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Annotated Bibliography

Andersen, Hans Christian. The Little Mermaid. New York: JellyBean, 1993. Print.

In Hans Christian Anderson’s fairytale *The Little Mermaid,* the youngest mermaid of five sisters really wants to swim to the surface to see the human world.  The mermaids are only allowed to swim to the surface when they are fifteen years old, thus the youngest mermaid struggles to wait patiently for her turn to travel to the ocean’s surface.  Upon turning fifteen, the youngest mermaid becomes enchanted with the human world, saves a sixteen year old prince from drowning, and ultimately wants to live on land to make him fall in love with her.  Her sisters and grandmother warn her that living life as a mermaid is better, but the persistent young mermaid does not listen and seeks help from the evil sea witch.  The sea witch provides her with legs in exchange for her voice; however, each time the former mermaid walks she will feel excruciating pain and if the prince does not marry her, she will die.  Ultimately, the prince marries another woman and the mermaid dies by turning into sea foam and dissolving into nothing.

Disney loosely based its plot for The Little Mermaid off of Hans Christian Anderson’s 1837 fairytale.  Anderson’s version depicts the hardships of growing up in a more accurate light than Disney’s version, which glorifies the female maturation process.  After the youngest mermaid decides to abandon her tail and get legs, the sea witch tells her, “It will hurt you as much as if a sharp sword was thrust through you… [and] you can never be a mermaid again” (27).  Anderson’s version emphasizes the permanence of growing up and the everlasting effects of making decisions along the way to adulthood.  When the youngest mermaid ultimately dies because the prince never loves her, the reader is shocked; however, it proves a valuable life lesson to the readers.  In contrast, Disney’s version continuously shows Ariel evading responsibility and trouble and ultimately ending up with her man, which glorifies the acceptance of gender roles.

Bell, Elizabeth, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells eds. *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995. Print.

In their anthology *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture,* Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells assert Disney films often escape being harshly analyzed by film critics. Most of their viewers are young children or adults who are still mesmerized and enchanted by fond childhood Disney memories. According to the Bell, Haas, and Sells, if more people began analyzing their favorite Disney films, they would see the subliminal gender messages the films are sending; however, it would forever ruin the films for the viewers. In chapter five of the anthology, “The Movie You See, The Movie You Don’t: How Disney Do’s That Old Time Derision” by Susan Miller and Greg Rode, the authors encourage adults to re-watch their beloved Disney favorites and analyze their content. In chapter eleven of the anthology, “Where Do the Mermaids Stand?: Voice and Body in *The Little Mermaid,*” Laura Sells asserts Disney’s rendition of the Hands Christian Anderson fairytale is an allegory for women’s struggle to ascertain a place in a patriarchal society.

The lack of mainstream analyses completed on Disney films allows parents, who grew up watching Disney films, to remain in a cloud of delusional-nostalgia. Bell, Haas, and Sells say, “Where cultural critics and film theorists omit Disney, popular critics and mass audiences valorize Disney as safe for children and a good investment for parents” (4). These same parents, who are blinded by Disney’s subliminal reinforcement of gender roles within their movies, are introducing the films they grew up watching to new generations: their children. Through this never-ending process, Disney is able to transmit its gender ideals across generations. Miller and Rode say, “It is obvious, or appears to be obvious, that the movies we saw as children, which younger home video viewers now see as many as 100 times over, were products of a story about their celebrated supposed origin that we didn’t see” (87). Children now have the ability to watch Disney films an infinite amount of times on DVD, which further helps reinforce the underlying gender roles in the films. Miller and Rode also add, “We can no longer protect from critique these charmed images or the hazy space in which we easily remember them” (87). Adults need to re-watch their favorite childhood Disney films and actually analyze the plot to understand the message they have been subliminally obeying all these years. A successful analysis and understanding of the plot can lead to educational conversations with their children, which parallels what Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen Silber suggest in “Good and Bad Beyond Belief: Teaching Gender Lessons Through Fairy Tales and Feminist Theory.” In her chapter specifically on *The Little Mermaid*, Sells says the film “establishes the world on land and the world under the sea as two contrasting spaces…the human world can be aligned with the white male system and the water world situated outside that system” (177). Sells believes the film is primarily about women assimilating into a male-dominated world; however, she is overall pleased with the ending because Ariel ultimately gets her voice back; thus indicating she successfully assimilated into the white male world and has a voice within that world.

