Consuming Gender:
Representations of masculinity and femininity in Disney.co.uk

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ABSTRACT

Theorists such as Butler (1985) and Foucault (1971) argue that language and texts available in everyday life seek to govern how we think of society and ourselves by constituting collective knowledge about a given category, in this case Gender. In this research, I argue that social problems, such as Anorexia, Sexism, Homophobia and Domestic Violence are, at least in some part, caused by a common sense view of gender, and the socialization of girls and boys into appropriate gender roles often begins from a young age. On these assumptions, the website http://home.disney.co.uk was analyzed using methodological contributions from both Foucauldian and Critical Discourse Analysis (outlined by Willig & Roger; 2008, and Wodak & Meyer; 2001 respectively). Findings suggest that whilst masculinity and femininity are constructed as binary opposites (for example the construction of girls as altruistic versus boys as violent), both men and women are constructed as consumers. Suggestions for future studies include the analysis of global corporations, both on and offline, for constructions of gender, as well as other categories such as sexuality, ethnicity and class, through which new directions from which to tackle gender inequalities can be found and new spaces for freedom of speech can be developed.

KEY WORDS: GENDER, DISCOURSE, MASCULINITY, FEMINITY, DISNEY
Introduction

For many years, Academics and Scientists didn’t differentiate between ‘Sex’ and ‘Gender’. By reducing gender to something biological and stable, irrespective of historical and cultural backdrop, men and women were often determined as fundamentally different as a result. The repetition of a view such as this can eventually lead to a ‘collective’ view of a social category. Gramsci (1988) described this process of repetition as ‘creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups’. In short, hegemony is the process by which dominant groups in society (re)produce a view so consistently no other alternative is feasible, and in the case of gender, this can have serious implications for both men and women.

Feminists have worked to counter this ‘common-sense’ view of gender, and argue that gender should be understood as something that is culturally and socially constructed. From a young age, men and women are socialized into different roles (deviation from which is often pathologized and seen as ‘abnormal’) and feminists argue this normalization is a form of social control, keeping men dominant and in power, and women as the weaker, more vulnerable sex. Simone de Beauvoir (1949) captured this notion perfectly, claiming ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman’ arguing that women were often portrayed as the ‘other’ to men, quite literally, the second sex.

Butler (1985) furthered this view, claiming that ‘We are not only culturally constructed, but in some sense we construct ourselves.’ Butler argues that through channels such as identification, imitation and even parodying (such as drag), we perform our gender. She continues that ‘To choose a gender is to interpret received gender norms in a way that reproduces and organizes them anew. Less a radical act of creation, gender is a tacit project to renew a cultural history in one’s own corporeal terms.’ Men and women internalize hegemonic views of gender so often presented to them, which limits their experience and serves to keep the current power balance in society unchanged. Moreover, the production of gendered identities is an influential factor in many current social problems, such as anorexia/bulimia, sexism, homophobia, domestic violence, rape and other gender inequalities. However, some academics maintain that Butlers theory of performativity alone cannot explain fully the complexity of Gender. As Zizek (1999) claims that Butler makes a contradiction of herself in seeing herself as an autonomous agent of her ‘submissive’ gender, even going as far to say that ‘the ultimate feminist statement is to proclaim openly; ‘I do not exist in myself, I am merely the Other’s fantasy embodied’. As Zizek (in Parker;2009) further points out, Butler’s theory lacks a ‘meta-narrative’ crucial for the investigation of gender; historical inquiry and the power of knowledge. In order to properly rectify these downfalls, we must turn to the theories of Foucault.

Foucault (1971) maintains that beyond the power of the law, policing and government, power is constructed through discourse, and therefore through
knowledge and its re-circulation. What is made available and accessible to us through discourse, and what isn't, constitutes what we 'know' and view to be 'normal. Foucault claims that 'every educational system is a political means of maintaining or of modifying the appropriation of discourse, with the knowledge and the powers it carries with it'. Hook (2001) furthers the work of Foucault and describes the effect of discourse as making it 'virtually impossible to think outside of them; to be outside of them is, by definition, to be mad or to be beyond comprehension and therefore reason'.

