

EXAMINING MASCULINITIES IN PIXAR'S FEATURE FILMS:
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A BOY, WHETHER HUMAN, FISH, CAR, OR TOY

by

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ABSTRACT

This study examined portrayals of masculinities in Pixar's first 13 feature-length films. Qualitative analyses of the characters and narratives revealed six over-arching themes about masculinities: (1) males are successful when taking part in teamwork, (2) males are naturally brave, (3) male romantic or sexual interest manifests as heterosexual desire, (4) males desire to be loved and/or needed, (5) males who are fathers or paternal figures express fears about the future, and (6) male bosses are predominantly shown as greedy and driven solely by profit.

Common narratives found throughout the films show male characters journey toward becoming emotionally expressive and aware "New Men." Homosocial relationships were found to provide the most growth for male protagonists, whereas heterosocial relationships are continually shown to help males become better husbands and fathers. Narrative analyses also revealed the ways in which hegemonic masculinity subjugates female characters in positions of authority to the power of patriarchy.

Additionally, comparison of Pixar's films to societal shifts in masculinities in the 1990s and 2000s showed strong parallels between the real and mediated worlds. Numerous plot elements mirrored real-world concerns during the so-called "crisis of masculinity," including crises of identity, leadership, and portrayals of gender.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, Jackie, who always encouraged me to write—especially on the days when I would rather have done anything else.

Thanks for being my best friend, unwavering motivator, head cheerleader, and biggest fan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Woody, Buzz, Mr. Incredible, Nemo, Lightning McQueen, Mater, and WALL-E represent a handful of characters from Pixar's 13 highly successful feature-length films. Each character has become a major part of popular culture, and each is beloved by a global audience. We not only encounter Pixar characters in the theater, but they are often watched repeatedly by young children in their homes, on in-car DVD players, and on mobile devices. In fact, some Pixar characters have become so popular in today's society that they have supplanted former cultural icons with the same names. After all, the names Woody, Buzz, and Nemo are more likely to conjure up images of a cowboy toy, spaceman action figure, and a lost clownfish than images of actor Woody Harrelson, astronaut Buzz Aldrin, or the fictional Captain Nemo.

Additionally, the Pixar characters are integrated into massive marketing campaigns, where they not only become toys for children to play with, but their likenesses are emblazoned on products everywhere: backpacks, Halloween costumes, kid's meal toys, bedding, lunchboxes, posters, birthday cards, toothbrushes, Hallmark Keepsake ornaments, children's vitamins, t-shirts, shoes, and even underwear. Large sections of toy aisles are devoted to Pixar products. In fact, the merchandising campaigns are so prevalent and successful that consumer products related to Pixar's *Cars*, released in 2006, raked in more than \$1 billion, which was a first for a Pixar film (Booker, 2010), and it was projected to earn \$5 billion within two years of the film's theatrical release (Fields, 2008)—and that is not including the \$461 million the film earned in the global box office (Box Office Mojo, 2012).

Although the merchandising efforts have been highly successful and the characters have become a familiar part of everyday life, we should remember that none of it would be possible without the films themselves. Hundreds of millions of people—children and adults alike—encounter some form of Disney-related media, which includes Pixar films, every day. Former Disney CEO Michael Eisner (cited in Giroux, 1999) highlighted Disney’s prevalence in society:

More than 200 million people a year watch a Disney film or home video, 395 million watch a Disney TV show every week; 212 million listen or dance to Disney music, records or compact discs and more than 50 million people a year from all lands pass through the turnstiles of Disney theme parks. (p. 19)

Looking at the present day landscape of the Disney children’s entertainment empire, Pixar is king. Pixar-themed attractions have even become integrated as major fixtures at Disney’s theme parks, such as Disney World’s “Toy Story Mania” and “The Living Seas with Nemo and Friends” and Disneyland’s “Cars Land,” which recreates the fictional town of Radiator Springs from the *Cars* films. The theme parks also have Pixar Parades, featuring the characters from those films. Outside of the parks, Pixar’s characters are some of the most visible Disney-related characters in today’s society. Exposure to Pixar products is not confined to the theater or home. Pixar films are also used as teaching tools in elementary and middle school classrooms. For example, *Finding Nemo* is used to teach children lessons about family dynamics and environmental issues (see Evely, 2005), and *WALL-E*’s futuristic wasteland is used to spark classroom discussions about consumption and commercialism (see Baker, 2008).

Although it is easy to understand how the films are used as teaching tools about fairly straightforward topics such as sea life or the effects of consumerism on the environment, Pixar films can also teach children about the ways of life and the world around them. In an analysis of

entertainment media's impact on children, Bryant and Bryant (2003) concluded media function as "potent agents of socialization" (p. 204), causing children to view the real world according to what they see on the screen. Signorielli (1991) argued television may be the media tool most suited for socialization because it is found in nearly every American home, it requires only minimal skills to operate, and its visual nature is appealing to young audiences. I believe children's films easily fall into Signorielli's generalization because children often watch those films repeatedly at home and on mobile devices. Giroux (1999) stated "entertainment is always an educational force" (p. 28-29), and the most powerful role they play for children are as the new 'teaching machines'.... These films possess at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching roles, values and ideals as more traditional sites of learning, such as public schools, religious institutions, and the family.... The authority of such films, in part, stems from their unique form of representation and their ever-growing presence. (p. 84)

With television and films functioning as "teaching machines," researchers are often left to discover exactly what the lessons are. One area of children's media that receives a significant amount of scholarly attention is gender portrayals. Researchers seek to uncover the messages about gender that can be read from the texts, analyzing films for messages that may tell children what it means to be a boy or girl. The current project focuses on the construction of masculinity in Pixar's feature-length films. The goal of this research is to uncover, deconstruct, and ultimately reconstruct Pixar's messages about masculinity, providing the first comprehensive, in-depth, qualitative analysis about masculinity in Pixar films.

To begin, I will explicate the importance of Pixar's dominant position in the world of children's entertainment and its mainstream appeal, also discussing the power of popular culture and children's media, and why gender is an issue that warrants this type of investigation.

Pixar's Rise to the Top

For most of its life in the public eye, Pixar has been tied to Disney, but Pixar's founders were involved with the world of movie making long before Pixar became a household name. In fact, Pixar's creators showcased the potential of computer animation with a groundbreaking scene of the Genesis Effect in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, and Pixar's work was also used as a test for computer animation's application to hand-drawn animation in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*, with Pixar Image Computers used to scan, color, and composite the scene of King Triton waving goodbye to Ariel and Prince Eric at the end of the film (Price, 2008).

Rather than using Pixar's technology to simply assist in the animation process, the Mickey Mouse media giant and the innovative computer animation company entered into an agreement in 1991 for Disney to distribute three computer-animated films produced by Pixar (Price, 2008). This deal, despite heavily favoring Disney, paved the way for Pixar to make a revolutionary film: *Toy Story*, the first fully computer-animated feature-length film (Price, 2008). *Toy Story* was a major success at the box office, becoming the highest-grossing movie of 1995, with domestic and global box office receipts totaling \$192 million and \$357 million, respectively (Price, 2008).

At the height of Disney's animation revival in the 1990s, with hits like *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, and *The Lion King*, Pixar's foray into feature-length animation certainly made the company the figurative "new kid on the block." But rather than being bullied by bigger films at the box office, Pixar's deal with Disney essentially allowed the computer animation company

to use the Disney moniker as a “stamp of approval, signifying that this new form of animation met the same standards of excellence and wholesomeness in family entertainment associated with Disney” (Brookey & Westerfelhaus, 2005, p. 110).

As computer animation continued to grow in popularity, eventually eclipsing Disney’s bread-and-butter hand-drawn animation, Disney struggled to match Pixar’s success in the computerized cartoon world. With the rise of competitors like DreamWorks with the very successful *Shrek* franchise and Warner Brothers’ *Ice Age* franchise, Disney’s longtime position as king of the children’s movie domain was in peril. Pixar, meanwhile, continued to produce blockbusters with “clock-like regularity” (Price, 2008, p. 8), with each becoming what Booker (2010) called an “instant classic” (p. 78): “Each Pixar film now draws a huge audience simply because it is a Pixar film, regardless of the nature of the film, which is something no other studio can really say, including its parent, Disney” (p. 92). After all, think about three of Pixar’s more recent films: *Ratatouille*, about a rat with dreams about becoming a chef; *WALL-E*, about a trash-compacting robot falling in love; and *Up*, about an old man who ties thousands of helium-inflated balloons to his house in order to fly to South America to live out a lifelong dream for adventure inspired by his deceased wife. None of them sound like they would be blockbuster films in their own right—much less blockbuster *children’s* films—but Pixar turned each of those ideas into major box office successes.

Much of Disney’s animated fare in the early 2000s, such as *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001), *Treasure Planet* (2002), and *Home on the Range* (2004), failed to impress audiences, allowing Pixar to continue establishing itself as the leader in children’s animation. Disney CEO Robert Iger realized the prominence (and dominance) of Pixar’s films within the Disney empire while attending the opening of Hong Kong Disneyland in 2005 (Price, 2008). While Iger was

watching a parade of movie characters walk by a startling notion occurred to him. “I realized there wasn’t a character in the parade that had come from a Disney animated film in the last ten years except for Pixar,” Iger recalled (quoted in Price, 2008, p. 252). Fortunately for Disney, Iger was able to acquire Pixar for \$7.4 billion in 2006 (Price, 2008), and as a result, Pixar’s John Lasseter became the chief creative officer for both Disney and Pixar animation (Booker, 2010; Price, 2008). Even though it was now completely under Disney’s corporate umbrella, Pixar was allowed to function independently (Securities and Exchange Commission, 2006). By this point, Pixar was setting its own rules. After Disney’s 2007 time travel tale *Meet the Robinsons* failed to reach the same level of success as Pixar’s releases, it was evident that “Disney proper was no longer the prime mover and shaker in the animated film business, a role that had now been ceded to its Pixar division” (Booker, 2010, p. 75).

Popular Culture as a Mediated Mirror

Many media researchers—especially film researchers—have long discussed popular culture as a mirror that reflects our cultural identities (Jeffords, 1994; Lang, 2002; Malin, 2005; Strate, 1992; Trice & Holland, 2001). Moreover, films that prove to be a hit with audiences offer an even “clearer” reflection, as Trice and Holland (2001) said:

The movie industry is a social institution which mirrors prevalent images of our culture.

The mass appeal of a film is of special importance: a film’s popularity attests to its being a mirror into which audiences of its day liked to gaze... [giving] us clues about how large numbers of people liked to see themselves at a particular time. (p. 1)

But the cultural reflection seen in these mediated mirrors does more than just show us what our culture looks like at the moment; rather, these reflections also create culture by reinforcing norms and mainstream cultural standards (Malin, 2005). Thus, we buy into this

mediated representation of our culture both literally (when we purchase a movie ticket) and figuratively (when we accept and rearticulate the messages).

However, to simply say that movies, television shows, and other forms of media we engage with are simply reflecting and reinforcing particular ideas about our culture is to grossly ignore two key aspects of the media: they are created, and, perhaps more importantly, they are created to make money. The messages we watch are not simple reflections of our culture. They are carefully crafted visuals and sounds that are engineered in ways to draw theatergoers to the box office and then rent or purchase the film. In the case of children's media, films are created by adults to appeal to both child and adult audiences (Rankin & Neighbors, 2011). Children's films cannot simply reflect children's culture. Instead, they pass through a filter of adulthood, where they are crafted into messages that adults think children (and the parents who take them to the movies and buy DVDs and Blu-rays) will accept and enjoy.

It is in so-called "children's media" that we see an interesting interplay of popular culture crossing generational boundaries. As King, Lugo-Lugo, and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2010) said, children's films are often known for elements that are "aggressively poached from popular culture and other animated films...[making] the films more appealing to adults, ensuring broader audiences, because they make them more current, even hip" (p. 26). While this pop culture poaching would seem to reinforce the film-as-mirror metaphor, it actually continues to serve as a reminder of a film's constructed nature. The borrowed elements of pop culture are not simply reflected back at us. They are altered so that they are both familiar, yet new. The reflections are often distorted, much like looking in a funhouse mirror.

Let us consider for a moment what the creative process of filmmaking entails, which is made up of numerous rhetorical choices made by producers and directors. Almost all films

undergo extensive preproduction and months of preparation before the first scene is shot. After all, rarely do directors start filming and say, “Let’s just see what happens.” Instead, directors stage events for the camera, generating a very purposeful *mise-en-scène* (Bordwell & Thompson, 2004). For a live-action film, the director works to choreograph actors’ movements and elicit certain performances from them. Despite all of the control that the director has, there are still elements of production that fall out of his or her control—after all, actors are human and cannot be controlled completely. An actor may recite a line emphasizing certain words and using certain facial expressions, and these human inputs can have ripple effects throughout a scene. Emphasis on a certain word of dialog may cause another actor to respond by tweaking the emphasis on certain parts of his or her line. In short, live-action films cannot be completely planned and controlled because of the human element of the performers. But that factor is largely removed when we consider animated films, which are a major part of children’s entertainment media, particularly Disney and Pixar films.

As one of the long-time major players in children’s entertainment, research into Disney films and the creative process behind them is nothing new. In fact, they have received extensive scholarly attention over the past two decades, particularly in the areas of gender portrayals and stereotypes. However, the portion of that extensive body of research that addresses films that Disney produced in conjunction with Pixar (both before and after Pixar became a full-fledged member of the Disney family) is extremely small when compared to the amount of research into Disney proper films.

However, one thing the literature makes clear is that Disney’s animated films are permeated with stereotyped gender portrayals. The presence of these gender messages is not a fluke in the filmmaking process. Bell (1995) drew attention to this fact: “Disney animation is not

an innocent art form: nothing accidental or serendipitous occurs in animation as each *second* of action on screen is rendered in twenty-four different still paintings” (p. 108). In addition to carefully crafting each character’s appearance, every move a character makes is also precisely choreographed. Abel (1995) stated, “The cartoon director controls the timing of a wink, a take, a gesture down to the twenty-fourth of a second, and sees exactly what it will look like at every step of the creative process” (p. 184). While computer technology has revolutionized the animation process, it does not change the fact that even computer-generated characters are created by artists (Catmull, 2009)—artists that are making choices about how characters look, move, and act in every frame of the film. In fact, Price (2008) credited the “illusion of life in the characters” to “subtle choices made by the animators” such as eye and lip movements and emotive body language (p. 135).

Computer animation takes the level of control that animators have over characters to unbelievable heights, and in terms of *mise-en-scène*, every pixel is under the director’s control. No longer is control in an animated film limited to an artist’s ability to draw. Now computers allow for the minutest expression or movement to be precisely manipulated. Take the original *Toy Story* for example, animators created individual points of articulation called “avars,” short for “articulated variables,” for every element on the screen that moved (Price, 2008). Buzz and Woody each had more than 700 avars, with Woody’s mouth alone containing 58 avars (Price, 2008, p. 134). In *Monsters, Inc.*, Pixar animators were able to control how each of the 2,320,413 hairs on the furry blue monster Sully moved (Price, 2008). More recently, Princess Merida’s unruly curly red hair in *Brave* is made up of about 111,000 individual strands, which took animators years to perfect (Seymour, 2012).

With all of the thought, planning, and countless hours of computer processing time put into Pixar's feature film releases, media researchers should seek to understand and uncover the messages these films may contain and how those messages may be read by audiences—especially audiences made up of impressionable children. After all, we tell children not to talk to strangers. We want to get to know their friends to find out with whom they are playing. It makes sense then that parents should want to know more about children's mediated friends—the characters that they spend countless hours watching each week and role-playing during playtime. However, for the most part, research into children's media is met with skepticism.

Bell, Haas, and Sells (1995) described how Disney's hegemonic power in entertainment in the twentieth century often allowed it to escape serious criticism. According to their argument, traditional film theorists viewed Disney films to have little artistic or critical merit and value. Bell et al. (1995) summed up the high-minded mentality this way: "Not unlike certain relatives forcing their feet into Cinderella's shoe, Disney film is the ugly stepsister unfit for the glass slipper of high theory" (p. 3). Conversely, popular critics and mass audiences often valorize Disney—and now, by extension, Pixar—products as safe entertainment for parents to allow their children to watch. Here, Bell et al. said some believe Disney films are not below some artistic critical threshold; rather, they are above reproach. Even media-literate consumers often have difficulty critiquing Disney films:

Our own students, occupying a halfway house between film critics and mass audience, are extremely resistant to critique of Disney film. Assigned to read several essays from this collection [*From Mouse to Mermaid*] for a class in cultural studies, our students commonly complained, "You're reading too much into this film" and "You can't say that about Walt Disney!" These students consistently cite four easy pardons for their

pleasurable participation in Disney film and its apolitical agendas: it's only for children, it's only fantasy, it's only a cartoon, and it's just good business." These four naturalizations create a Disney text exempt from material, historical, and political influences. The naturalized Disney text is "pure entertainment," somehow centrifuged from ideological forces. (p. 4)

I believe society has come to view Disney's Pixar products in much the same way. In the early stages of its entry in to the feature film business, Pixar's then-CEO Steve Jobs sought to "establish Pixar in the minds of parents as another Disney" and to gain the same level of trust that parents gave Disney films (Price, 2008, p. 164). Of course, the distribution deal between the two companies helped Pixar establish itself as a major player in the computer-animated film world, and its connection to Disney was completely solidified by the 2006 buyout. In many ways, Pixar and Disney films are often seen as indistinguishable from one another; Bryman (2004) noted, "audiences are sometimes unsure about what is and is not a Disney film" (p. 8). Even some media researchers appear to have trouble making the distinction by including Pixar films in their analyses of Disney films, even before Pixar merged with Disney (e.g., Faherty, 2001; Hubka, Hovdestad, & Tonmyr, 2009; Wiersma, 2001), while some purposefully exclude Pixar films from Disney analyses (e.g., Davis, 2006; Robinson, Callister, Magoffin, & Moore, 2007; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2003).

Despite Pixar truly becoming a full member of the Disney empire, Booker (2010) cautioned that Disney films and Pixar films are not really the same thing, even after Pixar became a wholly owned subsidiary of Disney (p. 43). Booker's argument focuses on the technological versus the magical realms, with Pixar's films, such as *Cars*, being grounded in "the realm of technology" (p. 44). Lightning McQueen, Mater, and the others are all machines driven

by electricity. Whereas characters like Lumiere the candlestick and Cogsworth the clock from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* exist as the results of magical intervention. To date, 2012's *Brave* is the only Pixar film to feature any form of magic as a plot device. However, the mechanical versus magical argument is not the only reason that I believe Pixar and Disney films should not be lumped together for analysis. Consider that when Disney acquired Pixar, the latter did not change its creative or production processes. Yes, Pixar was now a part of the largest entertainment empire in the world, but Pixar's creative minds still made movies the way that they wanted to make them. Pixar functions as a separate entity within the Disney empire (Securities and Exchange Commission, 2006). Additionally, Pixar's executives were given control of Disney's animation departments (Price, 2008). It was Pixar that continued to set the bar for computer-generated animation, not Disney. The bar of excellence is one that Pixar continues to set today. I believe researchers should be careful to consider how films are categorized for analysis. Lumping all Pixar films into a Disney study is very much like comparing apples to oranges: a direct comparison cannot be made. Pixar is essentially in control of Disney animation. Simply because Disney owns Pixar does not mean that their products are one in the same. Many members of Pixar's creative team are still some of the original employees from the company's early days, even before they began feature-length film production. Pixar continues to function as it did before the merger, and I believe these facts warrant the study of Pixar films separately from the rest of Disney's films.

Mediated Portrayals of Gender

Anyone remotely familiar with Pixar's collection of films can probably tell you that they predominately focus on male characters. Whether they are toys, monsters, fish, rats, cars, robots, or the occasional human, most of Pixar's films feature male protagonists. That is not to say that

female characters have not been included in Pixar's films (e.g., Bo Peep, Jessie, Elastigirl, and EVE), but the films have never been *about* a girl (Holmes, 2009)—that is, until *Brave*'s Princess Merida. After 12 films where males were in the limelight, Pixar finally told a story that focused on a female character. Although many were glad to see this symbol of gender inclusion, some critics wondered why Pixar would choose for its first female protagonist to be a princess—the oldest, most common role for a female character to play in an animated children's movie (see DeFife, 2009; Holmes, 2009). Brenda Chapman, *Brave*'s initial director, said she wanted to turn the fairytale genre “on its head,” (Murphy, 2010, para. 3) with what she called “an atypical princess story” (Griffin, 2011, para. 5); however, much of the literature about Princess Merida, which mainly consists of stories about the making of the film and reviews, make Merida's character seem similar to another “groundbreaking” Disney princess. With descriptions like “headstrong royal” (Phillips, 2012, para. 2), who is an “athletic girl...[with a] free spirit...[and] a wildness about her” (Murphy, 2012, para. 4), Princess Merida begins to sound like a Scottish version of Disney's Native American princess, Pocahontas. It should be noted that Chapman left the project before completion due to “creative differences” (Griffin, 2011), but Chapman's contract with Pixar prevents her from discussing the specific details of the events that lead to her departure from the film (Satran, 2012). *Brave* was directed by Mark Andrews after Chapman's departure; however, Chapman was given a directing credit.

Although I certainly applaud Pixar for finally creating a film with a female as its central character, I also worry that *Brave* will end any popular criticisms about gender in Pixar films now that Princess Merida has figuratively broken the “glass ceiling” for Pixar's protagonists. Although *Brave* is praised for breaking the gender barrier, I believe we should still be asking ourselves the questions, “What can these films be teaching our children about gender? And

because Pixar has so heavily focused on male characters, what are the messages about masculinity, in particular?”

Trying to answer those questions is the goal of this research. However, before we begin delving into masculine themes in Pixar’s films, we must first discuss some foundational points about gender and masculinity. These include acknowledging that gender is a social construction as well as a performance. A brief discussion about the concept of hegemonic masculinity will follow.

Gender Construction.

From the moment a person is born, the formation of his or her gender identity begins. These gender identities are largely products of cultural values that are written on the “blank page” of the human body (Butler, 1990, p. 166). Although everyone is born with a certain sex—either biologically male or female, except for intersexed individuals—no one is born with a gender as a part of one’s innate embodiment of personhood. Rather, our identity as a gendered being is something that we learn (Alloway, 1995; Craig, 1992). From those first moments of life where boys are dressed in blue and girls are dressed in pink, the unending life-long cycle of gender creation and formation has started. Alloway (1995) highlighted that the social construction of gender allows us to examine how “gender is ‘spoken into existence’ as children are immersed in multiple social practices and experiences endorsing gender as difference and opposition” (pp. 9-10).

Certain cultural expectations are held for boys and girls, and often parents, guardians, teachers, and childcare workers constantly measure a child’s actions against those expectations (see Harris, 1995). Many of these gender expectations are the commonly held stereotypes about males and females. Boys should play with trucks and build forts; girls should play with dolls and

host tea parties. Boys should play with toy guns; girls should play with fairy wands. Boys are loud and roughhouse; girls are soft-spoken and play quietly. Boys are expected to get covered in dirt and mud; girls are expected to play with makeup. Any child who deviates from these expectations is encouraged to tow the gendered line. For example, if little Johnny picks up his sister's Barbie doll and begins to play, someone would probably be quick to tell him that "Boys don't play with dolls." This example brings us to another important aspect about gender and society's way of seeing it as a binary system, with masculinity and femininity working in tandem to renegotiate and redefine the other (Alloway, 1995; MacNaughton, 2000). Often times demarcating the limits of one category requires the exclusion of the other, or as Alloway (1995) stated: "'Be a boy' is understood as 'Don't be a girl'" (p. 46). Even as children, young boys begin to change their behaviors by oftentimes withholding affection, showing reluctance to admit their fears, and becoming ashamed to cry when they are hurt (Smith, 2011).

Of course, gender is not simply established in childhood, nor is it universal. Alsop, Fitzsimons, and Lennon (2002) said recognizing that gender is "a structure of subjectivity, which can vary greatly in different social locations, means that gendering can be seen as a *process* rather than as a 'role'" (p. 79, emphasis in the original). Thus we derive gender by examining the meaning of what it means to be a man or woman, and those meanings are "constantly being reproduced and negotiated, and can have unexpected and contradictory effects" (Alsop, Fitzsimons, & Lennon, 2002, p. 80; also see Harris, 1995.) The meanings of those gendered messages are not concrete; instead they are malleable, influenced by many factors, such as time, race, social class (Alsop et al., 2002) and past experiences (Harris, 1995). Perhaps the most powerful of these factors is time. Our ideas about gender have changed markedly over the past century. Women were granted the right to vote. We have witnessed women running for our

nation's highest public offices. It is now acceptable and commonplace for women to work outside of the home, rather than being a stay-at-home mom. Conversely, men's role as the family breadwinner is now often shared with his spouse. More men are even starting to leave the workforce and become stay-at-home dads—a concept that was unimaginable 50 or 60 years ago.

This is where Alsop et al.'s (2002) “unexpected and contradictory effects” come into play. Our real life experiences with gender seldom fall within clearly demarcated categories of “male” and “female.” Do we consider a working mother less of a woman than a stay-at-home mom? Is a father who takes an active, involved, and engaged role in parenting seen as less of a man compared to a man focused solely on his job and providing financial resources for his family? The answer to both of these questions should be a resounding “No.” Our concepts of gender adapt to fit these iterations of gendered behavior. We accept that many women work outside the home and that many men take on increasingly active roles in parenting. Although these actions do deviate from stereotypic gender roles of decades past, neither of these types of behavior limits a person's ability to “be” a certain gender.

Gender Performance.

A second major aspect of gender to consider is that it is performative in nature. If our gender is socially constructed, thereby subject to a cultural rulebook by which males and females are measured, then our conception of our own gender is heavily influenced by how our performance of being either a male or female matches up with the cultural norms. Judith Butler's work on gender helps us to understand gender as a performance. As previously mentioned, many people automatically link gender to biological sex, and many people spend their lives trying to stay within gendered boundaries with the fear that a misstep could cause them to be seen outside of the traditional binary views of gender. Butler (1990) said this creates the idea of an

“organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (p. 173). Butler argued that if gender is viewed as a fabrication, then the idea of a true gender is also not real. It is a merely a fantasy, meaning “genders can be neither true nor false, but are only produced” (Butler, 1990, p. 174). Butler used the example of drag queens to highlight the performative aspects of gender, which she said mocks the notion of a “true gender identity” (p. 174). Though biologically male, drag performers may identify their gender as male or female, and are performing a specific gender (female). Drag, Butler said, reveals the interplay between those three factors; rather than creating a picture of a unified woman, it further shows how gender is not tied to anatomical sex, nor is gender performance necessarily tied to gender identity. It is a parody of gender that places a spotlight on the notion of a true female, which does not exist (Butler, 1990). Drag performers, in essence, are in on the fact that true gender is a joke, and that allows them to enjoy their camp performances. Conversely, those who do not see the truth about gender performance are unable to laugh at the joke, and ultimately, the joke is on them.

The performative aspect of gender also highlights gender’s instabilities. Since it is more fluid rather than fixed, we must understand that gender identities are in a state of constant flux. To better understand these fluctuations, we must ask ourselves where our gender identity comes from. Is it from within us, or is it an effect of the way we act? (Similar to the question “Which came first: the chicken or the egg?”) Because we have seen that there is no innate gender core within us, then our gender must be established outside of our body (Butler, 1990). This is accomplished by our actions and behaviors, such as body gestures and movements and other forms of expression that “constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler, 1990, p. 179). Thus, our gender identities are an *effect*, not the *cause*, of our actions. As Alsop et al.

(2002) succinctly put it: “The *doer* becomes formed from the *doing*” (p. 99, emphasis added). Each person’s gender identity is the unique sum of his or her actions.

Hegemonic Masculinity.

Despite the fact that there are many different ways in which gender can be performed, society still tends to use the blanket terms of “masculine” and “feminine” to categorize people. Society is also quick to punish those who “fail to do their gender right” (Butler, 1990, p. 140). These people are seen as deviant and classified as “Other,” falling outside of “acceptable” society. They often struggle throughout their lives as they try to understand their “alternative” gender constructions and fit within larger social structures (see Meyerowitz, 2002). Within each of those categories dominant ideals about what males and females should be reinforce the power of certain groups (e.g., males, Whites, heterosexuals) over others (Alsop et al., 2002; Butler, 1990). This form of hegemonic masculinity is not simply a descriptor for what a man should be like in a given society; rather, it is a particular version of masculinity to which women and non-dominant male groups (e.g., effeminate, young, or homosexual men) are subordinated (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1987; Connell, 1987). It works to establish and maintain patriarchal dominance in ways that largely go unquestioned. Hanke (1992) defined hegemonic masculinity as

the social ascendancy of a particular version or model of masculinity that operates on the terrain of common sense and conventional morality that defines ‘what it means to be a man,’ thus securing the dominance of some men (and the subordination of women) within the sex/gender system. (p. 190)

So why does our society as a whole not reject and rebel against hegemonic masculinity? One of the main reasons is that it (along with all other forms of hegemony) works behind a cloak of invisibility. As Pomerance and Gateward (2005) noted, “male power goes largely uninspected

and unseen, an invisible background that ‘innocently’ speaks to the way things are” (p. 1). Thus, hegemonic masculinity is constructed as something natural, ordinary, and normal (Donaldson, 1993). Of course, things that are ordinary and normal do not stand out. Operating under the guise of common sense, hegemonic masculinity can move within a culture without calling attention to itself, much like a plain, forgettable face in a crowd. Ultimately, we cannot question and analyze that which we do not see. The unseen message about what a man should be basically boils down to being “strong, stalwart, morally responsible, a good citizen, a taxpayer, predictable—indeed insurable—and a good catch for anyone eager to find a husband who can be counted on” (Pomerance, 2005).

Another feature that helps hegemonic masculinity maintain its invisible, enigmatic state is the fact that it is constantly changing. In order to maintain its dominance, a hegemony must react and adapt to those it dominates, and for masculinity, this means accepting the feminine and reproducing it in a hegemonic way. Thus, this form of masculinity “becomes less hegemonic in order to stay hegemonic” (MacKinnon, 2003, p. 73).

Denski and Sholle (1992) use the example of heavy metal rockers of the 1980s to show how the feminine is assimilated and rearticulated through hegemonic masculinity. Singing emotional ballads while wearing makeup and jewelry, many glam rockers incorporated traditionally feminine gender-coded features into their performances, and yet, they are still seen as powerful, heterosexual males. Their bodies became objects of desire. Thus, these glam-styled bodies were seductive to females. Conversely, Denski and Sholle argued that these glam rockers functioned in a different way for males, alleviating their fear of the feminine by integrating it into a masculine image. An additional example comes from the more recent work of Pompper (2010), who conducted numerous interviews with college-age men and their fathers or uncles

regarding how they view masculinity in our society and for themselves. Harkening back to Alsop et al.'s (2002) "contradictory effects" of performing masculinity, Pompper (2010) observed that men are conflicted by the emergence of the metrosexual male. Pompper (2010) found that men, especially younger men, described a metrosexual man in feminine or homosexual ways (e.g., excessive hair care, manicures and pedicures, using lotions and creams, shaving one's arms and chest, and "carrying a manpurse" (p. 690). Despite their negative attitudes toward these behaviors, many men admitted to engaging in them because they said more women are expecting men to act in those ways (Pompper, 2010). Thus, these men are conflicted because they feel they must engage in what they believe are feminine or homosexual behaviors in order to create and maintain hegemonic masculine heterosexual relationships.

Ultimately, what does this mean for boys and men in our society? It means that males are constantly trying to measure up to a "blueprint" that keeps changing. How can males build a solid gender identity if the plans continue to change? Indeed, adopting a gender identity and working to maintain it is a traumatic, painful, anxiety driven process; and it is a process that never ends because masculinity is continuously being constructed and reconstructed (Harris, 1995). As most males seek to firmly establish themselves, "true" masculinity is always frustratingly out of reach. In fact, the version of manhood created by hegemonic masculinity is one that most men do not live up to, and it is certainly not the most common form of masculinity (Connell, 1993; Donaldson, 1993). Instead, it is embodied by popular heroes, role models, and fantasy figures (Donaldson, 1993). Perhaps one of the most popular of these men is the "all-American cowboy" John Wayne. Although countless people idolize Wayne as the epitome of the 20th-century American male, many of them do not know that "John Wayne" is a fabrication—the stage name for Marion Morrison. In reality, Morrison was quite different from his Western alter

ego, aka “The Duke.” He preferred to wear business suits, not a 10-gallon hat and chaps, when not on camera (Jhally, 1999). Many professional athletes are seen as prime examples of the hegemonic ideal man. Trujillo (1991) argued that famed baseball pitcher Nolan Ryan is a prime example of how hegemonic masculinity is manifested in American sports culture. Trujillo (1991) demonstrated that Nolan Ryan exemplified five of the key features of hegemonic masculinity in American culture: “(1) physical force and control, (2) occupational achievement, (3) familial patriarchy, (4) frontiersmanship, and (5) heterosexuality” (p. 291). Trujillo explicated how Ryan met all of these criteria by (1) being a strong man whose pitches were so fast they broke a catcher’s hands and collar bone and knocked another unconscious, (2) becoming one of the most popular and successful baseball players of our time, (3) fathering his own children, as well as functioning as a symbolic father to his teammates, (4) embodying the spirit of the rugged American cowboy during the offseason on his family’s ranches, and (5) remaining faithful and married to his wife Ruth. Meanwhile, most men are Average Joes unable to match hyperbolic images of masculinity such as Wayne and Ryan. Pixar characters can certainly be viewed as modern-day heroes and role models for young children, so we must make an effort to understand what types of masculinities they represent.

It is important to understand that, despite the powerful messages about the hegemonic version of the ideal man, it is not the only form of masculinity available to men. Indeed, masculinity cannot be thought of as a singular concept, but rather as “varied, dynamic, and changing” (Alsop, 2002, p. 136). Therefore, for this project, the word “masculinities” will be used to encompass all forms of masculinity. The term “hegemonic masculinity” will be used to differentiate the idealized version from the plethora of forms masculinity can take.

Putting the Pieces Together

So how do we tie all of these things—Pixar, popular culture, and gender—together? Earlier, I quoted Giroux (1999) on children’s films functioning as educational forces, what he called “teaching machines,” that can influence millions of young minds. Because films serve as “central repositories” of cultural values (Booker, 2010, p. 186), it is important that we understand what lessons these films may be imparting to children (and reinforcing for adults who also watch the films). Film is one of the “most productive cultural sites on which identities are performed” (Quint, 2005), presenting audiences with a seemingly endless supply of different gender portrayals. In essence, it allows audiences to see what type of gender performances are accepted or rejected without ever actually putting their own gender identity at risk.

