

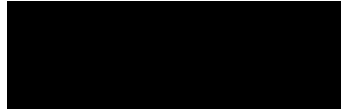
**WHAT IF THERE WAS NEVER ONCE UPON A TIME BUT AN “UNHINGED  
REPRESENTATION OF THE DISABLED WOMANHOOD JOURNEY?**

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### **Abstract**

The Walt Disney Company released its first feature animated film in 1937, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*; little to their surprise, this film initiated the princess phenomenon (Muir, 2023, p. 2). The Disney Princess films portray two representations of females: the naive, young, beautiful princess and the older, cruel, feared by all, independent villain. Using Critical Disability Studies, Feminist and Feminist Disability Studies paradigms will analyze how the ideology of cure is embedded in the Princess and Villain's journey to overcome the curses cast upon them and change the trajectory of their current life. The implications of the representations for the Princess and Villain journey to disabled womanhood and if there has been a progression in the depiction of disability and femineity in the Disney Princess animated films. A mixed method was used to uncover the findings for the qualitative study: reflective thematic analysis and autoethnography.

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### **Organization of the layout of the Major Research Paper**

The Major Research paper begins by contextualizing the background of the Walt Disney Company, the Disney Princess Franchise, and disabled womanhood. It then follows the frameworks applied to analyze the Disney Princess Films. Then, the methodology section deconstructs the methods used to collect and analyze the findings for the Villain and Princess's journey of overcoming body-mind differences. Moreover, the findings section presents a narrative of the overcoming journey of Princess Snow White, Ariel, and Anna, the Villain's Evil Queen, Ursula and Elsa and the progression of the films—as the implications of disabled womanhood. The conclusion summarizes the results and the implications of disabled womanhood.

### **Introduction**

#### **Exploration of Disabled Womanhood**

The body is a gateway to how humans experience the social, cultural, and physical world. The body has often been a topic of political debate, medicalized research, theorization, and entertainment. The ideologies created about the body have seeped into the social and cultural sphere resulting in othering individuals based on their bodily differences. For example, the Eugenics movement was enabled by the theory created by Francis Galton, a white, educated, straight man claiming he knew how to improve the genetic stock of human anomaly and feeble-mindedness (Gillham, 2001, pp. 83 & 87; Sofair, & Kaldjian, 2000, p. 314). The theory was put into practice in the social and political milieu and was reinforced through laws, and methods on how to “rid society” of the unfit, such as the medical practice of sterilization (Sofair, & Kaldjian, 2000, p. 314). In the United States beginning in 1907 laws were enacted to sterilize

women based on their ability to “breed” desirable children (Sofair, & Kaldjian, 2000, p. 13). This exemplifies the body being subjected to inhumane practices based on a theory that was created by an individual who had no lived experience to make these claims. However, through activism, there has been a shift in the political, social, and cultural realm regarding individuals reclaiming autonomy over their bodies. For example, Scotch (2009) claims “In the nineteenth and much of the twentieth century, having a disability came to be seen as a tragically defining characteristic that would and should keep people apart” (p. 17). This claim demonstrates the ideologies that were widespread in society about “othering” disabled people with the premise of not adhering to the status quo. The Disability Rights movement in the 1970s (Scotch, 1989, p. 385), included “Early Self-Advocacy Organizations”, such as the “National Association of the Deaf”, founded “in 1880 in Cincinnati, Ohio”(Scotch, 2009, p. 17). The Disability Rights Movement is an example of disabled people joining forces to reclaim their narrative by advocating equal rights and treatment in the social, political, and cultural spheres (Scotch, 2009, p. 385). Like the Disability Rights movement, there have been other movements within the different waves of feminism of women advocating equality in their everyday lives (Cullen & Fischer, 2014, p. 287). Although there has been a change in the social sphere regarding the representation of disabled people and women, past ideologies are embedded in media narratives, resulting in stereotypes perpetuating ableist and sexist innuendos (Parsons et al., 2017, p. 209). The Walt Disney Company was established before many of the contemporary disability movements occurred.

My aim in this study is to analyze the representation of disability and womanhood in Disney Princess films and determine how they have either hindered or contributed to disabled womanhood. To aid the categorization of films, I will use the method employed by England et al. (2011) in which they analyzed “the earlier movies (1937 and 1959), middle movies and the most

current film” (p. 555). Categorizing the films in this way will assist with contextualizing the trajectory of the representation of disabled womanhood and whether the movements influenced the Walt Disney studio to reframe how their portrayal of disabled and female characters in their animated Princess Films. Moreover, the outside layer of the human body and physical appearance are often overt representations as viewed in the depictions on screen, whereas the mind is covert in the inability to always imply the character’s thoughts explicitly. To assist in theorizing these representations, I will situate my own lived experience as how the Disney Princess animated films influenced my lived experience of disabled womanhood, along with examining the dynamics between the characters and their ideologies towards the Princess and villains. This Major Research Paper will unpack how the antagonists are depicted and how they assist the Princess with fulfilling or hindering the quest.

### **Disney’s “cultural pedagogy”**

The Walt Disney Company has indirectly established their own “cultural pedagogy” encoded behind the illusion of childhood innocence influencing the development of childhood across the social and cultural sphere (Giroux & Pollock, 2009, pp. 18 & 125). Giroux & Pollock (2010) claim that “Disney films combine enchantment and innocence in narrating stories that help children understand who they are, what societies are about, and what it means to construct a world of play and fantasy in an adult environment” (Giroux & Pollock, 2009, pp. 91 & 92). This claim demonstrates the significance of Disney animated films on contemporary child rearing and how Disney’s “cultural pedagogy” acts as an “agent of socialization” of children and how they situate themselves in the social, cultural, and political realm (Holcomb & Latham-Mintus 2022). However, scholars such as Holcomb & Latham-Mintus (2022), Griffin (2010), Robinson (2007), Kiyomi (2000) & Bazzini et al., (2010) argue that Disney uses overt and covert negative

representation of race, age, gender, disability, and sexuality through the portrayal of characters, discourse, and narrative of the animated film. Consequently, Disney’s “cultural pedagogy” is embedded with racist, ageist, ableist and sexist negative ideologies that can promote the normalization of these ideologies to develop children’s outlook on how they view certain groups of people and themselves. For example, Coyne et al., (2016) conducted a study to uncover the influence that “Disney Princess media/products” contribute to the development of early childhood in both male and female children and if stereotypical gender norms are perpetuated in their behaviour, body image, and “prosocial behavior,” (p. 1909). The findings suggest that female children “behavior, body image, and prosocial behavior,” were influenced by the “Disney Princess media/products” more than the male children (p. 1921). The example demonstrates the influence The Disney Princess Franchise has on its young female audience, and shaping their identity which can be translated to pretend play while enacting the gender norms in the animated films (Golden & Jacoby, 2018, p. 309). The Walt Disney Company’s early shorts were embedded with overt racial innuendos, setting the stage for embedded stereotypes. For example, the infamous character Mickey Mouse debuted in the public domain on November 18, 1928, in *Steamboat Willie* at Colony Theater in New York (The Walt Disney Company, 2024). The release of *Steamboat Willie* introduced a cultural staple; however, it influenced a dark side of Disney to produce “caricatured illustrations of Africans and African Americans,” reinforcing racist ideologies in society (Willetts, 2014, p. 10). Sammond (2018) describes how “(...) black bodies were imagined by American popular and legal discourse at the beginning of the last century” (p. 219). As a result, Walt Disney knew how to capture his audience by using overt stereotypes of “blackface” (Sammond, 2018, p. 218; Willetts, 2014, p. 15). However, López-Fuentes & Fernández-Fernández (2024) analyzed three contemporary Disney-Pixar films to

uncover the progression of “inclusive education” shown to young children about “difference, tolerance, race, interculturality, mobility and migration” and noted a positive trajectory of the lessons taught through the animated films (p. 1630). This demonstrates the positive shift in the Walt Disney Company, reframing past ideologies of the representation of characters to an inclusive pedagogy for young children.

### **The Disney Princess Franchise**

The Disney Princess Franchise is one of Walt Disney’s lucrative enterprises, amassing over “\$1.686 bn licensed retail sales in 2018 alone” (Muir, 2023, p. 3 as cited in The Licensing Letter 2019). The Disney Princess franchise was established in 2000 by Andy Mooney, chairman of Disney Consumers; however, the Princess line has been around since 1937, with Snow White as the first Princess of the franchise (Muir, 2023, p. 2). Mooney saw the popularity of little girls dressing up as Princesses, another profitable marketing tactic for selling Disney Princess merchandise (Muir, 2023, p. 3). Once again, Disney diversifying its equity capital to expand their multiverse instead of correcting gender stereotypes and reinforcing the same narrative for future generations. In the film Mickey Mouse Monopoly by Picker & Feng Su’s, (2001) the speaker, Dr. Gail Dines, Women’s Studies, Wheelock College, contextualizes how Disney uses certain ideologies of femininity, perpetuating them by caricaturing the women and encoding the message behind the magic of Disney that is then marketed to children (12:52-13:07). For example, Dr. Elizabeth Hadely, African American Studies, Simmons College provides an example of a Disney Princess animated film and how a scene when Princess Jasmine uses her body to become a seductress distracting Jafar who is after Aladdin, demonstrating to young girls that using your body can assist with getting the things you want in life (Picker & Feng Su’s, 2001, 14:43:15:32). Similarly, Wills (2017) notes that the saturation of North

American/global culture by Disney creates a “(...)‘Mickey Mouse monopoly’ over childhood, limit[ing] imagination and free play [so] that children grow up Disneyfied”(p. 210). The influence of the Disney Princess films of happily-ever-after transfers into the adulthood of women wanting to marry their Prince Charming and create that magical day of being a princess at their wedding (Maier, 2019, p. 188). The Disney Princess phenomenon is a cultural staple in the social realm and has influenced how women and girls view their body-minds to possess princess qualities, mannerisms, and bodily images (Muir, 2023, p. 7).

## **Frameworks**

### **Feminism**

Feminism is a complex paradigm, as there is an array of approaches in contextualizing gender inequality enforced by patriarchy, traditional cultural and societal values, and political systems such as the gender pay gap (Blau & Kahn, 2007, p. 7; hooks, 2000, p. 1; Walby, 1989, p. 213). Tong (2018) gives voice to this complexity by describing the different branches of feminism, including “(...) liberal radical, Marxist/socialist, women-of-color, global, postcolonial, transnational, psychoanalytic, care-focused, ecofeminist, existentialist, poststructural, postmodern, third-wave, and queer” (p. 1). Furthermore, Tong (2018) highlights how each tradition came to fruition through the waves of feminism; for example, liberal feminism emerged “roughly from the mid-nineteenth century through the 1950s” in the “first wave” and focused on “women’s suffrage” (p. 11). There are many approaches to theoretical applying feminism to contextualize representation of disability womanhood in Disney animated films; however, for the scope of this study the aim is focusing on how the body is portrayed and if second and third wave feminism has shifted the way Disney depicts the female characters.

### **The wave metaphor**

The wave metaphor is used to classify the different eras of feminism movements and the political cultural, and societal shift that movements brought for women's liberation (Henry, 2012, p. 102). Henry (2012) describes the ideology of the wave classification derived from second wave feminism, where the women paid homage to first wave feminist who advocated for women's rights (Henry, 2012, p. 102). Moreover, third wave feminism helped “solidified” the metaphor and the distinction of the outcomes and limitations of each wave of feminism (Henry, 2012, p. 102). Henry (2012): claims “Canadian and U.S. feminisms’ dominant model of organizing its history into three discreet eras: the first wave of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the second wave of the 1960s and 70s, and the third wave [early 1990s to the] present era” (Henry, 2012, p. 102). This claim provides a coherent account of the period of when the three different waves of were adopted and shifted to the next wave of feminism occurred. Understanding the period of when each wave occurred is imperative to the study as it will demonstrate the societal climate of when the Disney animated film was released to the public. For example, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* first premiered in 1937 in Los Angeles and then in 1938 to the greater public (IMD, n.d.). Using Henry (2012) theorization of when each feminist wave occurred demonstrates the animated film was released after the first wave and before the second and third wave. Moreover, Muir (2023) conducted a study employing the wave metaphor and feminist media studies to uncover the representation and traits of the Disney Princess and the attitudinal and societal climate based on the date the animated film was released (pp. 15,16 & 17). From their analysis Muir (2023) uncovered that Snow White was portrayed as “domesticated, passive, naive, positively minded, gentle, graceful, helpless victim who desired a

romantic relationship” and characters perceived Snow White as “beautiful, and someone to take care of” and Grumpy was the one who saw her as “wicked” (p. 22). Utilizing Muir (2023) findings of how the Princess was depicted I will apply that to my findings practically with how the Villains were portrayed as sinister, evil, and promiscuous.

### **“Personal is political”**

A prominent political discourse that emerged through second wave feminism was the ‘personal is political’ which was a slogan used by many female activists (Thornham, 2004, p. 142). Hanisch (1969) claim “It is at this point a political action to tell it like it is, to say what I really believe about my life instead of what I’ve always been told to say” (p. 113). This claim is a part of the phrase in the essay by Hanisch (1969) the “personal is political” which is paramount in second wave feminism of shedding light to the inequality of political frameworks and medical treatments such as therapy that are situated in patriarchal systems (p. 113). Thornham (2004) describes “personal is political” was used to deconstruct the narrative that was embedded in society and perpetuated by “consumerism and advertising” which marketed to women there is a particular way to be female and individuals not adhering to those beauty standards are unworthy (p. 142). hooks (2000) provides a contemporary contextualization of “feminist politics” describing feminism is intended for “everyone “as many bodies were excluded from second wave feminism (p. 20). As Harding et al. (2013) suggests the criticism of “second-wave femin[ism]” and focus on the rights of “white, middle-class, heterosexual women” (p. 52). These accounts of the use of “personal is political” is essential the study to analyze the transition of the representation of female characters in the Disney Princess animated films from “the earlier movies (1937 and 1959), middle movies and the most current film” (England et al., 2011, p.

