depiction of women. The second-wave princess demonstrates dissatisfaction with her life and wishes for something greater than her given place in society. She rejects the concept of arranged marriages, refuses marriage proposals by men considered the most handsome and sought-after in her village, and wants to actively pursue her own future rather than be treated as passive

¹ It is important to note that this paper does not attempt to determine how the messages in these texts are internalized. Rather, it highlights how the values contained and conveyed reflect socially important messages. For further readings that address the effects and internalization of media messages, see Fiske 1987; Gerbner 1969; Gitlin 1982; and Shively 1992.

² The terms “first-wave” and “second-wave” are my own linguistic differentiation between these two eras, which will be discussed further in following sections.

³ A further explanation of this time disparity will be discussed in the background section.

princess whose life choices are dictated by the men who rule her. These desires differ greatly from Disney's first-wave princess, who shows no critical understanding of her social standpoint past a mere acceptance of her given situation.

The second-wave Disney romance develops the concept of the "new world" where the protagonist will no longer need to live bound by the constraints of society. When *The Little Mermaid's* (1989) Ariel, sings of her desire to live on land during "Part of Your World"⁴ she expresses her wish to live as an autonomous young woman rather than as a princess under the constant supervision of her father and overseer. For Belle, from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), the new world is a place far away from her "provincial town" where no one understands her and she is mocked and isolated for her interest in intellect rather than materialism. Both of *Aladdin's* (1992) male and female protagonists search for a new life, and though their dreams are not the same, they still strive for freedom together during their duet "A Whole New World." For princess Jasmine, this is a world where she is not required to marry simply because it is the law; for Aladdin, the world represents a place where he is no longer treated as a "street rat" and where he can afford food rather than needing to steal it. Each of these protagonists, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, and Aladdin, fantasize about an ideal world through song, expressing their dual desire and need for this transformation.

Nonetheless, even with this search for a new world, and despite the differences in the starting places of the first- and second- wave Disney princess, each story ends by solidifying the same heteronormative marriage model. While each

⁴ For all song lyrics referenced, see appendix.

second-wave princess wants something new and something more, this “more” is consistently found through the convention of a heterosexual marriage. This pattern is dangerous, as it both maintains and serves to mask the perpetuation of an antiquated romantic convention through a more modern presentation of the female heroine. By constructing the new princess as unhappy in a patriarchal structure and still granting transgression by using traditional romantic conventions, the classic structure is thus re-ingrained into society. Second-wave Disney animated romances thus create and reflect a contradictory modern feminism that strives for new opportunities, while still searching for resolution through an old social structure.

Background

This paper focuses on the two pivotal eras of the Walt Disney Company that generated its romance genre films. The first is the period run by founder Walt Disney that spans from the 1930s to the 1950s. The second occurs thirty years later from the late 1980s to early 1990s when Disney was run by Michael Eisner and a team commonly identified as “Team Disney” (Do Rozario 2). Reflecting this periodization, the films included in this sample are: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *Aladdin* (1992). These are often colloquially referred to as Disney’s princess films⁵ and are frequently considered the six “signatures and legacy” (Bell 107) of Walt Disney.

⁵ The category of the “princess films” also sometimes includes *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Mulan* (1998). However these films are often left out as they arrived at the tail end of the princess boom and did not receive quite the same level of box office success.

The wide time gap in the creation of these films is note worthy. *Snow White*, the first feature-length animated film ever created, opened to enormous success and is still commonly considered one of Disney's greatest and most successful features of all time. After the success of *Snow White*, Disney continued to produce modernized versions of western romantic folktales under Walt Disney's guidance until his death in 1966. Each of the three earlier films was created under the reign of Walt Disney, who supervised their production from conception to creation. *The Little Mermaid* (1989), the first animated folktale released by Disney in thirty years, marked the beginning of a new era of Disney animated feature-length films under the supervision of Michael Eisner and Team Disney. The enormous success of *The Little Mermaid* led to the almost rapid-fire releases of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*, two romance films targeted at a similar audience. The quick turnout of these three features and their great reception by new generations indicated the new public demand for these films.

Literature Review

The romance genre has long been a central feature of cultural texts targeting female readers and viewers and may provide a useful framework for examining the evolution of Disney romance features. In their seminal works on media studies and the romance genre, Tania Modleski (1982) and Janice A. Radway (1983) both argue that every romance must uphold specific conventions in order for it to be successful. Modleski's work examines three genres of "mass-produced fantasies for women"—the Harlequin Romance, Gothic Novels, and Soap Operas—arguing that there are only a few repeated narratives and storylines that encompass a successful romance.

Modleski avers, “the peculiar result is that the reader who reads the story already knows the story, at least in all its essentials” (Modleski 23).

This relationship between readers and novels is corroborated in Radway’s (1983) ethnographic study of a group of Midwestern women romance novel readers, which serves to further illuminate the contradiction in their views of romantic conventions. She describes how the women she interviews both “claim to value the variety and diversity of romance fiction,” and yet, “these same women exhibit fairly rigid expectations about what is permissible in a romantic tale and express disappointment and outrage when those conventions are violated” (63). Radway’s observation illuminates the inconsistency in the readers’ understanding of her own relationship to the texts she consumes. In this example, Radway’s interviewees believe strongly in the diversity of the romance novel, but still hold the genre to a very specific set of subconscious stipulations.

Radway additionally argues that romance readers “expect and, indeed, rely upon certain events, characters, and progressions to provide the desired experience” (63). She then outlines the criteria for achieving this desired experience: the story must chronicle a female triumph and focus on an intelligent heroine who finds a man capable of loving her as she wants to be loved (54). Additionally, it must relay the feeling of being the object of a courtship, portray an identifiable heroine’s struggle to grapple with men, and develop a romantic love between hero and heroine throughout the story (64-65). Above all, Radway argues that the romance happy ending “is indispensable” (66).

Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario (2004) offers insight into romance as a genre of Disney films. Do Rozario observes the evolution of the Disney princess, commenting on the vast changes in both physical appearance and personality, discussing the newer princess' desire for transgression due to dissatisfaction with society. Do Rozario begins to address the "new world" present in second-wave Disney films, attributing this search of the dissatisfied princess desirous of something more to the juxtaposition of the "'real' world of the hero and the 'unreal' world of the princess" (14), signifying the prince's groundedness in the reality of the film in contrast to the princess' constant dreams for a different life.

Yet Do Rozario offers only minimal insight into why the change from first- to second-wave has occurred. In her view, the change was largely prompted by the shifting age range of the films' target audiences:

Walt's princesses were 'family entertainment,' but those princesses belonged to a previous age, a golden age of American stage and film musical. Ariel is less 'family' entertainment than 'cross-generational.' She appeals to parents and children, but also to teenagers. The director, Ron Clements, notes: 'It became a date movie' (quoted in Wioszczyna, 1997, p. 01D). *The Little Mermaid*, along with films in the late 1970s and '80s like *Grease* (1978) and *Dirty Dancing* (1987), re-invented the musical as teen musical: a self-reflexive, nostalgic, yet remorselessly contemporary offshoot of the genre. (9)

Do Rozario appears to suggest that the films were beginning to appeal, and thus be marketed towards, a wider range of viewers than just small children, who possessed different expectations for a heroine. This is a valuable but limited observation, as she fails to contextualize the Disney genre both within the larger scholarship on romance, and within the framework of more widespread changes in gender relations, thus making it unclear how these films fit into a greater scheme of expectations for the romance genre.