Some of the most prominent aspects of any culture are its representations of gender, and we know that gender is a constructed effect of our daily actions (Butler, 1990). Gender schemata, which are “mental representations of experiences telling us how to behave” (Harris, 1995), are ingrained in every type of cultural discourse (Bem, 1993). Once these schemata are internalized in the minds of young children, they begin to predispose children to develop gender identities in line with those social norms (Bem, 1993).

Additionally, in our screen-focused culture—no matter whether they are silver screens, TV screens, or mobile screens—popular media provide boys with easily accessible, repeatedly encountered, and socially approved models of masculinity (Donald, 1992), and sadly, many of those young boys spend more time each with mediated men than the real men in their lives, like fathers, teachers, and coaches (Barcus, 1983). Many of the unrealistic standards of hegemonic masculinity seen in the media leave boys and adolescents feeling insecure about their gender identity (Harris, 1995).

Therefore, it is imperative to study some of the most popular discourses in children's lives in order to better understand what messages they may be receiving. Although Pixar appears to have been largely overlooked in the field of gender research, it can no longer be ignored (Decker, 2010). Because of Pixar's popularity and prominence in popular culture, it deserves special attention, and with its primary focus on male characters, I believe that the messages about masculinity in Pixar films should also be explored. This qualitative project is an effort to answer calls to action for better understandings of gender portrayals in children's media (see Smith, Pieper, Granados, & Choueiti, 2010) that go beyond simple surface-level measures of research, like counting the number of male and female characters and cataloging plots (Ross, 2004). It is my hope that the findings of this research will help scholars, professionals and parents alike understand some of the possible meanings about masculinity that are present in Pixar films. In turn, writers and producers may get a better understanding about possible implications of their work, and parents can help their children critically analyze these characters that they repeatedly interact with (Baker & Raney, 2007). However, the first step in that process is understanding what messages are being presented (Baker & Raney, 2007).

The following literature review examines previous research on gender in the media and cultural shifts in masculinity during the 1990s and 2000s. It also surveys the work that had been done specifically on gender in Pixar films.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Signorielli (2001) explained that the study of mass media can be viewed as a three-step process. The first step involves examining the images that people encounter in the media. During the second step, researchers discover the possible effects these images may have on those audiences. The last step includes understanding the institutional processes that create the images and ensure their success or failure. While most research projects probe at one of these points, our understanding of a singular step in the process is tied to understanding aspects of the other two (Signorielli, 2001). Because the second and third steps rely more heavily on the completion of the first, which is studying the images themselves, more emphasis is often placed on developing those understandings (Signorielli, 2001).

When examining gender in the media, one quickly realizes that massive amounts of research have been conducted in this area. Research methods range from various forms of qualitative inquiry to numerous quantitative analyses. The most prominent mass-communication research method for studying gender is content analysis (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001). When focusing specifically on children's media, Disney has always been a main target for many researchers. However, much of that work has focused on the female characters in those films, and that is primarily because most Disney films feature female protagonists, many of them princesses. The study of masculinity in Disney films is very limited in comparison.

It is still important to understand the types of gendered messages that are present in the films that are produced solely by Disney, especially because Pixar films are now often

indiscriminately lumped with Disney proper films. This is in large part because Disney has been one of the dominant names in children's media for more than 70 years, and although Disney proper may no longer be the king of the children's animated movie hill, the company's cultural prominence is undeniable. However, the limited research into Pixar films has begun to show the different types of gender messages that children's animation is presenting (see Brydon, 2009; Decker, 2010; Finklea, 2010, 2011; Gillam & Wooden, 2008).

I will begin with a general overview of media and gender research, specifically looking at masculinities and cultural trends of the 1990s and 2000s, narrowing the focus to children's media, then Disney and Pixar films.

Media and Gender Studies: A General Overview

Prior to the evolution of television as a mass medium, our society was fascinated with the movies. Low ticket prices—along with a relative lack of other media-based entertainment options—helped spark our cultural fascination with moving images on a screen. With the growing adoption of television in American households in the 1950s, researchers were quick to begin studying the images presented on those small, black-and-white TVs (Signorielli, 2001). Some of the first content analyses of television programming found that males outnumbered females by a ratio of 2:1 (Head, 1954; Smythe, 1954). The lop-sided gender ratio has been repeatedly found in content analyses of television programming spanning several decades (Gerbner, 1997; Greenberg, 1980; Signorielli, 1984, 1989). This trend is also seen in feature films in recent decades. Smith, Granados, Choueiti, and Pieper (2007) studied more than 15,000 speaking characters in 400 top-grossing G, PG, PG-13, and R-rated films released between 1990 and 2006. They found nearly three-quarters of all characters were male. These studies make one thing very clear: both television and the silver screen are dominated by men. Comparing the

mediated world's gender makeup to that of reality further indicates how the images on television and in movies do not—and probably never will—accurately reflect the world in which we live, where the gender ratio is much more even, with women actually outnumbering men in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Studies also found particular gender traits common in both television and film. On television, male characters are more likely to be shown as having a job (Glascock, 2001; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999) and are more likely to be seen working (Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001). In addition to having jobs, male characters are also more likely than females to have leadership roles and power at work (Lauzen & Dozier, 2004). Female characters, in primetime programming are younger than their male counterparts (Gerbner, 1997; Glascock, 2001; Lauzen & Dozier, 1999; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999). Additionally, females are more likely than males to be married and/or have children (Gerbner, 1997; Glascock, 2001). Female characters in feature films are younger than male characters and are seen in more traditional roles, such as caregivers (Smith & Granados, 2009). Many female characters in film are there to be enjoyed by the heterosexual male viewer as hypersexual eye candy, and they are more likely than males to be depicted as “scantily clad, top heavy, and with little room for a womb or other internal organs” (Smith & Granados, 2009, p. 343). One need only think of the James Bond film franchise to see prominent examples of female eye candy, or “Bond girls,” as they have come to be known. Even some of the Bond girls’ names (e.g., Holly Goodhead, Pussy Galore) further present them as sexualized objects used for males’ sexual gratification. (Although, Funnell, 2011, argued the recent revitalization in the Bond franchise has presented Daniel Craig’s Bond in the role of the sexual spectacle that used to belong to the “Bond girls,” especially when Bond is seen in swimsuits emerging from the water, calling back to images of Bond women.)

Masculinity in the Movies and Cultural Shifts of the 1990s

Many books have been written investigating the portrayal of masculinity in the media. These books study masculinity and film in a variety of contexts. Some offer rather comprehensive examinations of films across several decades (see Trice & Holland, 2001) or varied looks at a variety of media texts (see Craig, 1992). Some focus on specific time frames (see Jeffords, 1994; see Malin 2005); others focus on specific aspects of masculinity, such as boyhood (see Pomerance & Gateward, 2005) or the male body (see Lehman, 1993). Mediated males have been the subject of intense study for the past 20 years.

Trice and Holland (2001) provided an extensive look at masculinity in popular American films from the 1920s to the end of the 20th century. Films like *Gone with the Wind* and *Casablanca* show men moving from outlaws and outsiders, to conspirators, and ultimately heroes (Trice & Holland, 2001, pp. 26-27). The clear message was that men should be men of action instead of men of contemplation. Trice and Holland examine the men of 1939's *The Wizard of Oz*, which is known for its "incomplete" men: the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, and the Cowardly Lion. The film implies that a "real" man must combine knowledge, feelings, and action, which the trio demonstrates when they work together to defeat the Wicked Witch. Each man feels incomplete because they lack a brain, heart, or courage, and the film shows us the process they endure to become whole. Ultimately, the film shows that each of the men possessed the quality they thought they lacked (Trice & Holland, 2001). The men were never "incomplete;" they simply had not realized their full potential.

Another theme of many early 20th century films is that men are not reach their full potential until they married a good woman and preferably had children. Messages about childrearing were also present in films. *The Bells of St. Mary's*, released in 1945, was very clear

in its message that, not only does it take two parents (or in this case, a Catholic priest and nun charged with caring for troubled children) to raise a child, it takes a man to raise a boy and a woman to raise a girl (Trice & Holland, 2001, p. 47). Trice and Holland said *The Bells of St. Mary's* Father O'Malley, played by Bing Crosby, can be viewed as a model of the ideal male: "He has skills; he takes charge; he acts with compassion. He is the full realization of the Tin Man-Scarecrow-Cowardly Lion configuration" (Trice & Holland, 2001, p. 47).

Biblical epics during this time also sent clear messages about masculinity. As Holland and Trice (2001) summarized, these films ultimately showed that men should "be strong, live simply, and keep the zipper up" (p. 99). Ironically, the Biblical epics paved the way for a major shift in the mediated male by changing the way male heroes should look, creating some of the early versions of muscular bodies that would permeate many films of the 1980s (Holland & Trice, 2001). As one of the first films to focus on the male physique, *Samson and Delilah* invited women to gaze at the film's nearly naked male star, prompting the *New York Times* to use the word "hunk" for the first time in a film review (Holland & Trice, 2001, p. 99).

Shifts in the Western notions of masculinity can also be seen in the most prominent political office in the United States: the President. As one of the most powerful people in the world, the President also symbolizes the United States during that certain point in time. Although most voters cast their ballot based on political ideologies, we must realize that we also cast our ballots for a person—a person that embodies certain ideas and beliefs that we hold as a country and as an individual. In her book *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era*, Susan Jeffords (1994) examined the masculine images in films of the 1980s and compared them with images and rhetoric of the Reagan administration. Jeffords argued that both President Ronald Reagan and Hollywood sought to construct a harder, tougher version of masculinity, especially

in the wake of the “soft” years of the Carter administration and the softer forms of masculinity of 1970s films (e.g., *Star Wars*’s Luke Skywalker must learn to use the feminized Force—which relies on feminine intuition, not masculine logic—to triumph over the Dark Side; see Trice & Holland, 2001, for further *Star Wars* analysis).

Jeffords (1994) said bodies were divided into two distinct categories during the 1980s: the errant body and the normative body. During this time, political images and rhetoric classified errant bodies as soft, containing STDs (particularly HIV and AIDS), illegal drugs, immorality, and laziness. Conversely, normative bodies were constructed as hard bodies, which were strong, loyal, determined, and courageous. Jeffords said Reagan’s white, male hard body was contrasted to the feminized, racial minority errant bodies. Similarly, characters like Rambo, John McClane, and Robocop represent heroic male bodies that are always superior to those of his enemies, his companions, and males in the audience. Additionally, it is their possession of the hard body that denotes them as the hero among other male characters in the film. As Jeffords (1994) said, “Though other characters may be quick-witted, charming, experienced, or clever, without the hard body to go with it, they cannot be heroes” (p. 53).

As the United States transitioned from the Reagan administration to first Bush administration, a shift in masculinities was seen both in the Oval Office and in theaters around the country. Bush struggled to find a balance between Reagan’s hard-bodied style and balancing his own interests. Jeffords (1994) noted this dichotomy between Reagan and Bush is mirrored in the relationship between Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito’s characters in the 1988 film *Twins*. Like twins Julius and Vincent (played by the hard-bodied Schwarzenegger and the antithesis of the hard body DeVito, respectively), Reagan and Bush were members of the same

family (i.e., the Republican party), yet they were fraternal twins, so to speak, representing two different forms of masculinity.

Starting in his inaugural speech, President Bush started to distance himself from the form of hard-bodied presidency that Ronald Reagan had portrayed, saying that the United States should develop a kinder global persona (Jeffords, 1994) However, in the wake of Reagan's hard-bodied stance on both international and national issues, Bush's attempt to develop a kinder nation meant that he "brushed perilously close to appearing...weak and soft. George Bush would struggle throughout his presidency to straddle the images of himself as a man who 'cares' about people and as a rough commander-in-chief" (Jeffords, 1994, p. 95).

One of the most popular mediated men during Bush's presidency was the iconic superhero Batman. Jeffords (1994) argued that Batman mirrored the changes in masculinity embodied by President Bush. In the world of *Batman*, the Dark Knight begins to transition masculinity away from hard-bodied heroes, such as Robocop and the Terminator, toward an image of men who are divided and troubled (Jeffords, 1994). When fighting crime in Gotham City, Batman is seen as a tough, strong, muscular, hard-bodied hero. However, his alter ego, billionaire Bruce Wayne, is a wounded, flawed real man. Bruce Wayne's vulnerability stems from the brutal murder of his parents when he was a child. Much like how the private Bruce Wayne dons the Batsuit to transform into publicly known Batman, President Bush represented a form of masculinity that transforms the concept of a hard-bodied hero into a public performance, while allowing a man to retain his kinder, emotional side for interpersonal relationships (Jeffords, 1994). Due to the polysemic nature of all texts, it should be noted that this is not the only way Batman can be interpreted. Lang's (2002) queer theory approach to Batman highlighted the possibilities of reading Batman—particularly his relationship with his sidekick

Robin—as a homosexual romance, which is resistant to the traditional messages about masculinity that the franchise supposedly promotes.

Aside from Bruce Wayne's wealth, he does not embody the type of masculinity that the public would necessarily want to embrace: he was haunted by his past and his loss of family. The ghosts of Bruce Wayne's past still haunt him in the present. So although Batman/Bruce Wayne moves away from the hard body of the 1980s, he represents a broken man—a man who is emotionally stunted because his lack of family. (Sorry, Alfred. You are a fine butler, but it is hard for you to fulfill a paternal role when you bring Bruce Wayne his robe and slippers.)

The shift away from the hard-bodied masculinity of the 1980s and the fractured masculinity of Batman was made more complete during the early 1990s. Mediated masculinity evolved away from the hard bodies of the 1980s toward a man with a family and emotions. According to Jeffords (1994), 1991's *Kindergarten Cop*, starring hard-bodied action star Arnold Schwarzenegger, outlined how audiences would be allowed to peel back the layers of the rock-hard muscular 1980s man to reveal their emotional core—one that audiences were previously unaware of. Essentially, Jeffords said the muscle-bound movie heroes of the 1980s focused on meeting societal demands for being successful in the workplace, and they were good at it—except that their success at work came at the detriment of their personal lives. At the end of the day, Jeffords said these mediated men portrayed a “real man” as being lonely, unhappy, and in emotional pain. Since they had no family to focus on, they continued to pour themselves into their work. However, by the 1990s, male characters began to transition away from being self-destructive loners toward seeking to connect with others—and in turn, reconnect with themselves (Jeffords, 1994, p. 145). As the male characters of the 1980s once found happiness in their skills as company man, in the 1990s, happiness was found in their ability to be a family man.

This version of masculinity has become known as the New Man (Barthel, 1992; Gillam & Wooden, 2008; Jeffords, 1994, 1995; MacKinnon, 2003; Malin, 2005). Rather than relying on external signifiers of strength, New Men are valued for internal strength and their “moral rather than muscle fiber” (Jeffords, 1994, p. 136). Whereas traditional portrayals of masculinity presented “real” men as physically strong and emotionally distant from others, New Men understand the value family and friends, take active roles in the lives of their children, and are capable of expressing emotion. The New Man is a symbol of masculinity in the 1990s, and this form of masculinity was prominently seen throughout the media during the end of the 20th century and into the 2000s (for further review, see Malin, 2005).

The New Man seen in the media also parallels shifts in American masculinity seen during the 1990s. As masculinity transitioned from stereotypical hegemonic ideals of masculinity, the rhetoric surrounding discussions of gender positioned masculinity as being in “crisis” (Kusz, 2008; Malin, 2005). In response to this crisis, men’s movements arose to enable men to reclaim and reaffirm their masculinity. Two of the most well-known and public movements are the Million Man March and the Promise Keepers organization. Poling and Kirkley (2008) argued that movements like the Million Man March and Promise Keepers “emerged because there is slippage in the bedrock of male dominance” (p. 19). Indeed, both the Million Man March and Promise Keepers sought to solidify American masculinity during a time in which gender instability was increasingly visible:

Men can act like women; women can act like men; both men and women can have various sexual orientations. Multiple sexual and gender identities are threatening to the social order—single women who choose their own sexual behaviors; lesbian, bisexual and transgendered women who choose “other” sexual objects; gay bisexual and

transgendered men who engage in proscribed behaviors. Such multiplicities are interpreted as threats to family values, heterosexual marriage and proper upbringing of children. (Poling & Kirkley, 2008, p. 19)

The Million Man March occurred on October 16, 1995, on the Mall in Washington, D.C. (Poling & Kirkley, 2000). The march was part of a larger grassroots movement to gain national attention for minority issues (Nelson, 1998), but also called for racial empowerment and solidarity (Poling & Kirkley, 2000). The majority of the 875,000 participants were African American men, and the attendees vowed to “love their brothers, respect their sisters, refrain from violence except in self-defense, refuse to poison their bodies with drugs,” and better themselves politically, economically, socially, spiritually, and morally in order to benefit themselves, their families, and their people (Poling & Kirkley, 2000, p. 9).

Unlike the Million Man March, the Promise Keepers movement was more than a one-time rally in Washington. Promise Keepers began in 1990 with 70 men and quickly grew through large rallies held in football stadiums and arenas around the United States attended by hundreds of thousands of men (Donovan, 1998). In 1997, Promise Keepers even staged a rally in Washington, D.C., similar to the Million Man March called the “Stand in the Gap” (Donovan, 1998; Heath, 2003; Poling & Kirkley, 2008). By 1999, it was estimated that 3.5 million men participated in Promise Keepers events (Heath, 2003). The primary focus of Promise Keepers is to reestablish men as the “rightful” leaders of their marriages, communities, and churches (Bartowski, 2000; Donovan, 1998; Poling & Kirkley, 2008). Promise Keepers blames feminism as a driving force for emasculating men and making them ashamed of their “God-given role as leaders of their households” (Poling & Kirkley, 2008, p. 13).

Promise Keepers encourages men to live similarly to the images of the New Man seen in media at the time. Shunning the independent and isolated masculinity, Promise Keepers encourages men to reconnect with their families and build male-only social networks (Heath, 2003). One of the cornerstones of the Promise Keepers movement is for men to become involved in small all-male “accountability groups” (Bartowski, 2000; Donovan, 1998; Heath, 2003). Within these small groups, men form close-knit relationships with other men, sharing details about their lives that they would normally not talk openly about, such as sexual improprieties, problems with the law, and difficulties with their families (Bartowski, 2000; Heath, 2003). These group meetings (and even the large rallies) often create an environment where, as Bartowski (2000) and Heath (2003) explain, men openly weep, hug, and sometimes hold hands. An interesting rhetorical management tool utilized by Promise Keepers small group members is calling the other men their “brothers,” thus grounding the relationship in a familial context in order to avoid any hint of homosexual relationships (Bartowski, 2000).

In addition to the male accountability groups, Promise Keepers members are taught to reclaim leadership of their families and recommit to their wives through sexual purity and monogamy. Although both Promise Keepers members and their wives attest to better communication skills (Heath, 2003), the Promise Keepers movement allows for hegemonic masculinity to assimilate this New Man rhetoric into the dominant form of masculinity (Donovan, 1998; Heath, 2003; Poling & Kirkley, 2008). The recentering of the male in the family, church, and community reestablishes his patriarchal role. Although they are seen as more sensitive and caring, what Heath (2003) called “soft patriarchy” (p. 436), men are returned to positions of power. Although it would seem that many celebrated this transformation of masculinity, we should remember that “soft patriarchy” is still patriarchy, which means men are

still in control. Bartowski's (2000) study of Promise Keepers accountability groups and Heath's (2003) study of members and their wives reflect how this softer version of masculinity is integrated into hegemonic masculinity by still addressing issues of leadership and heterosexuality but also incorporating markedly "feminine" displays of emotion and attempts at more egalitarian gender roles in marriage.

Even the popular *Left Behind* Christian book series, which began in 1995, shows the struggle of balancing the Old Man and the New Man. Chapman's (2009) study of masculinity in the *Left Behind* series found that the male characters represent a version of masculinity that vacillates between demonstrations of heroic machismo and displays of feminine submission to God. Chapman's analysis of the *Left Behind* series addresses an interesting element of the faith-centered New Man not addressed in Promise Keepers studies: the requirement of "submissiveness before God which would conventionally be characterized as feminine" (Chapman, 2009, para. 4). Chapman argued that the series sets itself up for this gender paradox by juxtaposing action thriller narratives that show the male characters in life-threatening situations where they rely on "apparently limitless reserves of technical skill, resourceful creativity and gut instinct" (para. 23) to try and defeat the machinations of the Antichrist with moments of emotional surrender to God. Chapman argued that the overt displays of masculinity are to ensure that the protagonists are indeed "real men," despite their humble and submissive attitudes and actions toward God. These fluctuations in male characters' actions and behaviors highlight the instability of gender portrayals. As Chapman concluded:

The apparent need on the part of the authors to constantly, hyperbolically, proclaim the manliness of their heroes might be read as a tacit acknowledgement of the insufficiency and fragility of traditional gender categories. Such assertions strike the reader as over-

compensatory, excessive, and thus suspect. Far from being inviolate, hegemonic masculinity is exposed as thoroughly unstable, troubled both from within and without. (para. 27).

However, despite the apparent fragility of hegemonic masculinity, it is capable of adapting to these softer and arguably feminine portrayals of masculinity in order to maintain its power and promote patriarchy both in the real world and in the media. Recent research into men's beliefs about masculinity also shows that the New Man has become part of Western masculine identities. Pompper (2010) found that men did not use physical means to define their manhood, but rather they predominately defined masculinities as mental qualities, such as character, attitude, responsibility (especially for one's family), confidence, and assertiveness,

Despite the apparent shift to a mental form of masculinity rather than a physical one, males' appearance once again came to the forefront of culture with the emergence of metrosexual males, who Simpson (2002) described as urban males who invest large amounts of time and money into their appearance and lifestyles and who can be straight, homosexual, or bisexual. Although Simpson (2002) argued that metrosexuals are often narcissistic pleasure seekers, they have molded many Western ideas about masculine appearance. This is evident in the popularity of clothing lines such as Abercrombie and Fitch, whose marketing campaigns feature half naked men with hairless chests, toothy smiles, and chiseled physiques, with "straight, beer-drinking frat boys...[signifying that] metrosexuality has gone mainstream" (Simpson, 2002, para. 13). Similarly, words like "guyliner" (eyeliner for men) and "manscaping" (shaving, waxing, or trimming of body hair) have become part of the Western lexicon. So while men may associate "true" masculinity as a set of mental qualities, physical appearance is still a key part in masculine gender performance. And males engage in these metrosexual rituals,

particularly manscaping, because they feel women have come to expect their man to be hairless (Pompper, 2010). The men in Pompper's (2010) study attributed this expectation to the images of smooth, chiseled men seen prevalently in movies, magazines, and television.

Gender Studies and Children's Media

Studies of children's media have revealed some alarming similarities to the larger body of media research into general programming. Notably, the gender imbalance has long been a problem in both children's films (Smith et al., 2007, 2010) and television shows (Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Baker & Raney, 2007; McArthur & Eisen, 1976; Smith, Granados, Choueiti, Pieper, & Lee, 2006; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). Between 1990 and 2006, males outnumbered females in G- and PG-rated films 2.5 to 1 and 2.6 to one, respectively (Smith et al. 2007). In a study of 1,034 children's shows on both broadcast and cable networks found that nearly two thirds of the characters were male, resulting in a male-female ratio of 1.72 to 1 (Smith, Granados, Choueiti, Pieper, & Lee, 2006). Thompson and Zerbinos's (1995) analysis of 175 cartoons found that 45% of the shows had no female lead characters, 50% had one female lead, 4% had two, and only 1% had three. Conversely, only 1% of the cartoons featured no male lead, while 47% had one, 33% had two, 8% had three, 9% had four, and 2% had five (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). Similarly to adult-targeted content, male characters in children's media are more likely to have a job (Smith et al., 2006; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995).

A good deal of research has examined gendered personality traits in children's television programming; however, samples vary drastically among the studies (i.e., shows can be animation, entertainment, educational, or simply the researchers' favorite programs), thus it is difficult to compare findings directly (Smith & Granados, 2009). Despite this limitation, general patterns of behavior show males displaying dominance, aggressiveness, and leadership, while

females are shown as more affectionate, compassionate, and nurturing (Aubrey & Harrison 2004; Barner, 1999; Leaper, Breed, Hoffman, & Perlman, 2002; Smith et al., 2006; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). In a study of children's super heroes cartoons, Baker and Raney (2007) found female characters were significantly more likely than males to worry about their appearance. Smith, Pieper, Granados, and Choueiti's (2010) analysis of G-rated films found males were more likely to be shown as strong and funny, whereas females were more likely to be depicted as attractive, smart, and good.

Although stereotypical gender portrayals persist in much of children's media, there have been signs of positive change, especially the shift away from stereotypical female portrayals. In their study of cartoons released between 1935 and 1992, Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) found that female characters after 1980 began to exhibit more independence, competency, assertiveness, strength intelligence, responsibility, and helpfulness. Additionally, female characters became more verbally aggressive and exhibited more leadership skills and ingenuity. The timing of this change in the depiction of female characters is most likely related to the rise of feminism in the 1970s (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011). Meanwhile, the female characters were shown to be less emotional, tentative, sensitive, and affectionate. Aubrey and Harrison (2004) discovered similar results, finding that male and female characters in some of children's self-reported favorite shows (e.g., *Rugrats*, *Doug*, *Pokémon*, *Arthur*, *Rocko's Modern Life*, and *CatDog*) scored comparably for assertiveness, independence, sensitivity, and importance to the plot. Baker and Raney (2007) concluded the equanimity in gender portrayals is not due to more feminized male characters, but rather, it is due to more masculine female characters. These studies suggest personalities and behaviors for females are changing, indicating better balance with male character, despite the fact that they are still outnumbered on

television screens. Aubrey and Harrison's (2004) findings showing male and female characters were scored similarly on sensitivity hints at changes in male characters, which we will discuss more fully in coming sections.

Gender in Disney's Animated Feature Films

Following Disney's box office revival at the hands of former CEO Michael Eisner, research focusing on Disney films boomed in the 1990s, and since that time, Disney has remained a popular subject of study for many researchers. This wide range of research covers many different topics, ranging from Disney's portrayals of nature (see Whitely, 2008), the elderly (see Robinson et al., 2006), body image (Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, & Thompson, 2004), and, perhaps most prominently, gender. Of course, since Disney researchers are looking at one studio's film projects, many of the quantitative results about gender remain fairly constant. Of course, depending on sampling criteria, there are some minor aberrations between the results, but these are largely inconsequential.

As with the broader categories of films and television shows geared toward adults and children, Disney's animated films also feature a gender imbalance where male characters greatly outnumber female characters (Faherty, 2001; Hoerrner, 1996; Robinson et al., 2006; Wiersma, 2001). (My 2010 study found Disney's male-heavy gender imbalance can also be found in the studio's more recent live-action films, such as *Bedtime Stories*, *Beverly Hills Chihuahua*, and *Race to Witch Mountain*.) Yet despite the predominance of male characters in Disney films, most of the gender research has examined the representations of female characters. Many of the most popular female characters in Disney films are princesses, and Do Rozario (2004) said because of Disney's popularity and status as the primary author of modern princess narrative, a Disney princess is the "princess of all princesses" (p. 34).

Disney's history in animated feature films can be divided into three distinct time frames: the "classic" years under Walt Disney's rule from 1937 to 1967, the "middle" period after Walt's death in 1967 until 1988, and the "Eisner era," which began in 1989 when Michael Eisner took over as Disney's CEO (Davis, 2006). Early heroines in Disney's animated films (especially the princesses Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora, also known as Sleeping Beauty) are often classified as passive and weak (Bell, 1995; Davis, 2006; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2003). These characters are stuck in what Bell (1995) called classic "fairy-tale templates" (p. 112). These heroines are prime examples of damsels in distress, and indeed, all are rescued by a prince and go on to live "happily ever after." This story format was a staple of the "classic" era (Davis, 2006).

It was not until the midpoint of the "middle era" of Disney animation that audiences began to see a different portrayal of a female lead, with Miss Bianca's character from 1977's *The Rescuers* (Davis, 2006). Miss Bianca works for the Rescue Aid Society, and she eagerly volunteers to rescue a young girl named Penny from the clutches of the evil Madame Medusa. Miss Bianca's appetite for adventure and daring sense of courage are new to the Disney heroine model, and Miss Bianca is seen as a very pro-feminist character introduced to the Disney family (Davis, 2006).

However, Disney heroines did not undergo another fundamental change until the "Eisner era" began in 1989 with the release of *The Little Mermaid*, which also marked a shift away from anthropomorphized animals back to more human characters (Davis, 2006). *The Little Mermaid's* Ariel and *Beauty and the Beast's* Belle broke away from the traditional stereotypes of Disney females, instead showing portrayals of young women in active pursuit of their dreams in spite of parental wishes to the contrary (Bell, 1995). Belle also added an interesting twist to the role of a

Disney heroine: she is seen as an outsider because of her intelligence and love for books (Davis 2006).

Another break from the classic and middle Disney era princesses is the way their bodies move. Whereas the earlier princesses moved with the grace of a ballerina (Bell, 1995), the Eisner Era princesses (e.g., Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, Jasmine from *Aladdin*, and Pocahontas from *Pocahontas*) moved with “the grace of sportswomen” (Do Rozario, 2004, p. 46), who are excellent swimmers, pole-vaulters, and runners.

These characters also distanced themselves from the glamorized images of princesses in earlier Disney films. Davis (2006) said 1992’s *Aladdin* served “to shatter the idea that being a princess is something to strive for, since all being a princess means to Jasmine’s life is that she has no personal freedom” (p. 181). Jasmine’s daily existence limited to the confines of the palace walls, allowing her palace to function as her prison. Her desire to escape the world of a princess and experience the outside world resulted in her disguising herself as a peasant and sneaking out of the palace into the city, which is where she first encounters Aladdin.

England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek’s (2011) study of Disney’s princess films found that princesses from the Eisner Era displayed significantly more masculine traits than the heroines in princess movies released during Walt Disney’s lifetime. However, Disney princesses always displayed more feminine qualities than masculine ones, with the top five characteristics being affectionate, assertive, fearful, troublesome, and athletic. (The researchers noted that assertiveness in the early Disney princess films was directed at animal characters, not other human characters.)

One of the modern Disney heroines who has perhaps been the subject of the most scrutiny for her gender portrayal is Pocahontas. Although some scholars see Pocahontas as

another pivotal change to the Disney heroine model, others say she merely conformed to a different set of traditional gender stereotypes imposed by society. Pocahontas is faced with two options: she can leave her tribe to be with the man she loves, or she can let him go and stay to help her people. Ultimately, she chooses to remain with her tribe. Although researchers agree this is a sharp divergence from the majority of Disney endings because Pocahontas and John Smith do not live “happily ever after,” Dundes (2001) said her decision to stay is a “transformation from selfish preoccupation with relationships to selflessness in order to benefit her community and prepare for the self-sacrifice underlying motherhood” (p. 355). Dundes said this self-denial of personal desires in order to care for other people could lead Pocahontas to depend on others for self-esteem and approval, thus taking on the quintessential passive female role. Thus, Dundes posed the question: “Is Pocahontas a laudable role model if she must choose between self-abnegation and self-indulgence?” (p. 354). However, not all scholars agree that Pocahontas as a princess stuck in a lose-lose situation. Davis (2006) lauded Pocahontas’s choice to stay with her people, saying she is more than a nurturer, but rather “a skilled diplomat and careful decision-maker” who doesn’t need a man—in this case, John Smith—in order to feel complete (p. 184). Despite Davis’s (2006) argument that Pocahontas is not limited to a nurturing role, England et al. (2011) found her to be the most affectionate out of all of the Disney princesses, thus further limiting her role as a mold-shattering Disney princess.

Another character that received a mix of praise and criticism was Mulan. Despite proving herself to be a more capable warrior than the men and rejecting matchmakers, Mulan does not follow in Pocahontas’s footsteps. As Maslin (1998) concluded, the film “is still enough of a fairy tale to need Mr. Right” (para. 5). So it seems there is no right choice for many of Disney’s heroines. They must either reject true love like Pocahontas or accept it, thus reinforcing ideas

that finding a man is the key to finding happiness. In Mulan's case, she proved herself to be better than the men in combat, and yet, the film shows her happiness hinging on the love of a "real" man. Both Pocahontas and Mulan took part in stereotypical masculine activities (e.g., engaging in both battle and diplomacy), but the resolutions of both films center the female protagonists in traditional roles for women (i.e., Pocahontas remaining with her family rather than leaving with John Smith and Mulan being paired with her male love interest) (England et al, 2011).

Although the stereotypical characteristics of heroines in Disney films underwent dramatic changes over the decades, most Disney films still use body stereotypes to define the female characters. Bell (1995) described the three body images broken down by age: the teenage heroines (such as Snow White, Cinderella, Ariel, and Belle) are thin and beautiful; villainous women (e.g., Snow White's stepmother, Maleficent, and Ursula) are depicted as mature, voluptuous, middle-aged *femme fatales*; and the older women (e.g., grandmothers, godmothers, and some fairies) are shown as post-menopausal, pear-shaped, comical, and are often seen caring for those around them (p. 108). Brydon (2009) said this limited three-stage view of women sends specific messages about women's bodies and their roles and interactions with families to the millions of children that will see those Disney films, thus perpetuating and reinforcing those stereotypes.

Comparing Males and Females in Disney's Animated Films

Although most gender research into Disney films focuses on analyzing the female characters, some studies explore both masculinity and femininity. Wiersma (2001) and Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, and Tanner (2003) provide some of the most comprehensive studies that analyze both male and females.

Wiersma (2001) analyzed gender portrayals and roles in 16 feature-length animated Disney films and discovered large disparities between the portrayals of men and women and compared those portrayals with traditional feminine and masculine stereotypes. Wiersma found male characters greatly outnumbered female characters, 199 to 83. Heroines were shown as young, attractive, thin, and shapely. The male heroes were all young, handsome, tall, with broad shoulders and narrow waists. These heroes (with the exception of the boy who would not grow up, Peter Pan) also have muscular arms and legs. Herbozo et al. (2004) reached similar conclusions about female and male body types, noting that the ideal female body is shown as thin, while the ideal male is shown as muscular.

Wiersma (2001) also found more female characters were seen performing in-home labor compared to men. Thirty-nine female characters performed some sort of household chore on screen; meanwhile, only six male characters did some sort of household chore. The variety of in-home labor was also higher for women. Examples of their household chores included sweeping, knitting, and sewing to gathering food and water, putting children to bed, and throwing a birthday party. Men, on the other hand, were limited to only four tasks: serving food, feeding the dog, ironing, and cooking. Wiersma noted that the cooking and ironing were both performed by the butler in *The Aristocats*, and could be considered duties of his job, rather than in-home labor.