555). The aim is to uncover how through their physical appearance, body language, discourse, interactions with side characters these women were influenced by their male counterpart or if they had autonomy of their bodies and the space they inhabited.

As I will be sustaining my lived experience of how the Disney Princess films influenced how I view my body-/mind and my ideology of love it is essential to be self-reflective. I need to consider my privilege as a white, heterosexual, middle-class woman and how my experience could be redundant. hooks (2000) provide a contemporary analysis of feminism about the female body, the need for self-love, the influence of eating disorders stemming from perpetuated beauty standards, and the need to reclaim the female body (pp. 31, 35 & 36).

### **Feminist Disability Studies**

A preliminary search for scholarly resources based on the progression of overt/covert disability representation of the female characters in the Disney Princess films revealed a lack of sources. The first article found by Sebring & Greenhill (2020) examines the Little Mermaid films using feminist, queer, and crip paradigms to uncover the “cultural narratives of disability” throughout the films (p. 256). Resene (2017) unpacks the encoded disability representation of the character princess/Queen Elsa and how her sister, Princess Anna, provides the viewers with a traditional narrative of the Princess’s journey. Furthermore, England et al. (2011) used content analysis, not a feminist disability study paradigm, to examine nine Disney Princess films and unveil the progression of gender portrayal among female and male characters (pp. 555 & 556). Situating my thematic analysis with a Feminist Disability Studies paradigm will add to the conversation on the representation of females in the Disney Princess line. Thomas (2013) details how disabled women have published their own “personal accounts” using the framework

of “feminist maxim that the personal is political” in hopes of giving “voice to disabled women” (p. 49). Disability scholars situate their analysis in the context of 'personal' and the 'experiential' and use the social model of disability to “identifying disablist social barriers 'out there' in the socio-structural environment” (p. 50). Thomas (2013), describes “Feminists, in contrast, reject forms of thought that posit a 'binary divide', that reproduce a dualism, between 'the personal' and 'the social'” (p. 50). This quote demonstrates the gap that Feminists paradigms reflect regarding the inclusion of disabled women’s lived experience as linear and not fluid of other disabling barriers in the social, political, and cultural realm.

Garland-Thomson (2005) states, “Feminist disability studies helps us understand in more complex ways that the particularities of human variation are imbued with social meanings and that those meanings comprise narratives that justify discriminatory practices that shape the lives of both disabled and nondisabled women” (p. 1582). Concerning my research, this assists in contextualizing and dissecting the Princess journey narrative and the experience of interrelationships between the protagonist female and antagonist female characters and how disability is encoded in the films. Moreover, the theory focuses on re-imagining disability, correlating with the fluidity of how disablement is perpetuated in the social and cultural environment within the film and the year it was released (Garland-Thomson, 2005, p. 1557).

For example, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was released just after the first wave of feminism and the Eugenics period. This was a time of havoc for both disabled people and women trying to gain autonomy from the patriarchy using a combination of both paradigms’ examination of disabled female representation in the Disney animated films (Allen, 1997, p. 83; Tong, 2018, p. 18). Hall (2008) highlights, when using feminist disability studies, the need to centre the conversation on analyzing all forms of oppression and the intersection between the

ideology of “bodily difference” and “normalization” which is represented in the social milieu (pp. 4 & 6). Regarding this research project, many female characters are able-bodied, and I will employ the method of how disability is presented in all areas of the female characters’ narrative. In addition, the theory would benefit from analyzing the development of my womanhood as I have a hidden disability and found I could relate to the Princess and Villain characters. The use of discourse is imperative for reclaiming disabled womanhood. Garland-Thomson (2005) provides examples on how to reframe the language used to discuss disability identity in regard to “‘people who identify as disabled’ or ‘people who identify as nondisabled’ or even ‘people who are considered disabled’ (p. 1558).

### **Critical Disability Studies**

Critical Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary paradigm with various avenues to explore and contextualize in the research process (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009, p. 49). The aim of employing critical disability studies as a research paradigm is to uncover how the disabled body is represented in the Disney Princess animated film and what it means for disabled womanhood. Using my own lived experience, I shall contextualize how the depiction of the Disney Princess and villains affected how I view my mind, the implications of personal ideologies of my body and how I occupy space in the social and cultural sphere. The social and medical models are significant frameworks in Critical Disability Studies (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 197). Shakespeare (2013) describes the benefit of using the social model as “(...) the recognition that disability is a complex phenomenon, requiring different levels of analysis and intervention, ranging from the medical to the socio-political” (p. 2020). This quote demonstrates the social model’s versatility and the need for a cross-disciplinary approach. For example, Clare (2017) wrote a text *Grappling with cure* in which the author pulls from various areas, including lived

experience, historical references, disability representation, racism, sexism, gender identity, ecological restoration, and much more, to showcase how a cure is too complex to provide a singular definition. The text is essential for my analysis of disability representation of the women in the Disney Princess films as I want to uncover how the ideology of cure is showcased in the films. Titchkosky & Michalko, (2017) describes “Cure, of course, is the quintessential solution to disability conceived of as a problem” (p. 133). This quote demonstrates the medicalized ideology of cure; however, cure could be applied to the social realm and to many other facets of disability such as the physical space an individual occupies and barriers as well as the supercrip trope (Silva & Howe, 2012 p. 185; Shakespeare, 2006, p. 198). The ideology of cure frames disability as the individual disabled person is expected to “adapt and overcome” their body-mind difference to adhere to societal norms (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 198; Titchkosky & Michalko, 2017, p. 13). The ideology of cure and its relation to disability tropes of overcoming disability, which are evident in Disney’s Princess line and its correlation to Disney’s overall message of magic (Clare, 2017, p. 8). Clare (2017) challenges westernized ways of thinking, particularly the dualisms embedded in them: body-mind, normal, abnormal, natural/unnatural (xvi). The representation of the characters in Disney Princess films of the villains and princess are situated in these dualities of good versus evil. The good overcame their differences, and the bad did not. They were killed.

### **Disability Rights Movement**

The contemporary disability rights movement which developed from the 1970s influenced the trcategory of disabled people gaining control over the rights of their body-mind (Scotch, 1989, p. 389). Pfeiffer (1994) describes the influence the Eugenics movement had on

“domestic relations” resulting in enacting “public laws” on who is worthy of “the right to have children, to marry, and to raise one’s children” (p. 482). This explanation showcases how much power the state had over the rights of disabled people’s lives and controlling their bodies in hopes of not reproducing more disabled children (Pfeiffer, 1994, p. 482). Furthermore, disabled, and mad people were institutionalized. For example, Willowbrook State school “located in Staten Island, New York” began operating approximately from 1948 to 1985 (Hill, 2016, p. 104; Klacik, 2023). The state school intended to hide children and adults with bodily and ‘mental’ impairments from integrating with the rest of society and to “rehabilitate” the individuals (Hill, 2016, p. 105). However individuals experienced inhumane practices, such as sexual abuse (Hill, 2016, p. 105; Klacik, 2023). These examples provide context to the way the state had authoritative rights over disabled people’s autonomy, financial, legal, and interpersonal relationships. While these examples are from the United States there are more historical examples from across the globe.

Longmore (2020) states “The disability rights movement has never been a single or homogeneous campaign” (p. 82). However, it is a continuation of previous advocacy done in “nineteenth through the late-twentieth century” but changes began to occur in the 1970s when disabled people mobilized together and advocated for their legal rights and treatment in the political, social, and cultural sphere (Longmore, 2020, p. 82). Many social, cultural and political outcomes resulted from the Disability Rights Movement such as “504 was the first federal civil rights law protecting Americans with disabilities” which was enacted in 1977 (Longmore, 2020, pp. 81& 92). The Americans with Disability Act was passed 1990, which is used in contemporary society to protect the rights of disabled people and “prohibits discrimination” against disability in

the United States (ADA National Network, 2024). The aim of using the Disability Rights Movement in my study is to analyze how outcomes impacted disability representation in the Disney Princess films.

## **Methodology**

### **Research question**

How is disability portrayed in the Disney Princess films, and what are the implications for disabled womanhood?

### **Secondary Question**

Is there a progression from earlier to contemporary films of using an overt or covert representation of disability and femininity in animated films?

### **Methods for collecting data**

As I embarked on the journey of establishing a unique research methodology for analyzing Disney's representation in animated films, I was initially drawn to content analysis, a common qualitative methodology successfully applied in various Disney-related Studies (Doberstein, 2019, p. 8 Hefner et al., 2017, p. 515; Wasko, 2020, p. 129). However, I stumbled on reflective thematic analysis, a methodology that resonated with my research. Braun & Clarke (2006) state, “A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 82). This relates to what I noticed in regard to similar words appearing when watching the Princess films, music lyrics, and secondary

resources, which sparked my curiosity. This approach also allows the flexibility of using autoethnography to bring my lived experience into the conversation, making the research more meaningful and novel.

I originally proposed to analyze six Disney Princess films: two from the early movie, the middle movie, and the current movie; however, due to the limited space, I could only analyze three. The primary data I used are film transcripts and music lyrics from a selection of Disney Princess films from 1938 to 2023. Based on the release date of The Princess films, several ways of categorizing exist. The England et al. (2011), method of categorizing Princess films is based upon dividing the three films into three categories: “the earlier movies (1937 and 1959), middle movies (“Thirty Years Later, a Group of Five”), and the most current film” (there is only one film for this category The Princess and the Frog) (England et al., 2011, p. 555). For the section on most current films since the publication of this journal article, there have been several Princess films released: Frozen (2013), and Moana (2016).). The list of Disney animated films the earlier movies Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1938); Middle Movies: The Little Mermaid (1989); the most current films Frozen (2013). These films were selected based on the first film released in the Princess Franchise, Snow White, and The Little Mermaid (1989) had secondary sources from a Feminist disability studies paradigm. However, these are animated films that I do not remember much of from childhood. I want to ensure the probability of the overt/covert representations of disability were not hindered based on my favourite Princess films. My observation was based on five-minute intervals of the animated film to analyze the discourse, setting, and physical appearance of the Villain, Princess, and supporting characters, as well as what I believed was relevant to my analysis of disabled womanhood. The inclusion criteria dialogue used by the characters to describe the Villain and the Princess, and the

discourse used by the Princess or Villain. The physical appearance of the Princess and the Villain. The exclusion criteria dialogue is not used to describe the Villain and the Princess; the conversation between the side characters does not mention the female characters. The aim is to uncover reoccurring phrases or words. I will make observations based on the character interactions and the physical appearance of the female lead and the villain. The encoded variables are used to portray Disability through the Princess’s journey and the discourse used by the other characters to describe the female characters. Moreover, how the “sidekicks” are depicted, such as if they are childlike, which coincides with disability representation of infantilization (Trescher & Halsall, 2017, p. 1). The goal is to track the progression of representation of disability and femineity, including how characters are introduced and how the narrative concludes, reaffirming certain ideologies.

Secondary resources will use a snowball method from scholarly articles and texts that I have purchased and sorted through. The inclusion criteria for the secondary sources are literature relevant to the contextualization of Disney, Disability and representation and aging. The exclusion material did not focus on Disney, theory related to gender, and disabled womanhood. First *Understanding Disney* by Janet Wasko delves into contextualizing the Disney multiverse and provides information on female representation in the Disney classic themes depiction of characters and progress to revised Disney films. The text also references other resources to check out. Second, *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture* is a collection of literature written by scholars describing Disney. However, the piece of literature from the text which coincides with my research interest is Jack Zipes (1995) *Breaking the Disney Spell*, which details the adaption of fairy tales/folklore to Disney animated films (p. 21). Holcomb & Latham-Mintus (2022) provide an overview of Disability tropes used in Disney animated films—

for example, intersecting disability with old age and evil (Holcomb & Latham-Mintus, 2022).

This article will allow me to look at the reference list to gather other resources about depictions of old age as evil and its correlation to disability. Zervas, et al., (2021) explain the seven dwarfs' impairment from an endocrinologist's perspective.

### **Autoethnography**

There are many variations in the methodology of Autoethnography. For example, Robinson (2017) used autoethnographic poetry to contextualize his lived experience as a black male with a hidden disability and the cultural influence of racism and ableism toward black males in academics, particularly special education (p. 749). The way Robinson (2017) used his lived experience to deconstruct societal and cultural attitudes and position himself in the research provides a space to bring attention to the duality of both ableism and racism in the educational system and how two identities intersect. I will use autoethnography to explore how Disney Princess Films influenced how I view body-mind from childhood to adulthood, reinforced by societal beauty standards and cultural norms (hooks, 2000, p. 35). Moreover, Autoethnography will be used for my data collection and elaborating on the themes identified from the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 36). Moreover, Simplican (2017) states, “But while feminist disability scholars use autoethnography to challenge ableist stereotypes, certain strains of life-writing in feminist disability studies tend to calcify the difference between abled and disabled identities” (p. 47). This statement demonstrates the importance of including lived experience as the Disney princess films have two types of women: abled (princess) and disabled (villain) my lived experience of how I view my body-mind can add to the conversation of disabled womanhood. Court & Abbas (2022) described the insider/outsider approach in qualitative research of people; however, in the context of this study,

the characters are the insiders as they are not able to express how they feel, and I will be the outsider describing my lived experience of disabled womanhood.

### **Reflective thematic analysis**

The methodology I am enthusiastic to employ in my research paper is thematic analysis. This choice was not made lightly. Initially, I was hesitant due to the prevalence of examples from psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 77). However, as I delved into the research, I discovered the unique aspects of thematic analysis that make it profoundly relevant and applicable to my study. This resonated with me, especially considering my past experiences during my undergrad when I grappled with understanding how to handle the data, I collected for a major research paper. Braun & Clarke (2022) offer a comprehensive six-phase guide on conducting reflective thematic analysis (pp. 13, 35 & 36). Moreover, Braun & Clarke (2006) have another guide explaining the six phases of thematic analysis; however, it does not include the *reflective* aspect but explains the advantages and disadvantages of the methodology (p. 77). Reflective thematic analysis entails positioning yourself in the research and being conscious of bias and preconceived notions influenced by your education and lived experience (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 13). Going into the research process, I need to be aware of only critiquing the opposing side and including positive aspects of disability representation in the correlation of disabled womanhood throughout the Disney Princess films.