With these assumptions in mind, the mass media is crucial in understanding the acquisition (and performance) of gender identity for critical psychology. Watkins & Emerson (2000) argue that 'Globalization has a profound influence on the nature and ideological content of media around the world. Because corporations like Disney and Time Warner are such formidable players in the global economy, the United States exerts a disproportionate influence on how audiences receive and incorporate media in their everyday lives'. Findings from Derne (2002) have illustrated how the mass media reinforces gender ideologies and hierarchies at a local level. Even relatively recent technologies, such as the Internet, have already been argued to perpetuate patriarchal views of society (Gilstavasson & Czamiawska; 2004). Others, such as Gersch (2009), claim that the internet should be viewed as a site of discursive power struggles which continually reinforce gender relationships and power imbalances. All these authors highlight the importance of investigate to new technologies and illustrate how the mass media and its globalization can indirectly impact upon us, and contribute to wider social problems such as gender inequalities.

The media’s impact upon bodily satisfaction, as a result of the reproduction of gendered discourses, has been widely documented. Indeed, Benveniste et al (1999) claim that both male and female sufferers of Anorexia explained it within a discourse of femininity and many pointed out pressure to be thin from the media. Park (2005) also found a direct media impact, but claimed that women also appeared to create additional pressure on themselves by assuming that others, exposed to similar images, preferred a thinner body type. Park illustrates, in these findings, how both humans and the media can regulate the ‘self’. Even more progressive representations of women, often presented wrapped up in the guise of empowerment (usually through consumerism or sex), have been criticized for still holding heteronormative values and presenting women as primarily for the ‘male gaze’ (Gill, 2008; 2009). Similar findings in advertisements are also found by Magaholes (2005) who states that even though some adverts encourage/explore new ways of being a man or woman, the underlying ideology remains the same. What these studies demonstrate is how even though these discourses encourage new channels through which to perform gender, they still promote the same patriarchal values.

However, when looking into constructions of masculinity, the literature isn’t as vast. Carter and Steiner (2004) argue ‘the concept of masculinity is no more a biological given or standardized certainty than femininity, and no less a problem’. However, rather than empowerment through consumerism or sex, men are often empowered through sport and ‘fantasy’ sports (such as online games) and these often reinforce traditional gender roles of ‘active’ versus ‘passive’ (Davis & Duncan; 2006). The constant construction of gender roles such as this obviously has strong social implications in relation to issues such as domestic violence and rape. Hearn et al
(2003) found that violence was the most well represented form of masculinity across 10 European countries, accounting for 20%-78% of articles on men. Some argue that boys identify with portrayals of sexually aggressive men in films (Milkie, 1994) and others found that discourses on masculinity were often constructed within a ‘hero/villain’ narrative (Andeersson; 2008). More recent research has also argued that not only does constructing women negatively as passive and ‘in crisis’ give women and young girls skewed perceptions of femininity, but also strips them of agency to challenge these hegemonic views (Mazzerella & Pecora; 2007). The circulation of knowledge and (re)production of gender stereotypes not only constructs how we value concepts such as ‘masculinity’ and femininity in society, but also how we construct and regulate the ‘self’ and the socialization of men and women into binary roles, often starts a very young age. As a result, the literature on discourse aimed at children, and particularly Disney, is broad.

Research that has looked specifically into Disney has found ideals of femininity and masculinity transcend into their re-telling of fairytales. Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) found that the most successful (in terms of retelling/popularity) often present a ‘feminine beauty ideal’. They conclude that ‘Children’s media can be a powerful mechanism by which children learn cultural values. Through the proliferation of fairytales in the media, girls (and boys) are taught specific messages concerning the importance of women’s bodies and women’s attractiveness’. Here, we see how discourse aimed at children can endorse and even applaud sexist values. Similar thoughts are echoed by Parsons (2004) who argues that ‘Fairy tales are sites for the construction of appropriate gendered behaviour. Although fairy tales are certainly not solely responsible for the acculturation of children, they are an integral part of the complex layering of cultural stories and influences that affirm and perpetuate cultural norms.’ Martin & Kazyak (2009) analyzed a range of Disney films and found women are often subjected to the ‘male gaze’, and many storylines were woven around themes of ‘hetero-romantic love’. They conclude that these representations ‘provide powerful portraits of a multifaceted and pervasive heterosexuality that likely facilitates the reproduction of heteronormativity’. However, other critics have taken a much more critical view of Disney’s portrayal of love, arguing that their films (such as Beauty and the Beast) romanticizes issues such as domestic abuse (Beres; 1999).

