



Candidates must complete this page and then give this cover and their final version of the extended essay to their supervisor.

Candidate session number

Candidate name

School number

School name

Examination session (May or November)

MAY

Year

2012

Diploma Programme subject in which this extended essay is registered: FILM

(For an extended essay in the area of languages, state the language and whether it is group 1 or group 2.)

Title of the extended essay: To what extent do Disney Princess films challenge traditional gender roles?

### Candidate's declaration

*This declaration must be signed by the candidate; otherwise a grade may not be issued.*

The extended essay I am submitting is my own work (apart from guidance allowed by the International Baccalaureate).

I have acknowledged each use of the words, graphics or ideas of another person, whether written, oral or visual.

I am aware that the word limit for all extended essays is 4000 words and that examiners are not required to read beyond this limit.

This is the final version of my extended essay.

Candidate's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 9.2.2012

## Supervisor's report and declaration

The supervisor must complete this report, sign the declaration and then give the final version of the extended essay, with this cover attached, to the Diploma Programme coordinator.

Name of supervisor (CAPITAL letters) \_\_\_\_\_

Please comment, as appropriate, on the candidate's performance, the context in which the candidate undertook the research for the extended essay, any difficulties encountered and how these were overcome (see page 13 of the extended essay guide). The concluding interview (viva voce) may provide useful information. These comments can help the examiner award a level for criterion K (holistic judgment). Do not comment on any adverse personal circumstances that may have affected the candidate. If the amount of time spent with the candidate was zero, you must explain this, in particular how it was then possible to authenticate the essay as the candidate's own work. You may attach an additional sheet if there is insufficient space here.

Due to a change of staff at the school, the majority of supervision and guidance of the candidate's work was provided by my predecessor. In the final, pre submission stage, \_\_\_\_\_ ensured that the ideas and arguments presented were done so with clarity and, through our discussion, demonstrated an enthusiasm and very good depth of development in her thinking and understanding of her chosen topic.

This declaration must be signed by the supervisor; otherwise a grade may not be issued.

I have read the final version of the extended essay that will be submitted to the examiner.

To the best of my knowledge, the extended essay is the authentic work of the candidate.

I spent  hours with the candidate discussing the progress of the extended essay.

Supervisor's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 19th Feb 2012



**Assessment form (for examiner use only)**

Candidate session number

**Achievement level**

Criteria	Examiner 1	maximum	Examiner 2	maximum	Examiner 3
A research question	1 ✓	2		2	
B introduction	1 ✓	2		2	
C investigation	2 ✓	4		4	
D knowledge and understanding	2 ✓	4		4	
E reasoned argument	2 ✓	4		4	
F analysis and evaluation	2 ✓	4		4	
G use of subject language	2 ✓	4		4	
H conclusion	1 ✓	2		2	
I formal presentation	3 ✓	4		4	
J abstract	1 ✓	2		2	
K holistic judgment	2 ✓	4		4	
Total out of 36	19 ✓				

Name of examiner 1: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of examiner 2: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of examiner 3: \_\_\_\_\_  
(CAPITAL letters)

Examiner number: \_\_\_\_\_

IB Cardiff use only: B: \_\_\_\_\_ ✓

IB Cardiff use only: A: 104836

Date: 15/5

Extended Essay

Extended Essay  
Session: May 2012

To what extent do Disney Princess films challenge traditional  
gender roles?

Candidate name:

Candidate number:

School:

Word Count: 3,438



## Extended Essay

### Abstract

The purpose of this Extended Essay serves to examine the extent to which Disney Princess films challenge traditional gender roles. Disney is well known for its Princesses, whom are believed to, by their dedicated audiences, rebel against the traditional gender based stereotypes.

In order to explore this in depth I have particularly chosen two films to focus on and investigate the proportions in which Disney has gone to really challenge and question these long-established ideas. The films used are Disney's *Mulan* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. I have also considered a historical point of view by analyzing the events occurring during the time of the making and release of each of the two films. For example, I have discussed the situations concerning gender roles during the time of the Great Depression and the change and advancement in women's rights during the 90s.

Just 2 films  
as a little  
hinting to  
establish the thesis.

After carrying out this deep-rooted investigation I have deduced that the Disney Princess films do not challenge traditional gender roles as much as they are acclaimed to do so. However, I have also concluded that over time these films have evolved to become more challenging of this concept compared to earlier films.