Brydon, Suzan G. "Men at the Heart of Mothering: Finding Mother in Finding Nemo." Journal of Gender Studies 18.2 (2009): 131-46. Academic Search Premier. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=43211329&site=ehost-live>.

In her article “Men at the heart of mothering: finding mother in Finding Nemo,” Suzan Brydon asserts the term mothering is associated with a feminine connotation and defines the term as caring for children, emotionally and physically, and attending to domestic responsibilities.  Society’s definition of mothering has been widely used in Disney movies; however, in every movie prior to Finding Nemo, the mothering has been provided by a female character.  Since Disney mothers are often killed in the very beginning or are assumed dead, a new maternal figure is forced to emerge as the fathers are left to raise the child alone.  The fathers are typically incapable of raising the child, which is demonstrated through their stupidity and lack of mothering knowledge.  Brydon believes that Finding Nemo is the first Disney film in which the father actually exhibits acts of mothering.

Although the analysis of Finding Nemo does not entirely relate to my paper, the first half of Brydon’s article specifically references a lot of the rigid gender roles present in Disney’s motherless movies.  She says, “Within Disney’s narrative structure, mothers are usually killed early in the story or not allowed to exist in the first place” (Brydon 134).  This observation supports the motherless plot of The Little Mermaid.  In addition, Brydon says, “Female ‘heroines’ are drawn with delicate strokes of femininity and coquettishness; they have hourglass figures, flawless features and need their men” (131).  Ariel is merely a sixteen year old; however, her curvaceous hips, voluptuous breasts, and pouty red lips would suggest otherwise.  The depiction of the princesses in Disney films also reflects society’s rigid gender roles: women should be small and dainty while men should be brave and muscular.

Budd, Mike, and Max H. Kirsch eds. *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2005. Print.

In their anthology *Rethinking Disney: Private Control, Public Dimensions,* Mike Budd and Max Kirsch encourage readers to acknowledge that the ever-expansive Disney Empire is a cultural phenomenon and the messages it is sending need to be analyzed. Budd asserts Disney has become such an integral part of society’s childhood that to analyze its negative messages or monopolistic tendencies is unsettling. In chapter six, “Anglophilia and the Discreet Charm of the English Voice in Disney’s *Pocahontas* Films” by Radha Jhappan and Daiva Stasiulis, the authors propose Pocahontas is a unique Disney princess because of her skin; however, Disney portrayed Pocahontas as an extremely feminized version of the real girl she was based off of. Prior to Pocahontas, all of the other Disney princesses were white with very pale skin, which is a symbol of purity. Pocahontas was drawn with full lips and long thick hair, which was uncommon for the people of her tribe to have. Disney added sexual appeal to the female protagonist to ensure she would attract her man, John Smith, and still be able to send its message that women need to be attractive.

Similarly to Bell, Haas, and Sells, Budd and Kirsch feel Disney avoids being criticized or excessively analyzed. Budd says, “Anyone who has reflected critically on the company or its ubiquitous products has likely discovered quite concretely the power of the Disney aura. Few texts or brands enjoy the relative immunity of Disney products from criticism within mainstream U.S. opinion” (2). Disney’s wide-spread appeal is a cultural phenomenon and acts as a protective barrier towards anyone who attempts to shed a negative light on the empire. Budd also says, “This power derives in large part from Disney’s close association with and appropriation of childhood innocence as a personal and cultural memory for several generations of an intensely pleasurable and reassuring mass cultural experience to which they became uncritically attached as children” (3). Adults who grew up watching Disney films have difficulty accepting the films they grew up watching and loving are packed with subliminal messages instructing them how to act, look, and think. The reinforcement of gender roles is one of the most common messages in Disney movies. Jhappan and Stasiulis say, “The idea of whiteness [is] the pinnacle of human beauty…white is beautiful because it is, coincidentally, the color of virtue, purity, transcendence, cleanliness” (164). Pocahontas’s character is drawn in a sexualized version of a Native American, which makes her character irresistible to John Smith. The depiction of the female characters in *Pocahontas* further demonstrates Disney’s strategic depiction of women to emphasize the importance of beauty in a woman.