However, Davis (2006) maintains that since the 1990s Disney portrayal of women have become more dynamic, arguing that ‘in its effort to appeal to the sensibilities of its audience, Disney helped to create an important reflection of American societies rapidly changing attitudes and beliefs about women, gender, and femininity’. This is a perfect example of what Hacking (1999) describes as looping effects. As humans can gain knowledge, both individual and collective, about what label they are given (such as man or woman) they can change as a response to this, and change the definition as a result. However, many academics simply criticize Disney not only for their definitions of femininity and masculinity, but as a global, capitalist corporation.

Wasko (2001) argues that the values Disney endorses could be seen as conservative, homophobic and superficial. She continues that while ‘Disney did not create these attributes, but it is possible to argue that the Disney Empire helps to perpetuate them. Are they the only company that does so? Of course not. But they do it very well and (at least for many) in an appealing, seductive and enjoyable way.’ Wasko illustrates perfectly how the globalization of Disney normalizes these views of
society. As a result of this, Other academics even brand Disney as a ‘Motherless Corporation’ which perpetuates patriarchal values in its fairytale retellings (Craven; 2002). Giroux (1999) also criticizes the Disney Corporation, and claims it must be thought of in terms of its influence and shaping of public memory (or collective knowledge) and in its determining the role of consumerism in everyday life virtue’. However, not all academics are so radically against Disney. Kooijman (2001) makes clear, ‘making parents aware of the possible negative influence of Disney movies on their young children is one thing, but to blame Disney for the sins of western society is unjustified’.

As has been discussed, social issues (such as sexism, homophobia or anorexia) arise as a result of the construction of gendered identities, and of men and women as binary opposites within discourses, which are (re)produced by the mass media and the circulation of Knowledge. Moreover, this socialization of men and women begins from a young age, and so mediums aimed specifically at children should come under close scrutiny. Recent technologies such as the Internet have now opened new spaces to analyze the interaction of different power relations, and also new directions from which to tackle gender inequalities in society. It is for these reasons that http://home.disney.co.uk has been chosen as the text for analysis.

Method

To properly analyze the different discourses in http://home.disney.co.uk the chosen methodology for this study is Discourse Analysis. This calls for a selection of texts, in this case all sourced from the UK Disney website, which will enable an in depth analysis of representations of men and women, whilst also placing this within a wider socio-political context. van Dijk (1993) explains that ‘since serious social problems are naturally complex, this usually also means a multidisciplinary approach, in which distinctions between theory, description and ‘application’ become less relevant.’ As a result, I hope to draw methodological frameworks from a number of different schools of thought.

Central to discourse analysis is investigation into the interplay and interlocking of different power relations. Butler (1985) argues ‘oppression isn’t a self-contained system which either confronts individuals as a theoretical object or generates them as its cultural pawns. It is a dialectical force which requires individual participation on a large scale in order to maintain its malignant life.’ In the case of this study, individuals identify with, and perform gendered identities which are presented to them in the mass media, which plays a factor in a multitude of current social problems and gender inequalities. However, Butler oversimplifies the different systems which underlie gendered representations of men and women. As Burkitt (1998) asks, ‘can it still be maintained that it is only the act of naming and the iterative performance resulting from it which constructs gender identity?’

Burkitt argues we must turn to the theories of Foucault to understand how power relations operate through the recirculation of knowledge amongst humans and produces gender identities, inequalities and power structures. Hook (2001) furthers this notion, stating that ‘we over-play the importance of originality and freedom in everyday discourse when in fact much of what is spoken is really the product of repetition, and of discursive ‘re-circulation’.
Based on Foucault’s theories of Power/Knowledge, Willig & Rogers (2008) outline a ‘Foucauldian Discourse Analysis’ with 4 different areas of interest. These include Problematizations (intersection between competing discourses which exposes power/knowledge relations), Technologies (how human behaviour is governed both indirectly through the media and directly through self-regulation) Subject Positions, (how people are located within society) and Subjectification (how individuals attempt to transform and gain desirable traits).