Both romance and Disney scholars acknowledge the essential nature of heterosexuality in the conventional romance narrative (Byrne and McQuillan 1999; Butler 1990; Do Rozario 2004; Modleski 1982; Radway 1984; Rich 1982; Towbin et al. 2003; White 1989). Towbin et al. (2003) conducted a study revealing that marginalized groups in Disney animated features are portrayed negatively, rarely, or not at all. The study focuses on the absence of same-sex relationships or desire in any Disney animated film and argues that, “this omission continues to reinforce the invisibility of homosexuality in society” (40). This point echoes feminist poet and essayist Adrienne Rich (1982) in her criticism of “compulsory heterosexuality” and society’s attempt to erase non-heterosexual identity. Rich’s essay offers a useful structure for analyzing the pedagogical implications of the heterosexualization of the Disney romance. Her work addresses socially constructed heteronormativity, arguing that the absence of voices of society’s “other” serves to marginalize minority groups and reinforce socially dominant and pervasive heterosexism. Rich argues that American society “demands heterosexuality” and behaves as though “lesbians simply do not exist, even as marginal beings” (230). Feminist theorist Judith Butler (1990) similarly asserts the social “heterosexualization of desire” (23) a theory that serves to label both the explicitly and implicitly forced nature of heterosexuality on women (Rich 241). Public neglect of non-heterosexuality abnormalizes these identities, stunting their ability to mobilize into the socially normative sphere. The absence of explicit non-heterosexual desire in Disney thus serves to reinforce this matrix (Butler 23), perpetuating a heteronormative society.

While the importance of heterosexuality in the romance has remained constant over time, other various conventions of this genre begin to shift in modern (post 1980s) romantic fictions. Toward the end of the 1980s romance scholars began to identify the emergence of the “new woman” in modern cultural texts, which they saw as a response to the challenges posed by contemporary feminism. Janice Radway (1984) writes that the new heroine is differentiated from her counterparts by her unusual intelligence and “extraordinarily fiery disposition” (123). Additionally, her “aberrant personality” is “tempered and undercut by her extraordinary beauty,” and “her initial rejection of feminine ways” is essential to the plot of the romance she inhabits (124). This rejection of femininity differentiates the new heroine, or similarly Disney princess, from the original. In her study of blockbuster romance films that emerged in the 1980s⁶ Mimi White (1989) argues that the films all follow a “both/and” logic where “romance and marriage are represented as available and satisfying choices for a female protagonist who is able, nonetheless, to break out of conventional roles and exercise dependence no matter what her initial status seems to be” (White 43). Cynthia Erb (1995) likewise summarizes these contradictory tensions:

On the one hand, the films seek to address an audience increasingly defined by feminist consciousness by offering female protagonists who are active, free-thinking agents of a fantasy/adventure narrative; on the other, the films’ narrative development and resolution still hinge upon the eventual formation of the heterosexual couple. (Erb 51)

⁶ White’s study primarily focuses on, but is not limited to: *Romancing the Stone* (1984), *Jewel of the Nile* (1985), *American Dreamer* (1984), *Thief of Hearts* (1984), and *Desperately Seeking Susan* (1985).

This dilemma of the Hollywood romantic comedies is remarkably similar to the reflected contradiction in the second-wave Disney romance. White argues that films address “an increasingly feminist consciousness” in their audiences and try to address and deconstruct a problematic patriarchal model. Still, “at the same time the films can be seen in terms of post-feminist and neoconservative pressures, as the weight of the narrative development hinges on and concludes in the formation of a traditionally conceived couple” (White 41).

Though the endings of these new stories ultimately serve to reinforce the traditional romantic narrative, scholars still assert that this culmination is a positive one. Do Rozario (2004) writes that in the end of second-wave Disney romances: “[the princess] has effected the resolution and her choice is always honored: there is no return to the former patriarchal structures” (Do Rozario 15). She avers that the princesses transgression is rewarded through the move away from patriarchy and into independence, even though the princess must still submit to a patriarchal structure in the new world. Her idea resonates with White’s assertion that in the new romance, the heroine is rewarded for her desire to achieve something more than her given status:

The new heroine is not forced to submit to conflicting or restrictive choices, nor is she confined by conventional middle-class morality. On the contrary, she is rewarded for seeking something more, and the choice of an exciting male partner is represented as a class/lifestyle image which includes a decisive anti-middle class bias. (White 45)

Radway offers another example of how the new woman differs in modern romance.

She writes that what her interviewees enjoy most about romance reading is

The opportunity to project themselves into the story, to become the heroine, and thus to share her surprise and slowly awakening pleasure at being so

closely watched by someone who finds her valuable and worthy of love.
(Radway 67)

Radway demonstrates how the modern woman—in this case, the readers of romance novels—wants to be able to identify with a female protagonist who is as strong and independent as she is, and observe this character as she achieves an ending desired by both women. This theory of the female audience members' self-projection into romance narratives is essential to understanding how second-wave Disney princesses reflect the desires of the modern woman.

In each of the works cited in this literature review, the romance genre has been almost strictly limited to romance novels, with the exception of Modleski's addition of the soap opera. Only Do Rozario addresses the significance of Disney films in this genre, but her still work appears decontextualized from a greater study of romance. Building off of these theories, this paper questions how the use of romance and film theory can explain or account for the emergence of the "new world" in second-wave Disney animated romance features: how has Disney adopted the concept of the "new woman" and what is to be said about the "new world" for which she searches? This essay ultimately asserts that the Disney romance's structure adheres to a typical romance narrative intended for female viewers. Additionally, it will argue that second-wave Disney animated romance features' subscription to a new world and a new feminist consciousness is not solely a reflection of a change in audience composition, as posited by Do Rozario. Rather, the search for a new world coupled with an adherence to old endings represents a response to a social contradiction in the modern woman, who is only able to transgress beyond what is expected of her through the tired mechanisms of the old social structure. These films

reflect the advances and limitations of a new feminist consciousness in which changing views of women are contradicted by a continued commitment to the heterosexual couple and the choice of a proper mate as key to the determination of women's destiny.

Methodology

This study focuses on films created and distributed solely by the Walt Disney Company due to its iconic status in Western culture and its position as one of the most successful children's film distributors of all time. The films presented in this study were chosen based on their inclusion in the category of Disney Classics; their presence as symbols of American culture in merchandise; consistent re-releases; and the inclusion of the film's heroine in the mass-marketed group of Disney princesses.