In examining out-of-home employment, Wiersma (2001) documented a wide variety of jobs for male characters. These included doctor, police officer, pirate, sheriff, governor, butler, lawyer, etc. However, female characters were only seen working outside the home as an actress, sheep tender, puppy thief/coat maker, or fairy. In examining characters' societal power, Wiersma said 30 male characters were shown in positions of power compared to only five female characters. Most characters with societal power were members of royalty, with a few holding

military rank. Others held various positions of power. In terms of familial power, the number of male and female characters was nearly equal. Out of the five females displaying some sort of societal power, four of them were due to royal status.

Wiersma (2001) also analyzed character traits that are usually stereotyped as feminine (i.e. passive, dependent, emotional, and romantic) and masculine (i.e. aggressive, independent, unemotional, and unromantic). She found most characters fit these stereotypes; however, there were three exceptions. In more recent Disney films, male characters were shown as dependent, and almost every male hero was romantic. Dependence was determined by the need to be rescued. Wiersma found that in 11 of the 16 films analyzed, male characters needed to be rescued—and some of them were rescued multiple times. Female characters performed many of these rescues. Heroines were also depicted as more independent, yet still exhibited dependence also. The data did support stereotypes for females as emotional, passive, and romantic and males as unemotional and aggressive.

A content analysis of 26 feature-length Disney animated films conducted by Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, and Tanner (2003) identified four over-arching themes about “what it means to be a girl/woman”:

- (a) A woman’s appearance is valued more than her intellect;
- (b) Women are helpless and in need of protection;
- (c) Women are domestic and likely to marry;
- (d) Overweight women are ugly, unpleasant, and unmarried. (p. 30)

The Evolution of the Disney Male

Although female heroines have undergone significant changes, they are not alone. Male characters in Disney movies have also begun to develop into more well-rounded, emotional, caring men. Early Disney heroes, such as the princes, are often described as “silent, dramatic

‘cardboard’” (Bell, 1995). Though they received little screen time, these princes also exhibited very masculine traits (England et al., 2011). Gillam & Wooden (2008) describe the early Prince Charmings as “often too two-dimensional to do more than inadvertently shape the definition of the protagonists’ femininity” (p. 3). However, Trice and Holland’s (2001) analysis found some richer portrayals of masculinity in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio*, *Bambi*, and *The Lion King* that espoused similar messages about masculinity: men should be selfless, brave, and connected with their family. Although Trice and Holland’s analysis is not a comprehensive look at Disney films—they chose to look at a select handful of highly successful films—it appears that some films did have some form of proto-New Man themes.

England et al.’s (2011) study of Disney’s princess characters also included analysis of the princes in those films. Comparing the early Disney princess films (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Sleeping Beauty*) to Eisner Era films (*The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*) and the last hand-drawn princess movie (*Princess and the Frog*), the researchers discovered that the princes did not differ significantly over time. However, they did display more feminine-coded characteristics. The top five characteristics displayed by all of the Disney princes included showing emotion, being affectionate, physically strong, assertive, and athletic. (Although the first two characteristics are traditionally considered feminine, it is logical for the princes to display these characteristics because of their romantic interests in the princesses.) The two exceptions to this progression were the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast* and Shang in *Mulan*, whose top three characteristics were all masculine. For the Beast, this included inspiring fear, being assertive, and wanting to explore. Shang’s most common characteristics were being strong, assertive, and athletic. Additionally, England et al. (2011) found that the films with the most masculine princesses (i.e., *Pocahontas*

and *Mulan*) corresponded with two of the most masculine princes out of the sample. Both John Smith and Shang were shown as physically strong, unemotional, assertive, athletic, and were depicted as leaders more than the rest of the princes (England et al., 2011). Thus, it appears that to maintain the “proper” gender balance, more masculine princesses are counterbalanced against the most masculine princes of all.

By the end of the 20th century, the males in Disney films had developed their own distinct character traits and stereotypes. Towbin et al. (2003) found five distinct themes that emerged describing how men are portrayed in Disney animation:

- (a) Men primarily use physical means to express their emotions or show no emotions; (b) Men are not in control of their sexuality; (c) Men are naturally strong and heroic; (d) Men have non-domestic jobs; and (e) overweight men have negative characteristics. (p. 28)

The New Man narrative that evolved in the wake of the hard body imagery of the 1980s also impacted images of masculinity in Disney films. The Beast in Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast*, released in 1991, particularly embodied this evolution of masculinity. In examining the Beast’s behavior, Jeffords (1995) proposed that “masculinity has been betrayed by its own cultural imagery: what men thought they were supposed to be—strong, protective, powerful, commanding—has backfired” becoming a curse for men, and the only way to break it is for men “to be nurtured until their ‘true’ goodness arises” (p. 171).

Jeffords (1994, 1995) argued that Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* removes the burden of blame for the Beast’s actions and behaviors because he simply does not know any better. The root of his troubled masculinity is based on the external factor of his upbringing and societal expectations, rather than on inner personality traits. Jeffords (1994, 1995) equated the Beast to a spoiled child, who simply has not been taught any manners, that is, until Belle teaches him how

to properly behave. It is under Belle's tutelage that the Beast is able to shed his brutish behaviors and become a kinder, loving man—a New Man.

According to Jeffords (1995), this curse translates to the audience because “they too are implicated in this curse of hyper-masculinity.... No one can be free until men are released from the curse of living under the burdens of traditional masculinities” (p. 171). Thus, once men are able to acknowledge the parts of themselves that were once considered taboo (e.g., showing emotions, being openly affectionate), they will become a more “complete” man, rather than a man living in constant repression of his nature. Thus, even Disney mirrored the transition from the “hard bodied” man of the 1980s, embodied by villainous Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*, toward a kinder, more caring New Man the 1990s, seen in the Beast's transformation to a loving prince.

Trice and Holland (2001) concluded that *Beauty and the Beast* gave audiences unambiguous messages about masculinity: “Men should be kind, not selfish; they should be brave in defense of others, not gratuitously violent; and they should treat women with respect and as their intellectual equals, not as minions” (p. 188).

Gender in Pixar Films

Although Disney has received most of the attention from gender researchers, Pixar has, for some reason, largely been ignored. As mentioned earlier, occasionally researchers include a few Pixar films in with Disney films for analysis, but *very* few studies examine Pixar alone. There are only a handful of papers and theses addressing gender in Pixar films. Although a few recent books do incorporate some Pixar characters in their discussion of gender, none of those analyses have been comprehensive (e.g., King, Lugo-Lugo, & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2010; Smith, 2011). With the 2012 release of *Brave*, the first Pixar film to feature a female protagonist, I

suspect that Pixar will certainly receive more attention from researchers, especially to compare Princess Merida to Disney's long list of princesses. However, because males make up the overwhelming bulk of Pixar's films, most of the work has examined masculinity in some form or fashion. In this section, I will examine the limited scholarly literature available about gender construction in Pixar feature films.

To date, the most comprehensive research project to examine gender in Pixar films is Decker's (2010) quantitative content analysis of the first 10 Pixar films, *Toy Story*, *A Bug's Life*, *Toy Story 2*, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*, *Cars*, *Ratatouille*, *WALL-E*, and *Up*. Preferring a predetermined quantitative approach, Decker criticized Wiersma's (2001) study, which he also cited as an inspiration for his work, for its use of a malleable research method. Wiersma (2001) called her method a "spiraling process...[where she went] backward and forward making decisions based on what emerged from the data" (p. 35). However, Decker insisted on an *a priori*, unchangeable design. Shunning the use of any qualitative research methods, Decker used a modified version of Wiersma's (2001) coding scheme (stripped of its qualitative components that allowed for character descriptions) to test his 21 hypotheses. Decker examined the male-to-female ratio, physical appearance, in-home and out-of-home labor, societal and familial power, and specific character traits.

Decker found that, although Pixar stuck to some sex-stereotyped trends, overall, a much more egalitarian views of gender are present in Pixar feature films. Of his 21 hypotheses, only six showed a significant difference between males and females, and most of them showed an "adherence to traditionalism" (Decker, 2010, p. 90). The first of those six is that males outnumbered females by a ration of 3:1. Seventy-one of the 99 characters coded in the project were male. These findings mirrored those found in studies of the general programming and films

and those targeted at children. Secondly, females were more likely than males to have eyelashes and slender or athletic builds. Additionally, females were shown to have more familial power than males. Lastly, males were shown to be more defiant, while females were more romantic.

The hypotheses that did not show a significant difference included the presence of lips, breasts, overweight and underweight body types, average and muscular builds, in-home and out-of-home labor, societal power, and character traits (i.e., compliance, democratic behaviors, dependence, independence, and emotional behaviors). Decker (2010) said viewing Pixar films will present audiences with a variety of body images for both males and females. It will also show male and female characters both engaging in a wide variety of out-of-home employment. In terms of in-home work, Pixar shows both males and females as responsible for household labor. Decker highlighted *Up*'s Carl Fredricksen as an example of a male character completing numerous chores around the house, a finding also found my previous research (Finklea, 2010).

Decker (2010) found both males and females are shown in positions of societal power; however, he noted that because female characters are so vastly outnumbered, audiences see far fewer females in authoritative roles.

In terms of emotional displays, both male and female characters were seen crying, and males were shown as sensitive and altruistic, with their masculinity "defined as much by caring about others as by strength or courage" (Decker, 2010, p. 88). Decker also noted that female characters continue to serve as a catalyst for male change, similar to Jeffords (1994, 1995) critique of Belle and the Beast. However, unlike Jeffords, Decker found that these relationships are not always romantic. Decker cited the child-caregiver dyad of Boo and Sully in *Monsters, Inc.* and platonic friendships, like Woody and Jessie in *Toy Story 2* and Marlin and Dory in *Finding Nemo*.

Decker's findings, although strictly quantitative, mirror other studies that have examined how Pixar articulates different representations of gender, particularly masculinity. As Decker's results indicated, males are shown crying and expressing other emotions, and emotional expression is one of the hallmarks of the New Man. Gillam and Wooden (2008) were the first to examine the New Man model in Pixar films; however, they approached the films from a cultural studies perspective. Gillam and Wooden observed that, in the case of *Toy Story*'s Buzz Lightyear and Woody, *The Incredibles*' Mr. Incredible, and *Cars*' Lightning McQueen, the male protagonists all follow a similar "narrative trajectory": each either is or seeks to become the alpha male, but they ultimately suffer emasculation; they then bond with another male character while pursuing a feminized object and/or set of values, and they eventually learn what it means to be a kinder, more emotionally aware man (p. 3). These characters develop into New Men differently than Decker (2010) concluded. Decker noted that several of the male characters in Pixar films are changed due to the involvement of a female character. However, in Gillam and Wooden's analysis, they found that male characters bond with a fellow male as a means of transforming from the hard-bodied alpha male into the New Man. Whereas, Beast transformed into a New Man because of Belle's love for him, and in turn his love for her, the men in these films do not change because a woman loves them. They change because of their love for a woman or feminized object. Lightning McQueen transforms from a hotheaded hot rod through his friendship with Mater and mentorship from Doc Hudson as he pursues Sally's affections, not because Sally loves him. The same happens through Woody and Buzz's relationship in *Toy Story* and Mr. Incredible's relationships with Buddy and Frozone in *The Incredibles* (Gillam & Wooden, 2008).

The common narrative themes discovered by Gillam and Wooden (2008) show audiences that New Men's strength is not purely physical, but rather, it is derived from having a cohesive family unit (whether biological or not) and signified through cooperation, intelligence, and selflessness.

Relatively few works have examined gender in specific Pixar films or characters. The characters that have received the most attention are *Toy Story*'s Woody (Finklea, 2011; Lugo-Lugo & Bloodsworth-Lugo, 2009) and Buzz Lightyear (Finklea, 2011), *Finding Nemo*'s Marlin (Brydon, 2009), and WALL-E (Bernard, 2011; Long, 2011).

In a study of masculinity in the *Toy Story* trilogy, I conducted a qualitative thematic analysis of all three *Toy Story* films (Finklea, 2011). While initially planning to focus on Woody and Buzz, I expanded my analysis to include supporting male roles, such as Mr. Potato Head, Rex, and Hamm. My results showed eight prominent themes about masculinity that carried across all three films:

(A) Alpha male characters have trouble expressing non-violent emotions to others until transforming into the "New Man" after emasculation; (b) the emotions males express most often are anger and frustration, and they are often expressed through physical or derogatory verbal means; (c) males ask others for help and benefit from teamwork and cooperation; (d) males are natural leaders, brave, loyal, and willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of others; (e) males feel the desire to be loved and needed; (f) the characteristics females value most in males are strength and physical prowess, and males are concerned about their physical appearance; (g) males are not able to control their sexuality; and (h) males displaying effeminate qualities are ridiculed by other males, but not by females. (Finklea, 2011, p. 11)

My findings showed that some male characteristics are similar to those found by Towbin et al. (2003); however, some new themes were uncovered. Neither Woody or Buzz are able to discuss their feelings about their insecurities until they have both suffered emasculation. Despite being able to express a wide range of emotions, the ones most often seen are anger and frustration. Even after his New Man transformation, Woody is seen expressing emotions aggressively throughout the trilogy: physically assaulting other toys (e.g., fighting Buzz, violently shaking the Etch-A-Sketch, pushing his companion Slinky off the bed, throwing a Magic 8 Ball, yelling at Jessie for thwarting his escape from an evil toy collector, and shouting in frustration at the toys when they decide to leave Andy's house).

Although the New Men in the *Toy Story* trilogy are sometimes seen acting in aggressive ways toward each other, they are also shown as willing to cooperate and work collectively with their fellow toys. Woody must cooperate with the "mutant" toys to rescue Buzz in the first film. Buzz, Slinky, Rex, Hamm, and Mr. Potato Head must work together to drive a truck to try and save Woody in *Toy Story 2*. The toys must also work collectively to escape the prison-like daycare in *Toy Story 3*, and "it is only through this massively coordinated effort of teamwork that the toys are able to escape" (Finklea, 2011, p. 16).

Additionally, I found males are seen as natural leaders (e.g., Woody is in charge of Andy's toys; Buzz coordinates the rescue mission to save Woody) (Finklea, 2011). Bravery and loyalty are shown throughout the trilogy when the toys face perilous circumstances either to rescue one of their own (e.g., rescuing Woody from the evil toy collector; Woody helping his friends break out of the daycare) and by their compulsion to stick together and return home. They toys are also shown acting selflessly, risking their own lives for the good of others. Of

course, being children's films, their lives are never lost, but their willingness to sacrifice themselves is still an important and powerful message.

As will most mediated New Men, the males in the *Toy Story* trilogy express the desire to be loved and needed. For Woody, his desire is to be Andy's favorite—which is the ultimate expression of Andy's love for him. Woody also explained to Bo Peep that he enjoys the one-on-one time he gets to spend with Andy at Cowboy Camp. In the third film, the toys express a desire to be played with (i.e., needed) by children, a longing that ultimately drives the plot of the film.

I also observed several characteristics about masculinity that are repeatedly praised by female characters in the trilogy (Finklea, 2011). Physical strength is celebrated, such as when Buzz first “flies” around Andy's room. Bo Peep admires Woody's bulging bicep at the end of *Toy Story 2*, telling him it makes him look tough. In *Toy Story 3*, we see that Mrs. Potato Head is clearly smitten with a green muscular-looking insect-like action figure at the daycare, asking to touch his muscles. Later, when Mr. Potato Head is forced to use a cucumber as his body, instead of his normal plastic potato, Mrs. Potato head gushes that he has lost weight and become very tall. I concluded, “Mrs. Potato Head is enamored with stereotypical masculine features, preferring her men to be tall, dark (green), and handsome” (Finklea, 2011, p. 21).

Another theme observed in the *Toy Story* trilogy is that male characters are not in control of their sexuality (Finklea, 2011). Woody loses his composure when Bo Peep asks him if she should get someone else to watch her sheep for the night, implying that she and Woody would spend the night together. Mr. Potato Head, Rex, and Hamm all ogle the Barbies playing in a toy store in the second film, prompting Mr. Potato Head to chant, “I'm a married spud. I'm a married spud.” Additionally, Buzz Lightyear is enthralled with Jessie the cowgirl that his jet pack wings uncontrollably spring outward, symbolizing an erection (Finklea, 2011).

The last main theme discussed in my 2011 research is that male characters who act effeminately are ridiculed by fellow males, but not females. This theme is prominent in *Toy Story 3* with the character of Ken. Throughout the film, Ken is ridiculed for his feminine dress and behavior. One toy calls him “Mr. Softie,” and others refer to him as a “girl’s toy.” Despite his apparent attraction to Barbie, Ken is presented as a stereotypical homosexual male. Because of his attraction to Barbie, the characters do not openly question Ken’s sexuality until the final moments of the film. In a scene that plays during the closing credits, Woody is reading a letter sent from the toys at the daycare. The letter is written in hot pink ink and covered in glittery stars and hearts. “That Barbie has some nice handwriting,” Buzz says admiringly. “Uh, Buzz,” Jessie says, pointing to Ken’s signature at the bottom of the letter, “Barbie didn’t write this.” Then Woody and Jessie swap nervous smiles with each other, indicating that something about Ken is “off” (Finklea, 2011).

Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2009) briefly address gender stereotypes in Pixar films, devoting two paragraphs to Woody and Mr. Potato Head. The researchers asserted that gender stereotypes found in Disney films are also present in Pixar’s. However, they only list two examples of what they call “heterosexual incorporation.” In their argument, Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo said that gender stereotypes are present in Pixar films because of the romantic interaction between Woody and Bo Peep and Mr. Potato Head’s longing for Mrs. Potato Head’s arrival. Their sweeping generalization has been criticized because of the limited evidence cited in their research (see Finklea, 2011).

Whereas Lugo-Lugo and Bloodsworth-Lugo (2009) argued that gender stereotypes are similar in Disney and Pixar films, Brydon (2009) found that *Finding Nemo*’s Marlin represents a new type of animated parent: Mr. Mom. Brydon (2009) argued Marlin effectively assumes the

role of “mother” in the film after his wife’s death. Noting Marlin’s cowardly demeanor and desire to talk about his feelings, which puts him in a stark contrast to other male characters, Brydon concluded that Marlin functioned as Nemo’s mother, rather than simply an overly-concerned father. Brydon cited additional evidence of Marlin’s mothering role, such as his use of “soothing, tender tones, anxiety-ridden rants, or high-pitched commands.... cradling Nemo’s face in his fins, grooming him, [and] holding his fin on the ‘streets’ of the reef”—all of which Brydon said are associated with a mother’s role (p. 139). Additionally, Brydon said Marlin does not engage with Nemo in the manner that other fathers are seen interacting with their children, which was primarily by roughhousing with them. Brydon also believed Marlin’s open expressions of emotion, especially his feelings of depression, feminized him. Brydon’s analysis seemingly operates under an assumption that a male must act stereotypically masculine, or else, he will be seen as a female. While she does not include any mention of the New Man model of masculinity, Brydon’s findings do show that a new version of masculinity, albeit a markedly feminine interpretation, is seen in Marlin. Alternatively, Smith (2011) called Marlin a positive gender role model of a father who clearly loves his son and who is nurturing and caring. Smith, however, did not go into a deeper analysis of Marlin’s character.

WALL-E is another character that has received attention from gender researchers. Bernard (2011) and Long (2011) stated that because WALL-E and EVE are both robots, they lack any type of biological sex—they are truly blank slates upon which gender identities are constructed. Audiences clearly read WALL-E as a male and EVE as a female partly because of their names (Bernard, 2011). According to Bernard (2011), WALL-E and EVE are of the same sex, which in this case is asexual. Therefore, in order to avoid any inclination of a same sex relationship, specific gender roles are created for both characters that place them squarely in a

heterosexual relationship, which would be palatable to the majority of audience members.

However, Bernard acknowledged that the understanding that the two robots are actually of the same “sex” opens the text up for possible queer readings.

The film does reverse some gender stereotypes by showing WALL-E as emotional, hopelessly romantic, and interested in holding hands, while EVE is seen as aggressive and unemotional (Bernard, 2011). Long (2011) suggested that in order to keep WALL-E’s emotionality from being construed as feminine, he is represented as childlike. However, Bernard (2011) concluded that WALL-E is already functioning as a New Man, as outlined by Gillam and Wooden (2008), and that the character that undergoes the most change is EVE. EVE learns how to be caring and nurturing (Bernard, 2011), and as Long (2011) suggests, even motherly toward the childlike WALL-E. Long (2011) also noted the gender reversal, citing the fact that EVE is technologically superior to WALL-E and therefore dominant over him.

Bernard (2011) and Long’s (2011) analyses differ when analyzing the gendered nature of WALL-E’s job, which is compacting trash. Bernard viewed WALL-E’s job as simply cleaning up after others, which she said is a job typically given to women. On the other hand, Long (2011) interpreted WALL-E’s job as physically demanding, resulting broken parts and leaving him dirty, which she said is more indicative of a masculine labor role. Indeed, WALL-E can easily be viewed as a futuristic garbage man, which is traditionally seen as a man’s job.

Lastly, Long (2011) noted that physical differences between WALL-E and EVE help to further delineate their gender. WALL-E is made up of disproportionate parts (e.g., “chunky” hands, wide-set eyes, and large treads) connected to a square-shaped body that has not been pristinely maintained, which Long said suggests a masculine gender. EVE, on the other hand, is sleeker and curvier, and her gleaming white body is well maintained (Long, 2011). Long said

EVE's appearance reinforces the idea that females should (and do) care more about their physical appearance than males.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Although gender portrayals in the media are a popular topic for researchers, for the most part, Pixar has been largely ignored, or it is briefly mentioned without much analysis. The closest example of a comprehensive study of gender in Pixar films is Decker's (2010) quantitative study. Despite revealing numerous trends in Pixar's representations of gender, the data lack depth. The study provides readers with a numeric overview, but it does not give us an in-depth examination of the data. For that, researchers must turn to qualitative research. This is not to say that quantitative results are not valuable in understanding gender in Pixar films, but I believe that many of the measures for which Decker coded do not provide us with an accurate representation of gender in these films. This is largely due to the fact that many of the physical features studied are not applicable to anthropomorphized cars, robots, rats, and fish. How can a car have breasts, aside from any crude interpretation of headlights? How can a robot have an average or muscular build? Decker used a modified version of Wiersma's (2001) coding scheme, which was developed for studying mainly *human* characters. Many of the physical qualities that human characters have simply do not translate to Pixar films that do not feature human characters.

The purpose of this research project is to examine the deeper meanings that can be read in Pixar films. Specifically, I want to examine how masculinity is constructed through the rhetorical choices shown in these films. Previous research has identified some themes about masculinity in Pixar films (see Finklea 2010, 2011; Gillam & Wooden, 2008); however, these studies used a

samples that together make up less than half of Pixar's feature film library, making it unlikely that all themes have been discovered. Based on this reasoning, I ask the following research question:

RQ1: What are the overarching themes about masculinity depicted in Pixar's feature-length animated films?

Based on previous research into masculinity in Pixar and Disney films (see Finklea 2011; Gillam & Wooden, 2008; Towbin et al., 2003), I believe certain themes about masculinity will be present, resulting in the following hypotheses:

H1: Males will be shown as naturally brave (i.e., willing to face the unknown or face perilous circumstances).

H2: Males will be unable to control their sexuality.

Gillam and Wooden (2008) identified common "narrative trajectories" (i.e., alpha males characters suffer emasculation, bond with another male character while desiring a female character or feminized object, and ultimately understand what it means to be a New Man) for the development of New Men in *Toy Story*, *The Incredibles*, and *Cars*. However, it is possible that this particular narrative could be present in other Pixar works, especially those released after Gillam and Wooden's study. Thus, the following research questions are related to their work:

RQ2: Do Pixar movies other than those previously studied by Gillam and Wooden (2008) feature New Man narratives?

RQ2a: If so, how do those narratives compare with ones identified by Gillam and Wooden?

Decker (2010) noted that female characters can act as catalysts for change in male characters, instead of homosocial relationships. However, those relationships were not part of

Decker's specified purpose for his study, and thus, they were not explored in any detail, generating the next research questions:

RQ3: Do Pixar films other than those studied by Decker (2010) feature narratives of female characters catalyzing change in male characters?

RQ3a: If so, how do those narratives compare with ones identified by Decker?

In an effort to better understand Pixar's construction of the New Man in their films, I ask the following research questions:

RQ4: How do the lessons about masculinities in female-inspired New Man narratives compare to narratives centered on male homosocial bonds?

RQ5: If no New Man narrative or transformation occurs, how are male protagonists depicted?

Finally, in order to better understand Pixar's function in Western culture, I must examine how American masculinity appeared and evolved in the 1990s and 2000s. Connecting cultural understandings of masculinities to Pixar's version of masculinities results in the final research question:

RQ6: How do Pixar's masculinities compare with trends in Western versions of masculinities during the 1990s and 2000s?

This study employed qualitative research methods to answer these research questions and test the hypotheses. In this chapter, I will detail the study sample and explicate the study design and methods used to collect and analyze data. I will also outline the validation strategies utilized throughout this project and clarify any researcher biases that I may bring to the project.

Sample

This study is based on all 13 feature-length Pixar films released as of 2012: *Toy Story*, *A Bug's Life*, *Toy Story 2*, *Monsters, Inc.*, *Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*, *Cars*, *Ratatouille*, *WALL-E*, *Up*, *Toy Story 3*, *Cars 2*, and *Brave* (in order of theatrical release).

These films were chosen because they represent the entirety of Pixar's feature-length film library as of 2012. As previously noted, these films have become some of the most widely consumed popular cultural texts of our time, with each film becoming an "instant classic" (Booker, 2010, p. 78). Pixar has also been re-releasing the films (e.g. *Monsters, Inc.* and *Finding Nemo*) in theaters in 3D. This not only allows the public to enjoy the films on the big screen again (and introduce them to a younger generation), but it also allows Pixar and Disney to reap the financial rewards of higher-priced 3D movie tickets.

Not only are the films re-released in theaters, they have now been re-released on Blu-ray and also in 3D Blu-ray. It is very likely that they will be re-released in the future, similarly to how Disney re-releases its classics from the "Disney vault."

Study Design

With any qualitative form of inquiry, there is no off-the-shelf method that can simply applied to an individual project. Therefore, I pooled qualitative techniques used by other researchers that enabled me to answer my research questions and test my hypotheses. Creswell's (2007) guidelines for conducting a case study served as my primary guide for this project. Stake (2005) said case studies optimize our understanding of an issue or topic by answering scholarly research questions, which I outlined in the literature review. For the purposes of this study's narrative analyses, each film was treated as a separate case. When examining individual themes of masculinity, characters were treated as separate cases. Yin (2003) suggested identifying key

features in each case, followed by examining the cases for any common themes among them. Creswell (2007) and Eisenhardt (2002) described the procedures for conducting a within case analysis, which entails writing detailed descriptions of each case. These write-ups help researchers begin to manage vast quantities of data (Eisenhardt, 2002). Once these individual write-ups are complete, researchers conduct a thematic, “cross-case” analysis (Creswell, 2007; Eisenhardt, 2002).

One of Eisenhardt’s (2002) methods of conducting cross-case analyses is to select themes (either predetermined or emergent) and look for similarities and differences among the cases. This method drove the data collection and analysis phases of this project. Towbin et al. (2003) utilized a similar strategy in their study of gender, sexual orientation, race, and age in Disney’s feature-length animated films, leading to their development of distinct themes found across various films. This strategy is also similar to how I discovered themes in my study of the *Toy Story* trilogy (Finklea, 2011); however, I did not conduct a clear within case analysis before proceeding to the cross-case analysis. (In that study, I focused more on the characters’ overarching narratives instead of a film-by-film examination of masculinity.)

Data Collection and Analysis

Creswell (2007) highlighted three points for data collection and analysis: reading though the text (i.e., individual film), making notes, and forming initial codes. During the data collection phase, I examined various forms of data contained within each film, such as characters’ physical appearance, dialog, and interactions with other characters (Dyer, 1998; Finklea, 2011; Towbin et al. 2003; Wiersma, 2001). Dyer (1998) also outlined “character signs,” elements of character construction that can reveal data regarding gender construction. These elements include characters’ names, objective correlatives (e.g., symbolic elements, montages), dialog said both

by and about the character being studied, characters' body language, characters' actions that propel the plot, and elements of *mise-en-scène*. Towbin et al. (2003) and I (Finklea, 2011) also studied song lyrics, which I also did in this study.

Creswell's (2007) second point about data collection and analysis is to make notes in the margins. During my 2011 study, I first wrote down what I remembered about the films from previous non-research related viewings. This was done so that I would be able to look back at my initial ideas about the films during data analysis to see if my emerging themes were based on actual pieces of data or on my own preconceived notions. Multiple careful readings of the films allowed for detailed analyses of the texts. This practice also allowed me to achieve what ethnographers call *thick description*, which presents "detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships....[Thus,] the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (Denzin, 1989). To achieve thick description, I took detailed notes while viewing the films. This resulted in 69 pages of single-spaced typed notes. During subsequent viewings and rounds of analysis, handwritten comments and notes were written alongside the typed notes. All of these data were kept in a binder.

Throughout the course of this study, each of the 13 films was viewed three times in their entirety. During the first viewings of the films analysis and interpretation began to take place. As Stake (2005) noted, there are no clear stages in many qualitative case studies. Data analysis often overlaps with data collection. This malleable approach is useful because it allowed for the study design to be altered to explore changing circumstances throughout the analysis process. Wiersma's 2001 study of gender in Disney films utilized this method, which she dubbed a "spiraling process" (p. 35). As Creswell (2007) suggested, initial codes based on the observed narratives and characters formed after watching the films and conducting a first round of

analysis. I made note of possible emerging themes and identified specific points of the films that may require further extensive analysis. I also noted any versions of the New Man narratives that were present.

After each initial viewing, a case write-up for each film and character was completed (see Appendices A and B). All write-ups included page numbers linking data back to the original notes taken while watching the films. After all write-ups were finished, cross-case analysis was conducted to examine the general themes and make narrative comparisons among the films. Films and characters were grouped according to inclusion of themes related to individual characters and narrative structures. Characters could be grouped into multiple categories, depending on which themes they manifested. Films could also be placed into multiple narrative categories because multiple plotlines found within the films. Throughout ongoing rounds of analysis, some themes were combined due to similarity.

Validation Strategies

Creswell (2007) outlined eight validation strategies for qualitative researchers to utilize to “document the ‘accuracy’ of their studies” and suggests that researchers employ at least two of the methods (pp. 207-209). Of these methods, I used rich description as the first validation strategy. As mentioned previously, my data collection involved taking detailed notes during the viewings, describing the scenes and characters as descriptively as possible. Secondly, I clarified my researcher bias. This reflective look at myself as the researcher serves to inform readers of my past experiences and beliefs that shape my interpretations, per Creswell’s (2007) guidelines. In order to add an extra layer of validity, I also adapted one of the validation strategies Towbin et al. (2003) utilized during their study of Disney films: creating audit trails “so that themes can be traced back to discrete units of text” (p. 28). Miles and Huberman (1994) also recommended this

validation strategy, and I used it in my 2011 study. My notes along with analysis memos documented the path that I took to reach my conclusions, thus creating audit trails that allow me to retrace the path I took to arrive at my conclusions.

Reflexivity and Reflection: Clarifying Researcher Bias

When presenting qualitative data, part of the interpretation is based on the researcher's unique perspective, "never clearly escaping our own personal stamp on a study" (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, it is imperative for researchers to understand how we impact our own results as we unavoidably leave our fingerprints on them. In this section, I will identify my preconceptions, biases, and beliefs in order to make them aware to both the reader and myself. For me, this process will help me to identify more clearly how my own interpretive lenses influence my findings.

One benefit of studying film is that the text does not react to my presence. Unlike studying people, who react to the researcher's presence in the field by answering questions or possibly altering their behavior because they know they are being studied, the element that changes in this study is me. I have grown up watching Pixar films, and I am admittedly a fan. As Bell et al. (1995) described to earlier, people often have difficulty criticizing touchstones of their childhood, such as Disney films. However, I believe my experiences in graduate school and with my own research have sharpened my critical and media literacy lenses, enabling me to study these films from a critical perspective. Additionally, I believe my professional experience working in television news gave me first-hand experience with the understanding that messages seen in the media are constructed—which, as mentioned earlier, is also true for the film industry.

I also have a lifetime of experience performing a male gender, and I know my interpretation of "what it means to be a man" will be heavily influenced by personal experience.

Many studies of masculinity have been conducted by women, and they do have the advantage of being able to examine the male gender from an outside perspective. Female masculinity researchers are outsiders looking in, whereas male masculinity researchers are insiders looking around. I also believe there is something to be said for masculinity research to be conducted by someone who is male. Although it may be more difficult to study something to which we are so personally connected, we also have a unique perspective on the subject. While masculinity is by no means monolithic, with each man performing gender in a different way, our first hand experience being male should help us understand the topic.

I am by no means saying that it is better for males to study masculinity and females study femininity. I believe the multiple perspectives provide us with a much broader understanding of masculinity. In fact, I invite *anyone* interested in masculinity to study it. Each individual perspective highlights new aspects of masculinity. Analysis and conclusions found in this project result from my perspective. I am sure that some will disagree with some of my findings or chose to interpret things differently. Any text is polysemic. That does not make differing viewpoints wrong. In fact, there is no “right” answer. This project is simply my answer to the research questions. I hope others will ask the same questions because I want to see what their answers will be.

CHAPTER 4

THEMES OF MASCULINITIES

In order to understand how Pixar¹ constructs masculinities in its films, we must first understand what themes about masculinities are represented in the films. These themes essentially serve as the building blocks from which Pixar's portrayals of masculinities are built. The themes discussed in the chapter arose after careful analyses of the 13 films in the sample and represent dominant trends seen throughout all of the films. The repeated presence of these themes throughout the films work collectively to build a common framework in which masculinities function. These themes also help to differentiate between versions of masculinities that could be interpreted by audiences as good and bad or acceptable and unacceptable. Ultimately, the themes that emerged show that protagonists are capable of changing into New Men, while antagonists tend to align themselves more closely with Old Man versions of masculinities, which are represented negatively.

Research Question 1 asked, "What are the overarching themes about masculinity depicted in Pixar's feature-length animated films?" After analyzing the sample, six major themes about masculinities appeared throughout the 13 films: (1) males are successful when taking part in teamwork, (2) males are naturally brave, (3) male romantic or sexual interest manifests as heterosexual desire, (4) males desire to be loved and/or needed, (5) males who are fathers or paternal figures express fears about the future, and (6) male bosses are predominantly shown as

¹ The term "Pixar" is used throughout this analysis to refer to Pixar Animation Studios as the general apparatus that develops, constructs, distributes, and markets feature films. It is used to refer to all of the hundreds of people involved in the creation of these films, and is not meant to imply the themes or narratives are the ideas of any one person at Pixar.

greedy and driven solely by profit. In this chapter, I will explicate each of these themes and provide evidence from the texts to support their development.