However, whilst this serves to analyze macro-structures and power relations operating behind discourse, it seems to fall short in investigating the ideology which underlies it. Vighi & Feldner (2007) criticize Foucauldian Discourse Analysis for this, claiming that a critique of ideology is imperative for Discourse Analysis. For this reason, I will also draw methodological techniques from ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’.

As Wodak and Meyer (2001) outline, Critical Discourse Analysis should cover the following 6 aspects of discourse; Firstly ‘Context’ where general aspects of the text are covered (such as why is this text typical, and why has it been selected). Secondly, the ‘Surface of the Text’ should be analyzed, with focus on the layout of the text (including graphs/pictures that accompany it) and how discourses are structured into units of meaning (for examples headings and subheadings). Third, investigating the ‘Rhetorical Means’ includes asking what argumentation/strategy does the text employ and what logic underlies its composition? What is the vocabulary and style of the text? Who is mentioned and in what ways are they portrayed, if at all? Fourth, ‘Content and ideological statements’ aims to investigate concepts of humankind/society/technologies does the text presuppose and convey. Finally, attention should also be paid to ‘Other Peculiarities in the Text’ and the ‘Discourse and Overall Message’ of the text.

For the purpose of clarity and to avoid repetition, these 10 different areas of interest will be fused together to form 6 different categories; Context & Surface of the Text, Rhetorical Means & Technologies, Content & Ideological Statement, Peculiarities & Problematizations, Subject Positions & Subjectification and Discourse and Overall Message.

As discourses found in http://home.disney.co.uk has been chosen over the use of participants for a more in-depth analysis, there are no serious ethical considerations to be taken in regard to this research (Please see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for completed ethics forms).However, within Discourse Analysis of any kind, there is the issue of Reflexivity, which will be discussed in the ‘Reflexivity’ section.

Results

As van Dijk (1985) describes ‘On the one hand, we have the sphere of the ‘cultural’, where relations of power- of dominance and subordination- are established, maintained and contested around fundamental social divisions such as gender, age, class, ethnicity: and this by means of the production and circulation of specific ideologies. On the other hand, we have the sphere of the ‘textual’. ‘Texts signify by virtue of the way in which they articulate together signs selected from an array of signifying systems.’ By incorporating aspects of both Foucauldian and Critical discourse analysis, this will allow not only an in-depth analysis of the ‘textual sphere’,
but also of the ‘cultural’ sphere of ideology and oppressive social structures which underlie the Disney website and the gender inequalities this reproduces within society.

**Girls Section** ([http://home.disney.co.uk/foryou/girls](http://home.disney.co.uk/foryou/girls))
(for ‘Girls Homepage’ see Appendix 3, for text-only version of features, see Appendix 4)

The icon for the Girls section features princesses Jasmine & Sleeping Beauty, and the tagline ‘It’s a girl thing, no boys allowed’. Both this and the girls page has a pink and blue backdrop, and pink flowers also frame the ‘Video Box’. The font highlighting the different areas is in lowercase in a thin, curly font. The screen also features a picture of a female Disney character with the word ‘Girls’ above, such as Tinkerbell or Tiana, Disney’s first black princess and newest release ‘The Princess & the Frog’. Both the Girls and Boys areas are then split into areas named New, Play, Watch, Listen, Visit and Shop.

The Play area includes interactive games, such as ‘Princess Protection Programme’, in which girls can ‘Help Rosie and Carter win the bid for Homecoming Queen’, ‘Horse on a Course’ in which girls help a horse navigate its path, ‘Mittens Hot Dog Game’, where player help a kitten juggle hot dogs.

In the Watch area, girls are invited to watch episodes, buy DVDs and game from Disney shows such as Hannah Montana.

The Shop areas includes many different products including clothing (Hannah Montana Clothing, Minnie Costume, Clothes for Girls, Fairies Costumes, Girls Character Costume) and other gifts such as Belle Winter Dress-Up doll and other toys for girls to ‘make her dreams come true!’.