The choice to study solely feature-length animated films stems from their consistent marketing towards young children, and the leeway they give to designers in meticulously constructing a visual world for the viewer. The great power of an animated feature lies in the conscious construction of each part of the visual world. Because of the precise detail that comprises each image, nothing appears by accident. Man-generated landscapes create an environment in which only specific people and places can fit, thus producing very calculated images and subsequently, social messages. Additionally, as Rabison (2008) writes,

Because the images are not reliant on pre-existing people already familiar to the general public, their fabricated appearance is able to stand alone as iconography, images that then become cemented into the cultural framework and recognized as characters. (32)

It seemed appropriate that this world, literally constructed by adults for children, be the ground in which to base my analyses.

Using other critical Disney studies (Herbozo et al. 2004; Rabison 2008; Towbin et al. 2003) as a model, I developed a coding scheme to use upon watching the films. Categories initially viewed for were physical appearance, references to beauty, affective behavior, perceptions of love, falling in love, employment/domesticity, marriage, expressions of intellect, sexual behavior, and expressions of sexual desire. Notes from these viewing sessions focused primarily on the lead characters, but also took into account many secondary and background figures. Using these categories as a general framework, I formulated various questions to which the films could respond: How is ideal femininity portrayed? What is the relationship of the heroine to the villain? What kind of sexual desire is portrayed and what is left absent? And finally, how do the characters conceive of the process of falling in love, and how does this event actually occur?

With these questions in mind, my research commenced. However, once I began to view the films as they were released chronologically, the most interesting pattern became how the construction of the princess and her relationship to the villain, hero, and other characters, evolved over time. Consequently, I watched the films a second time considering the changing portrayal of the princess as the most important analytic focal point. Ultimately, my categories for viewing were collapsed into four main sections: activity and passivity in females, perceptions and processes of falling in love, perspectives not represented, and dreams of the new world.

Active Women, Passive Princesses

During the evolution from first- to second-wave, a major change occurs in the princesses' active relationship to society. In the earlier films, the heroines passively accept their lives without questioning or challenging them in any way. These princesses, Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora (the Sleeping Beauty), are content in their present circumstances, despite how grim or lonely they may be. Both Snow White and Cinderella are servants to their stepmothers, who treat the princesses with jealousy and disdain. These young women wear dirty rags and constantly cook or clean for their elegantly dressed family members. Still, neither ever complains about her given circumstances, but instead focuses on hoping for a better future. During the overture to *Cinderella*, a narrator describes the circumstances in which the audience will meet the heroine. After her father passed away,

Cinderella was abused, humiliated, and finally forced to become a servant in her own house. And yet, through it all, Cinderella remained ever gentle and kind. For with each dawn she found new hope that someday her dreams would come true.

Rather than bemoan the present, the first-wave Disney princess uses song as an outlet to express her hope for a bright future. Cinderella sings:

A dream is a wish your heart makes / When you're fast asleep / In dreams you will lose your heartache / Whatever you wish for, you keep / [...] No matter how your heart is grieving / If you keep on believing / The dreams that you wish will come true.

Similarly, in one scene during *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, Snow White entertains the dwarves with a hopeful song for the arrival of her prince:

Someday my prince will come / Someday I'll find my love / And how thrilling that moment will be / When the prince of my dreams comes to me / [...]

Though he's far away I'll find my love someday / Someday when my dreams
come true.

The content of these lyrics demonstrates the passive nature of the early princess. Rather than actively pursuing change, the first-wave princess dreams of a better life, which follows a formulaic path of a man transforming her circumstances for her. This sentiment marks an important distinction between earlier and later princesses: first-wave princesses believe in and dream of a better future, while second-wave princesses activate this change themselves.

The first interaction between prince and princess differs greatly in the first-versus second-wave Disney film. In *Snow White*, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Cinderella*, love always occurs instantly through the lovers singing or dancing together. In *Sleeping Beauty*, Prince Philip sees Aurora in the forest and, unannounced, enters into her song to waltz with her. A similar scenario occurs in *Snow White* when the prince hears Snow White and joins her song. The lyrics of Snow White's song are particularly noteworthy in this moment, as they reflect the princess' passive existence and her reliance on awaiting her prince: "I am wishing / For the one I love / To find me today." Her song is echoed first by the birds around her and ultimately by the Prince, who startles her by joining in. Both Snow White and Aurora are initially alarmed by the invasive presence of the prince, but eventually are engulfed into the song and dance. Similarly, at the royal ball in *Cinderella*, the prince asks Cinderella to dance before they are introduced. During their waltz they sing the duet, "So This is Love," though it is not until the clock strikes twelve and Cinderella realizes she must leave that the prince even asks her for her name. In these first-wave films, the

introductory song and dance serves to join the prince and princess without dialogue, illustrating the simplistic nature of their relationship throughout the film.

In first-wave Disney romances, passivity is coupled with the innocent heroine and the only active women depicted in the films are the villains. Disney's early villainesses—Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty*, the Queen in *Snow White*, and Cinderella's stepsisters and stepmother Lady Tremaine in *Cinderella*—differ from their corresponding princesses in two main capacities: they strive to actively intervene in the world of the film and their overt sexualization. The evil stepsisters of *Cinderella* throw themselves at men and actively pursue marrying the prince, as demonstrated in their excessive planning of their outfits for the royal ball, and forceful behavior with the prince's servants when they try to fit the mysterious glass slipper. The stepsisters abrasively insist that the slipper will fit despite its clear size difference, and shove the Prince's servants out of their way in attempt to make the shoe fit themselves. These women are portrayed as selfish, vain, and unladylike, and are ultimately unsuccessful at marrying into royalty. Cinderella, on the other hand, never actively searches for a royal marriage, and her traditional demure femininity ultimately wins the prince's love. The evil stepsisters are thus punished for their assertiveness and effectively mocked for the ways in which they try to gain the Prince's affection. *Sleeping Beauty's* Maleficent and *Snow White's* Queen are depicted with a mature, dark, and sinister beauty that reflects the classic femme fatale as described by Elizabeth Bell (1995):

[...] living and thinking only for themselves as sexual subjects, not sexual objects; the duplicity derives from the animated perfection that subverts their authority even while fetishizing it—these deadly women are also doomed women. (116)

From Bell's analysis it follows that the sexualization of the female villainess, in opposition to pure and passive princess, is ultimately an element of her downfall.

The construction of these contrasting characters is a common mechanism of the romance genre used to highlight the positivism of the heroine. Janice Radway (1984) labels the protagonist's oppositional character the "foil," and describes how his or her distinct opposition to the hero/heroine is essential to the romance plot:

The significance of the heroine and hero as ideal feminine and masculine types is established by the existence of two abstract foils who embody those features of the female and male personalities that must be eradicated if women and men are to continue to love each other and fulfill one another's needs. (131)

In applying this theory of romance literature to Disney, the construction of the active villainess may be conceived of as Disney's "female foil." By opposing the ideal nature of the heroine, she in turn teaches young female viewers which qualities to avoid and reject when constructing their femininity.