Teamwork

The most pervasive theme throughout Pixar's films is that of teamwork. Repeatedly, male characters are shown taking part in teamwork in order to succeed and accomplish their goals. Each of Pixar's feature-length films features at least one scene where male protagonists must work with others, either male or female, in order to successfully complete a task, which ranges from defeating a giant robot to becoming a popular French chef to escaping from a daycare controlled by a tyrannical teddy bear. Learning the value of teamwork is also depicted as necessary for some male characters—typically those in alpha male roles (e.g., Lightning McQueen from *Cars* and Woody in the first *Toy Story* film)—to better themselves and become Gilliam and Wooden's "New Men" (2008). Additionally, in order for teamwork to be viewed as good, the results of the teamwork must primarily benefit characters other than the protagonist. When characters engage in teamwork in order to seek personal gain, their plans often backfire, and they are depicted in a negative light. The ability to work in a team is shown as an essential component to positive portrayals of masculinity. Together, the films convey the message that good men work together to help others. Lastly, whereas Pixar clearly promotes the idea that teamwork is a good thing, it also reinforces this theme by showing villains openly spurning the idea of teamwork and refusing to work with others. Their negative views toward teamwork—and subsequent lack of participation in it—often contribute to their defeat or demise.

Functions of teamwork.

The primary function of teamwork is to allow male protagonists to achieve their goals. Male characters are repeatedly shown as being incapable of succeeding at their goals unless they

take part in teamwork. Many of Pixar's male protagonists are shown needing the talents and abilities of others, and often they are shown struggling with the fact that they cannot be entirely self-sufficient. The situations that force them to rely on someone else are instrumental in alpha male characters' transformations into New Men. As Gillam and Wooden (2008) observed, selflessness and cooperation are two of the hallmarks of the New Man narrative, and the alpha male characters they analyzed all had to learn the value of teamwork. However, this theme is not confined solely to New Man narratives

The teamwork theme is most blatantly addressed in *Cars*, where Lightning McQueen is seen at the beginning of the film ignoring the advice of his pit crew to get new tires and boasting, "I'm a one man show." Despite being a celebrity and clearly enjoying his fame, it is McQueen's lack of teamwork and his confidence in his own abilities that cost him the victory. In fact, McQueen is so determined to be a "one man show," that he habitually pushes people away. One of the race commentators says that McQueen had fired three crew chiefs that season, and after ignoring his current chief's advice to make a pit stop for new tires, the chief—and the rest of his crew—quit. McQueen does not want anyone's help or advice, clearly believing that his raw talent alone is enough to win the Piston Cup. This aligns with other portrayals of alpha male masculinity where men are typically seen as self-destructive loners, not needing or wanting the help of others (Jeffords, 1994). McQueen's character flaw is highlighted early in the film and concretely signals to the audience that teamwork is vital to a male's success.

The King: You're one gutsy racer.... You've got more talent in one lug nut than a lot of cars have got in their whole body.

Lightning McQueen (flattered): Really? Oh, that...

The King (continuing): But you're stupid.

Lightning McQueen: Excuse me?

The King: This ain't a one-man deal, kid. You need to wise up and get yourself a good crew chief and a good team. You ain't gonna win unless you got good folks behind you, and you let them do their job, like they should.

Throughout many of the males' transformations, the audience sees them struggle with giving up their beliefs in their self-reliance and self-sufficiency. In *The Incredibles*, Mr. Incredible also struggles with coming to terms with his own shortcomings, both as a superhero and as a family man. Early in the film, Mr. Incredible insists on working by himself, telling Elastigirl that he does not need her help and then telling his want-to-be sidekick, Buddy Pine, that he works alone. However, before the film's climactic battle with Syndrome's robot, Mr. Incredible voices his concerns about what he views as the ultimate failure for a man: not single-handedly having enough physical or emotional strength to succeed. He realizes that he is not strong enough to defeat Syndrome's robot by himself, which inherently puts the lives of his family members at risk, and he is also afraid that he is not emotionally strong enough to withstand losing them. Like The King in *Cars*, who pointedly told Lightning McQueen about the value of a good team, Mr. Incredible's wife, Elastigirl, assures him that teamwork is the key to his success: "If we [the family] work together, we don't have to be [strong enough individually]." Not only does she alleviate his fears about his inadequacies, she also highlights one of the main transitions seen in New Men during films and television in the early 1990s: the newfound strength gained by reconnecting with one's family (Jeffords, 1994). In this example, drawing on that familial strength is crucial to the family's success.

As Jeffords (1994) outlined, the hard-bodied men in films from the 1980s were focused on individual achievement at work. Early in both *Cars* and *The Incredibles*, Lightning McQueen

and Mr. Incredible focus on their careers and achieving work-related success. While McQueen is a successful racer and Mr. Incredible is seen as a revered superhero before they are both emasculated, their success comes with a high personal price. When asked which of his friends should receive complimentary race tickets, McQueen cannot name a single friend. Meanwhile, Mr. Incredible is shown as distant and disconnected from both his wife and children. However, it is both friends and family that end up being crucial to each male's success.

Other examples of teamwork include the ant colony in *A Bug's Life* working together with the circus bugs to build a bird that will scare off the grasshopper gang that has been bullying the colony for years. In *Monsters, Inc.*, Sulley and Mike work together to return Boo to the human world. In each example of this theme, males are repeatedly shown as being incapable of achieving their goals without the help and talents of other characters.

Teamwork must benefit others.

Although teamwork is largely shown in a positive light, a few films provide examples where teamwork for the sake of personal gain backfires on the protagonists. Whenever teamwork is for personal benefit, their relationships with their teammates suffer. However, even in these cases, the protagonists find a way to work together for someone else's benefit, thus restoring their initial relationship. This facet of the teamwork theme is very similar to the selflessness that Holland and Trice (2001) noted in their analysis of Disney's animated classics *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Pinocchio*, *Bambi*, and *The Lion King*. Male characters in those films showed that they were able to act in the best interest of others, and Pixar's male protagonists either show that same characteristic or learn that they must be able to think about others. This is not to say that male protagonists cannot benefit from teamwork, but the benefits they enjoy are tied to the betterment of someone else or a group.

For example, *Ratatouille* shows clumsy garbage boy Alfredo Linguini teaming up with Remy, a rat that wants to become a gourmet chef. Remy's dream of becoming a chef would be impossible without working with Linguini, which involves a fanciful plot device that allows Remy to control Linguini's body like a marionette by pulling on locks of the latter's hair. The initial impression is that this teamwork is good because it allows Remy to work in a kitchen, and it allows Linguini to get closer to his crush Collette, who is impressed with Linguini's apparent culinary talents. However, despite finding success in the kitchen, Remy's time as a chef is still vicariously experienced through Linguini. Remy may be controlling him, but ultimately, he is not the one who is cooking. Linguini chops the vegetables and stirs the pots; Remy simply serves as a puppet master, not a chef.

On the other hand, Linguini becomes smitten with the sole female member of the kitchen staff, Collette, and after he receives credit for the soup Remy made, this opens a door for him to spend more time with her as they cook together. However, Linguini does not really know how to cook. Although neither character is capable of achieving their goals, their partnership is imperfect because it is built on a foundation of falsehoods and deceit in the quest for personal benefit. Remy does all of his work hidden from view under Linguini's toque, and he becomes jealous after Linguini publicly gives Collette credit for inspiring him to cook. Meanwhile, Linguini's culinary talents are a complete farce. Eventually, they part ways because the teamwork was not a true partnership. Both characters are using each other as a means to an end, and because their motives are selfish, both are shown eventually losing what they desired. It is not until Remy is actually able to cook out in the open and Linguini works as the restaurant's server rather than the chef that we see the results of their teamwork blossom, and each character's goals are met.

Carl Fredricksen and Russell's teamwork in *Up* is flawed much in the same way as Remy and Linguini's. Carl reluctantly teams up with Russell in order to get his floating house to Paradise Falls. He does not work with Russell because he wants to; rather, it is because he needs Russell's weight to help keep the house from floating away. His primary goal is to fulfill his dead wife's dream of living by the waterfall, and Carl is content to use Russell as a means to accomplish it. In this example, Carl clearly engages in teamwork for selfish reasons. Carl has not transformed into a New Man at this point, and this is evident because he is still firmly rooted in the past and does not seem capable of caring about the people he interacts with in the present. Although Carl's goal is achieved, he initially does not help Russell with his goal of freeing Kevin the bird. It is not until Russell sets out by himself to rescue the bird that Carl sees his selfishness. He used Russell to get what he wanted, but he did not want to help Russell rescue Kevin. It is not until the two work together to free the exotic bird that their teamwork is mutually satisfying—and it is because the primary beneficiary of their teamwork is the bird, not themselves.

In an early scene in *The Incredibles*, Mr. Incredible teams up with Frozone to engage in secret superhero work. When the two are nearly apprehended by the police, Elastigirl fears that Mr. Incredible is putting their family at risk and that they will be relocated again as part of the government's plan to keep superheroes out of the public eye. Her disapproval of Mr. Incredible's selfish act of teamwork with Frozone is made clear when she tells him "Uprooting our family again so you can relive the glory days is a very bad thing." Here it is implied that their marriage and family life have suffered in the past because of Mr. Incredible's selfish behavior, and audiences have already witnessed that he would rather duck out on his family responsibilities to team up with Frozone to covertly use their superpowers. As a husband and father, Mr. Incredible

must place the needs of his family above his personal desire to “relive the glory days,” and the message is clear that being selfish is “a very bad thing.”

Similarly, Woody and Buzz Lightyear’s partnership in the first *Toy Story* film is another example of how selfish ambitions lead to an unhealthy team dynamic. After Woody and Buzz find themselves lost at a gas station just days before Andy is moving to a new house, Woody reluctantly works with Buzz to find a way home. Here, Woody’s motivation is purely personal. He only works with Buzz because he knows that he cannot return home without him because he would not be welcomed back after the toys realized that Woody intentionally tried to get rid of Buzz. “Oh, no,” he gasps, “I can’t show my face in that room without Buzz.” Focused only on himself, Woody does not even appear to consider the emotional impact that losing both Buzz and Woody would have on Andy. Woody is also not concerned about Buzz’s wellbeing. He only cares about returning his world to the way it was: where he is the alpha male and is clearly Andy’s favorite toy. It is not until Woody and Buzz work together to escape from Sid’s house that their teamwork is mutually beneficial.

While the previous examples outlined how engaging in teamwork for selfish reasons is clearly depicted as bad, other films provide examples of how teamwork for the benefit of others is shown in a positive light. These examples of teamwork show males working with other characters, which can be male or female, in order to benefit someone other than themselves.

One of the earliest examples in the Pixar film library is Flik from *A Bug’s Life*, who works with the circus bugs to formulate a plan to bring an end to Hopper and his gang bullying the ant colony. Flik expresses a deep desire to make a difference, and by volunteering to leave the island in search of warrior bugs to fight off the grasshoppers, he unwittingly teams up with a group of circus bugs. Together, they formulate a plan that does eventually lead to the

grasshoppers leaving the ants alone. Like other male protagonists, Flik is shown as being unable to be successful on his own when he initially tries to better the lives of the ants in the colony. His independent attempt to better the lives of those in the colony is seen when Flik is introduced to the audience as he is testing a harvesting contraption that would allow them to gather food more rapidly, thus alleviating some of the pressure on the ants to gather food quickly. However, the ants are resistant to change, and Flik is ordered to abandon his machine and conform like the rest of the workers. Thus, even when Flik is shown having good intentions, unlike Woody and Mr. Incredible, he still requires teamwork to make his goals a reality.

Brave also exemplifies this element of the teamwork theme. When the four clans are fighting with each other about Merida's refusal to choose a suitor, Merida is able to diffuse the conflict by reminding the men of their past. She recounts the tales of a great battle where the four clans united to fight their common enemy. Merida reminds the men how each lord risked his life to help the others throughout the battle. The lords, who have been trying to one-up each other throughout the film through posturing and puffery, stop fighting and remember that they are actually friends. We see that despite acting as stereotypical Old Men for a majority of the film, most of their gruff personality was just for show. They already know how to function as New Men and have seen the benefits that the New Man model provides. Not only did their teamwork in the past result in saving their own lives, it ensured the survival of their clans, and as a result, the future of their people. As a result, the cooperation of four men ultimately benefited thousands of people. This example not only codes teamwork as good, but essential to survival.

Toy Story 2 and *Toy Story 3* both include prominent themes of teamwork, showing characters engaging in cooperative work for the benefit of a single character (e.g., Woody in *Toy Story 2*) or for the good of the group (e.g., the toys escaping Sunnyside Daycare). In *Toy Story 2*,

Al steals Woody from Andy's mother's yard sale with the intention of selling him to a foreign toy museum. When Buzz learns Woody may have been taken to Al's Toy Barn, he announces that he is going to mount a rescue mission:

Buzz: *That's* where I need to go.

Rex: You can't go, Buzz. You'll never make it.

Buzz: Woody once risked his life to save me. I couldn't call myself his friend if I weren't willing to do the same. So who's with me?

Here we see that Buzz is readily willing to accept help from the other toys, and he assumes that they are equally willing to assist. This is a markedly different example of teamwork when compared to Woody only working with Buzz in the first *Toy Story* because he needs to in order to repair his relationships with the rest of Andy's toys. However, here Buzz is shown not thinking about his own safety or wellbeing. His intentions are selfless and depicted as noble and good because he is solely concerned with rescuing Woody.

In *Toy Story 3* teamwork is used to protect the toys' sense of family. Several times Buzz expresses feelings about the group staying together. For instance, when Woody gives the toys a pep talk at the beginning of the film, where he guarantees that they will enjoy being put in the attic, Buzz questions him about it:

Buzz: You guarantee it, huh?

Woody: I don't know, Buzz. What else could I say?

Buzz: Well, whatever happens, at least we'll all be together.

In the end, the toys must work as a cohesive unit to ensure that they will stay together, showing that teamwork is essential for the good of the team members. All of Andy's toys work together to stage an elaborate escape plan, in which everyone has clearly defined roles, and their plan nearly

works. However, Lotso catches them, and they all end up in a garbage truck on its way to the landfill. Even when threatened with certain death in the landfill incinerator, the toys face their fate together. In those final moments, they still draw comfort from being together.

Although *Toy Story* shows individuals working together to protect their sense of family, other films show that teamwork can be beneficial to one's biological family. This concept is presented in *The Incredibles* when Mr. Incredible's family works together to defeat Syndrome's robot. Their teamwork ensures the family's very survival. The teamwork among family members also benefits the individuals because it allows Mr. Incredible and Elastigirl to reconnect as a couple, and their children are able to use their superhero powers that they have been forced to hide from the public. Dash, who struggles with wanting to use his super-speed, fulfills his desire to be fast and helps his family at the same time. As a result, Mr. Incredible becomes a more engaged father, and all of this results from the family working together and combining their unique abilities in order to succeed.

Similarly, *Finding Nemo*'s Marlin engages in teamwork with Dory to rescue his missing son. However, the plots of *Finding Nemo* and *The Incredibles* depict opposite ends of the spectrum for the effects of teamwork on family dynamics. Whereas *The Incredibles* depicts Mr. Incredible as a distant father and shows their family's true identities being suppressed by societal pressures, *Finding Nemo* depicts Marlin as an overly-involved father who ultimately is the source of his child's suppression. However, both films conclude with depictions of more balanced family dynamics. Where Mr. Incredible learns how to become more involved with his family, Marlin learns how to give Nemo some distance. It is Marlin's teamwork with Dory that teaches him valuable lessons about letting go and living life. These examples of teamwork show that not only do the fathers benefit from teamwork, but their families do as well.

Villains show a willful lack of teamwork.

As previously discussed, a lack of teamwork is shown as a character flaw for male protagonists, such as Lightning McQueen and Mr. Incredible. Whereas protagonists overcome this character flaw and learn the value of working with others, antagonists are repeatedly shown not engaging in teamwork and spurning the idea of working alongside others.

Syndrome, the villain from *The Incredibles*, is created as a direct result of the “Old Man” model of masculinity seen in Mr. Incredible during the opening scenes of the film. Before becoming Syndrome, a young Buddy Pine wants to work with Mr. Incredible as his sidekick, but he is rejected by his idol. Mr. Incredible’s desire to work by himself reflects the Old Man’s tendency to work as a loner and close himself off emotionally (Jeffords, 1994). It is this rejection by Mr. Incredible that causes Buddy to become Syndrome, who, although rejected because of the Old Man model of masculinity, views the New Man model as inferior. After years have passed in the film, Mr. Incredible’s homing device goes off in Syndrome’s lair after Elastigirl activates it remotely to find out his location. Syndrome detects the signal, which he believes is a distress call, and captures Mr. Incredible. Syndrome tells Mr. Incredible that it is “lame” that he called for help. Clearly, Syndrome sees the possibility of a man needing to ask for help as negative and a sign of weakness. This is a stark contrast to his desire to be Mr. Incredible’s sidekick earlier in the film, since a sidekick is the first person a hero typically turns to for help. Like Mr. Incredible’s portrayal at the beginning of the film, Syndrome believes men should work alone.

Other villains are also shown eschewing the notion of teamwork. Chef Skinner from *Ratatouille* shouts orders at his subordinates and berates them rather than working alongside them. *Up*’s misguided adventurer Charles Muntz views other humans as competitors and chooses to only work with dogs, who do not challenge his dominance and call him “Master.” Similarly,

Hopper in *A Bug's Life*, and Professor Zündapp in *Cars 2* rely on their positions of authority to order others around. Villains often enjoy the patriarchal privileges of power and authority, which prevent them from forming close relationships with others. Here, Pixar aligns the villainous trait of spurning teamwork with being a bad man. These examples allow Pixar to construct an ongoing dichotomous relationship between the stereotypical Old Man version of masculinity, which is clearly coded as bad, and New Man masculinity, which is coded as good. Mr. Incredible comes across as rude when he shuns Buddy's offer to be his sidekick, and Lightning McQueen is depicted negatively in *Cars 2* when he yells at Mater, telling him that he does not need or want Mater's help. In *Up*, Muntz's demeanor is seen as intimidating and threatening when he confronts Carl about the existence of the exotic birds. None of these are traits seen in the good depictions of males, who are classified as New Men.

Whereas teamwork was previously discussed as having to benefit other characters, Pixar also clearly shows that not working with others has detrimental consequences. Lack of teamwork repeatedly plays a crucial part in each villains' downfall in their respective films. This only further strengthens the message that men should work with others, or face the consequences.

Teamwork summary.

Throughout all of Pixar's films, no male character is depicted as having the ability to be successful by himself. Each is shown needing the talents and abilities of others, and often they are shown learning to accept the fact that they cannot be entirely self-sufficient. Even if a character has the physical traits needed to successfully achieve his goals (e.g., Lightning McQueen has the speed to win the Piston Cup), his lack of teamwork and egotistical independence are not viewed as positive personality traits, but rather as character flaws that can only be fixed through experiences cooperating with other characters.

The need for and value of teamwork is the most prominent theme across all of the Pixar films. Although most films do not address the theme as directly as *Cars* or *The Incredibles*, all of them show male protagonists engaging in teamwork in some form or fashion in order to achieve their goals. Thus, audiences repeatedly see that a male character's strength, intelligence, or sheer determination is not enough to guarantee his success, nor are these qualities portrayed in a positive manner when used for a character's personal gain. Male protagonists must work with others to achieve their goals. Likewise, male characters who refuse to work with others are effectively punished, which can vary from simple embarrassment to death. Pixar's message about teamwork is clear: good men work with others.

Bravery

Hypothesis 1 stated, "Males will be shown as naturally brave (i.e., willing to face the unknown or face perilous circumstances)." Analysis of the sample showed strong support for this hypothesis. Nearly all males exhibited bravery in some form and to various degrees, and that bravery is depicted as inherent and natural. The source of characters' bravery varies depending on the character; sometimes it is because of external characteristics (e.g., physical strength) or internal characteristics (e.g., caring for others, wanting to protect one's friends or family). Bravery is also shown in both positive and negative lights. Bravery is normally depicted as an admirable character trait; however, there are examples where excessive bravery is depicted negatively. These instances are usually to heighten the drama or precipitate the plot.

Natural bravery.

Trice and Holland's (2001) analysis of a small sample of highly successful Disney films found that bravery was a common trait among the male characters. Similarly, in Towbin et al.'s (2003) study of Disney characters across 26 films, they found males to be naturally heroic. I

believe the acts Towbin et al. coded as heroic are largely based on those characters' bravery; however, their choice of discussing heroics aligns more with the idea that male protagonists are hero characters, rather than simply being male characters who exhibit bravery. Despite a difference in terminology, analyses of Pixar's films shows that male characters, like their Disney proper counterparts, exhibit bravery as a natural part of their masculinity. I first noticed this theme in my preliminary research on the *Toy Story* trilogy (Finklea, 2011), and the current project subsequently confirmed that it is a common theme throughout all of Pixar's feature film narratives.

The film *Brave* addresses the theme of bravery most pointedly. Although the film's title primarily refers to the bravery of Princess Merida, the film also provides very clear examples of male bravery with King Fergus and the other lords. In the opening scene of the film, the evil bear Mor'du emerges from the forest when the king and queen are celebrating young Merida's birthday. When King Fergus sees the bear, he charges at it with a spear, as do the royal family's male attendants. When his spear breaks, Fergus pulls his sword and shouts, "Come on, you!" at Mor'du as he charges at the bear. Later, Merida explains that her father lost his leg to Mor'du in that battle. During this scene, Fergus does not show any fear or hesitation when Mor'du appears, and he is brave in the face of danger, which allows for the queen and Merida to escape.

Later when Fergus leads the lords on a hunt for the bear in the castle, none of the men show fear as they storm through the castle in search of the beast. They do not appear to think about their personal safety or the harm they could suffer. For these men, bravery is shown as completely natural. The film also depicts it as a character trait instilled in men from childhood. In an establishing shot showing everyday life in the kingdom, children attack a stuffed bear with

wooden swords. Thus, from an early age boys practice how to be tough and aggressive in that type of situation.

The film further portrays bravery as natural by showing it as an innate part of heterosexual attraction. The patriarchal society that requires Merida to choose a suitor depicts bravery as an admirable quality that females should value in a potential mate. As the lords are presenting their sons for Merida's hand, each of the doting fathers boasts about his son's bravery in battle as one of the key reasons Merida should choose that son as her suitor, telling tales of their sons single-handedly wiping out armies of thousands of foes. The lords' competitive nature becomes apparent as each one tells a story more outlandish than the previous one. Lord Macintosh says his son "vanquished a thousand foes." Lord MacGuffin then says his son defeated 2,000 Vikings, and Lord Dingwall tells King Fergus and Merida that his son was "besieged by 10,000 Romans, and he took out a whole armada singlehandedly...with one arm." Clearly, the men view bravery, specifically when related to aggression and violence, as a praiseworthy characteristic for a man, whether young or old, to embody. However, because Merida is a non-stereotypical female who exhibits great amounts of bravery of her own, she is not impressed by these stories of bravery, strength, and conquest, unlike some of the village girls later shown swooning over the suitors.

Numerous other male characters exhibit bravery, such as Buzz Lightyear performing his flying demonstration in *Toy Story*, Flik leaving the ant colony in search of help in *A Bug's Life*, Mr. Incredible fighting villains in *The Incredibles*, Remy and Linguini teaming up in *Ratatouille* with the knowledge that being caught would most likely lead to Remy's death, and Carl Fredricksen's planning to fly his house to South America using thousands of helium-filled

balloons in *Up*. For all of these characters, these acts appear to be natural. These characters are not coerced into these feats of bravery, so it must be inherent to their personalities.

Bravery even manifests in very timid characters that the audience may not expect to act brave. Most notably, Marlin in *Finding Nemo* exhibits extreme fear and trepidation in the early part of the film. Even in the opening scene when the barracuda appears outside their new home, Marlin tells Coral to hide with him inside. His initial reaction is one of cowardice, compared to his wife who bravely tries to protect their unhatched eggs. Later, as we see Marlin raising Nemo, the effects of the barracuda attack manifest in Marlin's oppressive, over-protective parenting style. Repeatedly, the audience hears of Marlin's fear of the open ocean. However, when the diver takes Nemo, Marlin swims into the open water after him without hesitation. His parental instincts are the source of his bravery. He will do anything to save his only child.

WALL-E also exhibits natural bravery, despite being shown as extremely timid. Initially, WALL-E cowers and hides during the arrival of EVE's spaceship. Even during his initial encounters with EVE, WALL-E appears apprehensive and cowardly. However, when EVE's spaceship returns to retrieve her, WALL-E quickly begins to climb a ladder on the hull and clings to the ship as it travels through space. Later, while on the ship, WALL-E selflessly and courageously uses his body to stop a mechanical device from closing. The device nearly crushes him, but WALL-E shows no fear when trying to stop it from closing. Thus, despite often being timid and shy, he is also capable of exhibiting bravery in the face of danger and the unknown.

Sources of bravery.

The bravery exhibited by male characters comes from either external, physical features or internal, emotional characteristics. Physical features are often brute strength or superiority, while emotional characteristics tend to manifest as caring for others. The presence of physical strength

reflects the theme of being strong observed by Towbin et al. (2003) in their analysis of Disney films.

Characters possessing external sources of bravery tend to be alpha male characters. Most notably, Mr. Incredible exemplifies this form of bravery, and he is often seen fearlessly chasing criminals and putting himself in danger. Instead of bravery spawning from internal characteristics, Mr. Incredible's bravery is the result of his being a superhero. His superior strength gives him the ability to fight villains without fear because he has the strength to defeat them. His confidence in his physical abilities is clearly the source of his bravery. This is similar to King Fergus's exhibits of bravery described previously; Fergus fought Mor'du because he believed he was a skilled enough fighter to kill the bear.

In *Toy Story*, Buzz Lightyear exhibits bravery on multiple occasions, such as when he gives a flying demonstration around Andy's room and when he and Woody are taken to Sid's house. These examples of bravery all come before Buzz's emasculation that causes him to fall from his alpha male position. He is brave because he believes he is an actual space ranger. Although his bravery comes from the delusory belief that he is a highly-trained space ranger, it does not diminish his feats of bravery. His bravery comes from his belief that he is physically capable of flying. He also does not express any fear of Sid or his toys, while Woody literally trembles with fright at the thought of being dismembered. Repeatedly, Buzz believes he can defend himself with his physical abilities and his laser.

Finn McMissile in *Cars 2* is another character whose bravery appears rooted in his physical abilities and in his abundance of gadgets that allow him to engage in spy work, which requires bravery and skill. He is highly motivated to get the job done, and does not form many close relationships, which is indicative of Old Man models of masculinity.

Likewise, Sulley in *Monsters, Inc.* exhibits bravery that is largely because of his skills as a highly-competent “scarer,” who is poised to break the all-time scare record. Despite the belief that human children are highly toxic, Sulley enters the human world countless times to scare children, all the while believing that he is putting his life on the line.

Conversely, many other male characters exhibit bravery because of internal characteristics. This is most often due to their emotional connections to others and the fact that they care deeply for other people. The males that express this type of bravery are often not shown as alpha males. Marlin, as previously mentioned, is in no way depicted as an alpha male. He is not dominant or powerful, and his only apparent authority is in his role as a parent, which, as mentioned in Chapter 2, can be interpreted as distinctly feminine and motherly (Brydon, 2009). Marlin lives in fear of losing Nemo, and after that fear becomes reality, Marlin exhibits tremendous bravery setting out across the ocean to find Nemo. Nevertheless, Nemo is so accustomed to his father’s fearful demeanor that he initially does not believe the pelican’s story about Marlin making his way to Sydney. However, Marlin’s love and devotion to Nemo overpowers his paralyzing fears. Additionally, he exhibits bravery to rescue Dory from the jellyfish after they injure her. Not only is Marlin brave enough to reenter the smack of jellyfish, he endures physical harm and pain in order to save her. He has shown that he is capable of putting Dory’s needs above his own, even if it means that he may also be hurt. Although it takes extraordinary circumstances for Marlin to exhibit bravery, that character trait is within him and is exhibited as a natural part of parenthood and being a friend.

Flik’s bravery in *A Bug’s Life* also stems from his desire to better the lives of the ants in the colony. Not only does he stand up to Hopper when the gang first arrives, but Flik later volunteers to leave the island to recruit help to fight off the grasshopper gang. Volunteering for

this mission is unmistakably a sign of bravery because Flik still wants to go, even after the queen tells him leaving the island is a suicide mission. Although part of Flik's reason to volunteer to recruit warrior bugs is no doubt to impress Princess Atta, his desire to make a difference in the lives of those living in the colony is what primarily drives his brave actions, which he had already expressed with his inventions and in a conversation with Princess Dot.

Unlike Marlin and Flik, whose bravery is rooted in paternal instincts or a strong desire to better the lives of others, WALL-E's bravery is rooted in his romantic attraction to EVE. During EVE's arrival on Earth, WALL-E is shown acting timidly; however, once his attraction to her manifests, he begins to act more bravely. When the ship returns to retrieve EVE, WALL-E fearlessly rushes toward the ship and then climbs up the ladder to try and find her. Even when the ship's engines fire up, WALL-E clings the ladder as the ship is launched into space. In fact, from this point onward, most of WALL-E's actions are motivated by his attraction to EVE, allowing the romantic plot to not only drive the majority of the film but also be the source of WALL-E's bravery.

Negative portrayals of bravery.

The theme of bravery is overwhelmingly presented in a positive light; however, there are a few instances where excessive bravery is depicted negatively. These displays involve the males placing either themselves or others in danger, which goes against Pixar's general construction of protagonists' positive, caring portrayals of masculinities. For the protagonists, these excessive displays often result in heightened drama and the creation of a learning opportunity that proves beneficial for them. However, when an antagonist excessively displays bravery, it often is a contributing factor to their demise (much like a lack of teamwork as discussed in the previous section), and Pixar appears to imply that antagonists are unworthy of a chance at redemption.

The most dominant example of this facet of the bravery theme is seen in the penultimate battle in *Brave* when King Fergus and the lords have unknowingly captured Queen Elinor, who is in bear form, and are preparing to kill her. Fergus shows no fear toward the bear, which he believes killed his wife. As he is about to kill the bear, Merida fights him off with a sword. The two briefly engage in battle, until she can convince her father that the bear is actually the queen. In this scene, Fergus's bravery nearly resulted in him injuring Merida in their sword fight and killing his own wife. During these moments, it is easy for audience members to root against him. Had Merida not been able to intervene, Fergus would have undoubtedly killed the queen, which would strongly clash with Pixar's family-friendly appeal and requisite happy ending for a children's film. Although audiences—at least adult audience members—can assume Fergus will not be successful in killing the bear, most no doubt want him to fail, and children may have been scared by the dramatic scene. Although this display of excessive bravery is used to heighten the drama of the battle, it also paves the way for King Fergus to learn from and respect his daughter. When Merida does intervene, not only does she save the queen's life, but she also allows Fergus to see just how much she has matured. Here we see that it takes a brave girl to reign in her father's excessive bravery. Unlike antagonists, King Fergus must be given the chance to redeem himself from his wrong ways (i.e., excessive displays of bravery) to be viewed as an acceptable male character. Ultimately, this learning opportunity leads to a stronger familial bond, once the queen is returned to human form.

Buzz Lightyear also exhibits excessive bravery in the original *Toy Story* when he tries to prove to himself that he is indeed a real space ranger. After seeing a television commercial that clearly tells him that his space ranger reality is nothing more than a marketing sales pitch, Buzz desperately searches for some way to validate his identity. Earlier in the film when Woody

challenged Buzz's identity as a space ranger and his ability to fly, Buzz's successful—albeit extremely lucky—demonstration made him think that he did in fact fly and further validated his own belief that he was a real space ranger. Now to affirm that identity once again, Buzz climbs the stair railing and intends to fly out of an upstairs window of Sid's house. Buzz is certainly brave to leap from the railing; but as he goes crashing toward the floor, the last remnants of Buzz's reality also come crashing down around him. This is his moment of emasculation, which serves as the catalyst for Buzz's transformation into a New Man (Gillam & Wooden, 2008). The audience knows that Buzz is really a toy and that jumping from the railing will result in a long fall to the floor, but Buzz is so confident in his identity as a space ranger—and desperate for that identity to be true—that he does not notice the danger he is placing himself in. Unlike *Brave* where audiences no doubt wanted King Fergus to fail in his efforts to kill the bear, *Toy Story* presents audiences with a situation where they would like to see a character succeed, but ultimately, they know he will fail. Thus, although both films contain scenes of excessive bravery, they are constructed to elicit conflicting emotional responses from the audience. But both examples are viewed negatively because Fergus wants to (unknowingly) kill the queen and Buzz is doomed to fall and hurt himself.

Charles Muntz, the villain from *Up*, also displays excessive bravery, which can be interpreted negatively (in part because he is the villain), and it ultimately leads to his death. When he is fighting with Carl on the outside of the blimp, Charles jumps from the blimp to Carl's floating house—both of which are thousands of feet in the air. Even if he does not have a fear of heights, his actions, which continually put his life in danger, still require bravery. Here, Charles's excessive bravery can elicit the same reaction as King Fergus's in *Brave*: audiences want both men to fail when they show extreme bravery. Audience members are no doubt

cheering for the protagonists and Kevin to live. Charles and Fergus show audiences that excessive bravery can manifest itself as extreme aggression, where both men are readily willing to take the life of another living being.

Ultimately, Charles's bravery leads to impulsive actions that result in him plummeting to his death. Charles serves as a clear example that antagonists do not receive learning opportunities that their protagonist counterparts do. This allows Pixar to construct clearer messages about good and evil, in which good men are given opportunities to learn and grow from their mistakes, while bad men must be punished for their mistakes without having the opportunity to change.

Antagonists' punishments can range in severity from public embarrassment to death, but none is truly given a chance to redeem themselves. Like Charles Muntz, Syndrome dies at the end of *The Incredibles* after he attempts to kidnap the Mr. Incredible and Elastigirl's baby. However, most of the other villains meet much milder fates: Lotso gets tied to the grill of a dump truck; Skinner loses the restaurant he so badly wanted to own; Sir Miles Axlerod is publicly disgraced and presumably arrested; AUTO is deactivated; Mr. Waternoose is arrested and loses control of the company that was in his family for generations; Stinky Pete is given to a little girl who will no doubt ruin his mint condition. The only somewhat villainous character that is given to a chance at redemption is Anton Ego in *Ratatouille*. Although he is a foil for Linguini and the rest of the kitchen staff, his role in the narrative is to function as more of a tangential challenge that the staff must overcome than as a villain. As a food critic, his review will not physically harm anyone, and he does not set Linguini up for failure. He simply issues him the difficult challenge of impressing him with his cooking, and there is hope that Ego can actually enjoy the food. This is in stark contrast to Skinner, who actively sets Linguini up for failure.