### **Six Phases**

The six phases of reflective thematic analysis are not rigid rules but rather flexible guidelines that can be adapted to fit my research project (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 13 & 34).

**Phase 1:** Familiarizing yourself with the dataset – I will “immerse” myself in the dataset consisting of observations from the film and phrases from secondary sources, transcripts, lyrics, and reflections of my own lived experience. I opened the observations I took based on the five-minute interval combined with the lyrics and transcripts and grouped each section and took notes on reoccurring patterns in the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 42-43).

**Phase 2:** Coding - Braun & Clarke (2022) described this phase as an “analytic take on the data” (p. 35). This step entails reviewing your dataset and generating code labels “interesting, relevant or meaningful for the research question” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 35). Two approaches to start to develop codes are inductive (capture meaning) and deductive (theory-driven) (Braun & Clarke 2022, p. 57). There are two types of codes: sematic (surface-level codes) and latent (deeper meaning) (p. 57). Based on the notes I tool from the first step I created a chart and organized the information into categories, used the character’s name, wrote physical appearance/wardrobe, personality, discourse used by other characters to descried the character, the introduction of the film “once upon a time” and if the character was in it, the middle, the end “happily ever after”, Princess Journey/villain journey, other (that included theoretical ideologies from scholars). To create the themes, I grouped everything together and had a combination of sematic (surface-level codes) and latent codes. The technology I employed to conduct this was on a word document (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 65).

**Phase 3:** Generating initial themes—Braun & Clarke (2022) described this phase as “identifying shared pattern[s] across the dataset” (p. 35). The main objective is to create a “candidate theme,” which is not yet a theme; however, it has data extracts to support the claim (Braun & Clarke, 2022, pp. 81 & 82). Braun & Clarke (2022) provided various ways to organize information, such as thematic

maps with subthemes (p. 85). On a separate word document I had three questions to help guide identifying patterns to create themes: “What does Disney say about disabled womanhood”; “What do my secondary sources say about disabled womanhood”; and “What do I say about disabled womanhood”? I then printed the questions with the data and used sticky notes that were codes and themes and cut out of highlighted words or phrases that will be sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 86).

**Phase 4:** Developing and reviewing themes- Braun & Clarke (2022) discuss this phase as examining the “candidate themes” and checking them over to see if anything is missing from the dataset or letting of information (p. 35). Start thinking about the story the themes will tell and the theoretical concepts of Feminism, Feminist Disability Studies, and Critical Disability Studies (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 102). Braun & Clarke (2022) suggest creating a refined thematic map; I created a new thematic map on word with the framework of telling the journey of the introduction to the characters, the quest, and the overcoming narrative as it showcased a story of the villain and princess journey. Based on all the data I placed it under a category of the story of overcoming body- mind difference and the implication to disabled womanhood.

**Phase 5:** Refining, defining and naming themes. This phase entails “fine-tuning” each theme by providing a name and a meaning to what the theme is capturing (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 35). During this phase, as I uncovered the template of the story I need to focus on the themes I used all the data extracts so I can sort out what theoretical paradigms the main goal was to ask myself: How is disability portrayed in the Disney Princess films, and what are the implications for disabled womanhood? Is there a progression from the earlier to the later films?

**Phase 6:** Writing up: Braun & Clarke (2022) state: the goal is “... weave together your analytic narrative and compelling, vivid data extracts, to tell your reader a coherent and persuasive story about the dataset that addresses your research question” (p. 35). I plan to incorporate my lived experience in this phase and see how it will connect with the themes to solidify the names of my themes to tell the story of the Princess and villain’s journey of overcoming disability.

## **Literature Review**

### **The unofficial eras and their application**

The release of Walt Disney’s first feature-length film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* in 1938 brought much success to the company both economically and socially, resulting in Disney studios using the animation as a “blueprint” for future animated films (Pallant, 2011, p. 39). A considerable amount of literature has been published setting out to contextualize the formula used in developing feature-length animated films. Zipes (1995) claims “The great ‘magic’ of the Disney spell is that he animated the fairy tale only to transfix audience and divert the potential utopian dreams and hopes through the false promises of the images he cast upon the screen” (p. 22). This claim demonstrates the foundation of the Walt Disney animated films as Wasko (2020) describes the “Classic Disney Model” and the “Revised Classic Disney” are influenced by “revised fairy tales or folklore” (p.125), framed with dominant political, cultural, societal ideologies and values that are widespread in that period (p. 143). They are encoded with the portrayal of “fantasy, magic, imagination, and good conquering evil--and happy endings prevail” (p.130). For example, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was adapted from the Grimm Brothers’ Fairy tale “Sneewittchen” (1812) and had a negative representation of Snow white as

submissive, coinciding with the gender norms of the 20th century (Elgiva Theatre Chesham, 202; Muir, 2023, p. 22). The “illusion of fantasy” masked all the negative representations as Snow white found her Prince Charming and “lived happily ever after” (Wasko, 2020, p. 140). In the “Revised Classic Disney,” the creation is similar; however, the depiction of the characters is modernized to contemporary ideologies of race and gender (Wasko, 2020, p. 129). For example, *The Little Mermaid* (1989) was adapted from Hans Christian Andersen's Fairytale published in 1837 and “written in Danish and titled Den lille havfrue” (Myrna, 2022). Wasko (2020) describes the portrayal of Ariel as “stronger, more empowered” and less focused on romance as a result of the change in societal ideologies of deconstructing traditional gender norms (p. 129). However, in the film, there are still elements of fantasy and a happily-ever-after narrative (Wasko, 2020, p. 130).

Shawcroft et al., (2022) conducted a study to uncover the “gender depictions of characters” in Disney animated films, expanding from 1937 to 2019. Based on those results, Shawcroft et al., (2022) analyzed the influence “of the gender of those involved in the production” (p. 346). The findings from the study demonstrate that male characters were frequently more evident in films at 60% compared to female characters at 40% (Shawcroft et al., 2022, p. 359). Moreover, Shawcroft et al., (2022) noted “(...)we found that occupations, attractiveness, and leadership were all significantly different based on the gender of the characters” (p. 359). In regard to the findings from “Differences by Decade” Shawcroft et al., (2022) noticed a shift in “female characters’ occupational role, story role, and attractiveness” in each decade, attributing the shift as adhering to societal ideologies of the decade (p. 359). The results about the influence “of the gender of those involved in the production” demonstrate the

need to include more “women in the production process” (Shawcroft et. al, 2022, p. 362).

Shawcroft et al., (2022) note the portrayals of characters are influenced by the genders of those working on the film (p. 362). This example demonstrates a big-picture analysis throughout the decades and the application of the Disney formula used to portray characters based on gender.

Benhamou (2022) discusses the film *Shrek* (2001) as a parody of the Disney animation formula (p. 35). *Shrek* uses tropes from “Classic Disney films”; however, Benhamou (2022) categorizes Disney's formula as “pre-Renaissance” (p. 35). The tropes aid as tools to mimic the Disney formula (Benhamou, 2022, pp. 34-38). The references are framed with satirical humour to emphasize the irony behind the perpetuated formula by Disney (Benhamou, 2022, pp. 34-38).

For example, *Shrek* “starts with a book, lit from above, magically opening” similar to the films *Snow White*, *Cinderella* and *Sleeping Beauty* and includes the traditional Disney phrase ‘Once upon a time’, the “soft non-diegetic melody” enabling the viewers to believe they are going to watch a Disney-style film (Benhamou, 2022, p. 34). As a result of the satirical humour, the narration is cut short to *Shrek* dispelling the fact he will find true love along with the sound of a flushing toilet, interrupting the “ethereal music” (Benhamou, 2022, p. 34). The method of analyzing the Walt Disney formula is extensive with many approaches to contextualize the magic that is Disney.

### **Disney Animated Films use overt/covert stereotypes to market “childhood innocence”**

The Walt Disney Studio is notorious for incorporating overt “racist, sexist, ableist, ageist, and homophobic tropes into the imagery, discourse, and plotline of its animated films” (Cheu, 2013, pp. 1-8). Wasko (2020) highlights the irony of Disney’s philosophy as solely an entertainment company producing films that make their audience happy, fulfilling their intended

mission (p. 4). Moreover, throughout the years, the Walt Disney Company has been socially constructed to market the image of innocence, allowing it to escape scrutiny from the masses, as Disney cannot do any harm (Wasko, 2020, p. 128). Walter Disney (Wasko, 2020, p. 128 as qt in Eliot 1993, p. 72) stated “I do not make films primarily for children. (.....). The worst of us is not without innocence, although buried deeply it might be. In my work, I try to reach and speak to that innocence” (p. 128). This quote demonstrates Walt Disney’s logic in how his work is also intended for adults, evident in the overt portrayals of “violence and sexual content” and undetected due to the marketing tactic of selling childhood innocence (Wasko, 2020, p. 2). Best & Lowney (2009) discuss the benefits and setbacks of The Walt Disney Company establishing itself with a “good reputation” in the social milieu (p. 431). Moreover, the setback is that they are a massive company with stakes dispersed in avenues of their business such as entertainment and theme parks resulting in exposure to backlash from different groups, companies and academics; however, having a “good reputation” allows them to recover from severe criticism as individuals will come to their defence and describe it is a family company (Best, & Lowney, 2009, pp. 443 & 445). This demonstrates that of having a “good reputation” allows the Disney company to redeem itself and change its methods to ensure it appeases their supporters. For example, Metcalf (2016) describes in the “late 1960s” (...) “America experienced radical social and cultural changes” such as civil rights and “the Women’s liberation movement began” (pp. 117 & 118). The company received backlash for their overt “racist portrayal of black Americans” in the film *Dumbo* (1941), particularly from the lyrics of the *Song of the South* (Metcalf, 2016, p. 118). Metcalf (2016) notes that Walter Disney had to put his conservative ideologies aside and attempt to adhere to the societal shift to continue making successful animated films (p. 118). In 1967, the release of *Jungle Book* (1967) demonstrated the use of covert portrayals of characters, for

example, “Disney’s Mowgli is a boy who, though normally Indian, shows every sign of being a modern American Caucasian” (p. 119). The Disney Walt Company thrives to maintain an image of innocence; however behind that image is the method of using the use of overt and covert representation to incorporate their hidden agenda of “mainstream American values” (Wasko, 2020, p. 125)

### **Examples of negative representation of Race, Gender and Disability used in Disney's animated films**

The Walt Disney Studio has been producing feature-length animated films for almost 100 years and claims (2024) “we continue to honor our heritage through animated films that combine beautiful artistry, masterful storytelling and groundbreaking technology”. The claim demonstrates the dedication to creating films; however, it fails to acknowledge and bring awareness to deconstructing overt and covert negative representations of gender, race, and disability that have been used in the animated films. Several scholars, Garland Thomson (1997) Holcomb & Latham-Mintus (2022), Schwartz (2014) and Norden (2014) discuss how disability is negatively represented in Disney animated films. For example, Norden (2014) notes the protagonist Quasimodo embodies otherness through his character portrayal and is reinforced by negative disability stereotypes (p. 168). Furthermore, several studies by Benhamou (2022), Edgerton & Jackson (2016) and Towbin et al., (2004) analyzed the use of race, and gender represented in feature-length animated films. To illustrate, Towbin, et al., (2004) conducted a thematic analysis to uncover how “Images of Gender, Race, Age, and Sexual Orientation” are used in Disney animated films (p. 19). Some of the themes that emerged for gender included “A woman’s appearance is valued more than her intellect” (Towbin et., 2004, p. 30) and for race “only Western values and Christianity [are] depicted” (p. 31). Edgerton & Jackson’s (2016)

analysis of the film Pocahontas (1995) unveils Indigenous “advisors were hired to secure a more positive, even hagiographic, portrayal of Native American characters within an earnestly sympathetic narrative”(p.191); however, Disney still had the final say and incorporated overt racist stereotypes of Indigenous people with the song titled “Savages” (p. 196). These examples demonstrate the methods of analyzing the overt and covert representation of disability, race, and gender as it may not be evident in the animated film. Moreover, it is important to employ secondary sources such as scholarly research to observe common themes that have already been collected to expand them.

### **Contemporary representation of Freakshows**

In contemporary society, the media, films and TV series use the ideology of Freakshows for othering the portrayal of disability; however, it is framed by using tropes and discourse. Hevey’s (1992) article contextualizes the symbolizing of “Enfreakment” by analyzing an array of photographic books to uncover how or if disability is represented (p. 54). Moreover, if the disabled body is represented, it is “positioned either as meaningful or meaningless bodies” (Hevey, 2013, p. 73). Hevey’s (1992) dissection of photographic books, leads to the symbolization of Enfreakment confirming that “(..) the impairment of the disabled person became the mark, the target for a disavowal, a ridding, of the existential fears and fantasies of non-disabled people” (p. 73). This claim demonstrates the separation of disabled bodies from able bodies emphasizing that the entity of disability is fearful yet entertaining. Sandell & Dodd (2013) agree with Hevey’s (1992) theorization that ‘Enfreakment’ is not solely confined to the freakshows that flourished in the late nineteenth century”, but also in contemporary representations of othering disabled bodies (p. 6). Richardson (2017) investigates the Television Show “The Undateables” to uncover how Enfreakment correlates with the depiction of the

characters in the show and their quest to find love (p.334). A common media narrative is used to represent “disabled bodies as asexual – neither sexually desiring nor desirable” (p. 328).