The early villainess exists in only one of the second-wave Disney films, *The Little Mermaid*, which in many ways acts as a transitional film between the first- and second-wave features. The octopus sea witch, Ursula, like her earlier villainess counterparts, is steadfast and hypersexualized, and instigates evil throughout the film. Ursula's physical appearance differs significantly from first-wave beautiful and slender femme fatales, as her figure is exaggeratedly voluptuous, ugly, and overweight. Unlike the earlier villainesses whose clothing covered their entire bodies, Ursula wears a strapless black dress with a low-cut back that emphasizes her enormous breasts and curves. This sexualization, which is already more extreme than in earlier films, is taken further by her outrageous shakes and shimmies as well as

references to the importance of glamour and body language in winning men's affections. Although Ursula is never desired by men while she is an overweight octopus, she succeeds in diverting Eric's romantic affection from Ariel when disguised as a slender, petite, and quiet character on land. The message conveyed in this shift echoes Cinderella and her evil stepsisters, and demonstrates that passive and beautiful women can gain a man's love, while an active, strong and sexual woman is comedic and doomed to failure. Again, Janice Radway's discussion of the female foil can better contextualize Ursula's position in the world of *The Little Mermaid*. Like Ursula, Radway writes that the female foil, is "incapable of caring for anyone other than herself" (131) and contrasts her demeanor to heroine's innocence and sexual purity:

The heroine's sexual innocence, unself-conscious beauty, and desire for love are contrasted in the ideal romance with the female foil's self-interested pursuit of a comfortable social position. Because she views men as little more than tools for her own aggrandizement, the female foil is perfectly willing to manipulate them by flaunting her sexuality. (131)

Radway's analysis of the female foil therefore illuminates opposing demonstrations of sexuality by Disney's heroine and the female villains. In the case of *The Little Mermaid*, this analysis further helps situate the great discrepancy in Ariel and Ursula's sexual expression in the greater context of Disney's construction of ideal feminine identity.

An additional element indicating *The Little Mermaid's* transitional nature is the passive way the protagonist falls in love. Ariel's love for Prince Eric occurs instantaneously, constructing a similar understanding of the process of love as first-wave films. However, although the film adheres to the original passive love

convention, there are significant ways in which it veers from the earlier Disney model. In both *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty*, the prince watches the heroine while she sings and the princess is initially unaware of his presence. It is not an equal exchange of glance; he has fallen in love with her, and she will be pursued. *The Little Mermaid*, on the other hand, provides a reversal of this earlier model. Ariel first witnesses Eric dancing on his boat on one of her illegal journeys to the ocean's surface, and unlike her predecessors' romantic encounters, it is the woman who first falls in love with the man. Ariel then seeks out Prince Eric, saving him from shipwreck, bringing him ashore, and actively changing her fish tail for legs so that she may live on earth and make him fall in love with her.

Following *The Little Mermaid* a clear shift appears both in the princess' active disposition and in her process of falling in love with the prince. Disney's new princesses have become much like the ideal heroine described by Janice Radway (1984), with aberrant personalities and fiery dispositions who initially reject conventional feminine behavior and desires (123-124). *Beauty and the Beast's* Belle is both strong-willed and fearless upon her first interaction with the Beast, agreeing to trade in her life in exchange for the release of her father from the Beast's dungeon. During her first night in his castle, Belle refuses to join the Beast for dinner, despite his threat that she will either eat with him or go hungry. Additionally, earlier in the film Belle insists her disinterest in her town's most handsome man, Gaston, and refuses to marry him because he is "boorish" and "brainless" and she does not love him. Such female independence is also portrayed in *Aladdin* when Princess Jasmine powerfully stands up to her father, the Sultan, for insisting that she marry a prince by

her next birthday. When her father uses the law to justify the necessity of her speedy marriage, Jasmine declares, “the law is wrong,” to which he has no response. This interaction positions Jasmine as a figure whose opinion is as valid as her father’s; as a result, he is unable to stand up to his daughter or force her into a lifestyle she does not want. At the end of the film, the Sultan ultimately changes the law so that Jasmine may marry whomever she chooses rather than forcing her into a lifestyle she detests. Jasmine’s eventual prevail over the law and her father, and Belle’s joint discovery of love and escape from her town, resounds Mimi White’s (1989) description of the new heroine who “is not forced to submit to conflicting or restrictive choices” (45).

In addition to refusing to submit to conventional or restrictive choices, the new princess likewise rejects traditional romantic desires by mocking the classic ideal prince. In the audience’s first introduction to Jasmine, a suitor has just left the palace with a piece of his pants bitten off in the rear. We then see Jasmine petting her pet tiger, Raja, saying, “You were just playing with that overdressed self-absorbed prince Ahmed, weren’t you?” This phrase echoes Belle’s description of Gaston when she remarks, “He asked me to marry him. Can you believe it? Me, the wife of that boorish, brainless...” Each of these descriptions serve to parody the earlier Disney prince, who, in his lack of character development and stimulating dialogue, appears to be the quintessential overdressed, boorish, and brainless prince now loathed by the new, modern women.

The activeness of the new princess can additionally be seen through her physicality and physical actions. Do Rozario (2004) argues that unlike first-wave princesses who are designed with the grace of ballerinas and dancers, the second-

wave women “move with grace, but it is the grace of sportswomen” (8). This new type of grace is conveyed by each of Disney’s second-wave princesses. Ariel performs tricks underwater that resemble synchronized swimming and often brings herself into physical danger by exploring shark-infested sunken ships and bravely swimming into a burning shipwreck to save Prince Eric from drowning, dragging his unconscious body onto shore. Jasmine, while on a tour through her city with Aladdin, pole vaults across the tops of buildings without instruction and with perfect ease. Belle, in search of her father, rides through the forest alone at night on a bareback horse. These are not passive and dainty princesses, but rather young women in search of physical and emotional adventure who exhibit exceptional physical strength and prowess, much unlike the traditional Walt Disney princess. As Disney romance films evolve, the new princess becomes an active woman, fighting against the stereotypes set forth by her early princess counterparts. Not only does she desire a different life, but she actively pursues the achievement of her dreams rather than simply dreaming of or desiring change while passively waiting to be saved. The new princess will do whatever it takes to bring herself to the new world of which she is dreaming.

Perceptions of Love

A significant element of the princesses evolving nature in the Disney romance is her perceptions of how one falls in love. In first-wave romances love strikes the main characters immediately at first sight rather than taking time to develop. This sentiment still remains in the transitional *The Little Mermaid*, when Prince Eric

describes to Grimsby, his overseer, how he believes he will know when he has met the woman he is going to marry, "Believe me Grim, when I find her I'll know without a doubt. It'll just bam—hit me—like lightning." This easiness of love is a common thread to earlier films, illustrated in a scene from *Snow White the Seven Dwarves* when the Dwarves ask Snow White to tell them a story:

Dwarves:	Tell us a story. Yes! Tell us a story. A true story... A love story...
Snow White:	Well, once there was a princess.
Dwarves:	Was the princess you?
Snow White:	And she fell in love.
Dwarves:	Was it hard to do?
Snow White:	It was very easy! Anyone could see that the prince was charming, the only one for me.