Word Count: 196

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## Introduction

From its release of the "first sound cartoon"<sup>1</sup> in 1928, *Steamboat Willie*, starring Mickey Mouse, Disney's success brought forth a series of cartoons in the proceeding years called the *Silly Symphonies*, which included *Flowers and Trees* (1932) "the first full-color cartoon"<sup>2</sup>, *The Three Little Pigs* (1933) and 'Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' This was just the beginning to its prodigious franchise. "Soon there were Mickey Mouse dolls, dishes, toothbrushes, radios, figurines -- almost everything imaginable bore Mickey's likeness."<sup>3</sup> The Walt Disney Company is now known widely for its various Disneyland parks around the globe and most importantly, the Disney Princesses.

In Western tradition, and many others likewise, the man of the house would always be the breadwinner of the family, whilst the woman stayed back and tended to her home and children. Women were not expected to do much more than find a man who will be able to support them. They Disney is well known for its rebellious Princesses whom go to extreme proportions in order to steer clear of conformity and to escape the indomitable traditions of society. For instance, we see this level of defiance in *The*

<sup>1</sup> "The Walt Disney Company and Affiliated Companies - Company History." *The Walt Disney Company and Affiliated Companies - Corporate Information*. Web. 06 Jan. 2012. [http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete\\_history\\_1.html](http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete_history_1.html)

<sup>2</sup> "The Walt Disney Company and Affiliated Companies - Company History." *The Walt Disney Company and Affiliated Companies - Corporate Information*. Web. 06 Jan. 2012. [http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete\\_history\\_1.html](http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete_history_1.html)

<sup>3</sup> "The Walt Disney Company and Affiliated Companies - Company History." *The Walt Disney Company and Affiliated Companies - Corporate Information*. Web. 06 Jan. 2012. [http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete\\_history\\_2.html](http://corporate.disney.go.com/corporate/complete_history_2.html)

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*Little Mermaid* (1989)<sup>4</sup> when Ariel, the daughter of King Triton and the youngest of the mermaids, disobeys her father and gives up her voice to the sea witch Ursula, in order to become human. Later, audiences observed as Mulan disguised herself as a man, joined the Chinese army and liberated her country. But to what extent do these films really deviate from traditions and stereotypes of gender? In the end, we see that Ariel is really just craving Eric's love, while Mulan is only returning the loyalty she feels her father deserves<sup>5</sup>. These examples suggest that even when Disney attempts to create movies that stray away from stereotypes, a commitment to traditional male and female roles will always surface somehow. Earlier films, especially, such as *Snow White* (1937)<sup>6</sup>, *Cinderella* (1950)<sup>7</sup> and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959)<sup>8</sup>, show limited or no signs of feminism. They simply adhere to tradition; the 'damsel in distress' is sitting and waiting for her 'Prince charming' to come and rescue her.

The Mulan does  
as refer to the  
films.

<sup>4</sup> "The Little Mermaid (1989) - IMDb." *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*. Web. 17 Oct. 2011. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0097757/>>.

<sup>5</sup> "Why Mulan Isn't Feminist « There's More to This than Waves." *There's More to This than Waves*. Web. 05 Nov. 2011. <<http://morethanwaves.wordpress.com/2008/11/01/why-mulan-isnt-feminist/>>.

<sup>6</sup> "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) - IMDb." *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*. Web. 17 Oct. 2011. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0029583/>>.

<sup>7</sup> "Cinderella (1950 Film)." *Wikipedia, the Free Encyclopedia*. Web. 17 Oct. 2011. <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinderella\\_\(1950\\_film\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cinderella_(1950_film))>.

<sup>8</sup> "Sleeping Beauty (1959) - IMDb." *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*. Web. 17 Oct. 2011. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053285/>>.