Richardson (2017) details “The Undateables” brings “awareness” to disability; however, it suggests that the television show is a modern-day form of a Freakshow (p. 333). For example, the characters acknowledge their impairment by using “voice-over narration”, yet their on-screen presence is perceived otherwise as the discourse, actions and bodily differences mock the characters, creating a contemporary representation of Freakshows (pp. 334 & 335). The aim of the Şengün et al., (2022) study is intended to uncover how virtual Enfreakment in Street Fighter V and Tekken 7 is applied to characters to represent race and gender (p. 1). The results of the study were that “Of our 151 hypotheses, 65 were significant, although 12 of those exhibited the opposite of the effect we predicted” (Şengün et al.,2022, p. 8). An example of a hypothesis coming to fruition was the “design of female characters” as they were “less muscular, younger, thinner, more attractive, more sexualized, and had more sexualizing attire” (Şengün et al., 2022, p. 8). The Şengün et al., (2022) study demonstrates how Enfreakment is transferable to symbolize intersecting identities and other individuals based on race and gender to portray a certain representation. Freakshows are no longer socially acceptable in contemporary society; however, the ideologies stemming from Freakshows are embedded within society and are projected through stereotypes. For example, Pritchard (2020) argues that Freakshows have influenced the contemporary representation of Dwarfism in society and the entertainment industry as “their small stature is deemed an oddity that is used to amuse others” (p. 116). The derogatory term “midget” was established in 1865 to describe little people in Freakshows and is perpetuated in the social milieu to shame individuals based on their bodily differences (Pritchard, 2020, p. 117). Moreover, Pritchard (2020) describes the term “midget” as a form of hate speech;

however, it continues to be used “freely in society” (p. 127). Tomkowiak (2022) assesses the two Dumbo films, the animated version (1941) and the live-action film (2019). The aim was to uncover the “intersectional identity of the protagonist as a child, animal and disabled person” (p. 3). Debates surround Disney’s use of a dark piece of disability history of Freakshows to portray the film (Tomkowiak, 2022, p. 10). Tomkowiak (2022) regarding the live-action film claims “The mechanisms of the production of otherness and its discrimination, which were prominently shown in the original version of 1941, are weakened here and replaced by the presentation of inclusion in an empathetic multicultural circus community” (p. 17). This claim demonstrates the progression of reframing the representation of otherness in the film; however, in the film, there are direct references to Freakshows as the word is stated, and the portrayal of the characters such as Holt Farrier showcased as having a bodily difference of one arm (Burton, 2019, 14:42). The omission in the literature regarding the mechanisms that were employed in the film to avoid othering the individuals in the circus through the use of costume or physical appearance is absent. For example, the character Holt Farrier is encoded with the ideologies of past representation of “freaks” in freakshows as he was a part of the circus, a common space where individuals with bodily differences would be displayed (Bodgan, 1988, p. 40). However, the mechanisms employed to promote inclusivity of the character was using a stereotypically attractive man, who was well-kept, and the costume appeared to be used as a way to conceal his impairment as the arm sleeve was shortened to show no skin, as in Freakshows there was an emphasis on their physical appearance (Backe, 2013, p. 27; Burton, 2019, 14:42). The ideologies in Freakshows are embedded in entertainment and have been used to tokenize disability by framing the disabled body as “grotesque, monstrous, deviant, or other” (Backe, 2013, p. 28).

### **Omissions in the Literature on Ageism and Ableism**

Ageism and Ableism are their own set of negative attitudes and beliefs embedded in society, political systems, and media, enabling discriminatory practices towards specific age groups and disabled people (Berger, 2017 184; Gendron et al., 2024, p. 1 ). Levy & Macdonald (2016) highlight how in 1969 Robert N. Butler published a journal article “Ageism: Another form of Bigotry” which “introduced” the severity of ageism being a ‘serious national problem’ in the United States (p. 5 as cited in Butler 1969). Moreover, Butler (1969) described that “Ageism reflects a deepseated uneasiness on the part of the young and middle-aged—a personal revulsion to and distaste for growing old, disease, disability; and fear of powerlessness, “uselessness,” and death” (243). This quote demonstrates the intersections of ageism and ableism as “cultural attitudes” (Butler, 1969, p. 22) which stigmatize the aging process as a part of the medical model of disability of having to depend on others and the loss of a fulfilling life (Leahy, 2021, p. 8). Chivers (2016) suggests a possibility of the hesitation of intersecting both paradigms and the fear disabled people and older adults may face having an extra label and further social isolation (p. 74). However, research by Gendron et al., (2024), showcases the progression of the “intersection” of ableism and ageism has been conducted in the discipline of Disability Studies and the recently begun “gerontological literature” (p. 2). Grenier et al., (2020) suggest that the separation of age and disability in the “Life Course” can cause exclusion of how individuals position themselves in the social realm and access services (pp. 22, 23 & 24). This demonstrates the importance of analyzing disability and aging using an intersectional approach as the two entities have parallels and can further the discussions excluding certain bodies within society, political systems and media narratives. For example, Chivers (2020) contextualizes how “Crippling the Age–Disability Nexus” can reframe the narrative of how disabled and older people

access care and dismantle the attitudinal and systemic barriers in a society built for able-bodied people (pp. 53 & 54).

### **The stereotypes of “becoming” disabled and ageing**

The representations in the media focusing on the aging process are influenced by negative ageist stereotypes as the body-mind weakens when humans get older and are no longer young, able-bodied selves (Berger, 2017, p. 184). Ylänné (2015) points out, “North America and Europe reports that older people (typically defined as those over 50 years)” is an important feature in media representation to be aware of what is considered old age (p. 370). Especially, according to the United Nations (n.d) “global population aged 65 and above is expected to rise from 10% in 2022 to 16% in 2050” this demonstrates that since the population across the globe is anticipated to age it is important to be aware of the implications of the negative media representation of aging. Moreover, the media is a powerful tool used to shape the viewers’ worldviews and can be harmful to how individuals view themselves in relation to the narrative when depicted on the screen or in text (Perse & Lambe, 2017, pp. 1 & 2). For example, Goggin (2008) analyzed how journalism and the media use disabled people's vulnerability when gathering information to further their political agenda of the narrative they want to portray (pp. 2 & 10). This approach perpetuates ableist stereotypes similar to that which Berger (2017) describes regarding some common stereotypes used in mass media to portray elderly people as “weak, unattractive, and senile” and other “cultural stereotypes” as “frail, feeble, financially distressed, and not contributing to society” (Berger, 2017, p. 184). In 1997 Hurd (1999) organized a participant observation at a “seniors center in a central Canadian city” to uncover how older women resist being categorized as “old” and the negative stereotypes associated with the aging process (pp. 419 & 424) Hurd's (1999) findings demonstrate how ageist stereotypes

instill fear and also that the women in the study have internalized the fear of getting older, doing everything in their power not to be labelled “old” as society thrives on youthfulness (pp. 432 & 436). This example demonstrates how societal and cultural attitudes towards aging intersect with ableist ideologies, as the participants in the study feared losing autonomy over their body-mind (Gendron et al., 2024, p. 1). The fear that elderly women in Hurd's (1999) study endured is similar to Jackson-Brown's (2020) rationale of tropes being used to portray para-athletes in the Paralympics provides a safe distance between the audience and the disabled body as the media contributes to framing the narrative of becoming disabled (pp.183 & 184 as cited by Shakespeare, 2013).

The methods used to represent a disability and aging in media are synonymous as they are aimed to evoke certain reactions from viewers. Ylännä (2015) conducted a review of current research about how elderly people are represented in “print and TV media, focusing mainly on advertising” (p. 369). The information varied across an array of studies, including “content analytic studies”, and “qualitative studies” and how the discourse used in the media relates to the overall “cultural gerontological” implications (p. 369). Ylännä (2015) uncovered how advertisements target elderly people with such examples, “food, pharmaceutical products, health aids and financial/insurance” represent stereotypical “behaviour and characteristics” of generalizing all elderly people into categories and marketing these products as a necessity in the aging process (pp. 370 & 371). Similar to Channel 4, a British public service broadcaster, created a campaign called “Meet the Superhumans” used to advertise the UK 2012 Paralympic Games (Channel 4, 2012). This brought up much debate about ableist representation among scholars. For example, Pullen et al., (2020 p. 720) and Silva and Howe (2012 p. 185) argue that the advertisement groups all para-athletes under the supercrip narrative and it promotes the idea

that if individuals work and dedicate their time to a specific goal they can overcome their disability. These two examples demonstrate the similarities between Ylänne's (2015) finding and the Channel 4 campaign of grouping disabled and elderly people based on what the media believes would capture viewers' attention.

### **Films and TV series using ageist and ableist stereotypes**

Ableist and ageist stereotypes in films, TV series and other media are used to direct the audience's interpretation of the characters and the plotline on the screen without questioning the intent behind them. In a few studies, Blakeborough (2008), Ng et al., (2023), and Low & Purwaningrum (2020) point out that ageist stereotypes are common in films ,TV series, and other media and describe how they are used to portray characters and in the plot line. For example, Ng et al. (2008) conducted a transnational analysis in North America, and uncovered the topics gathered from “film representations of older people”, such as “Death, High Social Status, Murder, Religion, and Familial obligations” (p. 273). Similar to the use of ageist stereotypes, ableist stereotypes are embedded in films and TV, and other media. Bones (2022), Miller (2019) and Longmore (2013) demonstrate how stereotypes are applied to evoke reactions from the audience. For example, Longmore (2013) includes the negative use of Tiny Tim becoming the perfect “poster child” for disability charities evoking pity from the audience that then donated money to the charities (Longmore, 2013, p. 35). The image of Tiny Tim was embedded with empathy, the hope of overcoming disability, and memories of the film (Longmore, 2013, p. 35). These examples indicate wider ageist and ableist stereotypes, and that will support further analysis and focus on the examples in Disney animation.

### **Themes**

### **Disabled womanhood**

To generalize the ideology of disabled womanhood would be contributing to the conversation of assuming all disabled women's embodiment of femininity is similar. As disabled women come from all walks of life, religions, socioeconomic backgrounds, sexuality, race, age, and their lived experiences may affect how they want to situate their journey in womanhood. Demonstrating the simplicity of the journey from girlhood to womanhood and that puberty is the negating factor in womanhood is evident in the Oxford English Dictionary (2011), describing womanhood as “The state of being a woman rather than a girl; the time of life following girlhood or puberty”. However, for disabled females that is not always the case. For example, Ashley X, a disabled girl, “was given estrogen treatments and surgery to stop her growth into puberty” (Kafer, 2017, p. 282). Ashley x's parents with the assistance of medical personnel made the active decision to stop the process of Ashley's journey into womanhood as her parents wanted to prevent her from being ‘sexualized’ and it would be easier to care for her with a childlike frame (Kafer, 2017, p. 282). Kafer (2017) details how Ashley X's lived experience was theorized as a “‘pillow angel’ both reflect[ing] and perpetuat[ing] this linking of disability with infancy and childhood” (p. 289). The example of Ashley X showcases a disabled girl and that her development into womanhood was determined by her parents and medical personnel ending the process to infantilize her. The disabled womanhood journey is not linear, and puberty may be the mark of what distinguishes girlhood from womanhood; however, disabled womanhood is a lengthy process with many stages of women redefining who they are. For example, that period of when disabled women grow older and how they view their body-mind may differ from when they were younger. The added societal pressure of appearing young may influence how they present themselves to the world. The Disney Princess films represent two types of women, the

princess who is navigating her journey into womanhood and the villain who is redefining herself in her journey in womanhood.

### **Characteristics of the Princess's disabled womanhood journey**

*The Princess's Journey*, the protagonist in the animated film, is a female character, portrayed as beautiful, innocent and often sexualized; she goes on an adventure or a quest (Wasko, 2020, pp. 142& 143). With the support of a sidekick, the character is often an animal with encoded childlike qualities that correlate with the characterization of a good animal (Wasko, 2020, pp. 142 &143). The sidekick has a hidden impairment and is not overt but covert. For example, Scuttle in the Little Mermaid is the key to Ariel accessing knowledge about the human world, as he is a bird who flies over the human world but also resides at sea (Clements & Musker, 1989, 8:55). Through the discourse leading up to the introduction of Scuttle, anticipating the discourse to match the imagery and mannerisms of his portrayal, it is the opposite (Clements & Musker, 1989, 7:40). Scuttle is standing on a rock demonstrating the duality of land and sea. His physical appearance, large body, and hair sticking up reveal his bodily difference, providing comedic relief to the audience (Clements & Musker, 1989, 8:55). Scuttle appears to be looking through a telescope backwards, suggesting Ariel and Flounder to be further into the sea than they are (Clements & Musker, 1989, 8:55 -9:16). He puts down the telescope and states “Whoa, what a swim” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 8:55 -9:16). Although, Flounder and Ariel were immediately in front of him he was just holding the telescope incorrectly (Clements & Musker, 1989, 8:55 -9:16). This representation of Scuttle demonstrates him to have a hidden disability. It is employed in the animated film to frame disability as othering. The Princess wishes to change the trajectory of her life. She must face a villain who creates obstacles in completing the mission. To overcome the curse or contract, a true loves kiss from the prince is

often required. The Princess often sings when trying to solve a problem, falling in love with an attractive Prince who rescues her and completes the “happily-ever-after” narrative (Resene, 2017).

### **Characteristics of Villain Disabled Womanhood Journey**

*The Villain Journey*, the antagonist in the film is portrayed as an older female than the protagonist. Her physical appearance is sexualized and appears as deviant, often encoded with hatred and jealousy towards the Princess, framing the Villain as “ugly” and “wicked”. She lives a life of isolation, outcast from the other characters, has a lair or room hidden away from the rest of society in the animated film. She has a plan on how they to obtain their goal, and as a result, creates obstacles for the Princess. Magic is used to assist in completing the mission, and the Villains disguise themselves to appear unrecognizable to the other characters to get closer to the protagonist, love interest, or be alone. She completes the mission; however, it is short-lived as the good characters collaborate, and the villain dies for not overcoming their wickedness. The sidekicks are bad animals or inanimate objects and are the only companions. For example, in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the Evil Queen's companion is the Magic Mirror that acts as a “servant” to her, and when she calls him, he appears; however, he is honest when answering her questions even though they may not be the responses she wants to hear (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 2:44-3:15). When the Evil Queen is venturing into the forest, vultures are presented and are with her until the end when she dies (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:08:38). The female villains are not concerned with finding Prince Charming and often do not live the “happily-ever-after narrative”.