When the Prince sees Snow White singing at the well he falls in love with her before they ever speak. Similarly, after *Sleeping Beauty's* Prince Phillip watches Aurora singing in the forest and they dance together, they both describe having fallen in love—Phillip to his father, and Aurora to the fairies with whom she lives. In *Cinderella* during Cinderella and the prince's first dance, they join in the duet, "So This is Love." *The Little Mermaid's* transitional quality can again be seen in Ariel's perception of falling in love with Eric. When King Triton, Ariel's father, scolds her for saving a human's life, her one defense mechanism is to proclaim how she feels: "Daddy, I love him!" In each of these films falling in love is always immediate. The characters experience no process of flirtation or courtship, but rather their initial

attraction is always considered love. This equation of attraction to love perpetuates a naïve understanding of what love is, simplifying its complexities.

The immediacy of falling in love begins to shift in later films: in both *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*, love has become a process rather than a reaction, illuminating another way in which second-wave Disney romances begin to fit the criteria of the new romance. In her description of the stipulations to a successful romance plot, Janice Radway (1984) stresses the importance of the development of love between hero and heroine (65). Belle's insistence on an intellectual match and rejection of a marriage proposal are early clues that *Beauty and the Beast* will not ascribe to the same romantic conventions as its predecessors. Our first introduction to Belle is during her morning stroll through her French town, where she is called strange and odd by all of the townspeople, and is still lusted after by the town's most handsome man, Gaston. Unlike earlier ingénues, Belle is never attracted to this burly male lead, who is signaled as the town's main object of desire by a chorus of three adoring beautiful women. As looks are not the most important factor of romance for Belle, it follows that one theme of this film is finding love that exists beneath the surface. Belle's discovery of her romantic feelings, however, takes time, and Belle and the Beast's love arises remarkably slowly for Disney romances; it is not until the last scene of the film that they mutually recognize and admit their love.

The first time Belle and the Beast's attraction is introduced is midway through the film during their song "Something There." In this duet, they each sing individually about their newfound unexplainable feelings for one another.

Belle: There's something sweet / And almost kind / But he was mean and he was coarse and unrefined / And now he's dear / And so unsure / I wonder why I didn't see it there before.

Beast: She glanced this way / I thought I saw / And when we touched she didn't shudder at my paw / No it can't be / I'll just ignore / But then she's never looked at me that way before.

Belle: New and a bit alarming / Who'd have ever thought that this could be? / True that he's no Prince Charming / But there's something in him that I simply didn't see.

In this song the audience learns that "something new" is beginning to develop in their relationship about which they are both nervous and unsure. Belle's sentiment, "True that he's no prince charming" is telling, as it serves to self-reflexively differentiate her romantic desires from the classic female, whose dream male differs greatly from Belle's. These lyrics demonstrate Belle and the Beast's acknowledgement of their love as a passion that has developed over time. In this way, *Beauty and the Beast* perpetuates a more realistic and healthier understanding of the process of falling in love than earlier Disney romances.

Similar to the portrayal of love in *Beauty and the Beast*, love is conceived as a process in *Aladdin* rather than an immediate event. Although Aladdin falls in love with Jasmine immediately, their mutual love develops throughout the film and reaches its height during a magic carpet ride when they sing of the "Whole New World" that they are discovering together. Conflict arises when Jasmine discovers that Aladdin, who she believes is the Prince Ali, has lied to her about his identity entirely. Despite this betrayal, however, when Aladdin saves Jasmine from a near death during the chaotic climax of the film, his lies are forgiven and the two protagonists end the film in marriage.

Though both *Aladdin* and *Beauty and the Beast* convey a healthier process of falling in love to young children, they each contain certain disturbing sentiments regarding what can be suffered or forgiven for love. In *Aladdin*, Jasmine's forgiveness of Aladdin despite his blatant betrayal of her confidence conveys that forgiving the person one loves is paramount, regardless of any wrong committed; in *Beauty and the Beast* the Beast's physical, verbal and emotional abuse of Belle is likewise portrayed as a forgivable part of his character. The Beast yells at Belle, shoves her, separates her from her family, and refuses her food unless she will eat with him. He is repeatedly told by his servants and by Belle that he must learn to control his temper, but even when he initially tries to keep his composure, he is utterly incapable of staying calm and in control. Eventually, however, through Belle's love and patience, the Beast transforms from a violent, ill-tempered monster back into the handsome prince that he once was. Tania Modleski's (1982) discussion of emotionally cold and borderline abusive men offers one potential explanation for the Beast's behavior. Modleski writes of the confusion between male sexuality and violence common in the romance narrative, arguing that the male's emotional and physical abuse of the heroine may be his attempt to hide his real and true love. She contends that in romance literature two types of men prevail: those who are truly uncaring, and those who behave abrasively to hide their true feelings:

[...] romantic literature performs a crucial function in assuring us that although some men may actually enjoy inflicting pain on women, there are also 'bullies' whose meanness is nothing more than the overflow of their love or the measure of their resistance to our extraordinary charms. (Modleski 35)

Modleski's analysis sparks questions when considering *Beauty and the Beast* as to how Belle perceives the motive behind the Beast's behavior. Does he actually enjoy

causing her pain, or is his abusive behavior the defense mechanism of a “bully,” serving to mask his true feelings? Although Belle’s persistence with the abusive Beast ultimately yields love, the underlying message of her forgiveness is disturbing.

Susan Jeffords (1995) writes of *Beauty and the Beast*’s overall meaning:

It is the work of other people, especially women, to turn this childish Beast into a loving man. This message is clear: if the Beast has not changed before, it is not his fault, but that of those around him who failed to show him otherwise. (Jeffords 169)

While Jeffords begins to touch on an important observation, there is also a deeper and more disturbing narrative at play within this film: *Beauty and the Beast* teaches children that when met with tolerance and kindness, abusive behavior will eventually melt away. Towbin et al. address this aspect of *Beauty and the Beast*, writing,

Given the prevalence of domestic violence in the United States, this message is alarming. From *Beauty*, children learn that it is acceptable for men to abuse women. They learn that if women tolerate the abuse and continue to love him despite his abuse, she will eventually be able to change him into a loving partner. (Towbin et al 36)

Thus, in continuing to tolerate the Beast’s aggression in hopes that he will change, Disney tells young viewers that despite the abuse a woman may face from a man, if she stays with him and continues to give him affection, she has the power to change him from abusive to loving. She is, in a sense, acting as a parental figure, nurturing and loving him when no one else has. Janice Radway (1984) draws on Nancy Chodorow (1978) to discuss the female’s urge to behave as mother to their romantic partners, arguing that women care for their romantic partners maternally as a way to nurture themselves; their nurturing behavior shows that even as strong women, they, too, still have the desire to be loved and cared for (Radway 84). Belle’s development

of love for the Beast and constant maternal affection generates significantly disconcerting messages regarding love in the new world.