Bravery summary.

Overall, bravery is another strong theme across all of Pixar's films, and despite the wide variety of characters in those films, most male characters exhibit bravery to some degree. Some characters are brave because of physical superiority and other external factors. They are brave because they believe they have the physical abilities to be successful. However, many of the characters are not physically superior, and therefore their bravery is rooted in internal qualities, such as emotional connections to others. All of these acts of bravery are shown as being natural for males. Moreover, they are primarily coded as good, and bravery is predominately portrayed as an admirable quality to have. However, a handful of examples do show that excessive bravery needlessly puts themselves or others in harm's way, and these instances can be read as bad examples of bravery. Also, whereas protagonists are given the chance to learn from the error of their ways, antagonists are routinely punished for their actions, with no chance at redemption. This allows for clearer distinctions between positive and negative portrayals of masculinities and concurrently sends a message that bad characters are undeserving of opportunities for redemption or are incapable of change.

Heterosexual Attraction and Romantic Desire

Although not every male character in Pixar's films expresses romantic interest, each film contains at least one romantic relationship or display of heterosexual attraction. Sexual interest always manifests as heterosexual. Romantic relationships drive the plots of some films, like *Up* and *WALL-E*, but in many instances, relationships are used to define characters' sexuality and ground it in a heteronormative dual-gender paradigm. Moreover, we see numerous examples of males who are unable to control their reactions to members of the opposite gender. Lastly, Pixar

presents conflicting messages about sexuality with the character of Ken in *Toy Story 3*, which eventually marginalizes his version of masculinity and draws its appropriateness into question.

Functions of heterosexual relationships.

Romantic relationships serve two main purposes throughout all Pixar films. For some, these relationships drive the film's plot, but all of the romances help to ground sexuality in a heteronormative framework that reinforces male and female gender distinctions, which can be important when dealing with films that often do not have human characters.

WALL-E and *Up* are two films with plots strongly driven by romantic relationships, although the relationships are in contrasting phases, with one just beginning and the other ending. *WALL-E* is driven by the growing one-sided attraction that the title robot feels toward EVE and his attempts to win her affection. Conversely, *Up*'s plot is driven by Carl's desire to fulfill his dead wife's dream of moving to Paradise Falls. Carl is a man who does not have closure about the loss of his wife. He even keeps her memory alive by talking to her as if she were still there. It is his stubborn insistence to undertake this final romantic gesture that precipitates the film's plot the moment Carl's house is lifted away by thousands of colorful balloons.

The plot of *The Incredibles* is largely driven by the relationship—or lack thereof—between Mr. Incredible and Elastigirl. Their marriage is strained, and Elastigirl worries about the state of their marriage. Her fears about Mr. Incredible possibly having an affair cause her to take a jet to find him, unknowingly with two of her children onboard. It is Elastigirl's concern about their marriage that fuels her actions, which results in a substantial part of the film's plot.

Brave, despite the protagonist being a teenage girl, is a film with a plot also driven by heterosexual romance and patriarchal tradition, but unlike most classic Disney princesses,

Merida wants to actively *avoid* having to enter into a relationship with any of her three male suitors. Interestingly, it is Merida's mother who insists her daughter conform to the cultural expectations about courtship and marriage, while her father simply follows the queen's lead. Rather than using a male character to reinforce heteronormativity, Pixar uses a female character to actively promote adherence to patriarchal traditions. Although Merida bucks against the rules that patriarchy has placed on the culture and eventually is allowed to choose her own mate, the underlying assumption is still that she will eventually pick a male suitor and marry him. Even when she tries to revolt against patriarchy, Merida is still agreeing to conform to societal expectations; her defiant act only postpones the inevitable. Like Pocahontas, who complies with her father's wishes to stay with their tribe (see Dundes, 2001), Merida does not truly defy patriarchy because she essentially promises to fulfill the duties it requires of her. This example shows how hegemonic masculinity assimilates and rearticulates Merida's act of defiance in a way that suggests she has control over her fate, when she is actually still agreeing to pick a husband. When that happens, Merida will have conformed to the role that patriarchy designated for her all along. Thus, patriarchy has not been threatened by Merida's actions.

The second function of romantic relationships is to ground romantic expression in a heteronormative framework, while helping to establish male characters' heterosexuality. For example, Woody's emotional attachment to Andy could allow for a queer reading of Woody's desire for his owner. There is even a scene where Woody confronts Buzz, who has recently become Andy's favorite toy, and sounds like a jilted lover. "Listen to me, Light Snack," Woody says, "You stay away from Andy. He's mine and no one is taking him away from me." Even song lyrics about Woody's emasculation talk about the loss of the relationship between Woody and Andy: "I've lost the love of the one I used to adore." These data could easily be used to build

a strong case for a latent homosexual desire Woody might have for Andy. However, Bo Peep's character is used to align Woody in a heterosexual framework. He is sexually attracted to her, which makes his affection for Andy seem more paternal than romantic. It also prevents the homosocial bond that forms between Woody and Buzz (see Gillam & Wooden, 2008) from being read as homosexual.

Moreover, many of Pixar's films take place in fictional worlds where objects are anthropomorphized (e.g., *Cars*, *Cars 2*, and *WALL-E*) and animals do not feature any distinguishing genitalia (e.g., *Finding Nemo* and *Ratatouille*), which is common in children's cartoons (Abel, 1995). (Additionally, characters' names and voices overwhelmingly align with real-world expectations for male and female genders, which could aid in establishing sex and gender.) Therefore, establishing these environments within heteronormative frameworks where there are characters that are clearly male and female functions as a schema that allows audiences to quickly make sense of who the characters are.

For example, *Cars*'s Lightning McQueen is clearly coded as male because of the character's voice and other characters' use of masculine pronouns to refer to McQueen. McQueen even refers to himself as a "one-*man* show" (emphasis added). Pixar chooses to further solidify McQueen's masculinity by also including scenes of McQueen's delight when two female fans flash their headlights at him, saying, "I love being me," and of his attraction to Sally. In their initial meeting, he seductively tells Sally that she can just stand there and let him look at her, clearly objectifying her as a sexual object for him to use for his own pleasure.

Although romantic desire appears to be a prominent component in the creation of Pixar's protagonists, there are a few male protagonists who do not express any type of romantic desire. Sulley, Buzz Lightyear (only in the first *Toy Story*), and Remy are the only male protagonists

who do not express romantic desire. One reason audiences do not see these characters' romantic desires is perhaps because they are so strongly pursuing other interests. Sulley is focused on safely returning Boo to the human world; Buzz, believing himself to be a real space ranger, is focused on saving the galaxy; and Remy is passionately pursuing his culinary ambitions. They simply do not have time for love during the films' narratives. Aside from these three examples, it appears that Pixar routinely uses sexual desire as a method of further establishing normative gender portrayals.

Additionally, sexual desire is used to further delineate between "good" and "bad" men. Whereas the overwhelming majority of protagonists express some level of sexual attraction toward a female character, no antagonist is shown expressing romantic desires. They are shown desiring fame (e.g., Stinky Pete, Charles Muntz, Chick Hicks, and Syndrome), fortune (e.g., Al, Mr. Waterhouse and Randall, Sir Miles Axlerod, and Chef Skinner), or power (e.g., AUTO and Lotso), but they are never shown desiring a romantic relationship of any kind. This rhetorical choice to continually show villainous characters not engaging in romantic relationships prevents the audience from seeing a side of the character that, if they were to be in love with someone, would imply that they are somehow lovable.

The quandary of Ken in *Toy Story 3*.²

Any discussion of sexuality in Pixar films must acknowledge the ambiguous nature of Ken in *Toy Story 3*. In this section, I analyze his portrayal in the film and explore the fluctuations between Ken's outwardly expressed heterosexual desire for Barbie, but also how the character clearly provides evidence of the possibility that Ken is a closeted homosexual. As a sexually ambiguous character, Ken is an aberration from the way that Pixar routinely constructs

² An early draft of this analysis was presented at the 2013 Broadcast Education Association Convention in Las Vegas, Nevada.

masculinities, and because he represents a version of masculinity not found in any other Pixar film, he warrants additional study. An examination of Ken uncovers methods that Pixar utilizes to absorb Ken's performance of masculinity into the hegemonic fold by sometimes situating Ken within a heteronormative framework, which would appear to make Ken's version of masculinity acceptable. However, Pixar ultimately creates a specific space where this type of expression is allowed to exist that is separate from overarching hegemonic ideals, and although it is allowed, Pixar acknowledges that Ken's performance does not align with mainstream performances of masculinity.

Embodying masculinity and femininity.

Ken is first introduced to Woody, Buzz, and the rest of the toys after they have been accidentally donated to Sunnyside Daycare. After riding down the elevator on Ken's Dream House, the toys, as well as the audience, get their first good look at Ken, who is wearing a blue leopard-print shirt that is unbuttoned to his navel and tucked into light blue shorts with rolled up cuffs (see Illustration 4.1). He is also wearing a pale blue ascot around his neck. Although Ken's wardrobe can easily be coded as indicative of homosexuality, the film quickly establishes Ken's heterosexual attraction to Barbie, whereupon seeing her, his eyes widen and his jaw drops. (This example also provides additional support for Hypothesis 2.) Ken is awed by Barbie's beauty, and he shamelessly flirts with her.

The conflicting messages seen in Ken's portrayal during his introductory scene exemplify King's (2009) statement that "hegemonic masculinity does not articulate a single, monolithic ideal but a complex overdetermined matrix from which multiple, even conflicting, masculinities can emerge—even from the same body" (p. 371). Ken, who appears to be a master of flirtation,

Illustration 4.1. Ken is Introduced to Andy's Toys



exhibits both heterosexual desire for Barbie and an extremely feminine passion for fashion. He is the embodiment of both masculinity and femininity. Of course, it could be argued that Ken is simply a metrosexual male, who, as Simpson (2002) noted, put a great deal of emphasis into their appearance. However, while Ken could be classified as metrosexual, that aspect of his personality is not necessarily indicative of his sexuality, because metrosexuals can be straight, gay, or bisexual (Simpson, 2002). However, aside from his initial attraction to Barbie, Ken seems to primarily desire Barbie's company so that she can share in his love of clothing, rather than desiring her affection. In this way, Ken and Barbie's narrative is imbued with some romantic possibilities, but he functions more like her gay best friend, similar to how the narrative between the sitcom *Will & Grace's* title characters is constructed (see Shugart, 2003).

Additional juxtapositions of aspects of Ken's masculinity and femininity are interwoven throughout the film. For example, when Ken is describing the Dream House, he says, "It's got a dune buggy. And a whole room just for trying on clothes." The dune buggy is a very masculine

image; however, by pairing it with the mention of Ken's closet, the film refuses to allow Ken to align with traditional masculinity or femininity. These fluctuations mirror narrative threads analyzed by Chapman (2009) in the Christian-based *Left Behind* book series, where the male characters alternated between exhibiting alpha male bravado during action sequences and openly weeping and being subservient to God. However, the difference between Ken and the *Left Behind* characters is that while his sexuality is ambiguous at best, the sexuality of the books' characters is always rooted in heteronormativity.

Later in the film, Ken finally takes Barbie to part of the Dream House, which he tells her is "where the magic happens." The sexual innuendo implying that Ken could be referring to "magic" as a heterosexual encounter is dashed when he turns on the lights to reveal, not a bedroom, but his massive closet. As they admire his wardrobe, Ken, obviously upset, laments, "No one appreciates clothes here, Barbie. No one." Then as they are going through his numerous outfits, Ken shows Barbie his kung fu uniform and his "campus hero" letterman's jacket. This would seem to be another attempt to ground Ken as a heteronormative male, despite the fact that it is framed by his markedly feminine love of fashion. Again, he is fluctuating between the masculine and feminine worlds, with one foot in each, yet not at home in either. Of course, Ken's love of clothing and spending time in his closet could easily be read as a means of stating that Ken is in fact homosexual. He enjoys being in the closet literally because it is a place for him to express his figuratively closeted sexuality. When Ken models some of his outfits at Barbie's request, Chic's disco anthem "Le Freak" plays, repeating the lyrics "Freak out!" Even this song seems to imply that Ken is a freak as he parades around the closet in various outfits, including a glittery red tuxedo, 1970s-style leisure suit, German lederhosen, shiny gold shirt with rainbow-striped pants, and a variety of other outfits (see Illustration 4.2).

Illustration 4.2. Ken Models Outfits for Barbie



Ken's infatuation with clothing is seen in a very different light compared to scenes in *Toy Story 2* where Woody loses his hat and Buzz admires a new utility belt. When Woody loses his hat, Buzz organizes a search for it because Woody is too flustered to do so. In a reversal of stereotypical gender roles, it is Bo Peep, one of the few female toys, that calms Woody down by telling him it will be okay if he does not find the hat. These contradictory scenes send the message that it is acceptable for a masculine male to place importance on and emotional attachment toward fashion accessories; however, because Ken is seen as markedly feminine, his love of clothing suggests weakness. In *Toy Story 3*, Barbie tortures Ken for information by

ripping apart pieces of his wardrobe. Ken gets hysterical and quickly caves in, giving her the information she needed to help Buzz.

Passing for straight.

Despite questions the audience may have about Ken's sexual orientation, the toys in the film, for the most part, do not appear to question Ken's sexuality or behavior. When Ken asks Barbie to move into his Dream House with him, Barbie looks back at Woody and the rest of the toys for approval. Jessie and Mrs. Potato Head both encourage her to go with Ken. Jessie gives Barbie a smile and a thumbs up, and Mrs. Potato Head waves her hands, as if shooing Barbie on along with Ken. Meanwhile, the male characters do not react, which implies they also see nothing out of the ordinary about Ken asking Barbie to live with him. His actions appear to be seen by the toys as heteronormative, just as Shugart (2003) said many gay-male/straight-female romantic comedies (e.g., *My Best Friend's Wedding*, *Object of My Affection*, and *The Next Best Thing*) and sitcoms (e.g., *Will & Grace*) are narratively structured. Shugart (2003) concluded that many films construct narratives involving a gay man and straight woman in this way to make homosexual men appear to align with heterosexuality in order to make those media products more palatable to mainstream consumers. The toys' acceptance of Ken and his desire for Barbie mirror the way that many children most likely interpret the characters. Ken is a boy, and boys like girls. They are oblivious to any evidence that would counter ideas of traditional heteronormative masculinity. This is yet another way that hegemonic masculinity asserts power by having the toys automatically assume that Ken is straight, despite evidence that may suggest otherwise.

Whereas Ken's clothing is markedly feminine, he is seen numerous times taking on a very "tough guy" masculine persona. While some of the senior daycare toys are gambling (a toy

version of roulette that involves a See-and-Say), Ken is running the game and interacting with the other toys as just “one of the guys,” but when the muscular action figure Twitch mentions Barbie, Ken becomes defensive.

Twitch: You got yourself a little keeper yourself. Don’t you, Ken?

Ken: Hey, lay off, Twitch. Barbie’s different.

Stretch [teasingly]: Aw, Mr. Softie over here.

Chunk: What do you expect from a *girl’s* toy?

Ken [throwing his hands in the air and slamming them down on the table]: I’m *not* a girl’s toy! I’m not! Why do you guys keep saying that?

This scene shows how even when Ken is expressing interest in a female, the more masculine toys still pick on him because of his feminine nature. He is teased because he is not being masculine enough. The accusation that he is a “girl’s toy” infuriates him because his reality had been constructed without Barbie. Therefore, Ken would assume that the Dream House and closet full of clothes were intended for him and that it was normal. Ken cannot see the feminine aspects of his own nature, even as he defends himself to the others while wearing a pink glitter-trimmed jacket with matching ascot (which is later revealed to be Barbie’s pink scarf).

When Buzz is captured after spying on the gambling game, Ken switches back to being authoritative and menacing, ordering them to take Buzz away for interrogation. Ken also acts in a very masculine manner as the warden when Andy’s toys are imprisoned in metal baskets. However, once again Pixar does not allow an assertion of Ken’s masculinity without reminding the audience of his feminine characteristics, showing Ken in a fuzzy bathrobe and slippers during the prison rounds scene. In another scene, Ken is wearing Barbie’s scarf around his own neck,

which she yanks off of him when they fight. Gender transgression through clothing—a male wearing markedly feminine clothes—is one of the hallmarks of villainy in children’s films (Livvoller & LaPointe, 2003), and at this point in the narrative, Ken does function as a secondary villain to Lotso.

Questioning Ken’s heteronormativity.

For most of the film, Ken is presented as a character in flux between the masculine and feminine, but there are two instances where the other characters blatantly address Ken’s ambiguous gender portrayal. The first instance is when Mr. Potato Head, who insults almost every character in the trilogy by calling them a “moron” or an “idiot,” tells Ken, “You’re not a toy! You’re an accessory! You’re a purse with legs!” This line again alludes to the fact that Ken was made for Barbie and that he exists because of her. However, because Barbie is culturally known as the dominant partner in their relationship, Ken’s character in the movie is also seen as subservient to femininity. Ken’s attempts to portray a dominant alpha male version of masculinity come across as inauthentic and comical. He can never be seen as a legitimate alpha male example of masculinity because of the fact that he was created to be secondary to Barbie. Calling him a purse clearly centers him in a feminine context.

Accessories are also mentioned by Mrs. Potato Head when she says she deserves respect from Lotso because she has “over 30 accessories,” which implies that a female derives her value from her material possessions. Looking at accessories in this way, Ken is reduced to a being a possession, not a person. Mr. Potato Head choosing to call Ken a “purse,” a blatantly feminine accessory, only further belittles Ken as a man. He is not only viewed as an accessory—but as a *woman’s* accessory. After all, the insult would have a different connotation had Mr. Potato Head called Ken a “briefcase with legs.”

The most direct attention focused on Ken's ambiguous sexuality is in one of the final scenes in the movie that plays as the credits roll. After Andy's toys are given to a little girl named Bonnie, the toys at Sunnyside stay in touch with them by sending a letter home in Bonnie's backpack. Woody reads the letter, which is written in bright pink marker and covered with glittery stars and drawings of hearts, to the toys:

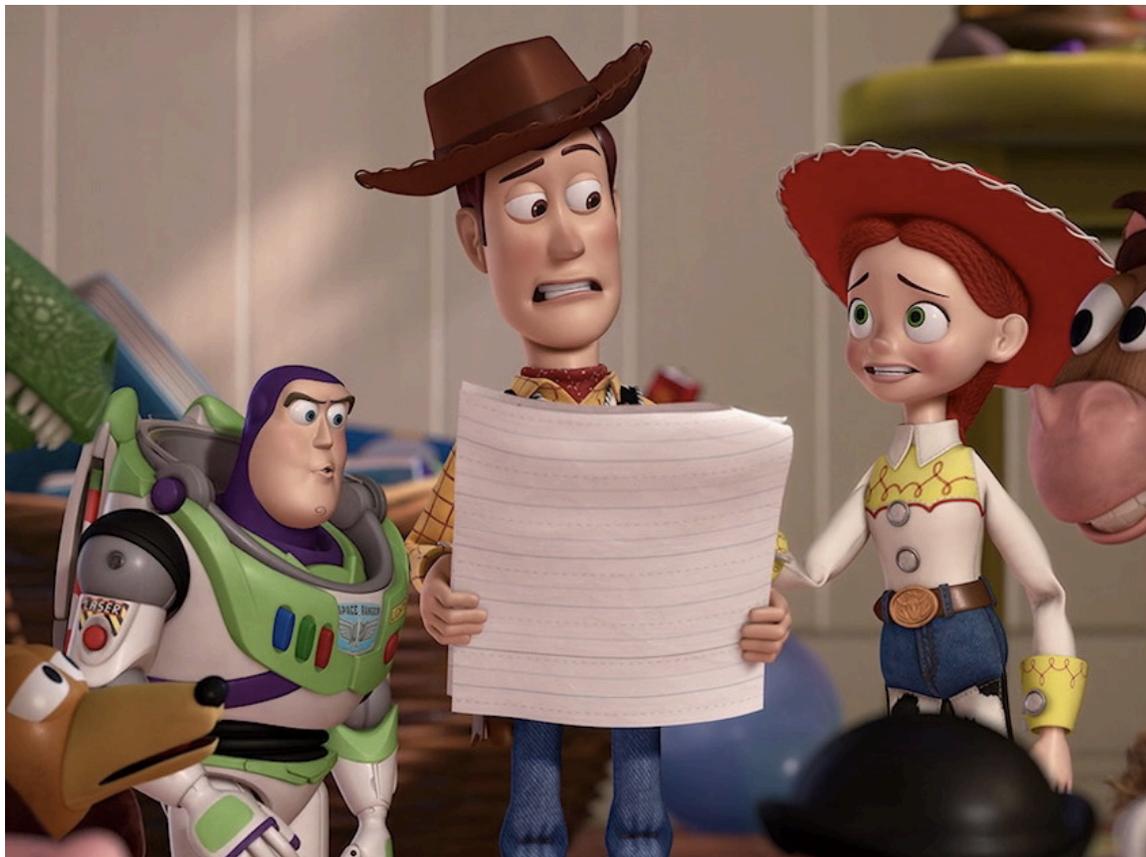
Woody [reading the letter]: "So I guess you could say that Sunnyside is sunny once again! Hope to hear from you soon! We're all super excited about your new home. Hugs and kisses to everyone." Aww.

Buzz [admiring the letter]: That Barbie has some *nice* handwriting.

Jessie [pointing to Ken's signature at the bottom of the letter]: Uh, Buzz, Barbie didn't write this.

After Jessie points to Ken's signature, the toys swap nervous, questioning looks (see Illustration 4.3). This brief exchange of worried looks functions to reestablish and reaffirm Pixar's adherence to hegemonic masculinity. Woody and Jessie's questioning looks serve as a final judgment on Ken's sexuality in the film because this is the last scene in which Ken is referred to, and that judgment is that they question Ken's masculinity and are uncomfortable with it. While the rest of the movie allows Ken to blur the gender line between masculinity and femininity without anyone questioning his sexuality, this final scene essentially says that Ken's behavior is not accepted, despite the aspects of heterosexuality that Ken exhibits. Woody and Jessie's reaction to Ken's letter serve to reassert a sense of heteronormativity for the audience. Whereas Ken's behavior was allowed for a while, this scene essentially "sets the world right" for what is culturally accepted as proper masculinity and Pixar's version of hegemonic masculinity.

Illustration 4.3. The Toys React to Ken's Feminine-Looking Letter



In many ways Ken is symbolic of the treatment of the Fab Five from *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* analyzed by Westerfelhaus and Lacroix (2006). Westerfelhaus and Lacroix said *Queer Eye* “functions as a mediated ritual of rebellion that allows for only a few highly controlled, minor, and temporary violations of the mainstream’s sociosexual order” (p. 430). *Toy*

Story 3 operates in much the same way: Ken's gender fluidity is confined to the length of the film and only allowed inside the confines of the daycare. For a brief time, he is allowed to bend the gender rules, and it appears that Pixar's version of hegemonic masculinity will assimilate Ken's behavior and deem it as acceptable. However, at the last second, the film sends a final message with Woody and Jesse's reaction to Ken letter that reestablishes the "proper" sexual norm and clearly implies that Ken violates that norm. Thus, everything is returned to normal as the screen fades to black. And in reality, this message reinforcing the mainstream heteronormative order is to be expected from a Disney-Pixar film. If the company were to truly challenge society's gender expectations, that would no doubt tarnish its kid-friendly reputation, but Pixar's use of Ken's possible heterosexual attraction to Barbie could, for some viewers, obviate any concerns about his potential homosexuality.

Uncontrolled sexual expression.

Hypothesis 2 stated, "Males will be unable to control their sexuality." Results of the analyses partially supported this hypothesis. Although many male characters exhibited instances where they were unable to control their sexual urges and reactions, the majority of male characters are in full control of themselves around members of the opposite gender. This theme has been found at least once in each of the films analyzed, except for *Up* and *Cars 2*.

This theme was first noticed with Woody's reaction to Bo Peep in the original *Toy Story*. When Bo Peep flirts with him, she asks, "What do you say I get someone else to watch the sheep tonight?" Woody laughs nervously but is obviously smitten with the idea of spending the night with her. "Oh, yeah," he responds. At the end of the film, Woody is seen with Bo Peep's lipstick on his face after she got him under the mistletoe and dipped him off screen to kiss him. Although

Bo Peep is a sexually aggressive character, Woody seems to lose his composure around her and is defenseless to her charms.

Buzz Lightyear provides examples supporting this hypothesis in both *Toy Story 2* and *Toy Story 3*. Buzz loses his composure when around Jessie the cowgirl, and his body involuntarily responds to her. When Jessie and Bullseye come to live with Andy, Buzz goes up to introduce himself to her and ends up unable to communicate clearly:

Buzz: Uh, ma'am. I uh... [clears his throat] Well, I just wanted to say you're a bright young woman with a beautiful yarnful of hair. [He tries to correct himself.] Hairful of yarn. It's, uh. Whoo. Uh. [He clears his throat again.] I must go.

Jessie (squeezing Buzz in an embrace): Well, aren't you the sweetest space toy I ever met?!

Buzz is then awed by Jessie when she uses a toy car ramp to launch herself across the room to open the bedroom door so that the dog can go outside. Buzz's jaw drops, and his jetpack wings spontaneously spring outward (see Illustration 4.4). Buzz's wings symbolize an erection, which is an example of the "double coding" discussed by Booker (2010) where certain elements of the film are clearly intended for adult audiences to understand on a different level from children. Although many children may laugh at Buzz's unexpected display of his wingspan, the innuendo is likely only to be understood by older members of the audience.

In *Toy Story 3*, Buzz's awkwardness around Jessie is still apparent—even after roughly a decade of being involved with each other—when the toys are taking their positions inside the toy box:

Jessie: Buzz! Mind if I squeeze in next to ya?

Buzz (flustered): Yes. No. W-w-w-why would I mind squeezing next to you? [He clears his throat] Is it hot in here?

Illustration 4.4. Buzz's Wings Spontaneously Open in Response to Jessie



Later in the film, Buzz is accidentally set to “Spanish Mode,” and he is finally able to articulate how he feels about Jessie. However, because he is in Spanish Mode, he can only speak in Spanish. Thus, Jessie cannot understand what Buzz is saying to her. Eventually, Buzz is reset, and in the final scene that plays during the credits, Jessie begins to play a Spanish version of “You’ve Got a Friend In Me,” the theme song from the first *Toy Story* film. When the Spanish music begins to play, Buzz’s hips involuntarily start swaying to the beat. Buzz is not in control of his body:

Buzz: I don’t know what came over me.

Jessie: Just go with it.

In this last example we see that Buzz literally is not in control of his body, and Jessie encourages him to see what happens. The latent effects of his Spanish Mode cause him to lose control of his

body and perform a romantic dance with Jessie. The differences between Buzz's awkward normal self and his romantically expressive Spanish Mode is a nod to the stereotypical Latin lover, which is one of the few instances where Pixar films address ethnicity or race. (The only other Hispanic character in Pixar's feature film library is Ramone from the *Cars* franchise. He is also depicted as being successful when it comes to romance, having married Flo, who is coded as African American female who publicly dotes on him and his appearance.)

Other instances of males being unable to control themselves include King Fergus being transfixed by a naked Queen Elinor in *Brave*, Alfredo Linguini uncontrollably staring at Colette in *Ratatouille*, and Flik's awkward, fumbling behavior around Princess Atta in *A Bug's Life* (see Illustration 4.5). In all of these examples, male characters appear to be enthralled with female characters and lose the ability to control their actions. They gape and stare at the female characters as if in a trance.

Additionally, *Toy Story 2* also depicts males as being unable to control their sexual reaction and shows that they are sexually attracted to the image of ideal feminine beauty: the Barbie doll. When Hamm, Mr. Potato Head, Slinky, and Rex are driving around the toy store, they happen to go down the Barbie aisle and see the dolls enjoying a barbeque and lounging by a toy pool. The car screeches to a stop and all of the male characters stare at the Barbie display. Their jaws drop in awe (see Illustration 4.6). When Tour Guide Barbie jumps into the car, Mr. Potato Head fights his attraction to her:

Mr. Potato Head: I'm a married spud. I'm a married spud.

Hamm (pushing Mr. Potato Head out of the way so he can sit beside Barbie): Then make room for the single fellas!

Illustration 4.5. Males Losing Control in the Presence of Females



Illustration 4.6. Rex, Slinky, Hamm, and Mr. Potato Head See the Barbies



Pixar further addresses the possibility of marital infidelity in *The Incredibles* and frames it in a way that suggests men cannot control the urge to commit adultery. Suspecting that her husband is cheating on her, Elastigirl confronts Edna Mode, the woman who designed their superhero costumes, about recent work Edna did repairing Mr. Incredible’s torn outfit. When Elastigirl tells Edna about her fears of Mr. Incredible’s infidelity, Edna responds, “Men at Robert’s [Mr. Incredible] age are often unstable. Prone to weakness.” Here, Edna suggests men cannot control themselves, even if they are in a committed relationship. Although Elastigirl is angry with Mr. Incredible for his assumed infidelity, she blames herself for letting it happen. “I’m such an idiot,” she tells Edna. “I let this happen, you know. The new sports car, the getting in shape, the blond hair, the lies.” Similar to Jeffords (1994) argument that Beast is not held accountable for his brutish actions because he was not taught how to behave properly, *The Incredibles* gives yet another example of men not being held accountable for their actions. Elastigirl blaming herself for her husband’s possible cheating essentially excuses him from

responsibility for his presumed actions. Thus, it implies that it is up to females to ensure that their partners do not cheat, because men are not able to control their impulses and should not to be held responsible for the actions that result because of their uncontrollable sexual desires.

Sexuality summary.

Overall, sexuality and romance play lesser roles than themes of teamwork and bravery in Pixar's films. Although a few films are actually driven by romantic relationship, romance and sexuality appear to primarily be incorporated into Pixar's films to further establish heteronormative frameworks that audiences can relate to. Romance and sexuality additionally anchor characters into those frameworks, eliminating questions about protagonists' sexuality. As Gillam and Wooden (2008) discussed in their analysis of *Toy Story*, *The Incredibles*, and *Cars*, in each instance where a male character begins to grow close to another male character, their bond is always focused on the goal of a heterosexual relationship or a feminized object.

Lastly, Ken presents the biggest challenge to hegemonic masculinity and heteronormativity in Pixar's films, but unlike Disney princesses Pocahontas and Mulan, who were praised for shattering gender lines (see Dundes, 2001; Maslin, 1998), Ken has not been heralded in the same way. The differing reactions to mold-breaking characters has been noted before, where tomboy characters are not teased, while effeminate boys are made fun of (Quint, 2005). This is seen in the *Toy Story* trilogy with the female character Jessie, who is very much a tomboy, and yet, her sexuality is never questioned, nor is she teased for her masculine actions. Thus, the message is clear: gender slippage is acceptable for females, yet unacceptable for males.

Although it appears as if Ken would be accepted into Pixar's version of hegemonic masculinity (albeit on the extreme feminine end of the spectrum), ultimately Ken's character only serves to reaffirm the "proper" heteronormative masculinity of other male characters, like

Woody and Buzz. Even Pixar seemingly refuses to acknowledge the potential impact of this gender-bending performance by choosing to return the *Toy Story* characters to their “proper” places in the gendered world when playtime is over.

Desire to be Loved/Needed

The fourth major theme about masculinities is that males express the desire to be loved or needed. Although wanting to be loved and wanting to be needed may seem like two separate categories, I am placing them together, because the two are often linked in narratives throughout the Pixar library. Male characters either mistake being needed as being loved, or their desire to be needed includes a longing to be loved.

This theme is perhaps one of the strongest hallmarks for showing the cultural transitions masculinities have undergone since the stereotypical Old Man images seen in the media until the late 1980s. As previously discussed in Chapter 2, the Old Man was often presented as an emotionally detached loner; in contrast, New Men are emotionally expressive and seek out connections with others as they shift their focus from their careers to their family lives (Jeffords, 1994). Not only is the desire for love and being needed present, Pixar’s males openly discuss this theme and their desire for these types of relationships. This openness about these desires presents them not only as natural, but also as acceptable in the new age of masculinity. However, Pixar’s films do send a consistent message that the desire to be needed can cause males to make poor choices that could affect their loved ones. Like the bravery theme, the desire to be needed must benefit others in addition to the individual, and when being loved or needed are in conflict, the need for love is positioned as the right choice for characters to make.

Much like the previously discussed themes, the desire to be loved or needed also functions as a narrative engine, serving as characters’ motivation for actions that drive the plot

forward, which further signifies the transition to the New Man model of masculinity. Lastly, this theme also shows audiences the negative consequences that are reaped when a male's desire to be loved or needed is not met. Thus, not only are these emotions seen as natural and acceptable, they are seen as a crucial part of successfully performing masculinity.

Markers of the New Man.

Gillam and Wooden (2008), Decker (2010), and I (Finklea, 2010, 2011) have all documented shifts in how masculinity is portrayed throughout various Pixar films, and the theme of being loved or needed is a clear sign that Pixar's males have moved away from the types of portrayals of masculinities common in older media. This theme is clearly presented in films with New Man narratives, such as *Toy Story*, *Cars*, *The Incredibles*, and *Up*. Part of the transition from the Old Man to the New Man involves getting in touch with his emotions—especially the commonly seen male emotions other than anger and frustration (Finklea, 2011; Towbin et al., 2003). For the alpha male characters, acknowledging and conveying these emotions only come after emasculation. Once their pride is stripped away, they are able to express these raw emotions in ways they have not done before. For example, Woody is not able to communicate to Buzz how he feels about their adversarial relationship until it appears that both of them are going to die. With Buzz strapped to a rocket and Woody trapped in a crate, the cowboy opens up about his feelings of being replaced as Andy's favorite toy and his longing for Andy's affection.

Woody: Hey. Get over here and see if you can get this toolbox off me.

(Buzz looks over at him, but then just hangs his head.)

Woody: Oh, come on, Buzz, I... Buzz, I can't do this without you. (Woody looks down, unable to look Buzz in the eye.) I need your help.

Buzz: I can't help. I can't help anyone.

Woody: Why, sure you can, Buzz. You can get me outta here. Then I'll get that rocket off you, and we'll make a break for Andy's house.

Buzz: Andy's house. Sid's house. What's the difference?

Woody: Oh, Buzz. You've had a big fall. You must not be thinking clearly.

Buzz: No, Woody. For the first time I am thinking clearly. You were right all along. I'm not a Space Ranger. I'm just a toy—a stupid, little, insignificant toy.

Woody: Whoa, hey, wait a minute. Bein' a toy is a lot better than bein' a Space Ranger.

Buzz: Yeah, right.

Woody: No, it is. Look, over in that house is a kid who thinks you are the greatest. And it's not because you're a Space Ranger, pal. It's because you're a toy. You are *his* toy.