**Case Study 1: Snow White and The Seven Dwarves**

Snow White was the first of the Disney Princess films, premiering in 1937. In 1929 the American economy crashed, triggering the Great Depression, which lasted for the next decade. This fabricated a significant impact upon the roles of men and women. Their parts played in society were virtually reversed. Women actually received more job opportunities than men did. They worked as teachers, nurses and domestic servants. Women were also employed in the industries producing arms and munitions, pre-World War II. Men struggled to find jobs. They lost their sense of pride and felt emasculated.<sup>9</sup> In a study carried out by sociologists Robert and Helen Lynd of Muncie, Indiana published in 1937, they noticed that: "...while in the homes the women's world remained largely intact and the round of cooking, housecleaning, and mending became if anything more absorbing." Essentially, housewives did not lose their jobs; instead these, to some degree, were enhanced.<sup>10</sup> It was necessary for women to hold their families together in difficult times. This new power handed to women did have an effect on marriage rates. The fact that men could no longer support their families financially meant that women became less dependent on them. This could have been a feasible reason why marriage rates decreased "reaching a low of 7.9 marriages per 1000 population in 1932, down from 10.1 in 1929."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> "Gender Roles during the Great Depression." *The Q&A Wiki*. Web. 25 Nov. 2011. <[http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Gender\\_roles\\_during\\_the\\_great\\_depression](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/Gender_roles_during_the_great_depression)>.

<sup>10</sup> "History Now. The Historians Perspective." *The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History . Home*. Web. 25 Nov. 2011. <[http://www.gilderlehrman.org/historynow/03\\_2009/historian4.php](http://www.gilderlehrman.org/historynow/03_2009/historian4.php)>.

<sup>11</sup> *Novelguide | Free Study Guides, Free Book Summaries, Free Book Notes, & More*. Web. 25 Nov. 2011. <[http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/egd\\_01/egd\\_01\\_00217.html](http://www.novelguide.com/a/discover/egd_01/egd_01_00217.html)>.

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Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs tells the tale of a young girl and her jealous stepmother. The film begins by exposing the wicked Queen's character to the audience. She looks into the magic mirror and asks, "Magic mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?" She finds that it is Snow White whom is the fairest when the mirror replies with "cheeks red as the rose, hair black as ebony, skin white as snow". Her cruelty is immediately unveiled as she orders one of her huntsmen to kill her and "bring back her heart". Here, a woman (the Queen) holds the most power, showing some divergence from tradition where a man would normally hold the dominating role. However, the reason for all of her cruelty is only due to one factor, and that is her jealousy of Snow White's beauty. This shows that, although she is set apart from the typical view of women, the basis of her actions are due to clichéd womanly needs. Viewers are then introduced to Snow White. She is dressed in rags (this was enforced upon her by the jealous Queen who tried to cover up Snow White's beauty) and she is carrying out the stereotypical female role of washing and cleaning. She then begins to sing, "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." She is portrayed as the conventional woman that audiences are familiar with. Her role shows no noteworthy importance; she does not save the world, she simply performs regular domestic chores. Stereotypical gender roles are once again reiterated when Snow White meets the seven male dwarves. As the audience is introduced to them, they are enduring their work in the mines. They are presented as hardworking men, making them the only characters in the film with real jobs. However, when Snow White has an encounter with the Queen's huntsman, gender roles are reversed. We see that he is not as manly and courageous as assumed considering the fact that he let her escape without killing her. At the same time, Snow white is shown to have some independence as she impulsively disappears into the

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woods on her own. These elements, to some degree, challenge the traditional gender roles where a woman would not dare to run off on her own and a man would never let his sentiment get the better of him. With her girlish, innocent features and her captivating beauty, though, it is possible that the Huntsman weakness was due to this and this may therefore show some degree of conformity to stereotypical gender roles.

Snow White is willingly accepted into the home of the seven dwarves: Sneezzy, Sleepy, Doc, Happy, Grumpy, Bashful and Dopey where she takes on a motherly role.

She cooks for them, makes sure they wash up before dinner and gives them kisses before they go off to work. The seven little men become giddy as they receive her innocent, girlish kiss suggesting that her sexuality takes a stand. If an unknown man were to walk into their home it is almost certain that he would not be so readily welcomed as was Snow White. With men feeling so undermined in their role during the 1930s Depression, they needed to feel in control. This is where sexual relations came into play. This was one of the few things that a wife could do for her husband in order to help restore his sense of masculinity. The story of Snow White and the Seven Dwarves includes some undertones regarding this. The Wicked Queen holds all the power in this tale and she is seen as the 'bad guy', perhaps symbolic of men's fears at the time. Snow White "on the other hand, is domestic, naïve, and finally completely helpless."<sup>12</sup> She simply waits for her Prince to come. Still, she is depicted as the heroine. In the end, the Princess's kiss is what managed to save her. "Snow White must be restored to life by a man's kiss, reversing the reality of the Depression years for many men, who were in their own form of sleeping death, from which they could

<sup>12</sup> "Gender Roles and Sexual Relations, Impact of the Great Depression on" 08 Jan 2012.  
Web.http://www.jiffynotes.com/a\_study\_guides/book\_notes/egd\_01/egd\_01\_00217.html

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be brought back to life, however briefly, only by a woman's "kiss"<sup>13</sup> This is something that the men enduring the punishing times of the Great Depression needed to hear. By reversing the roles of men and women in this film, they could feel as though they still held a purpose. This may have been what the story of Snow White signified. It was an escape for them.