England, Dawn, and Lara Descartes. "Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princesses." *Department of Human Development and Family Studies*. University of Connecticut, 2006. Web. 5 May 2012. <http://www.familystudies.uconn.edu/undergraduate/honors/posters/Dawn England poster.pdf>.

On their poster entitled “Gender Role Portrayal; and the Disney Princesses,” Dawn England and Lara Descartes assert that the Cultivation Theory, Constructivist Approach, and Priming Effects Theory all support the notion that children learn from Disney movies. Children watch Disney films and emulate their favorite female protagonists. England and Descartes conducted a study and found the Disney Princesses are very affectionate towards males while simultaneously being assertive. In addition, all eight of the Disney Princesses interact with animals for an extended period of time during their movies. While only Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora are witnessed completing domestic work within their films, the remaining princesses can be connected to domestic possessions or responsibilities: Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Mulan.

England and Descartes incorporate social theories into their research to bolster their argument about the portrayal of females in Disney films. Females tend to be rescued frequently and the rescuing is typically done by a man. Even in the film Mulan, where the female protagonist is depicted as a strong male warrior in disguise, the protagonist requires the help of men to save the Emperor. England and Descartes use the Cultivation Theory, which states “television exposure helps develop concepts of social behavior and norms;” the Constructivist Approach, which “suggests that viewing role depictions contributes to a child’s understanding of gender;” and the Priming Effects Theory, which “suggests media messages prime and influence thought processes after viewing” (England). The inclusion of these theories suggests that children are in fact impacted by what they see on television as well as in movies; thus Disney’s films containing messages that reinforce gender roles are being received by their young audience.

Fisher, Jerilyn, and Ellen S. Silber. "Good and Bad Beyond Belief: Teaching Gender Lessons Through Fairy Tales and Feminist Theory." Women's Studies Quarterly 3/4 28 (2000): 121-36. JSTOR. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40005478>.

In the article “Good and Bad Beyond Belief: Teaching Gender Lessons Through Fairy Tales and Feminist Theory,” Jerilyn Fisher and Ellen Silber postulate that young girls who watch Disney fairytales are at risk of being disillusioned with promises of true love and a happily ever after.  Fisher and Silber analyze Disney films through psychoanalytic and feminist literary theory, which provides explanations of the way the young female viewers respond to the films.  According to Fisher and Silber, girls secretly enjoy the female villain depicted in most Disney movies because it alleviates the guilt they feel for thinking negatively about their own mothers’ strict rules.  In addition, since the princesses have limited interaction with other females aside from the villain, the girls are forced to emulate the princess because they subconsciously are aware the villain’s actions would not be socially acceptable.  The authors believe Disney’s fairytales should be analyzed and the viewers should be educated on what they are watching.

Fisher and Silber attempt to explain, through literary, theory why young girls wish to emulate Disney princesses, which provides a more concrete understanding of why this gender role phenomenon is occurring.  They write, “Girl readers see that they must relinquish ties with other women so that all their energies can be harnessed in preparation for the fiercely competitive race towards men’s approval” (130).  When Disney immediately kills the mother in the beginning of the film or she is just assumed dead, this process of isolating the heroine from all other females has already begun.  In addition, Fisher and Silber write, “Ultimately, the prince delivers the heroine from women’s wrath.  His power to save her and her utter dependence on him seem key to their imagined future happiness” (121).  Disney only offers the heroines males to turn to in times of need; and by adding an evil witch to complicate the plot, Disney creates a situation in which the heroines need to be saved by males, which only enhances their dependence on males.

Giroux, Henry A. "Acting "Naturally": The Practices of Gender." From Inquiry To Academic Writing: A Text And Reader. By Stuart Greene and April Lidinsky. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008. 567-92. Print.