Buzz: But why would Andy want me?

Woody: Why would Andy want you? Look at you! You're a Buzz Lightyear! Any other toy would give up his moving parts just to be you. You've got wings! You glow in the dark. You talk! You're helmet does that, that, that *whoosh* thing. You are a cool toy.

(Pauses) As a matter of fact, you're too cool. I mean, what chance does a toy like me have against a Buzz Lightyear action figure? All I can do is (he yanks his pull string) "There's a snake in my boots." Why would Andy ever want to play with me when he's got you? I'm the one that should be strapped to that rocket.

Not only does Woody ask for help, which supports the teamwork theme and is another marker of New Man masculinity, he also expresses his fears about not being loved anymore. He is able to open up about his feelings because his alpha male persona has been stripped away. Buzz, on the other hand, is still struggling with the realization that his reality is not what he

thought it to be, nor is he the alpha male he thought himself to be. Trying to live in the old way of life (i.e., believing he is a Space Ranger) could have killed him when he leapt from the stairs.

The massive rocket—called “The Big One”—strapped to his back serves as a metaphor for the Old Man version of masculinity. If Buzz cannot change, the large, phallic bomb will kill him (see Illustration 4.7). He will be destroyed by an image of masculinity and patriarchy. Buzz must be able to come to terms with being needed in a different way than he originally wanted, which is a big shift when we consider that Buzz went from thinking he was needed to save the galaxy to being needed as the plaything for a little boy.

Illustration 4.7. Sid Prepares to Destroy Buzz with “The Big One” Rocket



Even this shift mirrors the transition that the hard-bodied men of the 1980s underwent (Jeffords, 1994). Whereas Old Men focused on being successful at their careers, New Men focus on their families and connecting with them. Buzz must also make that transition from being a successful space ranger to being devoted to the happiness of his owner. For Woody, this scene is where he first acknowledges his desire to be loved and his fear that he is no longer loved. For

both of these characters, understanding and learning to accept these desires is crucial for their transformation into New Men.

This desire for love and to be needed is also key to signifying Lightning McQueen's New Man transformation in *Cars* when he realizes that he does desire to have close relationships. Not only does he form a friendship with Mater, but he also pursues a romantic relationship with Sally. Both of these relationships shatter McQueen's isolated persona, as is seen at the beginning of the film. Moreover, McQueen learns that he not only needs others to be successful, but he wants to be needed. Connecting with the citizens of Radiator Springs gives him a new perspective about the value of relationships.

Function as a narrative engine.

Not only does the desire to be loved/needed function as a marker for New Man masculinity, it also serves as the driving force behind several films. After Buzz and Woody's evolution into New Men, they continue to express their desire to be loved and needed in *Toy Story 2* and *Toy Story 3*. The plot for the second film of the trilogy is driven by Woody's desire to be needed. Woody finds himself torn between his love for Andy and being needed by the other toys from *Woody's Roundup* in order for them to be accepted into a toy museum in Tokyo. However, Pixar sends a firm message that being needed is not the same as being loved. If Woody fulfills his desire to be needed to get into the toy museum, his goals are personal and selfish. Conversely, if he chooses to follow his desire to truly be loved, it will benefit not only himself, but also Andy and the rest of his toys.

Woody is figuratively torn between his love for Andy and his desire to be needed by the *Woody's Roundup* toys because of a literal tear on his body. At the beginning of the film, a small tear forms at Woody's shoulder, leaving his arm dangling limp and lifeless. When Andy's

mother tells him that toys do not last forever, Woody has a nightmare that Andy will no longer want to play with him and that he will end up being thrown away. The Prospector, a toy who is still in mint condition in his box, appeals to Woody's desire to be loved by telling him that they will be adored for years to come in the toy museum. Essentially, they could live forever without the fear of becoming worn out. The appeal of the museum, in addition to finding out about the *Woody's Roundup* program, gives Woody a new purpose. Fearing that his window of usefulness with Andy is coming to a close, the opportunity for seemingly eternal adoration appeals to Woody's desire to be loved. However, Buzz clearly points out that being admired is not the same as being loved, and Woody had confused the two:

Woody: They *need* me to get into this museum. Without me, they'll go back into storage...maybe forever.

Buzz: Woody, you're not a collector's item. You're a child's plaything. You are a *toy*!

Woody: For how much longer? One more rip, and Andy's done with me. And what do I do then, Buzz? Huh? You tell me.

Buzz: Somewhere in that pad of stuffing is a toy that taught me that life's only worth living if you're being loved by a kid. And I traveled all this way to rescue that toy because I believed in him.

Woody: Well, you wasted your time.... I don't have a choice, Buzz. This is my only chance.

Buzz: To do what, Woody? Watch kids from behind glass and never be loved again? Some life.

Toy Story 3 continues this theme of wanting to be needed and loved as the toys, except for Woody, decide to donate themselves to the Sunnyside Daycare after they have spent years in

Andy's toy box yearning to be played with. At the daycare, the toys are assured by Lotso, who informs Andy's toys that they will have an unending supply of children who will play with them, that having "no owners means no heartbreak." Here the toys have allowed their desire to be needed overshadow their desire for love, which is similar to Woody's selfish behavior in *Toy Story 2*. What the toys quickly discover is that they do want a loving relationship with a child, not simply needed by a child as a plaything. The children at the daycare have no emotional attachment to the toys and play roughly with them. Ultimately, the toys find their way back to Andy, who discovers a note from Woody with an address written on it. Andy drives to the house to find Bonnie, the young daughter of one of the daycare workers, playing in the yard. He gives her his old toys, and the toys finally have the relationship that they desired. Bonnie plays with them, and the toys once again feel loved.

Toy Story 3's theme of desiring love is also seen in Ken's character when he expresses his loneliness to Barbie. When showing Barbie around the Butterfly Room at the daycare, they arrive outside Ken's house.

Ken: And this, well, this is where I live. It's Ken's Dream House. It has a disco. It's got a dune buggy. And a whole room just for trying on clothes.

Barbie: You have everything!

Ken: Everything...except someone to share it with.

Although Ken is obviously lonely, it is unclear if he is seeking a romantic relationship or merely companionship with Barbie, as discussed in the previous theme section.

Looking at the *Toy Story* trilogy as a whole, it becomes evident that the desire to be loved and needed are intertwined, but these films send the message that it is better to be loved and needed. The desire to be needed seems to result in selfish rewards, which are viewed as bad,

whereas fulfilling the desire for love is shown as positive and good. If the two desires can coincide, then they are viewed positively, but if characters must choose, Pixar clearly identifies the need to be loved as the right path for characters to choose.

Ratatouille, on the other hand, sends seemingly contrasting messages about being loved and needed when compared with the other films. Whereas the *Toy Story* trilogy presents the desire for love as superior to the desire to be needed, *Ratatouille* shows audiences a character who is struggling with being needed in the right way—in a way that is personally fulfilling—and being loved despite that need. Remy struggles to find a balance between the love and need for his family and his love to cook and his personal need to use his culinary talents. Although Remy is needed by his colony of rats to be the poison checker, that job does not satisfy him. He is stifled by his father, Django, who is the leader of the rat colony. Being needed by the colony is not enough; Remy needs to be able to be himself—and that means being a French chef. Remy expresses his frustration and his dilemma to his father, saying, “I don't want you to think I'm choosing this [cooking] over family. I can't choose between two halves of myself.”

Once Remy's father realizes that his son is truly meant to be a chef, he enlists the colony to help Remy run the kitchen. Now Remy feels the love of his family, and his desire to be needed is also fulfilled in a way that is satisfying to him. The rats need Remy to be in charge and tell them what to do. It is when Remy is able to have free reign in the kitchen that he can unite the two halves of himself that he previously felt torn between. What this film teaches us about the conflict between being loved and needed is that being needed is important, but one must be needed in a way that is fulfilling to them. Forcing Remy to be the poison checker meant he could not pursue his passion. Not acknowledging his son's need to cook depicts Remy's father as unloving and domineering.

Marlin in *Finding Nemo* is another father figure who appears to be confusing the desire to be loved with the desire to be needed. Marlin struggles with the thought of Nemo growing up and becoming more self-sufficient. Marlin desperately wants Nemo to need him in every aspect of his life: from telling him what to do to helping him with every task without letting Nemo try things on his own. Despite his heart being in the right place, Marlin's desire to be needed is smothering Nemo. However, by the end of the film, Marlin learns that Nemo needs the love and encouragement of his father, instead of having Marlin do everything for him. Once again, Pixar positions love as being the right choice for a character to make. Marlin's desire to be needed is what pushes Nemo away and causes him to get captured.

This is very similar to Woody's narrative arc in *Toy Story 2*, where his desire to be needed ultimately hurts the ones he loves. Both Marlin and Woody's desire to be needed push others away and places them in a negative light. Both of them must come to realize that love is more important than need. Likewise, Mr. Incredible struggles with an overwhelming desire to be needed, and in doing so, puts his family at risk. Mr. Incredible's desire to be a superhero, even after they are placed in the protection program and told not to use their powers, compels him to act as a vigilante, and he is nearly arrested because of it. At the end of the film, Mr. Incredible acknowledges that his selfishly-framed desire to be needed was wrong and has placed them all at risk, saying, "This is my fault. I've been a lousy father. Blind to what I have. So obsessed with being undervalued that I undervalued all of you."

Repeatedly, males' desires to be needed instigate the plots for Pixar films, and in each of those films, that desire is ultimately viewed negatively because it adversely affects others. However, once these characters can learn that they need to be loved and to give love, they are shown as reformed and on the path to becoming better men.

When the desire to be loved/needed is not fulfilled.

Despite the expression of the desire to be loved or needed functioning as a hallmark of the New Man, some characters are presented as males whose desires go unfulfilled. Whereas protagonists may struggle with this lack of fulfillment temporarily and exhibit signs of depression (e.g. Carl Fredricksen, Remy, and Flik), ultimately, protagonists' needs are met. However, when these needs are continually unfulfilled, males become villains. The clearest examples of this are Syndrome from *The Incredibles*, Stinky Pete the Prospector from *Toy Story 2*, and Lotso from *Toy Story 3*.

In each of these villains, his desire to be loved is not presented as wrong. Just like their protagonist counterparts, it is presented as natural. However, it is their reactions to those desires going unfulfilled that distinguish them as villainous. Before becoming Syndrome, a young Buddy Pine wants to become Mr. Incredible's sidekick, but he is rejected by his idol. Gillam and Wooden (2008) noted the name Pine alludes to the nature of the unrequited relationship he wants with Mr. Incredible. Similarly, The Prospector spends his whole life wanting some sort of relationship, but instead, he spent most of his life on a dime store shelf watching other toys get bought. Lotso's owner not only loses him, but she replaces him with an identical stuffed bear. Unlike the protagonists, who face similar circumstances of feeling unloved or unwanted, these nascent villains grow resentful and angry. They harden themselves against the possibility of a true, meaningful relationship. Rejection and resentment are the common triggers in all of these examples.

Of course, to delve into why some characters become villains and others become heroes cannot be determined from fictional characters. Moreover, audiences generally understand that films have good guys and bad guys, so it is understandable that some of these characters will end

up becoming villains. What these characters do represent are examples of what can happen when males do not receive the type of love or attention they desperately want. This counters the Old Man notions that men naturally prefer to be alone and not tied down by relationships. However, Pixar sends a consistent message that without love, attention, or a sense of purpose, men become hardened and bitter. These two characteristics are always presented negatively. Thus, the villains serve as a warning to men and boys in the audience that they should seek out and engage in meaningful relationships with others. No Pixar villain is shown as having close friends or loved ones. They are alone with no one to love them, and that is in stark contrast to Pixar's heroes who have or gain relationships and friendships throughout the films.

Desire to be loved/needed summary.

The theme of expressing the desire to be loved and/or needed is prominent throughout Pixar's films, and that is most likely due to the evolving models of masculinity that have been developing since the company's first feature-length film. This trend was first analyzed in Gillam and Wooden's (2008) study of the New Man narrative and further supported by quantitative findings in Decker's (2010) study of gender in Pixar films. This theme strongly supports the presence of the New Man version of masculinity.

Pixar also uses this theme as the catalyst for the plots of several films. In each of these instances, the message that being loved is more important than being needed is repeatedly made. This also shows the transition to the New Man version of masculinity. As Jeffords (1994) described, hard-bodied men on the silver screen during the 1980s (and earlier) wanted to be needed. They were providers and protectors. But with the shift toward the New Man, male characters learned that they needed the love of their families and friends. Therefore, Pixar's

messages about the importance of love over need are in line with the larger shifts seen in masculinity during the 1990s and 2000s.

Lastly, this theme can also serve as a reminder of what can happen when males do not embrace this feature of masculinity: they become villainous and unlovable. This also serves a narrative purpose, allowing audiences to better understand why a villain acts the way he does. They are not bad simply for the sake of being bad. Often times, they are broken and hurt, which can make their villainy almost heartbreaking for the audience because they are able to empathize with them, but no matter how empathetically these villains are represented, Pixar ultimately depicts them as unable to change and deserving of their fates.

Fathers Express Fears About the Future

The fifth theme of masculinity observed in Pixar's films is that characters who are fathers express fears about the future, particularly regarding the safety and wellbeing of their families. This theme is largely the result of the New Man model of masculinity. As previously discussed, one of the key characteristics of the New Man is his connection to his family. Now more emotionally involved with their families, New Men would naturally begin to think more about what the future has in store, and as emotionally aware and expressive males, they are going to talk about their fears and concerns.

This theme also straddles the line between stereotypical images of fathers as providers and protectors and newer images of males who are more in touch with their families and their feelings. Pixar fathers continue to want to provide for and protect their families—which have long been characteristics of what Stacey (1993) called “‘bread-winner’ masculinity” (p. 718)—but now they must also learn how to integrate caring and compassion into their portrayal of fatherhood. As discussed in the previous section, males often express a desire to be needed, and a

part of these fathers' struggles is to understand how their families need them, especially as their children grow up and demand more independence. Additionally, this theme shows paternal characters learning to acknowledge their fears and concerns and ultimately let go of them. They must surrender their need for control, especially with circumstances that are beyond their control.

Fears of the paternal New Man.

The strongest example of the fearful paternal New Man is Marlin from *Finding Nemo*. Not only is he a fearful father, he is also a single one after a barracuda killed his wife. That attack causes Marlin to live in a continual state of worry about Nemo, and Marlin tries to shield him from the outside world as much as possible. He tells Nemo that it is not safe in open water, encourages him to play in the baby area of the playground, and also tells him that he could put off going to school for a while longer. Although any parent would want to protect their child, Marlin's over-protective parenting style is seen as abnormal, especially for a father. Although the New Man is often more emotionally connected to his family and expresses his feelings, his paternal instincts are still to protect and provide for his family. As Brydon (2009) argued, this struggle can result in males being viewed as feminine, and in Marlin's case, Brydon concluded that he fulfills the role of Nemo's mother more effectively than the role of his father. As discussed in Chapter 2, Brydon's analysis strongly supported the ideas of more rigid, gender-based roles for parenting. Instead of viewing Marlin simply as a caring, nurturing father—as Smith (2011) did—Brydon's analysis would seem to suggest that Marlin has violated gender norms. This harkens back to Butler's (1990) discussion about the cultural assumption of a gender core, when in fact gender is externally constructed. It is not something that is innate within us. Brydon's assertion that Marlin functions as Nemo's mother implies that a parental gender core exists in which male and female parents have clear roles. However, as Butler (1990) argued,

there is no such thing as an innate gender core. The construction of gender is a fluid process, and parental roles are equally as unfixed. There are no set roles for mothers and fathers. Rather than trying to figure out which gendered role Marlin falls into, he should be viewed simply as a parent concerned for his child's wellbeing. It is his smothering parenting style that is the issue, regardless of his gender. However, this issue could point to a larger real-world issue that fathers are facing. No doubt some men fear that being seen as too emotionally expressive with their family will cause them to be seen as feminine, as Brydon's analysis does with Marlin.

Both Marlin and Mr. Incredible express their fears of the unknown to others, and this is indicative of their fear about not having control. When Marlin and Dory are trapped inside the whale, Marlin wants to be in control of the situation, despite being unable to communicate with the whale. As the two fish cling to the whale's tongue, Dory translates the whale's message for Marlin:

Dory: He says it's time to let go. Everything is going to be all right.

Marlin: How do you know? How do you know something bad isn't going to happen?

Dory: I don't.

This dialog not only addresses Marlin's fears about how they will escape from the whale's mouth, but also his primary struggle throughout the film about learning to figuratively let go of Nemo. Similarly, Mr. Incredible, who is used to being in control because of strength and superiority is troubled at the thought of having to work with his family to defeat Syndrome, saying, "I don't know what will happen." Despite having superpowers and the love of his family, Mr. Incredible must admit that, like Marlin, he is scared of the unknown. However, he cannot shelter them forever. Not only is Mr. Incredible not emotionally strong enough to endure losing

his family, he is not physically strong enough to defeat Syndrome's robot. Here, this theme crosses with the teamwork theme because he must work with his family to defeat Syndrome. Sharing the burden—both emotional and physical—will allow their family to be successful. Mr. Incredible does not have to carry those burdens alone, as the Old Man would have. As a New Man, he must rely on others and the strength of his family.

Whereas Marlin and Mr. Incredible's fears center around the safety of their children in the future, Django in *Ratatouille* expresses a different type of fear, one that focuses on the impact of a child's choices on the family and breaking with tradition. When Remy tells Django of his plans to leave the rat colony and pursue his love of cooking, Django expresses his fears during a tense conversation with Remy:

Django: You're not staying?

Remy: No. It's not a big deal, Dad. I just—You didn't think I was going to stay forever, did you? Eventually, a bird's got to leave the nest.

Django: We're not birds. We're rats. We don't leave our nests. We make them bigger.

Remy: Well, maybe I'm a different kind of rat.

Django: Maybe you're not a rat at all.

Remy: Maybe that's a good thing.

Although Django is depicted as more angry than fearful during his exchange with Remy, his underlying fears are later addressed. However, whereas the other fathers appear to be more concerned about the safety of their children, Django's main concern is about Remy abandoning his family and the tradition of making the colony larger. Believing that Remy is turning his back on this heritage and culture, Django later tells him, "We look out for our own kind, Remy. When all is said and done, we're all we've got."

Django's fears are not seen as purely personal. He does express his fear for Remy's life, telling him that humans want to kill rats and saying that Remy is putting his life at risk following his dream. He is concerned about Remy, but Django, as the leader of the colony, is also focused on the impact this would have on the colony. Moreover, Remy's decision to leave could reflect poorly on Django's leadership abilities if he cannot control his own son. (However, that assertion cannot be made concretely because I cannot analyze the psyche of a fictional cartoon character beyond mere speculation.) As with previous themes, when characters are acting because of their own best interests, they are coded negatively, and that is also seen here with Django. Regardless of Django's motives for expressing his concerns, the fact that he expresses his feelings is significant.

Overcoming these fears.

For these fathers, the key to overcoming their fear about the future is to realize that they do not have ultimate control. This means they are susceptible to risk, danger, heartbreak, growth, and happiness. It forces them to open themselves up to the full continuum of emotions, from gut-wrenching heartbreak to indescribable joy, and this makes them vulnerable. For each character, this lesson takes different forms. For Marlin, it means that he will not be able to protect Nemo forever. For Woody and his paternal feelings toward Andy addressed in *Toy Story 2*, it means understanding that one day Andy will not want to play with him anymore. For Mr. Incredible, it means coming to terms with not being able to fix everything with his superhero strength. For Django, it means learning that Remy must choose his own path in life, even if that entails moving away from the colony.

Of course, for a film to have a happy ending, these fathers do not experience total heartbreak. Even Woody, whose greatest fear does come true, has closure for his relationship

with Andy as he begins his relationship with his new owner, Bonnie. And throughout each narrative, males are guided and shown how to conquer their fears and accept their lack of control. The clearest example of this is Marlin's encounter with Crush, a laid-back "surfer dude" father with a hands-off parenting approach where he allows his son Squirt to experience life for himself. Crush is crucial in Marlin's journey to become a better parent, and in their time together, Crush uses an instance where Squirt is knocked out of the current to show Marlin how to let children learn for themselves without having a parent rushing to their rescue all the time.

Marlin (begins to swim after Squirt): Oh, my goodness!

Crush: Whoa—kill the motor, dude. Let us see what Squirt does flying solo.

(A few moments later, Squirt swims back into the current. He is not scared, but excited. He asks if his dad if he saw him.)

Crush: You so totally rock, Squirt! So give me some fin.

(Squirt high-fives him and swims to play with his friends.)

Crush (to Marlin as they watch Squirt play): It's awesome man. The little dudes are just eggs. We leave 'em on the beach to hatch, and then, coo-coo-cachoo they find their way back to the big ol' blue.

Marlin: All by themselves?

Crush: Yeah.

Marlin: But, dude, how do you know when they're ready?

Crush: Well, you never really know. But when they know, you'll know, you know?

Even Crush's last line addresses the lack of control that Marlin is struggling with. Not only must Marlin come to terms with not having total control over Nemo, but he also cannot

control when Nemo will be ready to exert his individuality. All of the fathers in Pixar's films struggle with their children exerting individuality and a growing masculinity of their own.

Paternal fears summary.

This theme of fearing the future is centered on paternal figures losing control and dominance over their children. Whereas Old Men were often depicted as authoritative and in control, New Men must struggle with losing these foundational qualities of masculinity. This fear is also linked to males' concerns about obsolescence as their children show that they can act on their own and may not need their parents as much as the previously did. Even *Brave's* King Fergus seems uncomfortable with the idea of the other lords presenting suitors for his daughter's hand, so much so that the queen has to step up and take charge of the ceremony. Perhaps the king was considering that the ceremony was essentially to pick his own replacement as king, thus further bringing to mind thoughts about obsolescence.

Crush presents the only truly balanced portrayal of fatherhood in Pixar's film collection, and he is vital in showing Marlin how he, too, can achieve that balance. Although Marlin does make great strides in his parenting style, he is still shown as fighting his initial parental instincts when Nemo volunteers to enter the fishing net to save Dory near the end of the film. This is the first chance that Marlin has to let Nemo act on his own, and it is a pivotal moment in their relationship. Even Mr. Incredible finds a balance between the superhero world and the normal world. The end of the film shows the family rooting Dash on at a track meet, where he uses his super speed to come in (a restrained) second place. Allowing Dash to use his abilities and fighting crime together as a family permits Mr. Incredible to find the balance between his superhero and family man identities. Realizing that the family works well together as a team and that their powers complement each other also alleviates fears about the future. Django is also

shown having a good relationship with his son at the end of *Ratatouille* and supporting his decision to become a chef. In true children's movie fashion, these father-son duos all find a way to coexist to achieve a happy ending.

Males in the Corporate World

The last major theme that arose from the analysis is that males occupy an overwhelming number of leadership positions in the workplace. In fact, the one example of a female shown in a leadership position in the workplace is *Monsters, Inc.*'s Roz, who is revealed only at the end of the film to be the leader of the Child Detection Agency. Although the reveal is a surprising narrative twist, screen time showing her in a position of power is negligible in comparison to the male bosses shown throughout Pixar's films. The second facet of this theme is that male bosses are predominantly driven by monetary greed. Of the 13 films in the sample, eight of them feature male bosses, and of those, four are the films' main antagonists. The fact that males are continually shown in positions of power in the workplace is evidence of the dominance of patriarchy. At first, this adherence to patriarchy seems at odds with Pixar's progressive portrayals of masculinity, but by making all of these male bosses greedy and some villainous, Pixar once again seems to establish itself in a position of (limited) resistance to patriarchy.

When it comes to representing the workplace environment, Pixar takes a firm stance against avarice and primarily depicts males in leadership positions in the workplace as bad men driven solely by the pursuit of profit. Greed is also linked with other evil character traits, like a willingness to inflict harm on others, ruining someone's reputation, or destroying nature.

“Money, money, money!”

Millions of people are no doubt familiar with the axiom, “Money is the root of all evil.” This saying is especially true for Pixar, which repeatedly shows villains who are driven by their

greed. This theme is initially seen in the first minute of *Toy Story*, which opens on a scene showing Andy playing with his toys. Using his Mr. Potato Head as the bad guy, he demands that the other toys open the safe. When a few coins are shaken out of Hamm, Andy has Mr. Potato Head exclaim, “Money, money, money!” and kiss the coins. This theme is expanded upon in *Toy Story 2*, when Al steals Woody from the yard sale. “You’re going to make me big buck, buck, bucks!” he says. Later Al takes pictures of the *Roundup* collection to fax to Japan, he look at the photos and says, “It’s like printing my own money.” Al is clearly only concerned with making money, even if he has to steal to do it.

A Bug’s Life and *Monsters, Inc.* continue this theme of greedy bosses. In *A Bug’s Life*, circus owner P.T. Flea is willing to put his own life in danger to drive up ticket sales after the group’s Flaming Death act becomes a surprise hit. *Monsters, Inc.* expands the notion of profiting from harm by exposing Mr. Waterhouse, the head of Monsters, Inc., as the mastermind behind a plan to literally suck screams out of terrified children. These two bosses show that safety and wellbeing for themselves and others is less important than making money. As a group, these four films, which happen to be Pixar’s first four feature-length movies, position Pixar firmly against greed and the corporate world.

Examples of executives willing to hurt or let others suffer harm continue with Mr. Huph in *The Incredibles* and Sir Miles Axlerod in *Cars 2*. When Mr. Incredible is forced into superhero witness protection, he is given a job at an insurance company, where his boss openly expresses his contempt for their customers and focuses solely on the company’s profit margin. At one point, Mr. Huph confronts Mr. Incredible about approving payment on a policy for a family whose house was burglarized, which is covered by their insurance policy. “Don’t tell me about their coverage,” Huph snaps, “Tell me how you’re keeping Insuricare in the black. Tell me

how that's possible with you writing checks to every Harry Hardluck and Sally Sobstory that gives you a phone call." Later when Mr. Incredible sees someone being mugged outside Huph's office window, his boss refuses to let him leave to offer help and quips, "Well, let's hope we don't cover him."

Similarly, Axlerod orchestrates a plan to fabricate a public relations crisis for an alternative fuel that he created. His intent is to drive up demand for gasoline after he discovered a large oil reserve beneath the ocean. In order to do this, he sabotages cars competing in the World Grand Prix race that he sponsors. This shows a willingness to injure others solely for the sake of making money.

Chef Skinner from *Ratatouille* does not inflict physical harm in the pursuit of profit, but he is more than willing to tarnish Gusteau's reputation by exploiting the chef's likeness to hawk the line of frozen meals he has created to cash in on the Gusteau name. And the president of the B-n-L superstore chain in *WALL-E* allowed rampant consumerism, which his company no doubt profited from, to get so out of control that the planet became inhabitable. Even in the company's attempt to fix the problem, it still endorsed consumerism and materialism onboard the *Axiom*. And as the film illustrates, these traits have the potential to destroy the environment.

Pitfalls of patriarchy.

Pixar's criticism of the corporate world and of patriarchy sends clear messages that men being in charge in the workplace is clearly not always for the best. None of the bosses seen in Pixar films is depicted as a New Man. They all align with patriarchal views about male dominance and authority, and like Jeffords (1994) noted about masculinity in the pre-New Man era, they are focused on success in the workplace. However, because all of them measure success in dollars and cents, it is seen negatively.

Only when money or power is not the locus of the corporate structure is patriarchy depicted in a positive light, and these instances are fleeting. At the conclusion of *Monsters, Inc.* and *Toy Story 3*, Sulley and Ken, respectively, become the leaders of their organizations. Now in charge of the company, Sulley focuses on the people and creating a happy work environment. Similarly, Ken fills the leadership void left by Lotso's departure and revamps the hierarchical structure of the daycare to be fair and fun for all of the toys. Interestingly, even though Ken, as previously discussed, is a controversial masculine image, he is still placed in charge of the toys. This conflicts with reality, where we would assume that Barbie, as the dominant partner in their relationship, would be the one to take control. Although this would seem to indicate Pixar aligning with patriarchal and hegemonic ideals, I believe Pixar puts Ken in a position of power because he is an anti-hegemonic depiction of masculinity.

Even when females are shown in positions of power (e.g., the queen ant and Princess Atta in *A Bug's Life* and Queen Elinor in *Brave*) they are still firmly situated within the confines of patriarchal customs. This adherence to patriarchy can be attributed to the fact that the most powerful female characters shown are in royal positions. Their power comes from royal privilege, not because they earned it. Queen Elinor has power because she is married to the king, and the royal ants have power because of their bloodline. Not only are these females not shown earning their power and authority, but, for some, it is also shown as unnatural. In fact, Princess Atta is quite uncomfortable in a position of authority, and Princess Dot is picked on and teased by young male ants, despite her royal status.

In *A Bug's Life*, the royals are not direct overseers of all of the work performed by the ants, and male leaders are shown giving directions and orders to others. And even with their royal status, the females in leadership roles cede to the masculine dominance of Hopper and his

gang of grasshoppers. Hopper's grip on the colony is so strong that Princess Atta often frets about pleasing the grasshoppers, rather than being a naturally strong female leader. She is the insect equivalent of a nervous housewife hoping that her angry husband likes the meal she prepared. Even in her royal position, Princess Atta is subjugated to male dominance. Likewise, *Brave's* Queen Elinor is so tied to patriarchal tradition, that she is willing to force her daughter into a courtship against her will. She would rather her daughter be unhappy than unwed. However, as previously discussed, even when the queen and Merida appear to stand together against patriarchal tradition, they merely agree to submit to its demands on a delayed timeframe. Thus, their power is still undermined by the power of patriarchy. To truly challenge patriarchy, they would have to address the possibility that Merida may never marry, but this assertion is never made. She simply agrees to pick a suitor of her choosing in her own time; thus she will still find herself married eventually.

Males in the corporate world summary.

This theme directly challenges patriarchy and its power by largely showing males as greedy and bad bosses. These males are driven by their love of money and do not show empathy toward their employees or others. This negative depiction of males in the corporate world seems ironic given that Pixar is part of one of one of the biggest entertainment companies in the world and is predominantly run by men. However, Pixar operates in a unique way where the emphasis is put on the employees, and they are very highly valued. DVD extras often depict Pixar's headquarters as a fun, whimsical work environment that certainly goes against the common conceptions of how large companies operate. Thus, Pixar's negative depictions of the business world do serve as a critique of that real world culture, which Pixar does not emulate.

Pixar further challenges hegemonic masculinity by depicting all of the males in leadership positions in the workplace as bad bosses. They are too aggressive, too greedy, and too detached from their employees and customers. They are in need of undergoing New Man transformations in order to become characters that audiences would like, but none are given the chance to change. Thus, Pixar frames the Old Man version of masculinity embodied by male bosses as bad by making it a force that our good New Men characters must overcome.

Thematic Summary

Together these themes highlight specific rhetorical strategies used by Pixar to construct fairly unified versions of masculinities throughout its feature films. Overall, the themes of teamwork, bravery (especially to help others), desiring to be loved/needed, and fathers fearing the future demonstrate an abundance of New Man portrayals of masculinities across the 13 films. Moreover, these themes also clearly delineate between good and bad models of masculinities, with villains often not adhering to these themes or engaging in them with selfish motives.

Teamwork is the most noticeable and prominent theme throughout the films. Repeatedly, good male characters are seen working with others and asking for help, while villains are seen working alone or bossing others around. Teamwork and bravery also address concepts of selflessness and selfishness, with good characters working for the benefit of others and bad characters work only for their own gain.

The theme about sexuality and heteronormativity is not surprising given that studios would not want to risk using a film with strong family-friendly appeal and huge box office potential to try and push any type of alternative sexual message. Pixar films clearly operate within a dual-gender framework where the only form of sexual or romantic desire expressed is purely heterosexual. Although romantic desire is often used to help orient non-human characters

into binary gender frameworks that younger audience members would be able to easily understand, romantic desire is also present even after genders are clearly established for the characters, even if it is not crucial to the plot (e.g., Woody and Bo Peep). But even these instances help ground characters into a heterosexual framework and obviate any questions about a character's sexuality.

The theme about desiring to be loved is another sign of the New Man. These males long for relationships and emotional connections and want to be needed. These desires are also presented as being natural parts of masculinity and acceptable for males to acknowledge and talk about. Not only is this theme a stark contrast from many portrayals of Old Man masculinity, but not having these desires was typically a marker of villainy in the films. Thus, Pixar is using character traits of the heroes of yesteryear and showing that, in contrast to New Man models of masculinity, the Old Man is now considered a bad man. Pixar also clearly demonstrates that males should always choose being loved over simply being needed (e.g., Woody's dilemma in *Toy Story 2*), once again promoting a message that being connected to others is more valuable than fulfilling a selfish personal desire.

With Pixar's male characters being more emotionally aware, it stands to reason that those emotions would affect their relationships with others, and those effects are especially noticeable for paternal characters. Because so many of Pixar's films deal with growing up, it is understandable that parental characters would be apprehensive about their children moving on in life. This theme connects Pixar's portrayals of fatherhood to New Man masculinity in that fathers are shown taking a more active role in their families. This theme also speaks to other facets of modern depictions of masculinity in that males are not shown with complete control over their lives. Growing up is a natural part of life, and fathers are unable to control it. However, once

they can learn to accept that fact, they are shown as having more meaningful and deeper relationships with their children.

Lastly, Pixar also uses bosses in a variety of work settings to critique patriarchal power and teach lessons about greed. Although many audience members would not give a second thought to the gender of the bosses seen in Pixar films, the fact that this issue has gone unquestioned points to patriarchy's influence. Even when Pixar was criticized for a lack of female protagonists (see Holmes, 2009), the issue of only seeing males in positions of power in the workplace was not addressed. However, by making these characters bad men or even villains, Pixar is showing that male power is not always ideal. It could raise the question of "Would things be different if a woman was in charge?" But as previously mentioned, Pixar does not give females leadership positions that truly buck patriarchal dominance. Although Princess Atta becomes the queen at the conclusion of *A Bug's Life*, the only reason her power will no longer be challenged by Hopper is because of Flik's efforts. Thus, without a man to fight for her, Atta would still be essentially powerless. Similarly, Queen Elinor is shown actively striving to preserve the patriarchal order, all the while thinking it is what is best for her daughter. So although Pixar shows male leadership as largely ineffective, female authority still rests well within the bounds of patriarchal control.