The page also features ‘Enter a Character World’, where girls are invited to get to know certain Disney characters better. The girls sections include characters from ‘The Suite life of Zach and Cody’, ‘High School Musical’, ‘Camp Rock’, ‘Wizards of Waverly Place’, ‘Up’, Alice in Wonderland, Tinkerbell, Tiana, the Jonas Brothers and Hannah Montana

**Boys Section** ([http://home.disney.co.uk/foryou/boys](http://home.disney.co.uk/foryou/boys))
(for ‘Boys Homepage’ see Appendix 5, for text-only version of features, see Appendix 6)

The icon for the Boys section features with a Car and Buzz Light-year, and the tagline ‘An action packed adventure we picked just for boys’. This and the boys page has a blue backdrop. The font highlighting different areas are all in uppercase and bold, block font. It also features a picture of a male character, two of which include of two boys from a program called ‘Skyrunners’, and two other male characters with skateboards and the tagline ‘Skate, Eat, Sleep, Repeat’.

The play area includes games in where boys can play ‘Villains Lucky 13’, where boys are invited ‘Airhead Hockey’, the ‘air game of champions’, ‘G-Force’ about a space mission, ‘Monsters Inc. Boo’s Hide & Scream’ where boys can ‘Scare the Monsters’, ‘The Lion King Bug Blaster’, a ‘fast paced, addictive’ game and ‘Kim Possible- Rufus’ Snowride’ where boys can race down the slopes and ‘Hooks Dart Game’. The video box in the centre of the page automatically plays an Alice in Wonderland behind the scenes feature, in which lead actor Johnny Depp is interviewed about his character the Mad Hatter, describing him as ‘unpredictable’ and ‘fascinsnating’ with his
‘emotions very, very close to the surface’.
The Shop area of the boys section sells many products, including merchandise from
the film ‘Cars’ (Television, Beach Towel and Car models) other gifts such as Buzz
Lightyear action figure and other toys for boys.
The ‘Enter a Character World’ area in the boys section invites viewers to look at
characters such as ‘Captain Jack Sparrow’, ‘The Suite life of Zach and Cody’, ‘High
Band’ and ‘American Dragon’.

Analysis and Discussion

Context and Surface of the Text

Disney.co.uk is the online UK branch of the Disney Corporation. Aimed at both
children and adults, Disney is loved by many, and the constant globalisation of their
products continually adds to their faithful fan-base (and to their earnings). Not only is
Disney one of the most iconic in children’s media, but the expansion of the Disney
Corporation online calls for new inquiry as the amount of time children and adults
spend on the internet increases. Many of the discourses in the Disney website seek
not only to empower its viewers to purchase its products, but also display images of
men and women which contribute to collective knowledge about gender appropriate
behaviour (Giroux; 1999).

The Disney website is split up into different sections aimed at different target
markets, claiming that it ‘has something for everyone!’ and is updated on a weekly
basis. Whilst much of the analysis in this research has taken place mostly on the
respective Girls and Boys pages, Disney does include other sections, such as
Preschool, with the tagline ‘Stuff little kids and Mums alike can’t help but love’, and
the Families, with the tagline ‘Fun for Mum and the whole Family too’ (See Appendix
7)

The separate sections are split up into areas, each with differing functions, such as
Play, which introduces viewers to games, Watch & Listen, which invites viewers to
view videos and hear CD previews, and Visit & Shop, which gives adults the chance
to purchase tickets to theme-parks, tours and live shows as well as buy merchandise
such as DVDs, CDs and toys. Gendered images are immediately translated as soon
as the text opens, as shown by the stereotypical colours used in each the girls and
boys (pink for girls and blue for boys). The girls section is generally more detailed
than the boys section, which already suggests that girls should be more preoccupied
with ‘appearance’ than boys.

Rhetorical Means and Technologies

The text works to interpolate its visitors as their main goal is to sell a brand and
promote the consumption of the products they offer. Disney does this by giving
individuals a chance to explore online (through the sections on both the girls and
boys areas such as Play, Watch, Listen) and then offering them a chance to ‘own a
piece of the Disney magic’ for themselves (Shop, Visit). As Wasko (2001) has
pointed out, Disney is an appealing, seductive and enjoyable empire, and as can be
seen on the website, which targets both children and adults by encouraging them to
purchase Disney products. Indeed, the majority of the different areas of the website feature links to buy products associated with that character, alongside other Disney merchandise.

However, whilst also promoting their products, Disney also promotes patriarchal and heteronormative values in turn constructs cultural norms (Craven; 2002, Parsons; 2004) through the images of men and women feature on the website. Certainly, the text alludes to wider society, and whilst Disney may be focused on creating ‘fantasy’, fairytales told online, such as Princess and the Frog, serves to teach children important cultural values about gender hierarchies and how individuals are situated within society (Derne; 2002).