This film overall seems to give a very classic outlook on all its characters. There is barely any deviance from traditional gender roles with disregard to the power given to the Queen and compassionate behaviour of the huntsman. At the end of the day, Snow White is just an orthodox girl who can only be rescued by a man.



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<sup>13</sup> "Gender Roles and Sexual Relations, Impact of the Great Depression on" 08 Jan 2012. Web.  
[http://www.jiffynotes.com/a\\_study\\_guides/book\\_notes/egd\\_01/egd\\_01\\_00217.html](http://www.jiffynotes.com/a_study_guides/book_notes/egd_01/egd_01_00217.html)

Case Study 2: Mulan

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The story of *Mulan* (1998)<sup>14</sup> seems to give a more feminist impression on its audiences. When speaking about the film passively, she is known as the Disney girl who went against her father's wishes, deliberately dressed up as a man, joined the Chinese army and eventually saved her country. She is not, like the rest, a Princess.

How is this shown?  
✓ Moreover, her actions certainly do not stem from her desire for a man's love. Instead it is quite the opposite as they arise from her need for self-fulfillment. However, after an in depth analysis of the film, audience's may begin to ask themselves about the extent to which Disney's *Mulan* really challenges traditional gender roles. Was her heroic act just an obligation towards her father?<sup>15</sup>

Funny? Ceren aygü?  
From the first scene we see that *Mulan* is generally different, her laid-back attitude is immediately visible as audiences watch as she speaks with her mouth full while writing down a series of answers on her arm and arriving late for her chance to impress the matchmaker, allowing her to potentially "uphold the family honor."

Through this spoken phrase it is clear that it was a woman's duty to get married in order to preserve their family's honor. In addition to this, *Mulan* is shown riding a horse quite incautiously. This symbolizes her independence and her defiance of tradition, as most women would not be seen riding a horse on their own in that time. All the women in this scene are so caught up in beautifying *Mulan* and making her perfect for a man, singing "with good fortune and a great hairdo, you'll bring honor to us all". Meanwhile, she gets side tracked by a game of chess. This displays her wish

<sup>14</sup> "Mulan (1998) - IMDb." *The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*. Web. 17 Oct. 2011. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120762/>>.

<sup>15</sup> "Why *Mulan* Isn't Feminist « There's More to This than Waves." *There's More to This than Waves*. Web. 05 Nov. 2011. <<http://morethanwaves.wordpress.com/2008/11/01/why-mulan-isnt-feminist/>>.

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to convey her intelligence and to learn more; it subtly portrays her craving to break free of society's constraints and to live in a world where one's gender did not have to control what one could and could not do.

When Mulan finds out that the Huns have invaded China and her father, Fa Zhou, is conscripted for war, she takes a stand and tries to stop him. He is old in age and by doing this Mulan is expressing her care for him, a womanly characteristic. In return, Chi Fu, a member of the Emperor's council, reacts by saying "teach your daughter to hold her tongue in a mans presence." This emphasizes her place in society in that era and how a woman should always keep reserved. This scene clearly abides by tradition, showing that although Mulan herself is quite aberrant from gender archetypes, most of the characters around her are not. Later on that evening, she behaves rather daringly as she slams her tea on the dinner table to get her father's attention. She argues with him in attempt to keep him from going to war. This is not how a young woman would typically and traditionally speak to her father. He confronts her by saying "I know my place, it is time you learned yours." This exhibits the two very clear and distinct gender roles.

As Mulan runs away from home to go train for the war, the ancestors are awoken and begin to argue about her behaviour. They are worried that "traditional values will disintegrate" and she is labeled as a "cross dresser". This represents how strict traditional values and culture are and how Mulan has broken away from them.