Despite the fact that Pixar's films have varying narratives with characters who often exhibit these themes through different ways, Pixar's overall construction of masculinities does show a clear and consistent path toward kinder, more emotionally connected and aware males. Moreover, it contrasts these positive figures with negatively viewed portrayals of older stereotypical male behavior. No matter what narrative paths protagonists take to learn these themes, the end result is largely the same: Pixar constructs masculinities that depict Old Men as

bad and shows their transformations into kinder, more emotionally aware New Men, who are depicted as good.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVES OF MASCULINITIES

Throughout Pixar's film collection, no male character that undergoes any type of transformation into a New Man serves as the catalyst for his own growth. This change always results from a protagonist's interactions with antagonists during the course of each narrative. Gillam and Wooden (2008) identified common homosocial narratives for alpha male protagonists in *Toy Story*, *The Incredibles*, and *Cars*. In these narratives, homosocial bonds are crucial for emasculated alpha males to reach their goals. Additionally, Decker (2010) noted that females also act as catalysts for male protagonists' transformations. This chapter will expand upon this previous research by examining all of Pixar's films currently available on home video for additional examples of these narratives and comparing them with previous narrative analyses of homosocial and heterosocial bonds. Male characters that do not undergo a transformation (e.g., Flik and WALL-E) will also be analyzed.

Transformative Homosocial Narratives

As discussed in Chapter 2, Gillam and Wooden (2008) identified common narratives for several male protagonists that result in those characters transforming into New Men. Those narratives involve alpha male protagonists suffering emasculation from their alpha male status, bonding with another male character, and ultimately learning how to become a more emotionally aware, caring, and connected man as they strive to engage in a heterosexual romance with a female character or they seek a feminized object. This narrative is very clearly repeated in *Toy Story*, *The Incredibles*, and *Cars* (Gillam & Wooden, 2008). Research Question 2 asked, "Do

Pixar movies other than those previously studied by Gillam and Wooden (2008) feature New Man narratives?” Similar narratives were indeed observed in *Up*, *Ratatouille*, and *Cars 2*, although they are not as similar in nature as the films from Gillam and Wooden’s study. Despite not having the same amount of continuity from movie to movie as observed in Gillam and Wooden’s analyses, these additional examples of transformative narratives involving homosocial bonds do provide consistent examples of male characters actively engaging in cooperative relationships, and, as discussed in Chapter 4, this quality is a hallmark of the New Man model of masculinities. Thus, the outcomes of these narratives are similar.

Research Question 2a asked, “How do those narratives compare with ones identified by Gillam and Wooden?” Out of these additional films, the New Man narrative, as defined by Gillam and Wooden, is most clearly observed in *Up*. Variations of this narrative were also observed in *Ratatouille* and *Cars 2*. Despite the differences between these narratives and those studied by Gillam and Wooden, together all of these films show that Pixar actively promotes changing portrayals of masculinity that indicate the New Man is preferred over the Old Man.

Up’s Carl Fredricksen may not be considered a typical alpha male, especially in terms of physical power and authority. However, the old man is a loner who wants to be fiercely independent at the beginning of the film. Moreover, he is emotionally hardened and isolated after his wife’s death. All of these characteristics are hallmarks of the alpha male and Old Man masculinity in American culture. Carl is also shown being resistant to change. As skyscrapers are erected around his house, he refuses to sell his home to the developer.

The first major blow to Carl’s masculinity is the death of his wife, Ellie. In the montage of their life together, Pixar creates an egalitarian view of married life where both spouses shatter stereotypical gender roles. Carl is shown helping Ellie with housework that is stereotypically

considered feminine, such as cleaning windows, vacuuming, and dusting (Finklea, 2010), and Ellie is shown helping with construction projects at their house. Although the couple was unable to have children, they are still shown as happy and leading fulfilling lives. However, Ellie's death marks the beginning of Carl's seclusion. His life and undoubtedly a significant portion of his masculinity were defined by her presence and his role as her husband. Her death stripped that away. He seems determined to live out the remainder of his life holding on to everything they had built together by following his old daily routine, and maintaining the house exactly as it was during their marriage. This fixation on his past is part of the reason Carl refuses to sell his home to the developer.

Although Ellie's death has a significant impact on Carl's behavior and masculinity, his ultimate emasculation comes when the court orders him to move into a retirement community after hitting a construction worker with his cane. It is with this act of emasculation that Carl's narrative begins to align more closely with the New Man narratives observed by Gillam and Wooden (2008). The threat of losing his independence and also his beloved home, which was his last physical tie to Ellie, is what causes Carl to decide to use balloons to fly his house to Paradise Falls.

As outlined by Gillam and Wooden (2008), male characters in the New Man narrative bond with another male character in their pursuit of an actual female character (e.g., Lightning McQueen's desire for Sally) or feminized object (e.g. Woody's desire for Andy's love and attention). For Carl, fulfilling Ellie's adventurous dream to move to South America is the feminized object—or in this case, objective—that he seeks. He is determined to live out her dream. One characteristic of the homosocial bonds in Gillam and Wooden's study is that some of the pairings are coincidental and not actively sought out by the protagonist. For example, the

bonds between Woody and Buzz Lightyear in *Toy Story* and Lightning McQueen and Mater in *Cars* occur mainly out of happenstance. Similarly, Carl's pairing with Russell, who was under Carl's porch when the house began to fly, is coincidental. They are paired up by a twist of fate. Although these relationships were not actively sought out, they are instrumental in the transformation of the characters.

Carl and Russell's bond is unique in that it has distinct literal and emotional components. The two are literally bonded by the garden hose they use to pull the floating house through the jungle. Initially, Carl views Russell only as a means to an end: he needs Russell's weight to keep the house from floating away. From an emotional standpoint, Carl takes on the paternal role that Russell is so desperately seeking, and Russell fills the hole left by Carl and Ellie's inability to have children. However, their emotional bond does not truly form until they have completed Carl's initial task of landing the house at Paradise Falls, which is when Russell leaves on his own to try and rescue Kevin. It is not until Carl is sitting alone in the house and reads Ellie's *Adventure Book* that he realizes that moving the house has not changed anything. It does not bring him closer to Ellie, nor does it bring her back to life. This realization frees Carl to go help Russell, and this transition from Ellie's dream to his dedication to Russell and his safety marks a pivotal point in Carl's transformation into a New Man. He figuratively and literally lets go of the past and openly embraces his future. When he catches up to Muntz's ship, Carl rescues Russell, who Muntz was going to let fall to his death. With Russell safely in the floating house, Carl sets out to rescue Kevin.

Russell (protesting): I want to help!

Carl: I don't want your help. I want you *safe*!

Carl's initial response of "I don't want your help" is identical to Lightning McQueen's line in *Cars 2* that he yells at Mater after causing McQueen to lose a leg of the race. However, the motivation behind each line is very different. Carl does not desire to work alone out of a masculine drive for independence or desire to succeed. He wants to work alone and risk his own safety to ensure that Russell is out of harm's way. On the other hand, Lightning McQueen's motivation is to keep Mater from interfering with his chances of winning the World Grand Prix, not for Mater's own good.

Part of the New Man model of masculinity involves a closer relationship with one's family (Jeffords, 1994), and in Carl's case, we see him form a family-like unit with his ongoing involvement in Russell's life. When Carl and Russell return home, Carl fulfills a paternal role for Russell by attending his Wilderness Explorer ceremony with all of the other dads. The final scene shows the two at the ice cream parlor that Russell used to visit with his father. Carl's transformation from a grumpy, solitary old man into a kinder, involved paternal figure completes his New Man narrative.

Cars 2 presents a relatively rare look at the ongoing narrative of a Pixar New Man, allowing audiences to see what life is like for Lightning McQueen after his initial New Man transformation in *Cars*. (The only other Pixar sequels that present this opportunity are *Toy Story 2* and *Toy Story 3*.) What we see is that McQueen struggles to balance his public and private lives. In his public life, McQueen still very much embodies an alpha male role. His racing career reiterates Old Man masculinity qualities such as dominance and physical superiority, whereas in his public life, he is a New Man engaged in friendships and a romantic relationship with Sally. McQueen's struggle mirrors Jeffords's (1994) analysis of the Batman/Bruce Wayne character from the *Batman* film franchise. She categorized Batman as the public face of masculinity where

stereotypical Old Man qualities (e.g., toughness, strength, being a loner) are displayed, while Bruce Wayne's private life is filled with emotion, mainly because of the lifelong grief stemming from the murder of his parents. *Cars 2* focuses on the conflict that arises for McQueen when his public and private lives collide on a global stage. Here, the New Man narrative once again differs from Gillam and Wooden's analysis because McQueen struggles to commit himself to either portrayal of masculinity.

Initially, McQueen declines to race in the World Grand Prix because he wants to spend time with his friends and girlfriend in Radiator Springs, which is a decision that falls in line with ideas about how New Men would want to invest time in their relationships. However, alpha male racer Francesco Bernoulli criticizes McQueen for wanting to rest and spend time at home. He clearly views McQueen's choice negatively and as a sign of inferiority. Not wanting to be seen as either slow or weak, McQueen agrees to race, mainly to preserve his public identity as a successful racecar. At Sally's urging, McQueen invites Mater along as part of his pit crew. However, McQueen is quickly embarrassed by his self-professed best friend's uncultured actions. Mater poses a direct threat to McQueen's public alpha male image. McQueen even suggests to Mater that he act like a different person, saying, "Mater, look, things are different over here [in Japan], which means maybe you should, you know, act a little different, too." This dialog sets up one of the ongoing and clearest lessons of the film: Love people as they are, and do not ask them to be something they are not. When Mater does not change his behavior, his actions eventually cost McQueen the win in an early leg of the race. Here, McQueen's internal struggle to preserve his public persona versus his New Man sensibilities erupts in a fit of anger toward Mater. McQueen yells at him, telling him that he does not want or need Mater's help. In McQueen's desperation to maintain his public image, he realigns with Old Man masculinity both

by asserting his overconfidence in his own abilities and by isolating himself from his closest friend.

Despite McQueen's regression to a more independent, isolated, aggressive version of masculinity, we see McQueen regrets his behavior and that he truly is a New Man at heart. As McQueen and his pit crew move on to the Italian leg of the World Grand Prix, McQueen is shown as remorseful and worried about Mater, who he thinks has flown home to Radiator Springs. McQueen also shows that he knows his actions were wrong. Like *Cars* using other characters to bluntly direct McQueen's attention to his character flaws, the sequel takes a similar overt approach when it comes to conveying morality messages regarding McQueen's struggles with relationships. When McQueen's crew pays a visit to Luigi's Uncle Topolino, McQueen and Topolino have a one-on-one discussion that addresses McQueen's character flaw directly:

McQueen: I brought my friend Mater along on the trip, and I told him he needed to act different—that we weren't in Radiator Springs.

Topolino: This Mater is a close friend?

McQueen: He's my best friend.

Topolino: Then why would you ask him to be someone else?

McQueen: What did I do? I said some things during our fight.

Topolino: You know, back when Guido and Luigi used to work for me, they would fight over everything. They fight over what Ferrari was the best Ferrari, which one of them looked more like a Ferrari. There were even some non-Ferrari fights. So I tell them, "*Va bene*, it's OK to fight. Everybody fights now and then, especially best friends. But you [have] got to make up fast. No fight [is] more important than friendship."

After this conversation, McQueen eventually reunites with Mater, apologizes for his actions, and tells Mater that he will never push him away again. The two are able to mend their friendship, and McQueen once again aligns himself with the New Man model of masculinity. Only after the loss of his closest homosocial bond did McQueen realize how much he missed his friendship with Mater.

Although this narrative does not follow Gillam and Wooden's (2008) narrative trajectories closely, it does show the ongoing struggle of a character from their original study, much like Woody struggle with his evolving New Man existence in *Toy Story 2* discussed in Chapter 4 chapter. Unlike the original study, this time McQueen knows what it means to be a New Man, but he struggles with relinquishing his alpha male persona. Whereas Gillam and Wooden observed a concrete moment of emasculation for McQueen in *Cars*, the sequel shows McQueen facing the ongoing threat of public humiliation, which is a unique look at the struggles of being a celebrity living in the public eye. Instead of forming a new homosocial bond, *Cars 2* presents McQueen with the opportunity to get advice from another male character about how to repair the friendship that he damaged. Uncle Topolino is more like a mentor than a friend to McQueen. When McQueen apologizes to Mater, he promises not to push him away again, and seems to have realized that maintaining his public hyper-masculine persona is not worth losing the personal relationships brought about through his initial New Man transformation.

Ratatouille provides the last example of the New Man narrative in other Pixar films; however, like *Up* and *Cars 2*, this narrative does not follow Gillam and Wooden's (2008) New Man model as closely as the three films in the original analysis. Unlike any of the other transformative narratives, which begin with hyper-masculine alpha male characters, *Ratatouille* shows the *creation*, subsequent emasculation, and eventual transformation of alpha male

characters. Pixar places two unlikely allies, neither of which are even close to alpha male status, in a situation where they work together. As discussed in Chapter 4, teamwork is generally viewed in a positive manner, unless it is for selfish reasons, and this film clearly shows the pitfalls of teamwork for the sake of personal benefit. Although Remy's primary goal is to fulfill his dream of being a chef, Linguini quickly realizes that his apparent cooking skills allow him to form a relationship with Colette. This romantic aspect of the narrative does mirror other transformative narratives where one male character in the homosocial bond is focused on a relationship with a female or seeking a feminized object (Gillam & Wooden, 2008).

As Remy and Linguini find success in the kitchen, their combined talents begin to be noticed by the public. Quickly, Linguini becomes the talk of Paris. Here we see where selfishness and pride begin to fracture their newly acquired alpha male status. When asked at a news conference what inspires him to cook, Linguini says it is Colette, rather than admit that it is the rat hiding under his toque. Remy becomes jealous that Linguini not only gets the recognition for his cooking skills, but also because Linguini refuses to tell the truth about where those skills originate. Remy's jealousy threatens Linguini's public alpha male image, much like Mater threatens Lightning McQueen's public image in *Cars 2*. As the rift forms in Linguini and Remy's partnership, each character suffers a moment of emasculation. Remy's comes first when Linguini places him in time out in the alley after he gets jealous at the news conference. Remy retaliates by selfishly seeking revenge by bringing the entire colony into the kitchen to steal food.

Here, each character injures the other, but their motivations and intentions are different. Linguini's motivations were mainly unintentional because he needed to perpetuate the ruse and he wants to impress Colette. Remy, however, is clearly motivated by spite, and he actively wants to get revenge on Linguini. Again, narrative similarities appear between this film and *Cars 2*.

Audiences see that friends can and do hurt each other's feelings, just as McQueen intentionally hurts Mater's feelings after Mater accidentally wounds McQueen's pride during the race in *Cars 2*. Like McQueen yelling at Mater, Linguini's reaction to Remy's displays of jealousy comes across in a highly emotional outburst. Like McQueen, Linguini soon regrets that he treated Remy so harshly. Feeling remorse is a character trait shared by McQueen and Linguini.

Like Remy, Linguini soon faces emasculation himself when he is unable to inspire the kitchen staff to cook during Ego's visit. When he confesses that Remy is the true source of the restaurant's culinary comeback, all of the staff quit. In the end, Remy and Linguini—with the help of the rat colony and Colette—impress Ego with a ratatouille recipe, but despite winning over their toughest critic, the restaurant is shut down because of a reported rat infestation.

Although it would seem that our heroes sacrificed their dreams in the effort of coming clean about the true source of their culinary skills, the film concludes with a scene showing that they are successful when they work in jobs in their new restaurant that are natural fits for their innate talents. Linguini is certainly not a chef, but he is a good waiter. Likewise, Remy's time cooking is most satisfying when he is able to cook with his own paws, rather than having to hide beneath Linguini's toque. Both characters are shown as happy being who they are, instead of both pretending to be something that they are not. In the end, both Remy and Linguini undergo change, but their narrative does veer from the more standard New Man path. Although their initial teamwork appears to be successful, the motivations are selfish, which ultimately causes them to suffer emasculation and learn to work together in a way that is mutually beneficial.

Homosocial narrative summary.

Although *Up*, *Ratatouille*, and *Cars 2* present new variations of the New Man model in Pixar's films as it was first identified by Gillam and Wooden (2008), these new examples still

align with the general narrative trajectory originally observed. Rather than starting with an established alpha male character, *Up* depicts an elderly widower teaming up with a over-eager scout, and *Ratatouille* shows a human and an animal working together, which is more reminiscent of Disney's human-animal interactions in *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, or *The Rescuers* than any other Pixar film.

Up and *Ratatouille* also have the common narrative thread of one of the male characters focusing on a relationship with a female or the desire for a feminized object, similar to McQueen's attraction to Sally in *Cars* or Woody's desire for Andy's love and affection in *Toy Story*. *Ratatouille*'s Linguini does want a relationship with Colette, and the end of the film implies that they are couple. Like Woody, Carl Fredricksen is seeking a feminized object, which is his dead wife's dream of moving to Paradise Falls. Meanwhile, *Cars 2* shows McQueen desiring to spend time with Sally as he struggles to find the balance between his public and private lives. Thus, Pixar consistently promotes this male focus on feminine desire in the process of learning how to become a kinder, more caring, and more emotionally aware New Man.

Transformative Heterosocial Narratives

In his quantitative analysis of 10 Pixar's films from *Toy Story* to *Up*, Decker (2010) noted that some of the transformative narratives created by Pixar use female characters as catalysts for male change, which is similar to Jeffords's (1995) analysis of the Beast's transformation because of Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*. Two of Decker's examples provide clear examples of his claim. Noting that *Finding Nemo*'s Dory plays the key role in Marlin's transformation and *Monsters, Inc.*'s Boo instigates Sulley's transition into a New Man, Decker stated that, unlike the Beast's transformation because of the influence of romantic love, non-romantic relationships also instigate change in male characters. Examples of these relationships, according to Decker,

include child-caregiver dyads (e.g., Boo and Sulley) and platonic friendships (e.g., Marlin and Dory). Although Boo and Dory clearly fall into these categories, respectively, Decker also listed Woody's platonic friendship with Jessie as "catalyzing male improvement and change" (p. 88). However, my analysis of that film did not support Decker's assertion. That is not to say that their friendship does not result in a character changing, but it is Woody who causes a change in Jessie, not the other way around. Woody not only convinces Jessie to come with him to Andy's house, but he is also portrayed as her knight in shining armor when she is essentially a damsel in distress trapped in the airplane. Despite our differing interpretations of that narrative, the fact remains that Pixar does in fact use female characters to inspire change in male characters. Research Question 3 asked, "Do Pixar films other than those studied by Decker (2010) feature narratives of female characters catalyzing change in male characters?" Analysis of Pixar's films discovered a similar narrative with the character of Francis the ladybug in *A Bug's Life*, which leads to Research Question 3a, which asked, "If so, how do those narratives compare with ones identified by Decker?"

Like Sulley in *Monsters, Inc.* and Carl in *Up*, the character of Francis undergoes a transformation because of his interactions with children. Francis's interactions are with a Girl Scout-like troop of young female ants, known as the Blue Berries, but the similarities between Decker's (2010) analysis and this narrative end here. There is no child-caregiver relationship like in *Monsters, Inc.* or platonic friendship as observed in *Finding Nemo* or *Toy Story 2*. The Blueberries simply keep Francis company while he recovers. Instead of being a caregiver, his interactions are primarily limited to playing card games with them. Aside from the catalyzing characters being female, Francis's narrative aligns more closely with Gillam and Wooden's (2008) New Man model than Decker's (2010) observations.

As with many of Pixar's transformative narratives, Francis is first established as embodying several characteristics of Old Man masculinity, especially being overly aggressive. When Francis is first introduced, he is performing in the circus, and bugs in the audience mistake him for a female.

Fly One: Hey, cutie! Wanna pollinate with a real bug? [Francis flies toward him.] Oh, come to papa!

Francis: So, bein' a ladybug automatically makes me a girl? Is that it, flyboy? Huh?

Fly Two: Yikes!

Fly One: She's a guy!

Francis is defensive and confrontational with the flies, which probably stems from a lifetime of being mistaken for a girl. In addition to having a name that can be either masculine or feminine, it should be noted that Francis is one of very few male characters that his shown having eyelashes, which is a characteristic primarily seen on animated female characters (see Decker, 2010; Wiersma, 2001). Francis, no doubt, acts in a hyper-masculine manner to compensate for the constant emasculation of being mistaken for a female.

The continual threat of emasculation comes to a head when Francis is injured while rescuing Princess Dot from a bird. Not only must he then be rescued himself, but he is also taken to the ants' infirmary, where both children and adults alike assume his gender based on his physical appearance.

Blueberry member: As a tribute to Miss Francis, we've changed our bandanas.

[They show their bandanas, which are decorated to look like Francis's spotted shell.]

Princess Dot: We voted you our honorary den mother!

While Francis is recuperating, the Blueberries keep him company. They have a tea party with him, which Francis does not enjoy. When the doctor observes Francis with the Blueberries, she mistakes Francis for a female and also misinterprets his interaction with them as nurturing. “Oh, look. She’s a natural mother,” Dr. Flora coos. At that, Francis has an outburst and yells at the Blueberries to leave. When the children start to cry, Francis begins to juggle, and the girls enjoy it. Because Francis is not one of the main characters of the film, we do not get an in depth look at the transformative process, but through his interaction with the girls, he begins to change. Seeing that the girls are entertained by his circus tricks, he realizes that he can interact with them in ways other than tea parties, and a later scene shows him teaching the girls how to play cards.

The other circus bugs notice a change in Francis later in the film, and Slim even comments that Francis has “gotten in touch with his feminine side.” Coding Francis’s newfound softer masculinity as feminine mirrors Brydon’s (2009) analysis of Marlin from *Finding Nemo* in which she said his emotionally expressive actions were also indicators of being a mother, rather than a father. In addition to the toys in *Toy Story 3* making fun of Ken for being a “girl’s toy,” these mark the only instances in the narratives and in scholarship about Pixar that gender is viewed as a rigid, immutable concept.

Later when the circus bugs leave Ant Island after defeating the grasshoppers, the Blueberries gather around Francis, hugging him and crying. Francis, who is now in touch with his emotions, fights back tears and says, “I’m not gonna cry. I’m not gonna cry.” This is a major change from his characterization at the beginning of the film, when he was overly defensive and not wanting to display any sign of weakness. Francis not only displays emotion, but he also talks about his affinity for the Blueberry group, saying, “Those little raisins do grow on ya.” With

these signs of emotional expression, Francis has clearly changed into a New Man through the interactions with this group of girls.

Other female characters play supporting parts in the transformation of alpha male characters; however, they are not the primary catalyst for these changes. Sally in *Cars* and Elastigirl in *The Incredibles* both contribute to the transformation of alpha male characters in their respective films. Sally takes Lightning McQueen on a drive, which shows him what life is like outside of the fast lane and introduces him to the benefits of small town life. Elastigirl, although responsible for instigating major events in the plot and encouraging Mr. Incredible to work with his family to defeat the robot, is not the catalyst for Mr. Incredible's transformation, which is really brought about through his interactions with Syndrome.

Heterosocial narrative summary.

Despite not being a main character, Francis's subplot with the Blueberries does mirror the narratives Decker (2010) discussed. Francis is an interesting look at masculinity because of the ambiguity of his name and feminine characteristics of his appearance. For many of the characters in *A Bug's Life*, it seems they have a hard time adjusting their mindset to understand and acknowledge that he is, in fact, a *she*. This narrative does mirror other transformative plotlines, such as Carl Fredricksen's in *Up*. Both characters' transformations spawn from their interactions with children, who seem to have an almost universal ability to break through the hardened shell of Old Man masculinity and help men get in touch with their emotions and paternal instincts.

Homosocial and Heterosocial Narrative Comparisons

Research Question 4 asked, "How do the lessons about masculinities in female-inspired New Man narratives compare to narratives centered on male homosocial bonds?" Examining all of the transformative narratives throughout Pixar's film collection reveals that, like their

predominate use of males as protagonists (Gillam & Wooden, 2008; Decker, 2010), homosocial narratives greatly outnumber heterosocial ones. Seven films have homosocial narratives, whereas only three films have heterosocial narratives. Despite this lopsided representation, differences between the two types are apparent. Homosocial narratives depict a much wider variety of lessons (e.g., learning the value of teamwork and friendship, how to express emotions, and how to be yourself) learned by male protagonists compared to heterosocial narratives, which are primarily limited to becoming better family men. Heterosocial narratives, although empowering females with the ability to instigate change in male characters, are still limited to the specific function of helping men become better fathers or father figures.

The three films to feature heterosocial transformative narratives include *Monsters, Inc.*, *Finding Nemo*, and *A Bug's Life*. The first two center on relationships between the male protagonist and a young girl or group of girls, while the third is primarily about Marlin's platonic friendship with Dory. Both *Monsters, Inc.* and *A Bug's Life* show males (i.e., Sulley and Francis, respectively) coming in touch with paternal instincts that had been dormant until their interactions with the children. It should also be noted that neither of these narratives involve a protagonist being changed because of interactions with their own child. (In fact, the only Pixar film that shows a child having any type of transformative effect on his or her own parent is *Brave*, where Merida causes her mother to change.) In both *Monsters, Inc.* and *A Bug's Life*, the children are female. Interestingly, these narratives involve two of the more traditional alpha male personalities. Perhaps Pixar is saying that it takes a sweet little girl to truly break through a tough and gruff masculine exterior. *Up*, which presents the only homosocial transformative narrative featuring an adult and a child, chronicles a different type of transformation. Russell is clearly seeking a paternal figure, whereas Boo and the Blueberries are not. Additionally, Russell has a

sense of adventure that mirrors Carl's own adventurous spirit. Therefore, they are able to connect on a level that involves commonalities between their experiences and personalities.

Two films do feature protagonists learning to become better fathers through interactions with other adult characters. *The Incredibles* and *Finding Nemo* show transformations into the New Man through homosocial and heterosocial relationships, respectively. For Mr. Incredible, seeing how Buddy Pine grew up to become Syndrome shows him the effects of a boy without a strong male figure, who, even as an adult, still seeks the attention of his masculine idol. Marlin, on the other hand, learns how to become a better father through his interactions with absent-minded Dory. Her fearless approach to life is the exact opposite of Marlin's overly cautious lifestyle.

Aside from the aforementioned similarities between lessons learned in homosocial and heterosocial narratives, the remainder of Pixar's films with homosocial narratives display a much wider range of lessons learned by male protagonists. These lessons include expressing emotion, the value of teamwork and friendship, accepting one's own limitations, and not acting selfishly. Unlike the heterosocial narratives, this set of lessons focuses on how males should relate to all people, not just children. The lessons in these narratives not only apply more broadly, but also often display a character desiring a romantic relationship with a female. Homosocial lessons are shown as essential for a male to become a desirable mate, while the lessons in the heterosocial narratives are depicted as fine-tuning these New Men for them to become what could be termed "New Fathers." Thus, homosocial relationships lay the groundwork for these characters to become New Men, while heterosocial narratives prepare these characters for the logical progression from a romantic relationship into a parental role.

Narrative comparison summary.

Although relatively few heterosocial transformative narratives are depicted in Pixar's film collection, the ones observed do have a consistent theme that unites them: all of them help male characters to become better father figures. With these relationships primarily focusing on paternal themes, female characters are confined to a domestic role of improving the family unit. Though these narratives do show that female characters can exert influence over males, their power is limited.

Conversely, males are repeatedly shown learning a much wider range of lessons from their interactions from other male characters. In many ways, this is comparable with real world movements, such as the Promise Keepers and Million Man March, that focused on homosocial interaction to bring about change in masculinities in America in the 1990s. (This will be further discussed in Chapter 6.) It would appear that Pixar sends a consistent message that true changes in masculinity are sparked by interactions with other males, while female interaction can specifically help a man become a better father.

Male Protagonists Who do not Undergo Transformation

Although most of Pixar's films feature plots where main characters undergo some sort of personal transformation, *A Bug's Life* and *WALL-E* feature protagonists who do not experience that sort of change. In these films, Flik and WALL-E are not depicted as alpha males, nor do they undergo any type of transformative narrative. Both Flik and WALL-E have narratives that are unique in the Pixar world. This is in part due to their characterization, which gives them the ability to become agents of change for other characters. Ultimately, these characters are constructed in a different way than the majority of Pixar's male protagonists, which provides audiences with more diverse depictions of masculinities.

Characteristics of the non-transformed male.

Both Flik and WALL-E are shown in non-alpha male roles; however, this does not equate to functioning as a New Man. Unlike Bernard's (2011) evaluation of WALL-E, which concluded that he already functions as a New Man, Pixar portrays Flik and WALL-E as underdogs seeking to prove themselves, rather than as New Men who still embody dominance. Heath (2003) referred to the power still held by the New Man as "soft patriarchy," in which men still enjoy the privilege of masculine power and are shown in positions of authority; however, any aggression or hyper-masculinity related to that authority appears tempered by the incorporation of what are stereotypically viewed as feminine qualities (e.g., emotional expression, high engagement with one's family) into portrayals of masculinities (Bartowski, 2000; Heath, 2003). Neither WALL-E nor Flik display this type of dominance. Rather, Flik is subservient to the matriarchal rule of the colony, and WALL-E eagerly follows EVE's commands. Therefore, neither character initially operates as a New Man. However, they do share some character traits with other Pixar protagonists, including those that function as New Men. Both of these characters exhibit bravery, thus implying that bravery is a natural male characteristic, regardless of status. Additionally, both characters express romantic desire and interest, which firmly places them in a heteronormative framework that essentially removes doubt about these non-alphas' sexuality.

Moreover, these characters already express a wide range of emotions, which is a character trait that other Pixar characters often do not express until they experience emasculation. Flik expresses his feelings of inadequacy to Princess Dot when telling her that he wants to make a difference, and his romantic feelings toward Princess Atta are very clear. On the other hand, WALL-E is perhaps the most emotionally expressive of all of Pixar's protagonists. He openly expresses fear, curiosity, romantic longing, happiness, concern for others, and many other

emotions. WALL-E explores the world around in him in a constant state of childlike wonder. In fact, Long (2011) said Pixar constructed WALL-E in a childlike manner to negate the notion of his emotional expression being coded as feminine.

Another characteristic they share both with each other and with other male protagonists is their devotion to others. Flik repeatedly tries to improve living conditions for everyone in the colony. This is first seen when he is introduced trying to persuade colony officials to adopt the use of his new harvesting machine. It is also reflected in his choice to voluntarily leave the safety of the island to go search for bugs to help them fight the grasshoppers. Like Flik, WALL-E expresses a deep devotion to others. However, WALL-E is driven by his affection for EVE, rather than the benefit of a larger group of people. (Even when WALL-E helps EVE get the plant into the machine that will allow the ship to return to Earth, his involvement is tied more to helping EVE accomplish her mission than it is to the greater good of those onboard the ship. He will do anything to please her.)

Comparisons of non-transformative narratives.

WALL-E and Flik's characterizations as non-stereotypical males help to drive their films' plots. This is done by positioning them as underdogs who are unhappy with traditional aspects of Old Man masculinity. For example, WALL-E strongly desires a relationship, which is reflected by his obsession with EVE and his ongoing quest to hold her hand. Unlike the images of men acting and preferring to be alone often associated with pre-New Man media (see Jeffords, 1994), WALL-E is not happy as a loner and actively seeks out interaction with EVE upon her arrival on Earth. It is his desire to stay with her that drives the majority of the film's plot. Similarly, Flik's desire to break with the traditions of the ant colony cause him to challenge

Hopper, build his harvesting machine, and leave the island. The overwhelming odds against Flik's success clearly place him in an underdog role.

Ultimately, it is their actions that allow them to serve as agents of change responsible for the transformation of other characters. In both of these films, the male protagonists are shown as subservient to females. EVE is clearly the dominant over WALL-E, both in terms of personality and technology (Long, 2011), and Flik lives in a matriarchal ant colony ruled by a queen and two princesses. In both of these films, the male protagonists cause female characters to change. This is most evident in WALL-E. EVE is shown as aggressive and uninterested in any type of romantic relationship with WALL-E for the majority of the film. It is through her interactions with WALL-E that EVE's character changes. Bernard (2011) said EVE undergoes the most significant change, becoming caring and nurturing toward WALL-E. Long (2011) suggested that EVE's transformation makes her act almost motherly toward the childlike WALL-E. Either way, the change in EVE's character because of WALL-E's influence is apparent.

Additionally, Flik is responsible for helping Princess Atta transition into power. The princess is unsure of herself, unable to make quick decisions, and scared of Hopper and his gang. And despite her royal status, she seems uneasy in a position of power. It is Flik (the commoner) who exhibits bravery and the abilities to act decisively and take charge. Ultimately, it is because of Flik that Atta becomes more comfortable with her role as future queen.

In both *A Bug's Life* and *WALL-E*, males are shown helping women to transform; although, it should be noted that these two films approach transformation from opposite ends of the spectrum. Pixar depicts EVE's overassertive and aggressive personality as being in need of softening; whereas Princess Atta is shown as too weak in her position of power. Although presenting these females in positions of power is to be commended, Pixar does not show them

being capable of change on their own. These examples of female power are still constricted by the need for male guidance and influence.

Moreover, Flik and WALL-E are not limited to only influencing female characters. At the end of the film, when workers are shown using the harvesting devices that were initially shunned at the beginning of the film, we see that Flik's influence over the colony has grown. This influence and authority (because of his budding relationship with Atta) allow Flik to slip into the role of the New Man in the film's final minute. In *WALL-E*, the title character's influence is shown when two humans, Mary and John, start talking to each other face-to-face instead of over the video call. Additionally, WALL-E influences the course of events that allows the humans to return to Earth. However, in both films the primary beneficiary of interacting with non-transformed males are female characters.

Narrative comparison summary.

These two male protagonists who do not go through a transformation provide important examples of the way Pixar not only constructs masculinities, but also of how the influence of patriarchy limits the achievements of women by making them dependent upon the help and influence of men. Overall, Flik and WALL-E share many characteristics of the New Men seen in other films, but neither has the inherent dominance that New Men traditionally exhibit. Moreover, because they do not have dominance or authority, they do not suffer emasculation the way other Pixar males do. Nor are they influenced by female characters in the ways that Sulley and Marlin are. Therefore, their narrative trajectories differ from those identified by Gillam and Wooden (2008) and Decker (2010) where any type of transformation occurs.

In the end, Flik does appear to be operating as a New Man because he has obvious influence and power in the colony. However, WALL-E does not have that type of power, so his

character does not fully reach New Man status. Although he is still influential in the lives of those around him, his influence does not include authority or dominance. Giving these relatively powerless males some level of authority or influence once again asserts hegemonic ideals about masculine power into the narratives, showing that females cannot have power without the help of a male and that females should have a male to love and adore.