### **Scholars’ theorization of the journey into disabled womanhood**

The process from girlhood into womanhood for disabled women and girls is embedded with ableist ideologies of societal and cultural beliefs of how womanhood should appear, learning that independence leads to being a contributing member of society (Erevelles & Mutua, 2005, p. 254). The label of disability acts as a barrier for disabled girls to explore their identity in womanhood (Erevelles & Mutua, 2005, p. 254). The ideologies of disabled people circulating in social and cultural realms reinforces the beliefs of what it means to be a disabled woman in a world that thrives on able-bodies and minds (Erevelles & Mutua, 2005, p. 254). Barron (1997) describes in the interviews she had with disabled young people that many of the women uncovered had to “come to terms” with “normative criteria” of what it means to be female, particularly with ideologies of “physical beauty and motherhood” (p. 231). Todd's (2024) texts provide a theory to reimagine girlhood by Crippling Girlhood, “that disabled girls are at the forefront of the disability visibility revolution,” reclaiming their bodies- and minds (p. 6). The theory of Crippling Girlhood can be transferred into womanhood as this study is centred in my lived experience into disabled womanhood and the implications of the representations of the two female characters in the Disney Princess films. Moreover, having a hidden impairment my embodiment in the cultural and social sphere, resulted in people treating me differently once they uncover that I have a disability and the viability of my learning disability. Reinikainen (2008) claims that “... the impairment in itself, the experiences of disabled women are shaped by the social and cultural discourses and practices that define disability and womanhood as well as the normative roles, places, and contexts associated with them” (p. 19). The claim demonstrates that societal and cultural attitudes of projecting normative ideologies influences the “practices of isolation, medical practices, and practices of motherhood, work, and caring” on disabled women’s lives (Reinikainen, 2008, p. 19). This example contextualizes the lived experience of

disabled womanhood that is hindered by normative thinking and practices. Like the Disney princess films, they other the villain as they do not adhere to the conventional standard of beauty and the ability to do magic, and therefore are deemed wicked. The animated films reflect cultural and societal ideologies of disabled womanhood but are the gateway of re-imagining disabled womanhood.

**Once upon a time, the idea of Good Versus Evil in disabled womanhood began**

The introduction of the female characters in the Disney Animated Princess film sets the stage on how viewers are intended to interpret the characters throughout the film. In everyday experiences, women leave their home and encounter strangers who judge them based on their physical appearance, the way they carry themselves, their behaviours and mannerisms. People they encounter in society for a brief second or for an extended period of human interaction are judged. However, human interaction on judging before even speaking to them is met with societal and cultural ideologies of what is beautiful and what is othered. For example, in contemporary society with the rise of social media and influencers women are constantly bombarded with the latest beauty products, weight loss supplements or workouts, recommendations for amazon designer dupes, cosmetic fillers and the products to make people to appear younger. The more the individual interacts with the video or photo either by liking, commenting, or watching, the more social media algorithm showcases similar content (T.K et al., 2021, p. 1). Recently, when searching on Tik Tok “Best Botox Clinic in my area” as my face is getting older and when I look at myself in the mirror I want to “fix” my wrinkles as getting older equates with losing beauty. Since that search my home page on Tik Tok showcases an array of clinics and nurses who perform the service with before and after photos. This example demonstrates that we live in a world concerned with external appearance, as this layer is how we

present ourselves to others. If we see someone “different”, our initial reaction is based on stereotypes. Garland-Thomson, (1997) states “(...) such culturally generated and perpetuated standards as ‘beauty’, ‘independence’, ‘fitness’, ‘competence’, and ‘normalcy’ exclude and disable many human bodies while validating and affirming others” (p. 7). This statement demonstrates the disabled body as an object for ridicule and judgment as the body does not adhere to societal expectations of the able-body. Moreover, this understanding results in the disabled body framed in society as an object of fear, pity and othering which have been socially, politically, culturally, and medically constructed (Clare, 2017, pp. 7 & 14; Hirschmann, 2013, p. 141). Although, the Disney Princess films are animated, they reflect societal, political, cultural, and medical ideologies of the routine experience of disabled woman venturing into the outside world and perceiving them as beautiful (good) or ugly (evil).

The Disney Princess animated films suggest two types of women: the protagonist, i.e. the sweet, innocent, and loved by everyone they encounter, the beautiful princess. The antagonist, the villain, is depicted as cruel, wicked, isolated, vain, and older than the princess. In an interview, Sassatelli (2011) discusses Mulvey’s (2013) theory of the male gaze in Hollywood cinema applying it to contemporary representation of women in films. Sassatelli (2011) states: “While classic Hollywood movies give us back a woman-object through a male gaze that projects his own fantasy on the female figure in two ways voyeuristic (which sees the rebel woman as temptress and prostitute) or fetishist (the docile and redeeming woman represented as the Virgin Mary) Mulvey indicates a possible way out in the exploration of alternative representation strategies informed by feminism and avant-garde cinema” (p. 124). This claim correlates with the two types of women in Disney Princess films, although they are marketed for children. The ideology of voyeurism and fetishism are embedded in the representation of the

protagonist and antagonist of good vs evil. Women from a young age have been conditioned to adhere to the male gaze as the Disney Princess films reinforce these ideologies through the embodiment of the voyeuristic villain and the fetishist princess.

Introducing the villain embodiment to the audience was evident in the three films with the use of discourse, imagery, and physical appearance of the characters. In the earlier movie, the introduction of the Evil Queen represents the villain who is overt, as the beginning of the animated film opens with a storybook prologue detailing the introduction of the plotline as the discourse states, “Her vain and wicked Stepmother the Queen feared that someday Snow White’s beauty would surpass her own” (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:38). The Evil Queen's depiction is that of an able-bodied older woman and is a stereotypical attractive female; however, her callous demeanour is demonstrated through the life of isolation as she is always in the throne room with the magic mirror. Almost identical to The Evil Queen, Ursula’s representation of the villain in the middle of the movie is overt, and unlike The Evil Queen, there is no storybook with discourse such as “vain and wicked,” and the viewers are not introduced to Ursula until later in the introduction. The eels are employed as markers of evil, their depiction is eerie, and their eyes enact as a gateway to Ursula’s crystal ball to see what is occurring under the sea (Clements & Musker 1989, 10:53- 11:03). The camera zooms into the eels’ eyes, a reflection watching Ariel and Flounder swim. The frame then transitions to Ursula’s lair with her watching them through the crystal ball and her deep voice accompanied by the discourse “Yes, hurry home Princess” (Clements & Musker 1989, 10:53- 11:03). Ursula is “inspired” by the real life Drag Queen Divine with a “crimson mouth, eyebrows sharp as switchblades and a homicidal gleam in her eye” (Pasulka & Ferree, 2016). Moreover, the depiction of Ursula is encoded with disablement as she is an octopus living in a world meant for Merpeople. She is ostracized to a life of isolation

as Ursula stated, “Banished and Exiled” and her lair appears to be on the outskirts of the sea, not near Atlantica where the rest of Merpeople reside, solidifying her life of isolation (Clements & Musker 1989, 11:33). Her bodily difference is emphasized further as she is bigger in comparison to the other characters and highlights the distinction of being othered as the villain. In the most current film, the villain Elsa's introduction is covert as she is depicted as a child having fun with her sister but not until she accidentally hits her sister in the head with her ice powers that makes it evident, she is the villain (Buck & Lee, 2013, 4:20- 5:41). The dynamic of fun shifts to doom as her parents enter the room to see what Elsa has done, resulting in their bringing Anna to the magic trolls to cure her unconsciousness (Buck & Lee, 2013, 5:41-7:47). Grand Paddie indicates to Elsa and the family “Your power will only grow. There is beauty in it. But also, great danger. You must learn to control it.” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 7:31-7:41). This leads to Elsa's father creating a plan to protect and assist Elsa in learning to control her ice powers, consisting of wearing gloves to conceal her hands along with her and isolation from the kingdom and Anna (Buck & Lee, 2013, 7:49-10:00). Moreover, framing her hidden impairment (ice powers) as a problem in need of solution which is isolation, concealing and control (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 197). Resene (2017) notes Elsa is the first lead disabled character from the Disney Princess franchise to be depicted as a person who identifies as disabled. However, what sets the depiction of the villain apart from the other two films is Elsa's internalized battle with her identity. She has the outside world depicting her as a monster reinforcing the ideologies about herself; however, she is shown at the start of the film as a happy, innocent child demonstrating that words said to her impacted her body-mind identity in the journey of figuring who you are as a disabled woman (Buck & Lee, 2013, 7:49 & 28:23).

The embodiment of introducing the “fetishist” innocent, domesticated, naïve, damsel in distress, “docile” princess was evident through discourse, imagery, and physical appearance (Sassatelli, 2011, p. p. 124). The introduction of Snow White in the earlier movie reveals her innocence and beauty in the storybook prologue; the discourse used as “beauty” and “lovely little Princess” sets the stage for the characterization of the princess (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:38). The animated atmosphere correlates with the discourse used to introduce Snow White, she is on a set of stairs cleaning, cherry blossoms behind her with pigeons surrounding her, even though she is wearing ragged clothing her beauty is overtrumping the wardrobe (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 3:40). Unlike Snow White’s introduction of adhering to the traditional of roles of housekeeping (Muir, 2023, p. 20), Ariel was depicted early in the animated film as a women in post second wave feminism deconstructing gender roles. When introduced to the character Ariel she was supposed to be performing in a concert, however not in attendance leads to her father King Triton being angry at Ariel (Clements & Musker 1989, 5:00). However, Ariel was exploring ship wreckage with her sidekick flounder to uncover human items (Clements & Musker 1989, 10:53- 11:03). Ariel is described as “headstrong” as other characters constantly comment on Snow White’s beauty, further showcasing the development of the representation of the Disney Princess influenced by second wave feminism (Clements & Musker 1989, 14:20; Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:38). However, the imagery of Ariel as a mermaid is situated in the male gaze as her body is caricatured showing her hour class figure and her tiny waste reinforcing ideologies of able-bodiedness as when she is human, as she is wearing clothing that covers her chest and stomach. The introduction of Anna being the princess of the most current film is met with innocence as she is shown wanting to play with her older sister Elsa (Buck & Lee, 2013, 3:40-5:12). The scene escalates to Elsa accidentally hitting her sister in the head with her ice powers to save her from

not falling on the ground; the Anna character was used as a marker of victimhood of having a sibling with a hidden impairment (Buck & Lee, 2013, 3:40-5:12). Their parents rushed into the room and instantly blame Elsa for hurting Anna, demonstrating frustration in their daughter and victim blaming Elsa, the discourse used by the father “Elsa, what have you done”? (Buck & Lee, 2013, 5:38). To cure Anna, as she was hit in the head and not the heart, Grand Paddie is able to assist as “[he] recommends we remove all magic. Even memories of magic, to be safe. But don’t worry. I’ll leave then fun” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 7:06-7:14). This initiates the two folded plan of the father to isolate Elsa till she can conceal and control her ice powers but at the same time protect Anna from Elsa; however, this results in Anna living a life of isolation from her sister and the kingdom.

Through imagery and discourse, it is apparent that Anna is facing a life of isolation because of having a sister with an impairment. In the transition from girlhood to womanhood, Anna is singing about how she wants to “build a snowman” and constantly knocking on her sister’s door and is turned away (Buck & Lee, 2013, 7:06-7:14). For Elsa’s coronation day Anna is excited unlike Elsa, as she is finally going to have contact with the outside world and is hoping she may find her prince charming (Buck & Lee, 2013, 13:41:14:48). Anna is shown falling in love with a stranger and making plans about him moving into the castle (Buck & Lee, 2013, 25:41-27:19). She asks her sister for permission, and it is apparent that Elsa does not want this to occur as she works hard on concealing her ice powers. Having a strange person moving in will hinder her ability to hide (Buck & Lee, 2013, 25:41-27:19). This initiates Elsa to walk away from the situation as she is having a difficult time regulating her emotions as Anna is trying to have a conversation with her in front of people, Anna takes off one of Elsa’s gloves and Elsa’s

ice powers are unleashed (Buck & Lee, 2013, 25:19 -27:55). Moreover, Anna is used to negate her sister to unveiling her ice powers to the world and initiating the development of the villain and princess journey. Anna's physical appearance is the stereotypical princess; however, her beauty is not the centre focus as she is shown waking up in the morning looking unladylike, and her mannerisms are depicted as clumsy (Buck & Lee, 2013, 12:49 -13:15). However, Anna has a white streak of grey seeping through her red locks, showcasing the damage of what Elsa did. Prince Hans asked about it and she states “Uh, I was born with it. Although, I dreamt I was kissed by a troll” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 23:08-23:10), demonstrating the cure worked as she does not remember what occurred and believes it was a dream.

### **The other side of good versus evil**

The limitation of the introduction of the two types of women, the voyeuristic Villain and the fetishist Princess is pitting the two women against one another. Unlike the Princess's introduction, framed with fantasy and wishing for dreams to come, the villains are depicted with envy and malice. To demonstrate the premises of the Evil Queen characterization she is envious of Snow White that it leads her to appoint the Huntsman to kill Snow White, for her to be the “fairest one of all” (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 2:54 & 7:35- 7:41). Ursula from the middle movie is determined to gain control of the sea when she targets one of King Triton's daughters, she uses her vulnerability and naivety to exploit Ariel in order to pursue her goal (Clements & Musker 1989, 10:53- 11:03) In the most current movie, she exhibits the power of sisterhood, as Anna sees the good in her sister regardless of Elsa isolating herself from her all these years and not supporting her when their parents passed away (Buck & Lee, 2013, 10:37- 11:22). During the Coronation ball, it was evident Elsa was enjoying spending time with her sister as she is seen

laughing; however, she has been told by Grand Paddie and her father to fear and conceal her impairment as it can harm people, especially Anna (Buck & Lee, 2013, 22:22- 22:25). These examples correlate to Longmore's (2003) contextualization of assigning villains' roles to characters as it “reflects and reinforces” ableist ideologies of disabled people: such as “disability is a punishment for evil; disabled people are embittered by their ‘fate’; disabled people resent the nondisabled and would, if they could, destroy them” (p. 134). This reinforces the ideologies of the embodiment of disability being depicted as “ugly” and “monstrous” and presents a false narrative to young women and disabled people about what disability could look like. The Princess's introduction reveals innocence and optimism for the future, whereas the female villains demonstrate redefining themselves negatively by escaping their reality for power.