In his chapter entitled “Acting “Naturally”: The Practices of Gender,” Henry Giroux explains that it is important for parents to understand the negative gender and racial undertones Disney movies promote.  In addition, he suggests if parents are going to let their children watch Disney moves then they should educate their children on the subliminal messages within those films.  The children are vicariously learning through their favorite Disney princesses, such as Ariel and Mulan, to be dependent and subordinate to men.  Because the young audience has not fully developed its analytical skills yet, it is the parents’ and teachers’ jobs to educate the children that these movies are for entertainment and to discuss how these movies are actually sending subtle sexist messages.  By teaching the young audiences who enjoy these films how to employ reflective metacognitive practices upon watching these Disney films, the children will be able to better understand they have choices in society and do not need a man to succeed.

Giroux directly addresses the reinforcement of gender roles that appear in The Little Mermaid and says, “Ariel becomes a metaphor for the traditional housewife in the making” (580).  Despite giving up her fins, voice, and family to be with Eric, which may seem heroic to young viewers, Ariel has confirmed her rigid role as domestic caretaker.  Without her voice, Ariel cannot communicate with Eric, thus physical attraction is the only way in which these love birds bond.  Giroux writes, “When Ursula tells Ariel that taking away her voice is not so bad because men don’t like women who talk, the message is dramatized when the prince attempts to bestow the kiss of true love on Ariel even though she has never spoken to him” (580).  Right before Ursula takes Ariel’s voice, she sings “Poor Unfortunate Souls” and shows Ariel an extremely skinny, scrawny man and an obese woman in smoke figurines.  Ursula says both people are unhappy before she magically transforms the figures, moving the woman’s excess weight to the man in the form of muscle and making the woman very skinny.  This further reinforces the emphasis on the importance of gender-appropriate physical attributes.

Holmlund, Christine. "Tots to Tanks: Walt Disney Presents Feminism for the Family." Social Text 2 (1979): 122-32. JSTOR. Web. 04 Apr. 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/466401>.

Christine Holmlund analyzes Disney’s North Avenue Irregulars in her article “Tots to tanks: Walt Disney Presents Feminism for the Family” and states the unconventional use of female crime fighters reinforces negative gender roles of women.  Despite the movie utilizing women as the main characters, the film constantly shows the women asking for the men’s help, the women needing their permission, and the film spends the majority of the time portraying the males’ point of view.  The women are seen as subservient to the men and it reinforces the idea that women require men’s approval and belong at home with the children.  In addition, Holmlund asserts Disney movies cast a negative light on homosexuality, which reinforces the importance of masculinity in men.  Men are to be larger, more muscular, and smarter than women, thus in North Avenue Irregulars, Disney depicts women in a sexist manner that makes them smaller than the men.

Similarly to Brydon, Holmlund notices older women in Disney films are depicted in a particularly unflattering way.  The older women in the crime fighting coalition are not “overwhelming beautiful” and “were the very image of the girl/mom next door” (122).  The women’s matriarchal appearances and failures as crime fighters demonstrate they belong at home with their families.  The fact that the “women” working “together for the good of the entire community—is denied at every turn” further reinforces their domestic place in society, according to Disney (127).  This film relies on Disney’s formulaic plot in which the female heroine(s) ultimately require male intervention to reach the dénouement, where she realizes she belongs at home fulfilling domestic responsibilities.

Duttry, Caiti. "Perpetuation of Gender Stereotypes in *The Little Mermaid*." *YouTube*. YouTube, 01 Dec. 2010. Web. 05 May 2012. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AvP5-XOvWvE>.