The vocabulary and style of the text is friendly and inviting to children, such as the separate taglines for the Boys and Girls sections illustrate ‘An action packed adventure we picked just for boys’ and ‘It’s a girl thing, no boys allowed’ respectively. However, this illustrates how before you enter the separate sections, men and women are already gendered, with the construction of the men’s site as an active ‘adventure’, and the construction of the women’s site as a passive ‘girl thing’.

In the Disney website, human behaviour is regulated through many different channels. As has been discussed, Disney products promote different values for girls and boys; and they do this isn’t only in the representations themselves, but through the different channels they use (Play, Listen, Watch). Through identification with the characters, children learn the importance of gender role within society, and may adapt a form of self regulation in regards to their behaviour (Park; 2005).

Content & Ideological Statements

The text shows a clear difference between Girls and Boys, and what the ‘appropriate’ activities and interests are for each gender role. The majority of pictures of women on the website (which includes Jasmine, Sleeping Beauty and Tinkerbell) are all beautiful, thin women. In support of Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) and the persistence of the ‘feminine beauty ideal’, Disney's latest film, The Princess and the Frog, features the beautiful Tiana, is a re-telling of a Grimm Brothers fairytale, and other attractive female characters such as Tinkerbell and Hannah Montana are internationally popular. Indeed, these unrealistic portrayals of the femininity places not only undue stress on young girls, but also constructs what both boys and girls value women in terms of; attractiveness.

Whilst girls are encouraged to be empowered through appearance, the Boys section promotes a different agenda. The games boys can play on the Disney website are often sports themed (Airhead Hockey and Darts Game) and many of the games and pictures employed also allude to space exploration and adventure, such as Buzz Light-year, Skyrunners and the game G-Force. Indeed, all these different fantasy sports ‘allow men the opportunity to reconstruct hegemonic masculinity in a safe environment, free from feminine influence’ (Davis & Duncan; 2006). This promotes a hegemonic view of gender, which seeks to empower Boys to be ambitious and driven, but also teaches girls to be passive and beautiful, ultimately for the ‘male-gaze’. Whilst this not only reproduces gender hierarchies and ideologies, it also strips young girls of their agency (Mazzerella & Pecora; 2007). Indeed, if young girls are
taught to be passive from a young age, then how can women challenge hegemony and sexism?

Whilst in this example the boys are portrayed as having more desirable traits than women (such as active as opposed to passive) it isn’t always the case that men are the ones given superior qualities. In the games section, many of the girl’s games are themed on helping characters, and promote altruistic traits such as helping others and caring for animals (Fairies Shooting Stars and Horse on a Course). However, in the boys section, rather than being asked to help ‘good’ characters succeed in the games, the boys are instead encouraged to fight and defeat ‘bad’ characters, such as ‘Villains Lucky 13’ and ‘Monsters Inc’, placing masculinity in a ‘hero/villain’ narrative (Andersson; 2008).

Even further in contrast to the girl’s page, the boy’s page also includes a game called ‘The Bug Blaster’ in which boys must kill insects. This demonstrates that whilst women are presupposed to be compassionate and altruistic, men are encouraged to be violent, which has strong implications in light of research which shows the romantization of domestic abuse in Disney films (Beres; 1999) and boys tendency to identity with sexually aggressive men (Milkie; 1994). This clearly demonstrates that whilst gender hierarchies and ideologies are being passed onto children through Disney discourse, not all of them are in favour of men, and indeed, masculinity is no more a given than femininity (Carter & Stiener; 2004). Here I argue that it isn’t the construction of simply ‘masculinity’ or ‘femininity’ on its own, but the positioning of them as binary opposites, the hegemonic assumption that men and women are fundamentally different.

However, as Giroux (1999) points out, Disney must also be thought of in terms of its determining of consumerism in everyday life. Whilst many of the girl’s products are focused on appearance such as the Minnie Costume or Clothes for Girls, the boy’s products tie into discourses of wealth and power, such as the Cars merchandise which includes televisions, towels and car toy models. Here, the girls are still being taught the importance of appearance and fashion, whereas boys are taught the importance of ‘high status’ possessions and gadgets. Whilst the products are seen as promoting stereotypical traits of femininity and masculinity respectively, one similarity between the girls and boys section is another mode of empowerment; Consumerism. Whilst its viewers are entertained by and enjoy what Disney offers, the primary concern of Disney is to sell its products, merchandise and theme-park tickets and expand its global brand. This further demonstrates not only the need for feminist inquiry into Globalisation (Watkins & Emerson; 2000).