### **The quest begins with the use of magic**

The Disney Princess films are rooted in the medical model of disability, however encoded by employing the elements of fantasy and magic and wishing to hide the message from the audience. Each of the animated films represents the journey of a young and older female trying to fulfil their mission; nevertheless, obstacles are presented, and they must find an alternative method to complete the goal. That is where the ideology of the medical model is situated in the Disney Princess films, the notion of cure correlating to magic and wanting to overcome their current life. Clare (2017) states: “Yet in a world that places extraordinary value in cure, the belief that we can defeat or transcend body-mind conditions through individual hard work is convenient” (p. 10). This statement demonstrates societal, cultural, and medical beliefs in the “cure” for creating a normative society for the individual to work hard to overcome their bodily mind difference. Doyle (2020) deconstructs the ideology of individualism that resulted

from the Industrial Revolution and how society values those who deem fit to support themselves versus those who need financial support from the government. The ideology of individualism reinforces the stigma of disabled people being “label[ed] ‘lazy’ and ‘anti-social’” and having to overcome these false narratives about disabled people. Moreover, Doyle’s (2020) article discusses the lived experiences of those who have hidden impairments and the pressure of adhering to societal ideologies of appearing abled-body but having a hidden impairment. As a disabled woman with a hidden impairment, I use my physical appearance to seem normal to mask my disability and not let the world see the real me. These examples relate to the Disney Princess film in relation to cure as the Princess and Villains have a mission to fulfil; with the use of magic and the assistance of the sidekick, the barriers enact as redirection of the journey or help fulfil the mission. Some Villains and Princesses have overt and covert representations of having a hidden disability, apart from Ursula, who has a physical impairment. The barriers are created by their hidden impairment, reinforcing the ideology of masking your disability to adhere to societal expectations of normality. The Disney princess films demonstrate how interdependence can be employed for those worthy of community and those deemed to live a life of isolation as they are represented as monsters.

Parents play a significant role in the development from childhood to adulthood as they are the ones who influence their children’s behaviours, mannerisms, and ideologies of self, which sets up the stage for the quest of the Disney Princesses and Villains. Barron (1997) argues the importance of disabled girls having proper role models in their lives from a young age to assist in the socialization of forming an identity from girlhood to womanhood. (p. 235). However, the disabled women that she interviewed uncovered that disabled females do not view

their mother as a role model, but the caregivers have influenced their identity into womanhood (BARRON, 1997, p. 235). Furthermore, BARRON (1997) notes that the father played a passive role in the development of the women she interviewed (BARRON, 1997, p. 235). In the Disney Princess animated films in the early movie *Snow White*, the parental figure, Evil Queen, dislikes her as she is envious of her stepdaughter (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:38). *Snow White* is forced to leave her home as the Huntsman is assigned to kill her (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 9:12). In the middle movie *Ariel*'s mother is not in the plot; however, her father King Triton is depicted as controlling her as she wants to be human and he does not support her decisions (Clements & Musker 1989, 34:54-36:29). Which leads Ariel to rebel against her father's demands and her vulnerability leads her to trust Ursula who convinces Ariel that she can help her achieve her goal of becoming human (Clements & Musker 1989, 38:50-45:04). Moreover, in the current movie *Elsa and Anna*'s mom does not speak; however, the father influenced Elsa to fear her ice powers and as result Anna suffered the consequences (Buck & Lee, 2013, 7:57-9:57). Her father and mother then embarked on the journey which would be the last time Elsa sees her parents as they passed away in a storm at sea (Buck & Lee, 2013, 10:00 & 10:24). He told her “You’ll be fine Elsa” she did not want them to leave as this would be the first time she would be alone (Buck & Lee, 2013, 10:00). This demonstrates the significant role Elsa's father played in shaping her identity as she feared being without him as she might make a mistake. Unlike Barron's (1997) findings of fathers playing a passive role in the development of interviewees' identity into womanhood, the fathers in the middle film and current film impacted the trajectory of Elsa's and Ariel's development into womanhood. This sets the stage for Ariel and Elsa to embark on their quest to complete their Villain and Princess journey.

The quest for a cure that is embedded in the Disney princess animated films reinforces to disabled women that they should follow in the steps of the Princess to overcome their impairment as prosperity awaits when adhering to normative ideologies of womanhood. Meanwhile, the Villains demonstrate the repercussions of not fully overcoming their body-mind difference. As a result, they embark on the quest alone and must disguise themselves as their physical appearance needs to be improved. The parents influence the identity of the Princess. However, Elsa is the only Villain to have her parents visually presented and discourse is used to depict the long-term implications of Elsa's father reinforcing her to conceal her ice powers. As a result, Elsa internalized her father's approach to concealing her impairment. He caused her to resent her body-mind self instead of embracing and exploring the possibilities of her ice powers. The villain and princess quest are framed early in the films to the overall mission they want to accomplish. Moreover, as the films progress with discourse, imagery, character interaction, and physical appearance, they start to uncover how the quest unfolds and how the cure is embedded in the overcoming narrative of the females accomplishing their goal.

The Villain's journey is depicted as cruel, wicked, victimizing a young, naïve female to have power and control over the kingdom. These females are isolated from the other characters in the films, with some having animals, inanimate objects, or creations they created with magic enacting as their companions. However, these women are covertly depicted as strong and independent, not needing to depend on a man to rescue them on their quest. Furthermore, they can save themselves if obstacles are presented in their quest. The Villain's quest in the early movie is framed early in the film as the Evil Queen is jealous of Snow White's physical appearance as she is younger and surpasses her mid-age appearance (Sharpsteen et al., 1937,

1:32-7:40). She employs the Huntsman to kill Snow White, as he does not follow through with the plan. Instead, she takes it upon herself to complete the mission and, with the use of magic, she disguises herself into an old lady to kill Snow White (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 7:40-1:09:49). The disguise of the old lady demonstrates a considerable amount about the character's determination to complete her goal as she is willing to risk her embodiment of beauty to be an old ugly lady to kill Snow White. Through the discourse and imagery used, it is evident the Evil Queen feared the Seven Dwarfs as a barrier to her overall mission. The imagery to demonstrate this analysis is it was daylight as she was limping through the forest as an elderly lady: “The little men will be away and she'll be alone with a harmless old peddler woman” (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:08:26-1:08:35). This demonstrates the Evil Queen strategically planned out the quest and possible barriers and the solutions on how to overcome them such as disguising herself and going to see Snow White when the Seven Dwarfs were at work. The only barrier the Evil Queen did not foreshadow was the good animals as they were the ones to go and get the Seven Dwarfs (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:11:25). The ideology of cure was represented when the Evil Queen transformed herself into the old lady as the use of magic made her become someone else who Snow White would not recognize. This demonstrates the Evil Queen, who was represented as an able-bodied woman, turned herself into a disabled old woman to physically embark on the journey and give the magic poison apple to the naïve Snow White.

Unlike the early movie, Ursula's mission was not enabled by physical appearance but by redemption over power and control over the sea which appears as though King Triton stole the position of power from her (Clements & Musker 1989, 11:17-11:22). The discourse used to support the ideology of Ursula ruled the sea in which she states, “In my day we had fantastical

feasts, when I live in the palace” (Clements & Musker 1989, 11:17-11:22). This statement sets the stage to why she wants to reclaim power, as result of King Triton gaining power, she is forced to live a life of isolation as she has been shunned. This demonstrates the progression of female representation from first-wave feminism to the second-wave, as Ursula is not envious of Ariel's beauty. Still, she sees Ariel as the key to taking down King Triton and gaining control of the sea. However, the downside is that a man is still represented as having power and control over the sea and is not a Queen like Ariel's mother. Ursula has been watching Ariel through her crystal ball which is connected to the eels' eyes. She notices King Triton's youngest daughter wants to be human to be with Prince Eric on land (Clements & Musker 1989, 27:15-27:38). She employs her eels to lure Ariel into her liar discourse used by the eels “We represent someone who can help” (Clements & Musker 1989, 37:89). This demonstrates the eels adhering to Ursula's demand to complete the quest as they approached Ariel at her lowest as she cries after King Triton destroyed all her human possessions (Clements & Musker 1989, 34:57-34:48). Ariel was reluctant to go with the eels as Ursula is known under the sea as the sea witch (Clements & Musker 1989, 37:43). Ariel tells them to go away as they leave, they flick the remainders of Prince Eric's statue, seeing his face initiates her to go with the eels (Clements & Musker 1989, 37:58-38:09). The eels and Ariel enter the eery lair, where Ariel is presented with Ursula's garden of souls, this so as to not hinder Ariel from leaving. Ursula puts on a false persona of being Ariel's fairy Godmother and aiding Ariel to be with her Prince Charming and be human permanently. (Clements & Musker 1989, 38:53-45:25). Ursula grants Ariel her wish; however, she has to sign a contract with rules and regulations. The discourse used by Ursula to explain the deal “I will make you a potion that will turn you into a human for three days. Got that? Three days? Now, listen this is important. Before the sun sets on the third day, you've got

to get the dear old princie to fall in love with you. That is, he’s got to kiss you. Not just any kiss, the kiss of true love. If he does kiss you before the sun sets on the third day, you’ll remain human permanently” (Clements & Musker 1989, 41:38 -42:08). This demonstrates Ursula giving Ariel her wish; however, if the prince does not kiss her, she will be a part of her garden of souls, and for collateral, Ariel must give Ursula her voice (Clements & Musker 1989, 43:01). Moreover, this creates a barrier for Ariel to have the Prince fall in love with her, as he is in love with the voice he heard from the beach when Ariel rescued him from the sea (Clements & Musker 1989, 51:00-51:12). Pasulka & Ferree (2016) state “She’s the only one who actually gives a young princess what she wants”. Demonstrating how Ursula gave Ariel what she wanted with conditions and having a contract assisted in ensuring Ursula’s quest went accordingly. Ariel and Prince Eric were on a canoe about to kiss; however, Ursula’s eels tipped it over; she was watching the two of them through her crystal ball (Clements & Musker 1989, 1:02:18). The discourse used by Ursula included: “The little tramp! Ah. she’s better than I thought” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:02:33). “Well, it’s time Ursula took matters into her own tentacles” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:02:44). This initiates the ideology of cure as Ursula creates a potion to transform herself into Vanessa as an able-bodied women, petite frame, and long brown hair, with purple coloured eyes (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:05:05- 1:08:46). The physical appearance of Vanessa does not adhere to Ursula’s Sea form, as she has a bigger frame, short grey hair, the only correlation to her sea form is her purple eyes and shell pedant (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:05:05- 1:08:46). This demonstrates that for the Prince to fall in love with a woman she needs to have a petite frame and have long hair, as her bigger frame would not entice the Prince. However, as Ariel’s voice was collateral for Ariel to become human, Ursula used Ariel’s voice to put a curse on Prince Eric to ensure he will marry her human form at sunset, at

the same time the contract ends (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:05:05- 1:08:46). Ursula’s mission to ensure the Prince does not kiss Ariel to have her soul and manipulate King Triton showcases her determination to complete her quest. Like the early movie, a barrier was presented with the good animals supporting Ariel to stop the wedding, which reveals Ursula’s Sea form and the curse Prince Eric is under is uplifted (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:08:10-1:09:49).

Different from the early, middle, the most current movie of the covert villain Elsa, her quest in *Frozen* is an internalized battle with herself; however, she physically leaves the kingdom of Arendelle when the citizens find out about her ice powers and framed her as “monster” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 26:58-28:57). Although Elsa’s quest was forcibly placed upon her, it appears as though she did it to protect her sister and allow Anna to live a life free of isolation (Buck & Lee, 2013,54:54). Moreover, the quest was a period of exploration through imagery and discourse. This was evident as Elsa was unaware the capabilities of what her ice powers could do. For example, when she was running away from everyone as they found out about her ice, she was near a body of water, she stepped on the water and it began to freeze, her facial reaction appeared shocked that she can do that (Buck & Lee, 2013, 28:43-28:53). Furthermore, when Anna saw Elsa for the first time since she ran away from the kingdom Anna states: “Whoa. Elsa, you look different.” (Buck & Lee, 2013,54:20). Elsa states: “I never knew what I was capable of.” (Buck & Lee, 2013,54:30). This demonstrates Elsa is free to be herself and not have to mask her ice powers and adhere to the expectations of concealing her ice powers. The ideology of cure is unlike the early and middle movies where the villains overtly change their physical appearance, but covertly, Elsa isolates herself from the world and is free. This demonstrates an internalized cure at the expense of hiding away from her sister and the kingdom. However, Elsa’s acceptance

of her ice powers is short-lived, as Anna informs her that the whole kingdom of Arendelle has frozen over because of her ice powers (Buck & Lee, 2013, 56:56-57:32). Anna wants Elsa to unfreeze the kingdom (Buck & Lee, 2013, 56:56-57:32), but Elsa does not know how to do so. She refers to her ice powers as a “curse” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 56:55-57:20). Anna is trying to comfort her sister, implying we can sort this out together (Buck & Lee, 2013, 57:38-57:51). The news triggers Elsa and she accidentally hits her sister in the heart (Buck & Lee, 2013, 57:38-57:51). Elsa's biggest fear of harming her sister came to fruition; this demonstrates that having an impairment needs to be cured as it can hurt family members. Elsa was forced back to the kingdom as a group of men caught her, a chandelier fell from the ceiling, and pieces of the thick ice hit her, resulting in her losing consciousness (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:12:01-12:12). Moreover, Elsa gains consciousness and is in a jail cell with her hands and feet handcuffed and a window to the outside world showcasing the eternal winter she set off (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:12:01-12:12). The representation of the villain's quest demonstrates the need to cure the body-mind to adhere to societal and cultural expectations; if not, a consequence is isolation.