This changing perception of what one must suffer for love proves the lengths to which the second-wave princess will travel to reach her new world. The princess' determination to transgress the rituals and traditions of the world in which she was born makes her blind to different hardships that the new world brings. In the example of *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle's disgust with the prospect of marrying Gaston drives her to the Beast who fulfills Belle's needs for someone new outside of her village, but would falter in comparison to a compassionate, well-mannered man. Belle's ultimate romantic love of the Beast despite his abusive qualities exemplifies how a desire to leave the old world for the new causes her to do so at the expense of a different happiness. Additionally, Belle's reluctance to get married in the beginning of the film is eliminated when she falls in love with the Beast. Her great desire to depart from her provincial town is ultimately achieved through romance and relocation into the Beast's castle despite her dream of a new world and "adventures in the great wide somewhere." Belle's journey serves as an example of the trajectory of the second-wave princess whose drawn out process of courtship and love serves to revoke earlier dreams.

Absent Voices

In each film discussed in this essay, as well as every other Disney animated film to date, the final love story is one of heterosexual romance. Similarly, none of these films contains any verbal expression, or overt references, to non-heterosexual

desire. The absence of deviant sexual voices not only in these films, but also in greater children's media, feeds into the "heterosexualization of desire" (Butler 23). By heterosexualizing desire, "deviant" sexualities, meaning any sexuality or sexual practice that is not heterosexual, become abnormalizing practices that always require explanation and can never be accepted as simply what they are.

It has been argued that although there are no explicitly queer sexualities present in Disney films that there still exist many subversive queer references (Bell 1995; Byrne and McQuillan 1999; Do Rozario 2004; Erb 1995, Griffin 2000). Do Rozario (2004) describes Ursula the sea witch as "the femme fatale turned camp diva" (7) and suggests that her character was based off the drag queen, Divine. Cynthia Erb (1995) argues that there is an enormous gay subtext to the male characters in *Beauty and the Beast*, such as the fetishizing of the male form as representative in Gaston (63), and the possible metaphoric resemblance of the Beast's lair to the closet (67). Other subversive same-sex implications may exist in Ursula's desire to keep Ariel as her slave if her goal is not fulfilled, or the relationship between Gaston and his sidekick, LeFou. Although subversive deviant sexualities may exist in these Disney romances, their significance lies in their mere suggestion rather than assertion. Moreover, these same-sex implications are always associated with the unsympathetic villains, often based on coercion or constraint, and so work all the more to further normalize idealized heterosexuality.

Despite the potential subversive homosexuality within the Disney romance, by eradicating explicit same-sex desire, Disney clearly illustrates its belief that only one type of love leads to happily-ever-after, and any other type is not possible in the new

world. The strict heterosexual romance narrative fulfilled at the end of these films draws yet another connection to the work of Mimi White (1989) who posits that, like Hollywood films of the “new heroine” in the 1980s, these Disney romances “express contradictory tensions, as they emphasize the positivity of the heterosexual romantic couple which is at once an avowedly fictional model and the goal of the filmic fiction” (41).

The absence of overt non-heterosexual relationships or desires in Disney films has three important pedagogical implications and ramifications. First, it perpetuates the idea that homosexual desire does not exist. Second, it suggests that anyone “normal,” worthy of being idealized, or whose story is worth witnessing, indulges solely heterosexual urges. And finally, the focus on heterosexuality proposes that those looking for a happily-ever-after will not find it in a partner of the same sex. By not giving homosexuality a voice, these films perpetuate the belief that these voices do not or should not exist. These absent voices demonstrate that the new world, despite its seeming endless possibilities, does not hold a place for same-sex love or desire.

New Dreams, Old Endings

Of the many differences between Disney’s first- and second-wave princess, the most striking is the modern females’ consistent expression of discontent. Unlike first-wave princesses who never complain about their given circumstances, Ariel, Belle, and Jasmine are perpetually dissatisfied with their current positions in society and desirous of a world greater than the one in which they live. Both Belle and Ariel

sing individually of their unhappiness with their lives and their desire for something else, a key component of which is the shared conception that no one understands them. Belle sings, “and for once it might be grand / to have someone understand / I want so much more than they’ve got planned.” Similarly, Ariel speaks with her friend Flounder throughout the film about her wish that her father would understand her. Each girl shares the feeling of being misunderstood, and worries that she is strange and cannot fit into her prescribed life plan. These moments when the characters admit their feelings of social anxieties and dissatisfactions are moments of profound audience comprehension. In these admissions the viewer understands that the journey of the heroine in these films will be different than in past romances where first-wave heroines expressed no critical understanding of their lives. Ariel’s solo song, “Part of Your World,” is the key moment of *The Little Mermaid* that shares Ariel’s true feelings about her world and her yearning for something greater:

Wouldn’t you think I’m the girl / The girl who has everything?
 Looking around here you’d think / Sure, she’s got everything...
 But who cares / No big deal / I want more...

While Ariel knows she has more than most, she still craves a more fulfilling life.

Similarly, in *Beauty and the Beast*, Belle’s song conveys her own desire for something more. After refusing Gaston’s marriage proposal, she sings:

"Madame Gaston!" / Can't you just see it? / "Madame Gaston!" / His "little wife" / No sir! Not me! / I guarantee it / I want much more than this provincial life / I want adventure in the great wide somewhere / I want it more than I can tell / and for once it might be grand / to have someone understand / I want so much more than they’ve got planned

Belle’s aversion to the idea of becoming Gaston’s “little wife” shows the sustained theme that in second-wave Disney romance, female characters critically view their

social standing and desire transgression from the traditional feminine role prescribed to them.

As both male and female protagonists in *Aladdin* search for greater fulfillment, the film presents interesting comparisons to *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*. In an early scene between Aladdin and Jasmine, the new lovers share overlapping identical sentiments of feeling trapped in their world, incapable of escaping the social position into which they have been born. This desire is further exemplified in their romantic duet “A Whole New World” where they travel together on a magic carpet outside the walls of their Arabian city to see a world full of far more opportunities than they know. Unlike Ariel, who desires to be “Part of Your World,” in reference to the human world of Prince Eric, or Belle who wishes to individually find “more than this provincial life,” Aladdin and Jasmine share an equal longing for an entirely new world which they hope to find collectively—a world where they can be together without the ties of class or family obligation—though they do not know what or where that world will be. Thus, the new world presented in *Aladdin* is not solely a space for female transgression from society as it was in first-wave and transitional films, but also a world of romantic possibility that can be discovered collectively by a couple.