Narrative Summary

Analysis of Pixar's film collection reveals the company's heavy reliance on the New Man model observed by Gillam and Wooden (2008) and variations of that narrative. Routinely, Pixar places more importance on homosocial narratives than heterosocial narratives. Although the reasons for this type of storytelling are beyond the scope of this project, it is possible that the homosocial bonding narrative is so ingrained in Pixar's storytelling because it closely mirrors how the studio produces films. Pixar president Ed Catmull described the studio's peer-driven process to filmmaking, saying, "There are really two leaders: the director and the producer. They form a strong partnership" (Catmull, 2008, p. 68). Just like the male protagonist bonding with another male character and learning to work together, Pixar's predominantly male director-producer duos also seek out what could be conceptualized as a feminized object (i.e., the film goes through a cycle similar to pregnancy: conception, development, the completion of a film), just as outlined by Gillam and Wooden's (2008) New Man model. However, this possible connection could not truly be explored within the context of this study.

What Pixar's various narratives show audiences are a wide variety of males that can and do change into New Men. They range in age, occupation, and marital status. Additionally, Pixar shows male characters who do not need to change, and, in fact, become agents of change themselves. Whereas homosocial bonds result in a sweeping change into a model of the New

Man, narratives with female catalysts are often limited to influencing males' roles within a familial context. Moreover, when females appear in narratives with a male character that does not undergo a transformation into a New Man, it is the *female* who is changed through her interaction with the male character. As with the examples described above, females in positions of power and authority are depicted as needing the guidance and help of a male to acclimate to a position of power or to soften her aggressive demeanor. As a result, Pixar consistently aligns its films with hegemonic frameworks that show males in positions of power, authority, and influence, while largely subjugating females into secondary roles and showing them relying on men to help them adjust to power, thereby confining their influence primarily to the domestic realm. Lip service is paid to the notion of strong female characters, but actual change seems to be a long way off, which speaks to the ongoing influence of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. As with *Brave*, many people celebrated Princess Merida refusing to marry any of the suitors, but she only agreed to delay the inevitable. Eventually, she will conform to patriarchal expectations. Although mass audiences may think these female characters are shattering gender barriers, we see that these acts are clearly confined within the bounds of patriarchy, which ultimately is not challenged by these portrayals because of the way males are still given power, authority, and the love of a woman.

CHAPTER 6

COMPARING PIXAR TO WESTERN MASCULINITIES OF THE 1990s AND 2000s

Comparing Pixar's versions of masculinities to societal manifestations of masculinities is inherently problematic because such a comparison tends to paint Western masculinities with a broad brush. Indeed, generalizing Western masculinities into "a single, simple narrative of contemporary maleness [that] can be told would be to reinscribe the universally generalizable character that is the history of masculinity" (Malin, 2005, p. 21). Similar to Butler's (1990) argument negating the existence of an innate gender core, there is no precise representation of the American male to which I can compare my analyses of Pixar's films. However, there are several dominant trends that this chapter can address that do show connections between Pixar's mediated masculinities and the transformations of masculinities that were happening in reality during the time that these films were released, even if those changes are painted with a broad brush. My goal is not to ignore the fringes of masculinity, but rather to investigate the larger trends and connections between a time of "masculine crisis" and themes and messages about masculinities observed in Pixar's films. Many aspects of this analysis have been woven throughout Chapters 2, 4, and 5; therefore, this chapter will seek to synthesize connections among certain aspects of changing masculinities as they are evident in both Pixar's films and contemporary Western society.

The similarity between Pixar's narratives and the so-called "crisis of masculinity" is actually a composite of multiple crises, including crises of character and identity, familial roles and leadership, and gender.

Masculinity in “Crisis”

As discussed in Chapter 2, Western versions of masculinity were rhetorically situated as being under attack in the 1990s because of shifting cultural values and fluid gender representations (Malin, 2005; Poling & Kirkley, 2008). Having undergone the shift from the 1980s hard-bodied era of masculinity embodied by mediated men and by President Ronald Reagan (see Jeffords, 1994), masculinities of the 1990s were seemingly threatened by fluctuating ideas about gender roles and sexuality (Poling & Kirkley, 2008). Malin (2005) noted this crisis is neither indicative nor unique to the 1990s and that some traditional notions of masculinity did still exist during this time, just as they have during other points in history. This statement is supported by themes reflected in Pixar films discussed in Chapter 4 that are indicative of traditional images of masculinity, such as bravery and males being shown in positions of authority. However, some of those characteristics are the very ones that were challenged during the crisis of masculinity. Elements of this crisis are incorporated into many of Pixar’s films, like the crisis of character seen in *Monsters, Inc.*, Woody’s crisis of identity in *Toy Story 2*, and Marlin and Mr. Incredible’s crisis of familial roles in *Finding Nemo* and *The Incredibles*, respectively, and the crisis of gender in *Toy Story 3* and *Finding Nemo*.

Crisis of character and identity.

With its development and studio release straddling the turning point from the 20th to the 21st century, 2001’s *Monsters, Inc.* strongly mirrors some of the elements of the 1990s concerns about the state of masculinities. Primarily taking place in the monster world, the film depicts a society that is in the midst of an actual energy crisis. This crisis exists because the monsters responsible for scaring children are not capturing enough of the children’s screams, which are used to power the city. The monsters responsible for energy collection, all of whom appear to be

male, rely on the trappings of Old Man masculinity (e.g., intimidation, aggressiveness, and dominance) to scare the children, and those tactics have become ineffective. The energy crisis is so severe that Mr. Watnoose, the president of Monsters, Inc., authorizes a plan to harness scream energy by using one of the most dangerous hallmarks of Old Man masculinity: brute force. It is clear that this energy crisis is causing some characters living by Old Man standards to make immoral and unethical choices. It is only through the intervention of Sulley and Mike during their quest to return Boo to the human world that the solution to the crisis is discovered, and that solution relies on abandoning the Old Man tactics of intimidation and fear and embracing New Man methods, such as caring and emotional connection, to solve the problem. Rather than scaring the children, the monsters must now learn how to make them laugh. The energy crisis is ended thanks in part to non-alpha male characters, like Mike Wazowski, whose skills now elevate him from a secondary position as Mike's assistant into a prominent role as a comedian.

Despite the literal crisis the monsters are facing with energy production, we also see a crisis regarding the characteristics of masculinity because the tried-and-true Old Man methods no longer work. This is similar to some of the films analyzed by Jeffords (1994) that illustrate the transition from the Old Man to the New Man. Jeffords studied hard body poster boy Arnold Schwarzenegger as he (and some of his on-screen personas) transitioned from the masculinities of the 1980s into the New Man era in the early 1990s. Much like *Kindergarten Cop*'s John Kimball, who Jeffords (1994) described as a "tough, unshaved, brutal, determined police officer....a tough guy who needs no family or partners" (p. 141-142), Sulley is shown as a strong and emotionally isolated male who would rather go home and work out than engage socially with his friends. Even Sulley's assistant Mike tells him, "There's more to life than just scaring,"

a talent which relies on the Old Man characteristics of dominance and violence. Through Sulley's interactions with Boo, he realizes that there is more to life than just work, and perhaps he will begin thinking about starting a family of his own.

Other examples of masculinity in crisis include Woody's identity crisis in *Toy Story 2*. Produced and released in the late 1990s, this film shows lead character Woody struggling with the notion of no longer being wanted. Woody clearly embodies several hallmarks of hegemonic masculinity. Trujillo (1991) identified cowboy imagery as a readily identifiable sign of Western masculinity and clearly symbolic of the ruggedness associated with hegemonic masculinity. Having already been threatened in *Toy Story* by the arrival of the high-tech, space-age Buzz Lightyear, Woody, despite his transformation into the New Man, is shown in crisis again in *Toy Story 2* as he struggles with finding his identity when faced with the prospects of being unwanted and obsolete. As part of Woody's personal crisis, he even dreams about being thrown away with the garbage. Woody eventually decides to abandon his identity as a child's toy and chooses to become a museum piece, thinking that it will bring him love and happiness. It takes the intervention of Buzz, who is still grounded in his role as a New Man, to help Woody remember who he is and choose to return to Andy. Woody's identity crisis mirrors the overall concerns about the state of masculinity. Although many men no doubt wanted to freeze time—just like how Woody wanted to be eternally adored in the museum—masculinity could not remain stuck in the past. However, just as Jeffords (1994) argued that male characters in 1980s media were on the verge of self-destruction because of emotional and relational isolation, Woody would also experience this same fate if he were to be placed in the museum. He, like many male characters before him, must realize that the only way to thrive is to embrace the New Man model of masculinity, which allows them to have emotional expression in meaningful relationships.

Almost all portrayals of masculinities observed throughout Pixar's films construct masculine identities that are defined more by inner qualities rather than physical characteristics, similar to Jeffords's (1994) observation that New Men were valued for their "moral rather than muscle fiber" (p. 136). This trend toward defining masculinities as a set of mental qualities was also observed in the real world (Pompper, 2010). Pompper's interviews with a multiethnic and multigenerational sample of men found that not only did men define maleness in non-tangible terms, but those terms also fell into four distinct subcategories: character, attitude, responsibility, and confidence/assertiveness. Pompper suggested that the predominant use of non-tangible descriptors are indicative of a shift in masculinities that allows for broader constructions of maleness and less reliance on rigid definitions of gender. Thus, according to Pompper's findings, masculinity's identity crisis of the 1990s was largely resolved by the end of the first decade of the 21st century. Pixar shows this same resolution as characters learn to accept changes in masculinities and a wider range of personal identities.

Crisis of familial roles and leadership.

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the primary "threats" to masculinity during the 1990s regarded the supposed fall from leadership that men had in their families and communities. Men's movements like the Promise Keepers organization and the Million Man March were created in response to this supposed "slippage in the bedrock of male dominance" (Poling & Kirkley, 2008, p. 19). Each movement sought to better the lives of men, which would result in the bettering of the lives of their family members. Promise Keepers (PK) was very clear in promoting that the way for this type of individual and family improvement to occur was to restore men to their "rightful" positions of power in their families, neighborhoods, and churches (Bartowski, 2000; Donovan, 1998; Poling & Kirkley, 2008). As previously outlined, PK

essentially targets feminism as the cause for making men feel ashamed of their leadership roles and their resulting emasculation (Poling & Kirkley, 2008). Although dealing with the threat of emasculation is a common theme throughout many Pixar narratives, restoring male characters to positions of authority in the family is clearly echoed in several Pixar films, most notably *The Incredibles* and *Finding Nemo*.

This facet of the crisis of masculinity is seen in *The Incredibles* when Mr. Incredible is depicted as an emotionally disengaged father and husband, while Elastigirl is depicted as the dominant spouse, both in terms of leading the family and parenting their children. Stuck in his dead end job and berated by his diminutive boss, by the time Mr. Incredible arrives home in his confining compact car, he is disheartened and frustrated. Although he is physically present at the family dinner table, he is not mentally present. (The only time he shows interest in his family is when discussing Dash's use of super speed in the classroom to prank his teacher, which shows he is interested in his son's superior skills but not in the mundane events of ordinary life.) Without his influence as the head of the household, Mr. Incredible's family is struggling. Dash yearns for attention and is willing to act out in class to get it. Violet wants to disappear. Elastigirl often expresses worry about her children's behavior and what she assumes to be her husband's infidelity. Until Mr. Incredible engages with his family and becomes an active part of their lives, the family is in the process of unraveling. This engagement first results from Mr. Incredible lying to Elastigirl about attending work conferences, when he is actually secretly working as a superhero-for-hire. With the outlet to relive his alpha dog days, Mr. Incredible and his family seem to thrive. He engages with his children and rekindles the romance with Elastigirl. He is seemingly the ideal father and husband. A symbol of the change in his masculinity is Mr. Incredible's purchase of a long, sleek, black sports coupe—clearly a phallic image—that replaces

his small, boxy, compact car. It is not until faced with the threat of losing his family that Mr. Incredible changes and is truly recentered as the head of the household. With Mr. Incredible in a position of authority, his family is shown as united and successful. Mr. Incredible symbolically rejects the remnants of his Old Man masculinity when he uses this sports car to destroy Syndrome's jet—killing Syndrome in the process—to save his son, Jack.

Similarly, Marlin in *Finding Nemo* is an example of male leadership in crisis. Not only does single-father Marlin represent the crisis of male leadership in the family, he lives in a perpetual “crisis mode.” As mentioned in previous chapters, Brydon (2009) argued that Marlin's frantic, overprotective parenting style feminizes his character into functioning as a mother rather than a father. As the rhetoric of the masculinity crisis of the 1990s positioned masculinity as being threatened by feminism (Poling & Kirkley, 2008), Brydon exemplifies the crisis's fears that the masculine will not only be removed from power, but it will be transformed into the feminine. Thus, not only is Marlin's patriarchal position as leader of his family challenged by femininity, the femininity comes from within him. The message in *Finding Nemo*—and from the Million Man March and Promise Keepers—is that female (or at least feminine) leaders are ineffective in positions of authority. Marlin's overprotective parenting drives Nemo to act out, and it would be easy for some to characterize Marlin as an inept parent and leader. Through the interactions with Dory on his quest to find Nemo, Marlin's feminine qualities are tempered, and he is shown as a “normal” father by the end of the film. Thus, the film establishes a “correct” version of fatherhood and masculinity once again in a position of power and authority before the credits roll.

Crisis of gender.

The threat of femininity to patriarchal leadership also hints at broader concerns about gender representation in the 1980s and 1990s. Marlin's feminized portrayal of fatherhood and ultimate re-masculinization is characteristic of the fears about gender fluidity that rose to the cultural forefront in the late 20th century. Much of the attention directed at the Western male in the 1980s focused on their physical appearance. Not only were men depicted as the physically superior sex, their bodies were the objects of feminine desire (Jeffords, 1994). However, even during this time of the muscle-bound hero, challenges to the masculine image were arising in popular media. As discussed in Chapter 2, heavy metal rockers of the 1980s often incorporated feminine-coded behaviors into their performances (Denski & Sholle, 1992). Adorned with jewelry, high-maintenance hairstyles, and makeup, these "hair band" musicians often sang emotional ballads about love, and as a result, became the objects of desire for countless women (Denski & Sholle, 1992). Meanwhile, Denski and Sholle (1992) said those rockers also helped men confront their fears about femininity by seeing their representations of masculinity assimilated and rearticulated by hegemonic masculinity. This sort of assimilation is seen in *Toy Story 2*, where both Woody and Buzz express feelings about fashion accessories, which would stereotypically be coded as a female behavior. Woody is very worried about finding his lost hat because he is afraid Andy will not take him to cowboy camp, where Woody desperately wants to spend some quality time with his owner. Later in the film, Buzz expresses his desire for a tool belt. As discussed in Chapter 5, Mrs. Potato Head discusses her accessories as a sign of her self worth, and we see similar concerns about self worth with these two male characters' fixation on accessories. However, their gender portrayal is not called into question. This contrasts with the

scene where Mr. Potato Head insults Ken by calling him a “purse with legs,” which relegates Ken’s existence into being a feminine possession.

As mediated men were no longer seen as the muscled hard-bodies, their roles were shown in flux. Malin (2005) pinpointed *Friends*’s Ross Geller as an example of a man who is threatened by the changes in gender and sexuality. Noting that Ross’s pregnant wife not only leaves him—but leaves him for her lesbian lover—shows his character as “disempowered and displaced from his roles as father and lover” (Malin, 2005, p. 52). This connects directly to the fears about alternative gender and sexual identities Poling and Kirkley (2008) identified as motivating factors for Promise Keepers and the Million Man March. Showing Ken’s inability to comprehend Barbie’s dominant role in their relationship mirrors these struggles found in other media and in reality. *Brave* also provides examples of female characters taking charge of their own love lives, like Ross’s wife on *Friends*; however, this film shows that females not only have the power to choose their mates, but they can also choose not to have a mate. Princess Merida’s would-be suitors are thus displaced from their roles as potential lovers and eventual fathers by a strong-willed tomboy going against the societal norm. (Merida, despite being a princess, can easily be coded as a tomboy by her love of physical activities, such as horseback riding, archery, and fishing, and her general dislike for her mother’s etiquette lessons. At one point, Merida even rips her gown in anger, saying, “Curse this dress!”)

Toy Story 3 further highlights fears about gender representation through questioning Ken’s portrayal of masculinity by depicting his love of clothing as a weakness, one that Barbie exploits to get information on how to reset Buzz from “Spanish Mode.” Ken’s obsession with clothing and his personal appearance is also indicative of the metrosexual trend seen around the turn of the century. Buzz draws attention Ken’s appearance by calling him a “well-groomed

man.” The Bookworm also expresses disdain for fluid gender representation through clothing when Barbie—whose identity is concealed by a spacesuit—comes to get Buzz’s instruction manual. Believing it to be Ken, the Bookworm sighs, “Eesh,” and rolls his eyes when he sees “Ken” walking away wearing high heels with the spacesuit.

Ultimately, Ken’s character embodies the fears about masculinity moving too far toward the feminine end of the gender spectrum. Although he is shown in positions of power, getting along well with others, and seemingly accepted into his social group, Pixar sends the message that Ken is too feminine and that his extreme form of gender slippage is not entirely acceptable. However, Pixar does strongly promote finding a happy medium between stereotypical male and female gender portrayals and roles. As with Gillam and Wooden’s (2008) analysis of the New Man model and analyses of additional films discussed in previous chapters, male characters are breaking out of traditional alpha male roles and learning what it means to become more well-rounded males. Once these characters are no longer tied to old ideas about what it means to be a male, they are freed to express their true selves, but this process always entails rejecting the vestiges of Old Man masculinity.

As Sherman (2009) found real world examples of gender flexibility (especially regarding traditional expectations of breadwinner or homemaker roles and parenting duties) resulted in greater familial satisfaction, Pixar’s characters are similarly shown at their happiest once they have transformed and accept broader views of gender roles.

Comparison Summary

As this chapter and previous chapters have shown, Pixar’s deconstruction and reconstruction of masculinity on the silver screen strongly mirror societal changes in masculinity that were occurring in the 1990s, particularly the concerns about masculine identity, leadership,

and gender representation. Pixar's males are shown struggling with these same concerns, similar to other mediated and real-world counterparts, as they transform portrayals of masculinities to coincide with greater trends that showed masculinity changing from the 1980s into the 1990s and beyond. However, it should be noted that the Promise Keepers movement and the Million Man March are not the only culturally significant factors that influenced societal changes in masculinities during this time. Third-wave feminism, pop culture articulations of girl power, and the rise of Generation X can all be viewed as contributing factors to changes in masculinities.

We might speculate that the similarities between the aforementioned men's movements and Pixar's articulation of masculinities is because the majority of filmmakers at Pixar are men, and they have simply been putting elements of their personal lives into the films. However, without conducting interviews and other ethnographic research at Pixar, which is far beyond the scope of this project, such speculations cannot be validated. What is clear though is that Pixar's portrayals highlight many of the same tensions and ultimately construct masculinities in a way that is both softened from the hard-bodied images of the 1980s and restored to position of authority in the home. Although Pixar acknowledges alternative gender portrayals, it does not fully accept Ken's version of masculinity, which echoes concerns about the increasing feminization of males from the Million Man March and Promise Keepers movements.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE INQUIRY

As Pixar's male characters seem to have evolved over the past two decades, the animation giant continues to construct transformative narratives for those male protagonists. The studio's most recent release, *Monsters University*, revisits the *Monsters, Inc.* world to tell the story of how Mike and Sulley met during college. Whereas the two protagonists are best friends in *Monsters, Inc.*, *Monsters University* depicts them as rivals and eventually as unlikely allies. Thus, audiences get to see these two characters navigate the early days of their relationship, which we know will eventually result in a strong homosocial bond. Many of the themes from the current study can also be observed in *Monsters University*, such as the members of the fraternity working together to compete in the Scare Games, exhibiting bravery to benefit other fraternity members, and we also see the transformation of males via homosocial bonding. Like Flik and WALL-E, the members of Mike and Sulley's fraternity are depicted as underdogs who are neither alpha males nor New Men, and similarly to many other Pixar narratives these males transform into New Men as the result of teamwork and bravery.

My analysis of Pixar's 13 feature-length films from *Toy Story* to *Brave* shows that Pixar consistently presents masculinities shifting toward and embracing the New Man model. This is evident in the themes regarding expressing emotional needs to be loved or needed and involved parents fearing for the future of their families. Pixar also situates these evolving incarnations of masculinities as being good, while repeatedly situating Old Man masculinity as bad, even villainous. Both physical and emotional isolation are not seen as good qualities for males in Pixar

films to possess. WALL-E longs for nothing more than companionship. Lightning McQueen is bluntly told that he should not work alone. Pixar's positive portrayals of teamwork help to break down Old Man stereotypes of masculinity that valorized physical and emotional isolation. Not only does Pixar show that teamwork is good, it is always shown as *necessary* for protagonists to be successful. Moreover, viewers will see that it is acceptable for males to admit their weaknesses, openly talk about their feelings, and take on active and engaged roles in their families.

Although Pixar has clearly embraced the New Man model, it does establish limits to what are coded as acceptable portrayals of masculinities. If we were to place masculinities along a continuum with the stereotypical Old Man and Ken's feminized version of masculinity at opposite extremes, we would see that Pixar prefers to promote masculinities that fall somewhere in the middle. Although the outliers are represented in the films (which some will argue is better than not being shown at all), Pixar shows that they are shunned (e.g., villains functioning according to the Old Man paradigm), reformed (e.g., the "normalizing" of Marlin's role as a father), or questioned (e.g., Woody and Jessie's expressions regarding Ken's letter). Therefore, viewers could possibly take away messages like, "Men can be emotional, but not *too* emotional" or "Men can be brave, but not when it makes them too aggressive." These seemingly contradictory messages present a version of the New Man that is continually in a state of flux. Ultimately, viewers see that "middle-of-the road manhood" is the safest form of masculinity to embody. Given that these films are intended for global audiences, it is not surprising that Pixar would chose to limit acceptable masculinities to this middle ground, but we must ask ourselves about the impact that actively excluding some forms of masculinity could have. Even though positioning the Old Man outside of the acceptable range of masculinities could help to

discourage negative behaviors (e.g., closing oneself off to emotions and relationships), by presenting other forms of alternative masculinities (i.e., Ken and Marlin) as questionable or in need of changing implies that they are unacceptable, when in fact there is nothing wrong with a love of fashion or being overly cautious. To make matters more complicated, *Toy Story 3* shows Jessie, the tomboyish cowgirl, criticizing Ken's gender slippage. This further reinforces Quint's (2005) observation that tomboys' gender is not questioned, but effeminate male characters are often ridiculed. Thus, audiences may take away a message that says it is acceptable for girls to act like boys, but boys should not act like girls.

Some of the Old Men characters also serve as cautionary tales of what can happen to protagonists if they do not evolve into New Men. Viewers see Old Men like Mr. Waternoose from *Monsters, Inc.* become so career-focused and profit-driven that they lose sight of their morality, which he does when he approves a plan to forcibly suck the screams out of terrified children. Viewers can also perceive *Up*'s Charles Muntz, who is clearly entrenched in the Old Man model, as warning about the dangers of pride, paranoia, and isolation. When compared to Carl Fredricksen, we see that both men's lives revolve around their obsessions (i.e., capturing the exotic bird and moving the house to Paradise Falls, respectively), and their stubborn determination has caused them to close themselves off both emotionally and physically to the outside world. But whereas Charles is paranoid about human encounters, Carl discovers that his friendship with Russell can fill an emotional void in his life. Luckily for Carl, this narrative shows that it is never too late for a male to evolve into a New Man.

However, as much as Pixar appears to be challenging the masculine status quo, it ultimately works to maintain hegemonic ideologies. Despite the changes in masculinities, hegemonic masculinity successfully assimilates and rearticulates these various depictions to

maintain patriarchal dominance. Patriarchy repeatedly positions male characters as superior to female characters. Mr. Incredible replaces his wife as the head of the household. EVE's aggressive personality is tempered by WALL-E's sensitive one. Princess Merida eventually agrees to eventually follow through with courtship demanded by patriarchy after initially rejecting it. Even in the matriarchal ant society, Princess Atta needs Flik to help her prepare for her future role as queen. Despite showing females in positions of authority and leadership, Pixar overwhelmingly presents them as uncomfortable with or incapable of maintaining power, and male characters are show either taking over or assisting with those roles.

Moreover, some characteristics of stereotypical Old Man masculinity are still present in Pixar's films. Hypothesis 1 stated that males would be shown as naturally brave, and the data showed very strong support for this theme, which is clearly linked to masculine dominance. Hypothesis 2, regarding males being unable to control their sexuality, received partial support. Numerous males were shown being unable to control their sexual attraction to females, which aligns those characters with mainstream portrayals of heterosexuality. However, there were some characters that showed no romantic interest whatsoever, which reflects the Old Man trait of being focused on their work, rather than focusing on their relationships.

Although Pixar certainly could be praised for representing such a wide variety of male characters who do not align themselves with stereotypical masculinities, it is still crafting and controlling these images to present similar themes throughout their film collection. These similarities are also seen in my narrative analyses, where multiple films were identified as following similar narrative paths for multiple male characters. These narratives also help to establish Pixar's proclivity for portraying the New Man being involved in relationships with others. Homosocial relationships prove to be vital to the transformation of characters into New

Men. They learn the value of teamwork, bonding, and emotional expression. Meanwhile, heterosocial relationships are shown preparing males to be better fathers or father figures, which helps to complete the New Man transformation for those characters. Not only are they better friends, they also become better romantic partners and family men through their relationships with others. Regardless of the type of bond, Pixar overwhelmingly shows that males need relationships in order to thrive. Isolation, whether emotional or physical, is depicted as damaging and dangerous.

When compared to transformations in masculinity in contemporary society, Pixar's narratives and societal masculinity show strong parallels. Pixar films incorporate the major concerns that arose during the so-called masculinity crisis of the 1990s. Crises of identity, leadership in the family, and gender portrayal that were the focus of movements like Promise Keepers and the Million Man March are all seen numerous times in Pixar's films. While men in the real world were struggling with these issues in their everyday lives, millions of moviegoers were seeing how computer-generated characters were dealing with the same issues. In many ways, narrative resolutions observed in the films mirror the outcomes that the Million Man March and Promise Keepers hoped to achieve: solidifying men's identity and reestablishing them as leaders in their homes and communities. (Although this study focused on the parallels between the Promise Keepers movement and the Million Man March and Pixar's portrayal of masculinities, there are numerous other factors, such as third-wave feminism and the rise of Generation X, which could be studied for their influence on societal shifts in gender ideologies throughout the 1990s.)

Like the Promise Keepers and Million Man March, Pixar constructs masculinities in such a way to promote male authority by giving it a friendly face. Despite including a wide variety of

masculinities, not all forms are accepted. This sets up a mediated world where audiences will see certain forms of masculinity celebrated as good and others viewed as bad.

Limitations

The greatest limitation to this study is the texts' polysemic nature. My findings are based on my readings of the texts, but other researchers will possibly read them differently. Although I list this as a limitation, alternative readings do not truly pose a limitation for my findings. Rather, they will help build a more complete understanding of gender in Pixar's films.

A more concrete limitation of this study is that, although data were collected about all male characters in these films, some secondary characters did not heavily factor into the creation of the themes I articulated. Therefore, some singular instances of alternative masculinities may not be represented by the larger trends.

Moreover, my study's findings are not necessarily predictive or generalizable to other films. We shall have to wait and see how the cinema and popular culture, in general, articulate male (and female) gender roles in the future. Further, the themes and narratives discovered in this study may well be unique to this particular sample. Because I focused solely on Pixar products, my findings might or might not be generalizable to other children's films. Future comparative analyses could investigate just how pervasive New Man narratives have been in contemporary animation and other popular-culture texts.

Directions for Future Inquiry

Naturally, the continuing releases of new Pixar films mean this study could be revisited to incorporate new films, such as *Monsters University* and the forthcoming *Finding Dory*. My findings from this study could be used as part of a foundation for future inquiry into Pixar's gender portrayals. Also, because this study focused on masculinity, it invites future research to

analyze themes of femininity in the films. Although I touch on some observations of femininity due to instances where it intersects with masculinity, a deeper exploration of femininity would be a welcome addition to the body of research about gender in Pixar films, especially with the upcoming 2015 release of *Inside Out*, a film that will partially take place inside the mind of the female protagonist (Keegan, 2013).

Representations of race and ethnicity—or the lack thereof—in Pixar films could also be another expansion of this research, especially if race/ethnicity and masculinity were to be examined together. Buzz’s Spanish Mode alludes strongly to the stereotypical “Latin lover,” and *Cars*’s Latino character, Ramone, is also shown as being conventionally romantic. Additionally, Ramone’s marriage to Flo, who is coded as African American, marks the only instance of an interracial marriage in Pixar’s films. Additionally, this study focused predominately on Western versions of masculinities. Comparisons to international media, such as manga or anime, could yield interesting findings about how masculinity is mediated throughout the world. In addition to international media, Pixar’s gender representations could also be compared to other U.S. studios’ popular releases, such as DreamWorks’s *Shrek*, *Madagascar*, and *How to Train Your Dragon* franchises or Twentieth Century Fox’s *Ice Age* franchise.

Another direction in which this research could expand would be to travel to Pixar’s studios in California and conduct ethnographic research about the filmmakers. That type of research could help explain some of the similarities discussed about various films in the preceding chapters; however, that type of behind-the-scenes access could be difficult to obtain.

There are still many exciting studies that can be conducted on Pixar’s gender representations. My hope is that this research will help inspire and guide others along that process.

Final Thoughts

The goal of this research was to highlight the themes and narratives Pixar used to construct masculinities in its films and to examine how those items compared to societal changes during the time of the films' production. Pixar repeatedly utilizes the New Man model of masculinities that has been observed on television and film (see Jeffords, 1994, & Malin, 2005). My hope is that this qualitative research provides an in-depth examination into Pixar's portrayals of masculinities. In conjunction with the limited research that has been previously conducted into Pixar's films, we are beginning to have a better understanding of how Pixar is presenting gender to its global audiences. The current body of research continues to lay the groundwork for future studies that can examine the actual influence these films have on audience's understanding of gender. This project helps complete the first step of the study of mass media as outlined by Signorielli (2001): studying the images audiences see in the media. It also hints at Signorielli's second step, which is to explore possible effects the images may have on audiences. And the messages in Pixar films cannot be ignored. Because Pixar is one of our society's dominant cultural storytellers, we should be examining what messages these films may be conveying to those young, impressionable audience members.

Luckily, most of what has been observed has been positive, including the continued presence of non-stereotypical males, such as Flik, WALL-E, and Remy. Even when some characters are situated outside of the boundaries of acceptable masculinities, their inclusion in any form in some of the most popular movies in the world means that audiences are still exposed to these various articulations of masculinity. Yet despite how characters in Pixar films are coded, we must remember that these films account for a small percentage of the overall media that audiences are exposed to, but because of their cultural prominence they often become some of

the primary texts in childhood media consumption. However, a complete understanding of the themes and narratives in Pixar's films is far more complicated than a deconstruction and reconstruction of the texts.

The overarching presence of these themes and narratives points to the fact that none of them are in the films because of mere happenstance. Not only have they proven to be the keys of successful storytelling, the themes and narratives discussed in this study are ones to which audiences obviously respond. Therefore, we should always be asking ourselves, why do these films appear to resonate with such a large number of moviegoers? Is it simply because parents and children enjoy a fun day out at the movies, or is it because these films have encapsulated aspects of our society that we agree with and want to expose our children to? The answers to these questions are far beyond the scope of this study, but perhaps audiences will ponder these questions before they head to the box office again.

My hope is that Pixar will continue to depict positive portrayals of masculinities via the New Man model. Children need to see stories that tell them it is okay to show emotion, ask for help, work as a team, and engage with one's family. However, I also would like to see Pixar move away from such a strict adherence to patriarchy and show that female characters can be in positions of power without relying on a male character (e.g., Princess Atta in *A Bug's Life*) or without depicting them as villainous (e.g., Dean Hardscrabble in *Monsters University*). Moreover, when characters, whether male or female, embody counter-hegemonic ideas (e.g., Marlin's overly-cautious parenting style or EVE's dominant, aggressive personality), rather than showing these characters as abnormal and in need of reformation, I think Pixar should show more support for various types of gender performances. After all, despite Marlin's parenting style being overly cautious or EVE taking on a dominant role in her relationship with WALL-E,

neither of these portrayals of gender is inherently bad or wrong. There is the possibility for fathers or females in the audience to feel empowered by these characters, but for those types of messages to resonate with viewers, Sanchez and Stuckey (2000) noted that “positive reinforcement is necessary for any potentially emancipatory text to have a significant and lasting impact” (p. 82). While Pixar has largely gone against the grain of stereotypical portrayals of gender, I believe there is still much room for improvement.

Ultimately, I hope this project will help both researchers and parents alike to better understand the messages about masculinity in Pixar’s films. Society has afforded Pixar a great deal of power and prominence as one of the premiere creators of popular children’s media, but Pixar has not been subjected to as much scrutiny as previous Disney films. One of the hallmarks of hegemonic masculinity is its ability to retain power by going unseen and unquestioned, and this study helps illuminate how Pixar is articulating hegemonic messages that are hidden in plain sight. Through careful examination, these messages have been brought to light, and it is my hope that my findings will not solely reside within the realm of academe. I want parents to be able to use this study as a resource to understand how gender messages are a part of children’s media. Pixar products, which are not relegated solely to movie, television, or mobile screens, have permeated the global consumer culture, which allows children to incorporate Pixar characters into their playtime, clothing, and even schoolwork. Moreover, Pixar’s first 13 films show audiences that it is good for males to embrace the New Man model, where males work together, express their emotions, and become active and engaged fathers. Perhaps this study will help spark conversations between parents and children that will help the next generation grow up with a keener awareness of gender construction and representation both in our society and the media.

Pixar has opened the door for versions of masculinities that expose audiences to a multiplicity of gender performances. With the New Man firmly established in both reality and the media, it will be interesting to see how masculinities continue to evolve, and the potential for the ongoing creation of culturally relevant portrayals of masculinity already exists. After all, the creative minds at Pixar have the ability to tell a variety of stories that feature many different types of characters exhibiting gender performances that number to infinity—and beyond!

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APPENDIX A

Character Analysis Worksheet

Character Name: _____

Film: _____

Is this character in a main or supporting role? Main or Supporting

Is this character transformed into a New Man during the film? Yes or No

Describe physical markers (i.e., character's appearance) of masculinities for this character:

Describe verbal markers (i.e., spoken dialog) of masculinity for this character:

Describe this character's actions that function as markers of masculinities:

Describe any other data that signifies masculinity:

Describe any possible linkages to Western versions of masculinity:

Describe the themes of masculinity this character represents:

APPENDIX B

Narrative Analysis Worksheet

Film: _____

Is a New Man narrative present? Yes or No

If so, was it homosocial or dual gender? Homosocial or Dual Gender

Describe the nature of the relationship (e.g. friends, mentor, caregiver, etc.)

Describe the New Man narrative:

What are the lessons learned by the transformed male in the New Man narrative?

If no New Man narrative was present, describe how the male characters were presented.