**Peculiarities and Problematizations**

Other peculiarities in the text include the different Fonts used on the separate girls and boys sections. Despite the headings on each section saying the same word, the girls font is shown in lowercase, whereas the boys are all in uppercase, and so they read as ‘submissive’ and ‘dominant’ respectively.

Another interesting point to make is the absence of fatherhood throughout the separate boys and girls sections. Whilst other sections of the website such as ‘Preschool’ and ‘Families’ make references to mothers in its taglines and recognize
them as important caregivers, fathers are rendered invisible. Whilst Craven (2002) describes Disney as a ‘Motherless Corporation’ due to its sexist depictions of women, perhaps it could even be argued Disney is a also a Fatherless Corporation for its complete absence of fathers in its content, and also begs the question; is it better to be seen in an unpleasant light, or not seen at all? The exclusion of certain groups and people such as this is interesting, and the majority of Disney’s characters are white, heterosexual and attractive. Whilst Disney has recently attempted to include a more diverse range of characters (for example, Tiana, the first black princess) they still make some groups of society such as the disabled and the homosexual as invisible, promoting heterosexuality as the only option (Hook;2001).

Competing discourses such as these serve to reveal underlying Power/Knowledge relations. One example of this is Hannah Montana ‘Best of Both Worlds Concert Live’. The same video is available in both the Girls and Boys sections; however, in the Girls section it is listed under the ‘Listen’ area, whereas in the Boys it is found under the ‘Watch’ area. Whilst it is a video, girls are told to listen to Hannah Montana sing, whilst the boys are asked to watch her, illustrating perfectly the ‘male gaze’ (Martin & Kayzak;2009, Gill; 2008) and the construction of women as objects. Here, as Zizek (1999) points out, women are ‘the Other’s fantasy embodied’.

As many of the representations of femininity are the production of the ‘male gaze’, it is peculiar then that Tiana is absent from the boys section, despite this being one of Disney’s newest releases and the need for promotion, which suggests that Tiana is aimed primarily at young girls. Tiana as a character could be viewed as a much more dynamic portrayal of women, as Davis (2006) suggests many Disney characters developed after the 1990’s are. Although Disney finally including a black princess is certainly encouraging, I would argue that overall this isn’t so much a more dynamic portrayal of women as Tiana is still presented as the feminine ideal, and is marketed at the girls rather than the boys. Instead, I argue this could be Disney’s response to vast feminist literature which criticises its narrow portrayal of white beautiful women. This not only shows the interactional relationship between categories and their labels (Hacking; 1999) but should also prove the success of feminist research in demanding a more varied representation of women, and the importance for continuation of inquiry.

Another peculiarity is the choice of older characters on the website, and the exclusion of others. On the boys page, the character of Jake Long from American dragon is featured; a boy who can transform into a dragon and fight enemies. Whilst this yet again reinforces the stereotype of masculinity as violent, it isn’t surprising that no strong feminine alternatives, such as Kim Possible or Mulan are shown predominately on the girls opening page. Despite the fact more diverse representations of femininity, such as Kim Possible and Mulan are often welcomed, as is pointed many still hold heteronormative and patriarchal values (Gill; 2009, Magaholes; 2005)

Another contradictory discourse would even be the names given to different products on offer. A toy marketed to girls is described as ‘Belle Winter Dress-Up Doll’, whereas the boys is named the “12” Buzz Light Year Action Figure’. Whilst the girl’s toy shows passivity as they are dressed and ultimately defined by their appearance, the boys toy is active, talking and pose-able with gadgets. Perhaps even the price difference
of the toys (£16 for Belle and £20 for Buzz) could be seen to reflect truth about the difference in value of men and women in society.