The Princess's journey demonstrates wanting to overcome their current life to be with the man they love, needing rescuing from the male characters framed through fantasy and wishes. The Princesses are characterized as vulnerable, which acts as a gateway for the Villains to take advantage of them to complete their goals. Usually accompanied by a side kick who assists them either with redirection or support them to complete the mission in the early movie Snow White is venturing in the forest alone, through imagery of the wildlife, such as bats, and eerie trees, it is evident as this is the first time she has left the castle grounds (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 9:23-10:37). When Snow White drops to the ground and proceeds to cry the good animals make their

way out of the bushes and console her (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 10:38-11:45). The Evil Queen believes the Huntsman killed Snow White, resulting in her not being able to go to the castle, the good animals assist Snow White to the cottage of the Seven Dwarfs (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 10:38-11:45). In exchange for Snow White staying with the Seven Dwarfs she proposes “And if you let me stay, I’ll keep house for you” (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 34:48). Snow White’s character adheres to the societal and cultural ideologies prior to second wave feminism as she offers to do domestic work a role that was common for women (Muir, 2023, p. 22). Moreover, Snow White’s quest consists of her acting as mother figure to the Seven Dwarfs and wishing that Prince Charming will find her and live happily ever-after (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 58:59-1:00:38). The Seven Dwarfs warned Snow White before they went to work not to trust anyone or allowed anyone inside. Doc states “The old Queen’s a sly one, full of witchcraft” (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:05:49-1:05:51). However, the advice that the Seven Dwarfs gave Snow White did not stop the Evil queen as she kept insisting on Snow White taking a bite of the red apple (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:09:48-1:10:49). The good animals attacked the older lady and Snow White felt bad for her and allowed her into the cottage (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:10:49-1:11:26). The good animals were watching from the window of what is occurring and run to warn the Seven Dwarfs (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:11:26-1:12:43). The Evil Queen proposes to Snow White that the apple “It’s a magic wishing apple” as Snow White through the film wishing that she will marry Prince Charming so she bites the apple (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:12:56). When Snow White bites the apple she falls to the ground, resulting in the Evil Queen viewing her mission as completed as now she is “the fairest in the land!” (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:12:56-1:15:13). This demonstrates that Snow White’s naiveness led her to be vulnerable to a stranger, who deceived her, used her kindness and her wish, and sold her a false narrative just so she

would bite the apple. For Snow White to be cured from the “sleeping death” what will save her is by “love’s first kiss” (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 51:43 & 1:04:01).

The middle movie, *Little Mermaid*, Ariel yearns to be a part of the human world as she feels as though she does not belong under the sea (Clements & Musker 1989, 15:18-19:03). Unlike the early film, Ariel’s quest consists of Prince Eric falling in love with her but also about exploring her identity as human and not having a voice. Ariel rescues Prince Eric, and which sets the stage for her quest she has fallen in love with a human and wants to be with him (Clements & Musker 1989, 22:15-29:08). Sebastian her sidekick that her father employed to watch over her tries to redirect the mission by singing “Under the Sea” detailing the benefits of living under the sea versus on land (Clements & Musker 1989, 14:09-14:22 & 29:12-34:27). Flounder, Ariel’s friend, and sidekick found the statue that was given to Prince Eric for his birthday that sank to the ocean floor (Clements & Musker 1989, 21:15-24:09 & 31:28- 34:45). The statue that Flounder found develops the quest as if it was never found King Triton would have not gotten upset, therefore Ariel would not have been enticed to go with Ursula’s eels (Clements & Musker 1989, 21:15-24:09 & 34:45-39:19). Ursula persuades Ariel to follow her dreams and to become a human in order to be with the man she loves; however, Ursula appears to be mocking Ariel’s naiveness of want to change her body and lifestyle to be with a random Prince (Clements & Musker, 1989, 39:22-40:03). In exchange for Ursula turning Ariel into a human she must give up her voice; Ariel states: “But without my voice how can I...” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 39:22-40:03). Ursula describes to Ariel how she can get the Prince to fall in love with her without her voice “You’ll have your looks, your pretty face. And don’t underestimate the importance of body language” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 43:13- 43:18). This demonstrates to young females that

using your body to adhere to the male gaze will get you the man you love and that you do not need your mind. Ariel follows Ursula's advice; however, Ariel is unlike Snow White, who is depicted as regal and ladylike. Ariel is adventurous, which makes the Prince fall in love with her. For example, when Ariel and Prince Eric are exploring his kingdom, he is smiling and laughing (Clements & Musker, 1989, 57:30-58:39). Ariel and Prince Eric are on a canoe, while Scuttle initiates the song “Kiss the Girl”; the sidekicks are trying to aid in having Prince Eric kiss Ariel, for her not to be a part of Ursula's soul garden (Clements & Musker, 1989, 59:08-1:02:08). Scuttle barges into Ariel room congratulating her on the marriage; however, this was new information to Ariel (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:04:17-1:05:030). Ariel runs down the stairs to see Prince Eric; however, he is with another woman, and they are getting married today at sunset (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:05:47). Once again, Scuttle informs Ariel, Sebastian, and Flounder that the woman Prince Eric is going to marry is Ursula in a human disguise (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:06:39-1:07:38). Ariel jumps into the water she is unable to swim as she does not have her fins, so Sebastian creates a plan on how to stop the wedding with Flounder and scuttle assisting (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:07:37-1:08:31). When the good animals attacked Ursula her shell pendant broke, Ariel climbed onto the ship as she was standing; the shell pendant landed in front of her, where she got her voice back and Eric's curse was lifted and he ran to Ariel (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:09:23-1:10:11). The time Ariel and Eric are together is short-lived as the sun sets and she turns back into a mermaid and now is in the custody of Ursula (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:10:11-1:10:31).

In the current movie, *Frozen*, Princess Anna's quest is motivated by guilt and the love she has for her sister. The discourse is used to suggest that Anna states “And my sister is not a

monster. It was an accident. She was scared. She didn't mean it. She didn't mean any of this.

Tonight was my fault. I pushed her. So, I'm the one that needs to go after her” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 29:58 & 30:04 -30:13). Furthermore, The Duke of Weselton proposes his men to go after Elsa, when he asks Anna “You! Is there sorcery in you, too?” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 29:47), Anna states “No, no. I'm completely ordinary” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 29:52). This demonstrates the parrels of normal versus abnormal as soon as Anna states she is ordinary the characters are okay with her going on the quest. Prince Hans wants to accompany her; however, she goes alone.

Anna stumbles upon Kristoff and his sidekick reindeer Sven, who she must convince to accompany her on the quest (Buck & Lee, 2013, 38:47- 40:32). Kristoff questions the validity of Anna's engagement “You mean to tell me you got engaged to someone you just met that day?” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 38:47- 40:58). This suggests to the viewers Anna believed it was okay to marry someone right away as she was isolated in her life and wanted companionship and got engaged to the first person who gave her attention. Halfway through the quest Anna, Kristoff and Sven encounter a Snowman named Olaf that Elsa and Anna created when they were kids; however, Elsa brought him to life when she was exploring the ability of her ice powers during the song “Let it go” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 31:10-34:44 & 45:40-51:26). Anna's plan to communicate with her sister is to have a conversation, Kristoff appears to disagree with this method as his whole career is on the line and he wants Elsa to stop (Buck & Lee, 2013, 51:00). The four of them approach the mountain, Anna and Kristoff plan on climbing it; however, Olaf suggests they go up the stairs demonstrating he is assisting with the quest (Buck & Lee, 2013, 51:21-51:31). Anna is having the conversation with Elsa and Elsa accidentally hits her in the heart setting the stage for the second half of the mission (Buck & Lee, 2013, 56:41-57:54).

Elsa creates a snowman named Marshmallow who is depicted as evil and kicks them out of the ice castle (Buck & Lee, 2013, 58:17-58:29). This demonstrates a good versus evil sidekick as Olaf is cute, innocent, and bubbly and Marshmallow was created in a state of fear and has a larger frame, mean, and adheres to Elsa's commands which is a reflection of how she feels about herself. Kristoff notices Anna is getting weaker, and her hair is turning white and suggests that they go see the “love experts” so they can cure her (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:01:59-1:04:51). The love experts are the magic trolls that cured Anna earlier on in the film, the magic trolls assumed the reason the four of them came was for Kristoff to tell them that he and Anna are getting married (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:01:59-1:08:30). The magic trolls create a marriage ceremony as Anna and Kristoff are standing at the altar, she faints and is ice cold (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:08:30-1:08:32). Grand Paddie makes an entrance from the crowd and holds her hands when she states “There is ice in your heart put there by your sister. “If not removed, to solid ice will you freeze, forever.” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:08:46-1:08:50). The cure for Anna to overcome her frozen heart is “But only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:08:46-1:09:05). This demonstrates the evolution from the first, middle princess overcoming their curse not a true loves kiss but an act of true love that can be from any gender.

### **Connection to body-mind, and self**

The quest of the female villains and princesses demonstrates their journey of uncovering their connection to body, mind, and self. The cultural and societal ideologies project an idealized version of womanhood adhering to the normalization of control over body-mind and self. However, Barron (1997) states, “For disabled young people, who may require continual assistance in adult life, autonomy can mean exerting influence with regard to societal service and

avoiding dependency creating situations” (p. 225). This statement suggests that disabled girlhood and womanhood can appear different regarding how females uncover their body-mind and self to navigate in society. For example, Snow White, in the animated film, never comments on her appearance. All that the viewers know is that she wants to marry the prince. The Evil Queen is jealous of Snow White’s appearance. Watson (2002 as cited by Mauss, 1998, p. 3) deconstructs the notion of self: “This universal construct of the self is the product of the fact that ‘there has never existed a human being who has not been aware not only of his body but also of his individuality, both physical and spiritual’” (p. 510). This quote demonstrates the duality of contextualizing the body-mind in relation to the embodiment of self. Snow White is an example of a young female uncovering her body-mind self, and having outsiders constantly commenting on your appearance adds an extra barrier as she may feel that her looks make her womanly. For example, Snow White fixes herself and ensures she is presentable for the Prince (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 5:55-6:00). Right before she goes to knock on the cottage of the Seven Dwarfs, she fixes herself again (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 15:36-15:48). This shows that to present herself to the outside world, she must be properly kept ensuring that she will adhere to the male gaze. The villain Elsa has a similar journey of discovering her body-mind self as she had her father and Grand Paddie tell her that her powers will only grow was not until she is isolated on the mountain, uncover her body-mind, and self through imagery and the wardrobe change she was free (Buck & Lee, 2013, 7:35-8:20 & 31:10-34:44). Moreover, Dickson (2024) describes the lived experience of Abby from the Television show *Love on the Spectrum* and how Ariel from the Little Mermaid and the parallels to how she views body-mind, self “. “And when she finally became human, she couldn’t talk. She felt isolated and alone. And that’s how I felt.” This suggests that Ariel’s journey of womanhood correlated to how Abby felt about herself. The

process of disabled womanhood is not linear, and reimagining disabled womanhood could be situated in parts of the Disney and Villain journey to help contextualize the body-mind and self.

**Happily- ever after disability was celebrated or eliminated.**

The last phase of the voyeuristic Villain and the fetishist Princess is the overcoming of the curse by true love or death as the result of the inhumane actions put forth by the Villain harming the innocent Princess. The ideology of cure is present in the conclusion of the Disney Princess animated film. The innocent, beautiful, able-bodied woman overcame her curse with the support of her sidekicks and an able-bodied, stereotypically attractive Prince kissing her. Whereas the cruel, evil, monstrous, isolated villain who attempted to gain control and power over the kingdom is killed for not adhering to the status quo of innocence and true love. The Villain symbolizes independence and is depicted as covertly deconstructing the patriarchy; however, it appears as though in the early and middle movies, Disney did not want to be encouraging that representation to young female viewers and, as a result, had them killed. Instead, Disney wished to project the narrative of being a submissive woman who gets the happily-ever-after leads to community and true love. In the most current movie, Elsa is showcased overcoming by controlling her ice powers, suggesting the supercrip narrative. DeVolder (2013) deconstructs the overcoming story in relation to gender and “compulsory heroism” and provides three faucets of contextualization regarding the narrative (p. 747 & 748). The three rationales “it is not that long ago that womanhood was framed as a handicap to be overcome” as they were subjected to the ideology and practice of “charity and rehabilitation” and the overcoming narrative demonstrates the disabled female as strong and brave by obeying cultural and societal attitudes of normality (DeVolder, 2013, p. 747 & 748). This demonstrates

that the Disney Princess films adhere to the ideology of “compulsory heroism” as the first and middle movies were produced when attitudes about disability were overt, and thus the hero wins while the Villain dies. With the rise of disability advocacy, there has been a change in Disability representation embedded within ableist assumptions of the overcoming narrative (Pelka, 2012, p. ix).

The happily-ever -narrative in the conclusion of the Villain’s journey is represented by death, isolation, and fear of the unknown. In the early movie, the Evil Queen completes her mission of being the fairest in the land (Sharpsteen et al., 1937,1:15:34). However, her victory is short-lived as she is shown leaving the cottage of the Seven Dwarfs and Snow White sidekicks and protectors the Dwarfs and the good animals are running towards her (Sharpsteen et al., 1937,1:15:38-1:15:49). This demonstrates the rescuing of Snow White and seeking revenge on the harm the Evil Queen inflicted on the innocent and naïve Princess. The Evil Queen is trying to escape the Seven Dwarfs, she is limping through the forest, rain is pouring, with lightning and the evil vultures following her (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:15:56-1:16:18). The Evil Queen climbs the hill filled with rocks and boulders; she sees the Seven Dwarfs, are closing in on her, she makes it to the top with nowhere else to go (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:16:18-1:16:43). The Evil Queen states: “I’m trapped! What will I do?”, the frame transitions to the vultures, appears to be indicating something bad is going to happen (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:16:46- 1:16:51). The Evil Queen in her elderly frame attempts to push down a boulder to prevent the Seven Dwarfs from reaching her (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:16:54-1:17:08). However, a lightning bolt hits the edge of the cliff; resulting in her plummeting to her death and the boulder she was trying to push goes down with her (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:17:09-1:17:18). The vultures fly over

where she dies indicates the vultures being used as a marker of death (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:17:18-1:17:32). The death of the Evil Queen demonstrate good always prevails and her punishment of being jealous was death as her mission was to be the most attractive female in the kingdom.