Aladdin is also unique as it is Disney’s only romance film with a male title character who is as integral to the storyline as the princess. The only film of these six classic Disney romances that draws a comparison is *Beauty and the Beast*, as exemplified by the framing of the film with background narration of the Beast’s history, and in the Beast’s redemption found in Belle. But, Aladdin’s journey is

unique from that of the Beast, as he determinatively searches for better life than that into which he has been born much more like the second-wave princess than the male hero. Aladdin, a homeless orphan who lives with his pet monkey, Abu, spends his life stealing to eat and running from the police, who taunt him and threaten to cut off his hands each time he steals. Aladdin dreams of living in the palace where he imagines the world is free of problems or hardships. In his solo “One Jump Ahead (reprise),” Aladdin refers to this world for wish he longs,

“Riff-Raff,” “Street Rat” / I don’t buy that / If only they’d look closer / Would they see a poor boy? No siree / They’d find out / There’s so much more to me

At the end he turns to Abu and says, “Ah, some day things are gonna change. We’re gonna be rich, live in a palace, and never have any problems at all.” His belief in the possibility of a better life illustrates that the desire to break out of convention in second-wave Disney romance is not limited by gender, and can be felt by the male hero as well.

In each feature song of the hero or heroine, the desire for transgression from his and her given place in society is evident. Laura Sells (1995) writes of Ariel’s desire for transgression and access into the human world as an example of upward mobility in *The Little Mermaid*. She argues that “Part of Your World” clearly illustrates a desire for autonomy, mobility, and “the ability to participate in public (human) life” (179). She writes,

[Ariel] is figuratively and literally an upwardly mobile mermaid... The song intones her desire to run, walk, and dance, all synonyms for mobility. While singing, she caresses a book that she cannot read, expressing her longing for knowledge. Her desire for access is characterized by her hunger and fascination with a different world in which she believes she can have autonomy and independence. (179)

Both Belle's and Jasmine's desires, though not as literally intertwined with the idea of moving upward as Ariel's wish to live on land, arises from a similar place of discontent and desire for mobility from their present lives. Thus, as the first-wave princess sang about their dreams for a better future, the songs of the second-wave princess focus on an active transgressive desire that the princess plans to pursue.

Despite the second-wave female's transgressive desire for a new lifestyle and hope to be treated as a capable woman, the end to her story remains remarkably consistent to the classic Disney understanding of happily-ever-after. Regardless of the differences in the journey of the heroine, modern Disney animated romances have upheld the everlasting assumption that happily ever after always ends in love and marriage of the heroine to the hero. In fact, the only characters in these films who do not fall in love and get married are either too young, too old, already married, peripheral, or evil. While the modern heroines are depicted as autonomous but unfulfilled women looking to move forward, their ultimate ending has remained stagnant. Belle and Jasmine's journeys are particularly important in this regard, as they both initially reject marriage and "desired" male partners. While this change could suggest that *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin* are allowing for a transgression from the typical expectation of the woman, by the end of *Beauty and the Beast* the viewer sees that while Belle is excused from wanting the ideal man of her village, she still must marry as the mechanism for escaping her unhappy life and reaching happily-ever-after.

Ultimately, love and marriage, rather than adventure or accomplishment, constitute the resolution to the princess' unhappiness and desire for transgression.

Similar to Belle, Jasmine detests the idea of arranged marriage and wishes for a life that allows her to make her own choices. However, she finally achieves happiness through subscribing to the same paternalistic model from which she wanted to escape by marrying Aladdin. In *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel's greatest wish, a wish for which she is willing to give up her tail, voice, and eternal contact with her family, is to live as a human on the shore. At the end of the film, Eric and Ariel wed and it is this marriage allows Ariel the mobility to transform from a closely guarded young mermaid princess to a married human woman.

At the end of each second-wave film, Ariel, Jasmine, and Belle find happiness from moving from their social position as daughters into the world of wifedom and marriage. These endings echo Mimi White's "both/and" theory of 1980s Hollywood romances addressed to a new feminist consciousness, yet uphold a conservative model that bases itself in the formation of the traditional couple (White 41). By reconstructing the Disney heroine so that she begins at a more modern and enlightened level of understanding than first-wave princesses, Disney has created "active, free-thinking agents" (Erb 51) appealing to an audience defined by a new feminist consciousness. And yet they too all reinforce the tired heterosexual narrative (41).

This balance of the modern Disney heroine who has more agency over her life than the first-wave princess, with her ultimate classical happy ending, can also be illuminated through Todd Gitlin's (1982) analysis of the "Charlie's Angels" television series. Gitlin writes,

The popularity of 'Charlie's Angels,' beginning in 1976 suggests that television producers have learned how to appeal to elements of the new feminism and to its opposition at the same time. The Angels are highly skilled, motivated, working women; they show a certain amount of

initiative... At the same time, plainly the Angels are sex objects for men, as the cults of Farrah Fawcett-Majors and Cheryl Ladd attest. And they are subordinated: they usually rely on Charlie's aid to bail them out of the dangers to which their spunk has exposed them. (252)

He then goes on to quote an anonymous top television executive who said "quite seriously,"

'A series like *Charlie's Angels* performs a very important and valuable public service. Not only does it show women how to look beautiful and lead very exciting lives, but they still have to take their orders from a man.' (252)

Gitlin's analysis of the popularity of "Charlie's Angels" makes a strong comparison to the balance of the old and new woman in Disney romance. Like the Angels, Belle, Ariel, and Jasmine appeal to the modern sympathy of a young female searching for a life different than the one prescribed for her. These princesses seek further adventure and a greater sense of autonomy than traditional first-wave heroines. Belle's appeal to the modern female viewer lies in her differences from the others in her town. The townspeople mock her for being "odd" and "strange" because she reads avidly and rejects idealized femininity. Additionally, Belle rejects Gaston because his unattractive brutishness and disinterest in intellect are more important to her than his good looks. Modern audiences are attracted to Belle as an independent female in the same manner that viewers in the 1970s were attracted to the Angels breaking of stereotypes for women on television. Just as Gitlin describes the Angels' ultimate faithfulness to the classic model of woman submitting to man, the second-wave Disney princess, too, ultimately acquiesce to the traditional roles of love and marriage. Belle, Ariel, and Jasmine's journeys fit into Gitlin's model of the ways in which companies have learned to modernize elements of a typical genre narrative, while still subscribing to the classic morals that underlie them.

Conclusion

Each of these films, first- and second-wave, offers the prospect of the romance to the heroine, regardless of whether she submits to the ideals of the classic femininity or disregards this behavior completely. She can wait for her prince passively, or she can refuse marriage until it is with someone with whom she genuinely falls in love. For all of the princesses, old and new, stubborn and passive, waiting for love or running away from it, romance ultimately results and is always the fundamental mechanism by which she can achieve her dreams. Ariel wishes for a life on land, Jasmine dreams of a world that accepts her modern views, and where she can make her own choices, and Belle hopes for “something more” than her unexciting life. Each princess is an active, autonomous hero, unlike her first-wave counterparts. The second-wave princess desires a world greater and better than what she has, and she consistently reaches this world through marriage.