Caiti Duttry’s video “Perpetuation of Gender Stereotypes in *The Little Mermaid*,” asserts children imitate what they see protagonists do in Disney films, which has been proven by Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Learning Theory. The consequences of the protagonists’ actions within Disney’s films are subliminal messages to children and indicate whether actions are actable or unacceptable. Duttry also suggests Ariel’s facial features are the only physical indications that the protagonist in *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel, is sixteen years old. Her large hips and breasts, in combination with her sultry poses throughout the film, suggest she is much older than sixteen. Duttry also believes it is important to analyze the male characters within the film: King Triton and Prince Eric. King Triton is portrayed with extremely large muscles and a large nose while Prince Eric has a chiseled chin and protruding eyebrows. Throughout the film, Ariel waits for Prince Eric to kiss her first and continually relies on her use of body language to indicate she is interested in him. This sends a message to viewers that physical appearance in females is the most important aspect of their characterization and that men are only attracted to physically beautiful women.

Throughout the video, Duttry provides clips and images from *The Little Mermaid*, which bolsters her argument. The incorporation of a psychological interpretation of the film, using Albert Bandura’s theory, provides a new perspective on analyzing the impacts the film has on children. Duttry says, “Albert Bandura’s Social Cognitive Learning Theory suggests that children can imitate a character’s actions after seeing the video. Disney movies, such as *The Little Mermaid,* impart norms by showing how those models are rewarded or punished for their actions” (Duttry). Bandura’s 1977 *Bobo Doll* *Study* provides evidence that children are greatly impacted by what they see. In addition, similarly to Brydon and Holmund, Duttry acknowledges the differences in the way Disney depicts females; however, she goes farther and contrasts their appearances with that of men within the film.

Gallop, Jane. "The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters." *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* (2000): 7-17. Print.

In “The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters,” Jane Gallop asserts that readers should focus on the meaning that has been blatantly manifested in the text.  To successfully complete a close reading, readers should focus on smaller portions of the text, analyze that portion, and then continue analyzing smaller sections until they have analyzed the entire text. Upon analyzing the entire text in smaller sections, the reader should notice common thoughts and ideas throughout, which are the main points the author is intending to make. Gallop also believes that too often teachers instruct their students to search for latent meanings that may or may not truly exist and instead they should teach their students to focus on the importance of what is actually there.  Reading solely for the main point often results in the readers bringing their own projections and speculations into the text, thus veiling the text’s true intent. Instead of focusing on what they author actually intended to say, the readers create meaning that is not truly there or search for meaning that they hope to find and overlook the author’s key claims.

*The Little Mermaid* should be analyzed using Gallop’s approach to understanding texts. Parents only see the film for what they want it to be, thus demonstrating how the audience brings forth its projections onto the film. Parents overlook Disney’s, who is *The Little Mermaid’s* author, true intent: influencing young girls to be submissive, beautiful, quiet, and dependent on men. When the film is analyzed in smaller sections the true messages concerning gender roles readily present themselves. If parents closely read the lyrics to Ursula’s big performance, “Poor Unfortunate Souls,” rather than whimsically humming along to its catchy tune, they will begin to truly understand the messages the film is sending. Gallop says, “There is another…reason to practice close reading: I believe it makes for more ethical reading… I believe it is ethical to respect other people, by which I mean: listen to them, try to understand what they are actually saying, rather than just confirming our preconceptions about them” (12). Parents believe Disney is wholesome and completely kid-friendly and are refusing to closely read the film again now that they are older because they do not want to shatter the magical illusion of Disney.

The Little Mermaid. Dir. Ron Clements and John Musker. Walt Disney Pictures, 1989. Videocassette.

In Disney’s film The Little Mermaid, Ariel is a motherless mermaid who lives with her strict father, King Triton.  Although she loves her father, she wants to leave her life under the sea and live on land to be with Prince Eric.  Ariel’s friends throughout the film are a fish named Flounder and a crab named Sebastian, who ensure her transition from mermaid to human.  An evil octopus-woman named Ursula grants Ariel’s wish of having legs; however, she must surrender her voice to Ariel.  Ultimately, Ariel gets her voice back, keeps her legs, and falls madly in love with Prince Eric.  The film depicts Disney’s formulaic happily married ending and Ariel leaves her father and loyal friends to spend the rest of her life on land with Eric.