**Subject Positions and Subjectification**

Whilst the majority of this report has centred on gender and the hierarchies created between men and women, Gender intersects with many different categories, such as class, race and sexuality. Despite Disney having taken steps towards including characters of different ethnicities, such as Mulan and more recently Tiana, the majority of their characters are still predominantly white. Whilst some argue that these representations are much more dynamic (Davis;2006) I maintain that they still represent the same ideology in regards to gender (Magaholes; 2005). Mulan must disguise herself as a man to achieve success, Tiana is transformed through hetero-romantic love and both present an unobtainable beauty. However, this isn’t the only difficult position Disney creates. Class, and particularly poverty, is often presented as something to be escaped from (Aladin, Cinderella and Tiana) and this could be a further site for investigation.

Many of Disney’s characters are also subjectified, and characters often transform in order to gain desirable traits and are applauded for becoming the ‘ideal’. One particular character is the perfect example of how individuals transform; Miley Stewart, a small town girl who (with the help of a blonde wig and lashings of make-up) transforms into a beautiful internationally successful superstar Hannah Montana. Once again, this shows how Disney presents feminine beauty not only as the goal, but an important factor in popularity and success.

Alongside this, female characters portrayed on the website are often transformed through hetero-normative love. As Martin & Kazyak (2009) point out, by empowering women through ‘exceptional, powerful, transformative, and magical’, which not only constructs heterosexuality, but also serves to facilitate the reproduction of heteronormativity. Disney is famous for its portrayal of love prevailing all, and indeed, many of the female characters shown are often magically transformed through their relationships (including Jasmine, Sleeping Beauty and Tiana) and their ability to find a happy ending with a husband, which often brings with it success (Tiana), wealth (Cinderella) and happiness (Hannah Montana). However, this has implication for individuals with other sexual orientations (none of which are shown) and implies the achievement of success, happiness and wealth is only possible for those who conform to heteronormativity (Hook:2001).

**Discourse and Overall Message**

As Koojiman (2001) ascertains, to blame Disney for all western sins is unjustified. Whilst Disney is certainly one of the most influential forms of children’s media, it isn’t the only text which seeks to produce gendered identities (Wasko; 2001). However, I would argue this simply reiterates the importance for the further study of representations of femininity/masculinity (and indeed, other categories such as Race, Class, Ethnicity and disability) shown in other global corporations. Overall, the text demonstrates traditional gender roles for both girls and boys. The use of hetero-romantic love as transformative, and the construction of femininity and girls as beautiful, thin, altruistic, compassionate and submissive versus the construction of
masculinity and boys as strong, brave, violence, active and dominant, not only places limits on individuals behaviour, but constructs the collective knowledge that men and women are fundamentally different, which in turn plays a factor in many current social problems such as eating disorders, homophobia, sexism, domestic violence and other gender inequalities.

However, whilst men and women are constructed differently in many respects, both are encouraged to be empowered through the consumerism. Disney’s texts primarily aim to seduce its viewers to be faithful consumers for their endless products. What is most worrying about Disney’s promotion of its products however, is that when we buy Disney products, we are also buying into the heteronormative values that Disney promotes.

**Reflexivity**

It is fundamental that the author of any discursive approach recognize that they themselves are not outside of the discourses they describe. Not only am I subject to the same ideologies which circulate as discourses and knowledge, but my view are also discursively produced. My own political standpoint is that both men and women should be equal in their social, political and economic rights, and this allows me the advantage of a unique and critical approach in the deconstruction of Disney. Beyond this, I believe individuals should not have limitations imposed on their behaviour simply because they are classified as a man or a woman, and the positive qualities associated with femininity and masculinity should be encouraged in both sexes, as should the negative qualities be discouraged. This would not only break down the distinction between gender roles and radically alter the collective knowledge about masculinity and femininity which circulates in society, but also open new opportunities for men and women in both the public and private spheres. Furthermore, I believe the most effective way to do this is through qualitative methodology such as Discourse Analysis.

Whilst the combination of two methodologies (Foucauldian and Critical) certainly facilitates a wider understanding of gender roles, the constant updating of the website is difficult to analyze. Therefore I suggest that approaches to discourse analysis should tailor their investigation in order to make more focused interpretations of the text. However, the constant updating of the website simply demonstrates further the need for investigation and the constant evolution of methodological tools, and, as Hacking (1999) and Davis (2006) have argued, inquiry such as this can serve to change representations of men and women in society.
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