The unifying search of the new Disney animated hero and heroine for “A Whole New World” is a construction meant to allow these films to appeal to a more modern and perhaps skeptical viewing audience. This repeated desire for “a whole new world,” “so much more than they’ve got planned,” and to be “part of your world,” reflects modern dissatisfactions in a given social system and is an attempt to create protagonist figures to which a modern audience can relate. Disney’s evolution in ways reflects Janice Radway’s description of what the modern woman enjoys about reading romances: the opportunity to project herself into the story and become the heroine (67). However, by creating this new, more relatable protagonist figure, these films create an arena for enormous contradictions in modern romantic and

sexual desire. Whereas in the early films, the desire for the traditionally conceived couple was paramount, second-wave films mask their enduring belief in the importance of this ideal through a falsified new world that is ultimately just a newer version of the place from which they claim to be distancing. These films, like Hollywood blockbusters of the 1980s, can be viewed as “narratives that hold women—and men—in mediated balance between independence and romantic dependence” (White 54), normalizing for young girls the belief that one can be a modern feminist woman, while still instilling in them the desire for a conventional heterosexual romance.

Disney’s repeated use of this model is significant due to its child based audience. The significance of Disney’s adaptation of this framework is that whereas other popular culture media discussed by scholars in this essay such as “Charlie’s Angels” are made for adults, these products are made for and marketed to very young children. Five-year-old Madeleine’s dream to be like Ariel and marry Prince Eric in order to live happily-ever-after is only one example of the social effects produced by this model. Through these films, children—especially young girls—are learning a continuation of the classic romance narrative and the belief that this narrative is still the only road to happiness, even in the new world. By happily-ever-after continually ending in the same manner, the importance and necessity of this model is perpetuated. Children’s films become avenues for re-ingraining classic beliefs disguised as modern narratives, thus sustaining the importance of these classic romantic ideals to young generations. As transgressive and modern as Team Disney may hoped to have been in the creation of their unhappy protagonist princess, her ultimate road to happily-

ever-after shows that the “Whole New World” where everything can be different and better really is not so new at all.

Appendix*Song Lyrics**(in the order of appearance in the essay)***A. "Part of your World," *The Little Mermaid***

Look at this stuff
 Isn't it neat?
 Wouldn't you think my collection's complete?
 Wouldn't you think I'm the girl
 The girl who has everything?
 Look at this trove
 Treasures untold
 How many wonders can one cavern hold?
 Looking around here you'd think
 Sure, she's got everything
 I've got gadgets and gizmos a-plenty
 I've got whozits and whatzits galore
 You want thingamabobs?
 I've got twenty!
 But who cares?
 No big deal
 I want more

I wanna be where the people are
 I wanna see, wanna see them dancin'
 Walking around on those - what do you call 'em?
 Oh - feet!

Flippin' your fins you don't get too far
 Legs are required for jumping, dancing
 Strolling along down a - what's that word again?
 Street

Up where they walk, up where they run
 Up where they stay all day in the sun
 Wanderin' free, wish I could be
 Part of that world

What would I give if I could live out of these waters?
 What would I pay to spend a day warm on the sand?
 Betcha on land they understand
 That they don't reprimand their daughters
 Bright young women sick of swimmin'
 Ready to stand

And ready to know what the people know
Ask 'em my questions and get some answers
What's a fire and why does it - what's the word?
Burn?

When's it my turn?
Wouldn't I love, love to explore that world up above?
Out of the sea
Wish I could be
Part of that world

B. "Belle" (reprise), *Beauty and the Beast*

"Madame Gaston,"
Can't you just see it?
"Madame Gaston,"
His "little wife."
No sir! Not me!
I guarantee it
I want much more than this provincial life

I want adventure in the great wide somewhere
I want it more than I can tell
and for once it might be grand
to have someone understand
I want so much more than they've got planned

C. "A Whole New World," *Aladdin*

I can show you the world
Shining, shimmering, splendid
Tell me, princess, now when did
You last let your heart decide?

I can open your eyes
Take you wonder by wonder
Over, sideways and under
On a magic carpet ride

A whole new world
A new fantastic point of view
No one to tell us no
Or where to go
Or say we're only dreaming

A whole new world
 A dazzling place I never knew
 But when I'm way up here
 It's crystal clear
 That now I'm in a whole new world with you
 Now I'm in a whole new world with you

Unbelievable sights
 Indescribable feeling
 Soaring, tumbling, freewheeling
 Through an endless diamond sky

A whole new world
 Don't you dare close your eyes
 A hundred thousand things to see
 Hold your breath - it gets better
 I'm like a shooting star
 I've come so far
 I can't go back to where I used to be

A whole new world
 Every turn a surprise
 With new horizons to pursue
 Every moment red-letter
 I'll chase them anywhere
 There's time to spare
 Let me share this whole new world with you

A whole new world
 That's where we'll be
 A thrilling chase
 A wondrous place
 For you and me

D. "One Jump Ahead" (reprise), *Aladdin*

"Riff-Raff," "Street Rat"
 I don't buy that
 If only they'd look closer
 Would they see a poor boy? No siree.
 They'd find out
 There's so much more to me

E. "A Dream is a Wish your Heart Makes," *Cinderella*

A dream is a wish your heart makes

When you're fast asleep
 In dreams you will lose your heartache
 Whatever you wish for, you keep

Have faith in your dreams and someday
 Your rainbow will come smiling through
 No matter how your heart is grieving
 If you keep on believing
 The dream that you wish will come true

F. "Some Day my Prince Will Come," *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*

Someday my prince will come
 Someday I'll find my love
 And how thrilling that moment will be
 When the prince of my dreams comes to me
 He'll whisper I love you
 And steal a kiss or two
 Though he's far away I'll find my love someday
 Someday when my dreams come true

Someday I'll find my love
 Someone to call my own
 And I know at the moment we meet
 Or my heart will start skipping the beats
 Someday we'll say and do
 Things we've been longing to
 Though he's far away I'll find my love someday
 Someday when my dreams come true

Someday my prince will come
 Someday we'll meet again
 And away to his castle we'll go
 To be happy forever I know
 Someday when spring is here
 We'll find our love anew

G. "I'm Wishing," *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*

Want to know a secret?
 Promise not to tell?
 We are standing by a wishing well
 Make a wish into the well
 That's all you have to do
 And if you hear it echoing
 Your wish will soon come true

I'm wishing
For the one I love
To find me
Today

I'm hoping
And I'm dreaming of
The nice things
He'll say

H. "So This is Love," *Cinderella*

So this is love
So this is love
So this is what makes life divine
I'm all aglow
And now I know
The key to all heaven is mine

My heart has wings
And I can fly
I'll touch every star in the sky
So this is the miracle that I've been dreaming of
So this is love

I. "Something There," *Beauty and the Beast*

Belle: There's something sweet
And almost kind
But he was mean and he was coarse and unrefined
And now he's dear
And so unsure
I wonder why I didn't see it there before

Beast: She glanced this way
I thought I saw
And when we touched she didn't shudder at my paw
No it can't be
I'll just ignore
But then she's never looked at me that way before

Belle: New and a bit alarming
Who'd have ever thought that this could be?
True that he's no Prince Charming
But there's something in him that I simply didn't see

Servants: Well who'd have thought?
Well bless my soul
Well who'd have known?
Well who indeed
And who'd have guessed they'd come together on their own?
It's so peculiar
We'll wait and see, a few days more, there may be something there that wasn't there
before.

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