Throughout the film there are symbols representing society’s rigid gender roles, which act as examples for the young viewers watching the film.  When Ursula tells Ariel she needs to give up her voice in exchange for her legs, it seems Ariel is upset because she will miss singing and just being able to talk in general.  Ursula reassures her by saying, “You’ll never even miss it” (Little Mermaid).  Ariel is only making a deal with Ursula so she can get legs to hopefully fall in love with Eric, thus Ursula is implying that men do not like women who talk a lot.  She is suggesting that Ariel’s voice would have been a disservice to her anyway and it is better that she is taking it away from her now before it can ruin her prospective relationship.  As Ariel begins to contemplate the complications of being unable to speak, she begins to say, “But without my voice how can I,” before being abruptly cut off by Ursula’s reassurance that her looks will make up for her lack of verbal skills (Little Mermaid).  Ariel should be concerned about losing her passions, which include singing; however, it appears she is going to inquire how she will make the prince fall in love with her in three days without a voice.  Ursula then returns to further reinforce gender roles and says, “You’ll have your looks, your pretty face, and don’t underestimate the importance of body language” (Little Mermaid).  Ultimately in this short scene, girls are taught that knowledge, represented by speaking Ariel’s the voice, are not nearly as important as physical beauty.  In addition, Sebastian and Flounder act as liaisons between Ariel and the new, dry world.  They constantly push for her transition from mermaid to human and ensure that the transformation goes on uninterrupted, which is represented in Sebastian’s song “Kiss the Girl.”

Rabinowitz, Peter J. "Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences." Critical Inquiry 4.1 (1977): 121-41. JSTOR. Web. 15 Apr. 2012. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343045>.

In his article, “Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences,” Peter Rabinowitz asserts that in all genres, there are four types of audiences that need to be considered when writing: the “authorial,” “actual,” “narrative,” and “ideal narrative” (126).  While the authorial audience does not actually exist and is merely a hypothetical and all-knowing audience, it is the narrator’s job to persuade the actual audience to become a member of the narrative or ideal narrative audience.  It is essential for the narrator to establish ethos and convince the actual audience to join the narrative audience, which is the first and most difficult task to accomplish. Through interpellation and a successful establishment of ethos, logos, and pathos, the narrator can persuade the actual audience to join the ideal narrative audience.  When authors consider their audiences, they can more effectively convey their messages to that audience.

Rabinowitz’s method of audience analysis will be effective in analyzing Disney’s subtle persuasive tactics in The Little Mermaid.  The ideal narrative audience of The Little Mermaid is young girls, which Disney convinces need a man to be happy through a veil of entertainment.  Good writing anticipates its readers and Rabinowitz states the ideal narrative “audience believes the narrator, accepts his judgments, sympathizes with his plight, laughs at his jokes even when they are bad” (134).  Disney knows that young girls have not fully developed their analytical skills, thus they have the opportunity to freely persuade the girls’ and indirectly teach them their place in society, based on their gender.  The success of these subliminal messages is dependent upon the plot and if the heroine is beautiful enough to captivate them; Disney has been making films for a long time, thus they have perfected their subtle gender lessons that appear in their Disney princess films.

Teitelbaum, Michael. The Little Mermaid. New York: Golden Book, 1992. Print.

In this children’s storybook version of The Little Mermaid, the plot is essentially the same as Ariel longs to live in the human world, rescues Prince Eric, trades her voice for legs in a corrupt deal, and ultimately marries the prince.  The illustrations on each page appear to be identical to scenes shown in the film and each page only contains a small paragraph of text.  The illustrations are very colorful and eye-catching, thus the text works in combination with the pictures to rely the story in its entirety.  Although the plot needs to be condensed to fit within a small picture book, all of the major events occur throughout the story.

The illustrations reinforce Ariel’s sexy, curvy, and voluptuous sixteen year old figure.  On nearly every page, big-breasted, bodacious-hipped, and plump red-lipped Ariel is illustrated swimming her way through adolescence.  Her over-exaggerated features and sex appeal make it hard to remember that she is only supposed to be sixteen years old.  In addition, the condensed version of this story is limited amount of words available to narrate the story; however, the gender roles present in the film are still present in the story.  When Ariel is contemplating trading her voice for legs Ursula reminds her, “You still have your pretty face…it should be easy” (10).  This line implies men are not interested in hearing what a woman has to say; however, if the woman is attractive she should have no problem attracting men.  At the end of the story, Prince Eric needs to save Ariel from Ursula, which demonstrates women’s inability to handle situations on their own.  Finally, King Triton uses his magical powers to transform Ariel into a human, which signifies women’s subordinate role in society and implies women need men’s permission.