During her time in training she is slightly distracted by her commander, Li Shang's, well-built physique, revealing her girly demeanor. Disney managed to include this even in their most feminist character. It shows how her actions still somehow conform to tradition and how even with her utmost focus on finding herself; hindrance by a

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man was still possible. The song 'A Girl Worth Fighting For' portrays the "conflicting messages regarding masculinity and femininity in Mulan."<sup>16</sup> In this song masculinity is defined by strength, demonstrated in the lyrics "My girl will marvel at my strength, adore my battle scars" and "I'll bet the ladies love a man in armor." This also suggests how women are seen as "passive supporters" of men at war, however they are not "active participants" of society.<sup>17</sup> Femininity is elucidated by the lyrics "It all depends on what she cooks like" and "I want her paler than the moon, with eyes that shine like stars." This depicts how femininity is focused on domesticity and aesthetics. When Mulan tries to add "How 'bout a girl who's got a brain, who always speaks her mind?" she is dismissed immediately by the other men with the phrase "Nah!" showing how there is no room for a woman with intellect and that her role as a domestic wife and caring mother is the way it should be.

During an attack by the Huns, an avalanche is triggered causing their Chief Commander to fall off the edge of the cliff. Mulan, disguised as 'Ping', manages to rescue him. This scene completely contradicts stereotypes of genders as here a woman is represented as the strong one. Out of all the men present in the army, Mulan, the woman, is the only one with the strength and courage to save Shang and she is named "the bravest of (them) all". A perspective on gender roles is reversed here. However, they discover that she has been wounded and during her time in recovery, her true identity becomes apparent. Shang uncovers that she is actually a woman and circumstances proceed to go downhill from there. Chi Fu treats her disrespectfully

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<sup>16</sup> "A Girl Worth Fighting For" Analysis." *Gender Stereotypes in Disney Princess Music*. Web. 23 Nov. 2011. <<http://disneyprincess-swap.blogspot.com/2009/11/girl-worth-fighting-for-analysis.html>>.

<sup>17</sup> "A Girl Worth Fighting For" Analysis." *Gender Stereotypes in Disney Princess Music*. Web. 23 Nov. 2011. <<http://disneyprincess-swap.blogspot.com/2009/11/girl-worth-fighting-for-analysis.html>>.

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and it is as if she had never even rescued Shang. Her efforts and bravery are now entirely disregarded just because she is a woman. When she tries to warn the army that the Huns are still around, she is ignored and Mushu reminds her "you're a girl again, remember?" This delineates how now that she is known as a woman again; she does not really have a voice in society anymore.

In 1994, The Violence Against Women Act was passed<sup>18</sup>. This marked a significant change in the lives of women then. Mulan was released in 1998 and therefore the somewhat feminist behaviour illustrated in her character may be due to the transformation of women's right in world at the time of creating the film. Also in 1997, Madeleine Albright was made the first woman U.S. secretary of state<sup>19</sup>. This can also be reflected in the film, as Mulan is eventually accepted for being the first woman to fight in defence of her country and in the end was rewarded for it; she is given a medal and a sword to show the world her accomplishment, and she was to be made a member of the Emperor's council.

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<sup>18</sup> "Decade by Decade: 1990s - Women of the Century - DiscoverySchool.com." *Free Teacher Resources | Discovery Education*. Web. 02 Nov. 2011.  
<<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schooladventures/womenofthecentury/decadebydecade/1990s.html>>.

<sup>19</sup> "Decade by Decade: 1990s - Women of the Century - DiscoverySchool.com." *Free Teacher Resources | Discovery Education*. Web. 02 Nov. 2011.  
<<http://school.discoveryeducation.com/schooladventures/womenofthecentury/decadebydecade/1990s.html>>.

### A comparison of the two films

The feminist perspectives of Snow White and Mulan are altogether very contrasting. Considering the large time gap between when each of the films was made, values and portrayal of women were bound to change. The first comparison that may be drawn between the two is the difference in the songs they sing in the early stages of the films. They each have a song reflecting their inner desires, however, these cravings of theirs are clashing. As mentioned before, Snow White sings about the man of her dreams finding her and sweeping her off of her feet. She does not want much more than this and believes that this will bring her true happiness. This is an old fashioned belief held by women who were dependent on a male figure in their lives, much before World War II. As discussed earlier, during the Depression and the War, women's roles began to transform and they became less reliant on men. They did not think in this traditional way as much. Mulan, on the other hand, sings about finding herself and feeling like she does not belong. Her comfort does not rely upon finding the perfect man or such. The lyrics, "Who is that girl I see, staring straight back at me? Why is my reflection someone I don't know?"<sup>20</sup> indicate more depth in her character as she is trying to understand more about herself and the lyrics, "Can it be I'm not meant to play this part?"<sup>21</sup> show that she is different to most women and she is fine with that and therefore her character is not represented so traditionally as Snow White is. Another comparison that can be made is how in Snow White, she is rescued by the prince, where as in Mulan, she rescues the Chief commander, Shang. This is