Unlike the early, the middle movie, the Villain Ursula dies from manipulating a young female whose father is the sea king. Ursula manipulates King Triton to sacrifice his life and triton to save Ariel. The contract that Ariel signed detailed that if she did not have a true love kiss from the Prince by sunset on the third day, she would be the property of Ursula (Clements & Musker, 1989, 41:41: 44:22). Ursula crawls onto the ship and grabs Ariel and brings her back into the sea and states “Poor little princess. It’s not you I’m after. I’ve a much bigger fish to”. (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:10:26-1:10:35). Before she can complete her thought, King Triton interrupts; this demonstrates Ursula using Ariel to get to King Triton. King Triton demands Ursula to let Ariel go; however, the contract is legal as Ariel willingly agreed to the terms and conditions (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:10:52-1:10:55). This suggests that Ursula put thought into her plan and how to overpower King Triton’s magic that is stronger than her. Ursula is willing to bargain with King Triton to save Ariel so he can switch places with his daughter, and King Triton accepts the deal and signs the contract (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:11:09-1:11:38). King Triton’s crown was on the ground as he turned into a plant from her sea garden, she places the crown on her head and holds the Triton and states “At last. It’s mine” (Clements & Musker, 1989,1:11:53-1:12:02). Ursula’s mission is completed as she finally gains access to Triton and the powerful magic it holds. Prince Eric throws a harpoon at Ursula, it graces her arms, she employs her eels to go after him (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:12:15- 1:12:36). Ursula attempts

to harm Prince Eric with the triton; however, Ariel pulls her hair and the magic released from the triton harms her eels (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:12:15- 1:12:41). Ursula witnesses her eels turn into dust and their ashes fall into her hands as she states “Babies! My poor little poopsies” (Clements & Musker, 1989,1:12:41-1:12:49). The death of her eels represents the only companionship she has where the eels and she loved them as a result she gets angrier and seeks revenge on the good characters (Clements & Musker, 1989,1:12:48-1:12:51).

Ursula increases her bodily size, and her body is positioned on top of the waves, lighting is being released from the Triton she states to Prince Eric and Ariel “You pitiful, insignificant fools! Now I am the ruler of all the ocean” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:12:53-1:13:30). This demonstrates she acknowledges she completed her journey; however, like the early movie good always prevails when Ursula is killed. The death of Ursula is framed like the Evil Queen, such as the weather is dark, gloomy and there is lightning; however, the act of Ursula dying is different. Prince Eric was on a ship that arose from the ocean floor; he steered the ship into Ursula and stabbed her with the sharp bow from the ship (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:14:22-1:14:50). To showcase Ursula’s death, her body radiates lightning bolts, she becomes translucent, and viewers can see her skeleton, her tentacles get tangled into the ship, and it sinks to the ocean floor, and a black cloud is produced, representing death (Clements & Musker, 1989,1:14:50-1:15:00). The black clouds reveal Ursula’s death played a significant role in the elimination of what occurs when not adhering to cultural and societal norms. The symbolization of her bodily remains floating under the sea, the curses she put on the Merpeople were lifted, and King Triton was reunited with his triton (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:15:10-1:15:27).

Unlike the early and middle movies, the Villain Elsa does not die; however, the supercrip narrative is employed as she can overcome the fear of her ice powers and learn how to control them with a feeling of love. This demonstrates to the viewers that with love from the community, disabled women can adhere to body-mind normality, just as Elsa did in the film. Elsa escapes from the dungeon that was restraining her ice powers as her hands and feet were in shackles (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:12:33-1:13:30). However, her fear of the unknown of what was occurring to Anna and wanting to let go as she viewed herself as a monster, the shackles on her hands began to turn into ice (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:12:53-1:13:32). The guards and Prince Hans were on their way to get Elsa; however, Elsa's ice powers turned the dungeon into ice allowing her to escape (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:18:07- 1:18:33). Elsa is running through the ice storm alone; Prince Hans is after her as he wants to rule the kingdom of Arendelle, he manipulates her by the discourse he uses (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:25:00-1:25:39). Elsa mentions to Prince Hans to look after her sister, he goes on to say how Anna is turning into ice as a result of Elsa's ice powers (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:25:00-1:25:39). Elsa's biggest fear has come to fruition as she was scared to harm her sister (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:25:00-1:25:39). Elsa proceeds to turn her back towards Prince Hans and cry, it appears as the snowstorm is clearing up; however, Anna in state of weakness is going towards Kristoff but sees Prince Hans with a sword going to kill her sister (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:25:34-1:26:10). Anna chooses to save her sister instead of a man's love, she blocks the sword and turns into ice and breaks the sword (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:26:10-1:26:29). This demonstrates the progression of the treatment of the Villain as Anna always sees the good in her sister willing to sacrifice her life to save her sister, instead of having the Villain killed. Elsa sees that Anna has turned into ice and gets up, holds her sister's face, and hugs her as she cries; Anna begins to unfreeze (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:26:32:1:27:36). The fear Elsa once

had about being near Anna is going away as the two are seen hugging for the first time in the film. When they have touched Elsa states, “You sacrificed yourself for me?” Anna states: “I love you” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:27:36-1:27:43). Elsa uncovers the cure to overcome and control her ice powers and that is love and begins to unfreeze the kingdom (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:27:54-1:29:35). This demonstrates the power of community but framed with ableist ideologies of overcoming narrative. Elsa learnt how to control her ice powers and use them for good in the conclusion of the film, the gates are opened, and the members of the kingdom and Anna are skating in the ice rink Elsa made with her ice powers (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:31:33 & 1:32:26). Despite the fact Elsa is depicted as having to overcome her impairment, different from the early and middle movie, she gets the happily-ever-after depiction with her kingdom and sister demonstrating the progression of disabled womanhood being celebrated instead of killed.

The Princess Journey’s happily-ever-after narrative is framed with romance, hope, recusing, celebrating and overcoming the Villain’s curse and community. In the early film for Snow White to gain consciousness, the cure for the curse is “Love’s first kiss” (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:04:00). The Seven Dwarfs enacted the big rescue for Snow White to receive her justice as they were the ones who went after the Evil Queen and initiated her death (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:15:45-1:17:33). Moreover, The Seven Dwarfs created a “...a coffin of glass and gold and kept eternal vigil at her side” (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:19:03). This statement demonstrates The Seven Dwarfs supported Snow White in a state of unconsciousness; however, the individual to cure Snow White was Prince Charming (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:20:05-1:20:41). Moreover, through the film Snow White was waiting for his return and wishing for the happily-ever-after. The Seven Dwarfs did not receive praise for rescuing Snow White. The tall, able-bodied,

attractive male Prince Charming was depicted as the hero as he woke Snow White from her sleep and rode into the sunset with her and his white horse (Sharpsteen et al., 1937, 1:19:26-1:22:32). The Princess overcame her state of unconsciousness. Her wish to be with Prince Charming came true, and she got to ride into the sunset with the love of her life, completing the happily-ever-after narrative.

Ariel from the middle movie, the cure for her to remain human was “Not just any kiss, the kiss of true love” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 42:00). Unlike the early movie, the cure of Prince Charming kissing Snow White assisted with the film’s conclusion; however, Prince Eric was under a spell and was going to marry Vanessa; therefore, the animated film plotline was extended to showcase what happens if the cure does not occur. Ursula grabs Ariel into the ocean. Prince Eric goes after Ariel and attempts to rescue her under the sea, demonstrating the damsel in distress narrative of women needing “male protection” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:11:29-1:12:35; WHITE, 1986, p. 255). The damsel in distress narrative was present in the early and current movie; however, in the middle Ariel becomes a prisoner of Ursula, it was reinforced as Prince Eric, a human, goes into the water to save her and her father sacrifices his life and tries to ensure she is set free. Ariel goes above the surface to check on Prince Eric; however, Ursula’s powers have escalated. (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:12:49- 1:14:18). Ariel is holding onto a rock as the waves make it difficult to swim, and Ursula, with the power of the triton, breaks the rock (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:14:18-1:14:25). Ariel gets trapped inside a whirlpool that Ursula created, and the viewers can see the bottom of the ocean floor, Ursula attempts to hurt Ariel with the power of the triton, but she moves away (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:14:18-1:14:31). Moreover, Ariel is unable to take down Ursula; Prince Eric kills her demonstrating him

saving the Princess as she was in a state of helplessness and needed a man to seek revenge on behalf of her. King Triton is watching his daughter Ariel sitting on a rock, pining over Prince Eric; he states, “She really does love him, doesn't she, Sebastian?” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:15:33-1:15:44), Sebastian states: “(...) children got to be free to lead their own lives” (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:15:56). This demonstrates Triton had a change in his opinion about humans as he sees his daughter devastated being a mermaid. She wants to be with the man she loves; it appears as though he wants his daughter to be happy. Sebastian assists in supporting Ariel in completing the happily-ever-after narrative as King Triton uses his magic Triton to turn her into a human (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:15:20-1:16:33). Ariel becomes a human, showcasing her wish coming to fruition and fulfilling the overcoming narrative. Moreover, Prince Eric and Ariel get married in the conclusion, demonstrating the happily-ever-after narrative. The wedding was on a ship, and the Merpeople were above the water, showcasing the unity of a group of people coming together to celebrate a monumental event, a wedding and the joining of land and sea (Clements & Musker, 1989, 1:16:40-1:18:05).

In the most current movie, the cure for Anna to overcome her frozen heart is “But only an act of true love can thaw a frozen heart” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:08:46-1:09:05). To cure Anna's frozen heart, there were three acts of love that assisted in Anna's recovery from Olaf, and Kristoff and her saving Elsa. In the first act of love, Kristoff falls in love with Anna; however, he knows he must bring her back to Arendelle as he believes the individual to save her was her fiancé Prince Hans (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:13:40-1:14:24). Moreover, Kristoff is encouraged by his sidekick Sven to go back to Arendelle and save Anna, Kristoff is seen running towards Anna as it appears as that his love and kiss may be the cure (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:18:46-1:26:01). The

second act of love, Anna was locked in a room by Prince Hans who turned off the fireplace and critiques her naiveness of wanting to marry a stranger, as he had ulterior motives to take power over the kingdom (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:16:16-1:17:01). Anna is on the ground dying when Olaf appears, re-lights the fire and places her near it (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:19:48 -1:20:37). This demonstrates he sacrifices himself for Anna to stay warm as he is a snowman resulting in his melting; Olaf states, “Some people are worth melting for” (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:21:20). Anna and Olaf see that Kristoff came back for her and Olaf suggests to Anna that maybe Kristoff was the cure for her (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:21:42-1:25:58). It appears Disney wanted the viewers to believe that the cure was the stereotypical damsel in distress narrative of the man rescuing the helpless Princess; however, the trajectory changed as Anna is seen not running to Kristoff but to save her sister (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:26:00-1:26:26). The third act of love was Anna saving her sister Elsa from being killed when Anna unfroze as Elsa was crying and physically touching her (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:26:00-1:27:41). Anna throughout the animated film supported and believed in her sister, showcasing the progression of Disney current movie not having the man save the Princess. Anna overcame her isolation and received the happily-ever-after narrative; she fell in love with Kristoff at the film's end and created her community with Sven and Olaf (Buck & Lee, 2013, 1:30:17-1:32:16). Moreover, she established the relationship she wanted with her sister; the castle gates opened. She is with the kingdom celebrating Elsa's overcoming of her impairment. The Princess in the Disney animated film had the happily-ever-after narrative; however, in the current film, it is framed within the power of sisterhood, but Anna still falls in love.

## **Conclusion**

The research method of reflective thematic analysis and autoethnography provided flexibility in the data collection and analysis of framing the story of the Villain and Princess journeys. Each character had similarities, differences, and codes were created to establish the themes where the overcoming narrative was designed. The journey of the Princess and Villain in the Disney Princess films *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Little Mermaid*, and *Frozen* is embedded with the ideology of overcoming body-mind differences. In the early movie, the representation of the overcoming narrative is overt as Snow White completes her quest by being awakened by a true love's kiss and living happily ever after with Prince Charming. The Evil Queen transitioned into an old lady and deceived Snow White into biting the poisoned apple, resulting in Snow White being cursed into eternal slumber. The Evil Queen fulfilled her mission for a short period of being the most attractive woman in the kingdom, but it was short-lived as she was killed. In the middle of the movie, the depiction of the overcoming narrative is overt as Ariel achieves her goal of being a human, marrying Prince Eric and living happily-ever-after. Ursula achieves her quest of manipulating Ariel to prompt King Triton and having him sacrifice his life and Triton for his daughter. Moreover, Ursula's anger intensifies as her only companions die due to her selfishness, and she attempts to harm Prince Eric and Ariel; however, Prince Eric kills Ursula. The early and middle movies demonstrate that the Walt Disney Company adheres to the “redemption story” of good characters prevailing and evil characters facing the consequences for their cruel actions (DeVolder, 2013, p. 746). In the more current movie, the representation of Princess Anna is covert. Resene (2017) states, “Although Anna's journey offers viewers a feminist parody of the earlier princess stories in some ways, her story is familiar enough for audiences to recognize”. This statement emphasizes that Anna's characters adhere to the Disney Princess stereotypes to appease the viewer's expectations of having a helpless female needing

rescue from male characters and falling in love. In the animated film, Anna is introduced as needing to find true love in scenes where Kristoff saves Anna, and she receives the happily-ever-after narrative with her sister and falls in love with Kristoff. However, Elsa’s character portrayal of the encoded villain is covert, unlike the other Ursula and The Evil Queen, who are showcased as aiming to harm the innocent Princess. Meanwhile, Elsa fears hurting her sister, views herself as a monster, and internally represses her ice powers. In the end, Elsa overcomes her ability to control her ice powers, utilizes them for good, and has the happily-ever-after narrative with her sister and the kingdom. Elsa’s character representation highlights the positive trajectory of the Walt Disney Company in demonstrating the Villain's journey and the expectations to its viewers, from disabled girlhood to womanhood.

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