Ward, Annalee R. *Mouse Morality: The Rhetoric of Disney Animated Film*. Austin, TX: University of Texas, 2002. Print.

In her book *Mouse Morality: The Rhetoric of Disney Animated Film*, Annalee Ward uses various evaluative methods to reveal the inconsistencies in the subliminal messages sent to audiences in five of Disney’s successive releases: *The Lion King, Pocahontas, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, Hercules,* and *Mulan.* She asserts Disney’s films have a major impact on their viewers and are a large part of American culture, thus it is essential to understand the messages the films are sending. Ward believes Disney’s films do send positive messages; however, the majority of the films are spent reinforcing societal norms. Children and even adults need to be able to differentiate between the two messages the films are sending in order to understand what their own opinion is and what views are being forced upon them. According to Ward, when Disney combines good lessons with the reinforcement of societal norms, audiences are unable to effectively distinguish the good from the bad.

Disney films have the ability to many children each day with their subliminal messages. Ward says, “The place of Disney in American Culture—and, increasingly, world-wide culture—has grown to be both a dominant and powerful fixture on the contemporary landscape” (xiii). Even if a child has not been to Disney World or Disney Land, they have heard of it and can identify Mickey Mouse, which indicates the popularity of the entire Walt Disney Empire. With this popularity comes the “cultural presence and resources to dominate the messages children receive” (133). Unlike the other authors, Ward believes Disney does have some positive messages within its films on “mortality, including leaving room for spiritual realities, the clear delineation of good and evil, numerous examples that help define those categories, and the importance of open communication—all messages that will teach important lessons” (133). Despite the inclusion of positive messages, viewers need to be able to differentiate between the good, moral lessons Disney is attempting to teach and its subliminal reinforcement of societal norms.

White, Susan. "Split Skins: Female Agency and Bodily Mutilation in The Little Mermaid." Film Theory Goes to the Movies. Ed. Jim Collins, Hilary Radner, and Ava Collins. New York: Routledge, 1993. 182-93. Print.

Susan White’s chapter, “Split Skins: Female Agency and Bodily Mutilation in The Little Mermaid,” asserts Disney’s The Little Mermaid has been drastically modified from the original, gory fairytale from which it was adapted.  In the original fairytale from 1837, the mermaid’s transition from girl to woman is painful, and she is forced to contemplate her decisions because of the pain she suffers from the transformation.  Disney drastically waters down the storyline and makes Ariel’s journey to find a man seem fulfilling and exciting.  White believes the glorification of the female maturation process glosses over the hardships of growing up as well as encourages girls to conform to gender roles.  The Little Mermaid encourages girls to alter their appearances to appease a man, give up the things they love (Ariel’s voice, which she uses to sing) for a man’s love, and that ultimately to be happy a girl needs to marry a man so she can eternally depend on him.

White discusses the physical differences between Ariel and Ursula, which relates to Holmlund and Brydon’s assertions that Disney depicts women differently depending on their age.  White writes, “She is unself-consciously beautiful, physically exuberant, and able to pursue her dreams of love,” which is why young girls adore Ariel (183).  Young girls admire Ariel and want to emulate her character, thus they wish to be physically attractive and find love with a man they can depend on; however, Disney suggests this can be accomplished by being beautiful and making self-sacrifices.  White also asserts, “even though girls know that happiness in marriage is at best a fifty-fifty proposition, the intoxication of approval and recognition is so heady and so addictive that they will often pursue what they suspect to be a losing battle, at the expense of other opportunities for education and employment,” (191).  Girls are strongly influenced by their heroines, the anorexically beautiful Disney princesses, to find a man who can save them from any situation she happens to clumsily stumble upon.