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<sup>20</sup> "Mulan - Reflection Lyrics." *Lyrics, Song Lyrics - LyricsMode.com*. Web. 11 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/m/mulan/reflection.html>>.

<sup>21</sup> "Mulan - Reflection Lyrics." *Lyrics, Song Lyrics - LyricsMode.com*. Web. 11 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/m/mulan/reflection.html>>.



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interesting to note as normally it would be the man helping the woman, whereas in Mulan the roles are reversed entirely.

The comparison points have been fleshed out more thoroughly. Too much of the essay is described

**Conclusion**

In terms of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, it is apparent that traditional roles are not quite challenged. Throughout the film, Snow White essentially hopes and waits for her prince to arrive at her door and rescue her. She does not take much action to arrive where she wants to, but instead sings about it in hopeless melodies while she carries out regular domestic chores. She does take a standing role, however, when she is confident enough to run off into the woods on her own. It reflects that her character possesses some independence and has the ability to fend for herself when it is really necessary. This image of her is quickly erased however, as the audience watches her trust in the forest animals and later in the seven dwarfs. This portrays a naïve girl's foolish and gullible behaviour, which is also later illustrated when she takes a bite of the witch's poisoned apple, a quality in which a traditional female character would endow due to the lack of experience and exposure to the outside world. Though her trusting in the dwarfs did not land her in much trouble, she simply wound up working and carrying out the same domestic chores as she was at the beginning. During most of the film, it seems as though the Wicked Queen holds the most power, nevertheless, she ends up being smashed by a boulder at her own cost and Snow White is awoken from her 'eternal sleep'<sup>22</sup> by the prince's kiss. This reveals that in the end, the male character in the film supports the most dominant role and carries the most power.

When analyzing the film Mulan as a whole, it is surprisingly not as feminist as most audiences would believe it to be. It is filled with traditional values and sexist undertones, for example in the behaviour of Chi Fu towards Mulan when she attempts

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<sup>22</sup> *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937); film (USA): Walt Disney Productions

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to stand up for her father, and also in the way her father speaks to her, demanding her to learn her place. The film enforces how a woman's main role in society is to be married off to a good man in order to 'uphold the family honor'<sup>23</sup> and makes it crystal clear of the consequences to be faced if a woman tries to stand up for herself, her family or even her country. However, in contrast to this, Mulan's character herself is what really challenges the classic gender roles. Despite the film being entirely conformist on its own, her character defies this. This is Disney's way of challenging the norm. By placing such a character in such circumstances where the rules of tradition apply so strictly, they are able to portray what is it to be independent and to challenge such a society with the reality and the consequences that follow. She manages to save China and she is rewarded for this, but in the end it seems as though she is really just depicted as the stereotypical woman as viewers find that all she really wants is to return to her family and live a regular life where the affection between Li Shang and her could potentially grow.

It can be deduced from this that the Disney classics do not challenge traditional gender roles as much as they are credited to do so and as much as audiences believe them to, however, over time they surely have developed to become more challenging, as seen in the examples between Snow White and Mulan.

Word Count: 3,438

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<sup>23</sup> *Mulan* (1994); film (USA): Walt Disney Productions



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### Films Viewed:

- Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937); film (USA): Walt Disney Productions
- Mulan* (1994); film (USA): Walt Disney Productions
- The Little Mermaid*. Walt Disney Productions, 1989. Film (USA)
- Sleeping Beauty*. Walt Disney Productions, 1959. Film (USA)
- Cinderella*. Walt Disney Productions, 1950. Film (USA)

Using only 2 films rather limits the discussion.  
Potentially a very fruitful topic but many opportunities  
missed.  
A great deal of description or only limited exploration of  
how memory is constructed essentially.

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