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Fathering and masculinity in children's animated films: An analysis of top grossing lifetime films released 1989-2017

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Fathering and Masculinity in Children's Animated Films: An Analysis of Top Grossing Lifetime
Films Released 1989-2017

by

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Thesis

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FATHERING AND MASCULINITY IN CHILDREN'S FILMS

Abstract

Understanding gender norms, including norms surrounding parenthood, is one tool acquired during socialization. Film provides an efficient pathway for observational learning to occur in children, especially as they spend more of their time consuming media. Given the importance of the media's role in socializing children and continued research on how children use media to construct their own ideas, it is necessary to analyze messages regarding fatherhood and masculinity that are portrayed to children to better understand how they may use these messages when constructing their own beliefs. To address this gap, this project analyzed a sample of the top lifetime-grossing children's animated films released from 1989 to 2017. This qualitative analysis identifies characteristics that fathers and father-figures in these films display, differences that exist in the way characters are constructed and presented in these films, and the ways these characters are representative of and different from societal stereotypes of fathers.

Keywords: Children's media, socialization, gender identity, masculinity, fatherhood

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The process of socialization is experienced throughout the entire life course whereby people learn how to navigate the social world around them by acquiring and interpreting different beliefs, values, and norms. There are many different agents that contribute to socialization (Bandura, 1971; Corsaro, 2018; Dager, 1971; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Genner & Süs, 2017; Maccoby, 2015; Parsons & Bales, 1955). Traditionally, the most influential have been the family, community and peers, and religion; however, in a society that is increasingly surrounded by technology and communication, the media is becoming a more significant influence on the socialization process at all ages (Bandura, 1971; Corsaro, 2018; Genner & Süs, 2017; Stroman, 1991; Tobin, 2000). Social learning theory suggests that observational learning can influence the development of a person's attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral responses when they are able to observe both the actions of another as well as the consequences of these actions (Bandura, 1971), such as when watching films. Children are spending more time watching television shows and movies as they are more instantly accessible from computers, tablets, and cell phones, and the prevalence of streaming services allows children to consume this media again and again. Children begin interacting with digital forms of media as young as four months of age and are already using two or more forms of media simultaneously by preschool age (Radesky, 2017). This is something that has been amplified with schools and communities moving entirely online to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and then continuing to maintain hybridized remote approaches moving forward.

Gender roles and expectations are one of the many tools acquired during the socialization process, and this includes the norms and expectations that surround parenthood. The construct of fatherhood is one that is deeply intertwined with the construct of masculinity for men in societies

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through the Americas (Pleck, 2010; Schmitz, 2016). Masculinity can be expressed in a number of ways, though there are some specific expressions of masculinity—often referred to as “hegemonic masculinity”—that are typically rewarded in society more often than others (Connell, 1995; Paechter, 2006; Pleck, 2010; Rosen & Nofziger, 2018). Hegemonic masculinity places emphasis on toughness, aggression, and the way people who are typically masculine/male presenting have a societal position of power over and responsibility to provide both financial and physical protection and security for the women and children in their community.

As a societal concept, masculinity is undergoing change, as is the perception of what fathering entails (Banchefsky & Park, 2016; Barclay & Lupton, 1999; Browne, 2013; Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, & Bradley, 2000; Finley & Schwartz, 2006; Shafer, Fielding, & Holmes, 2019; Lewis, 2001; Wall & Arnold, 2007; Watson-Phillips, 2016). One way to better understand both the concepts of fatherhood and masculinity as well as the potential changes that these constructs are experiencing is to analyze the messages regarding these topics sent to and received by society through media over time. It is important to note that gender is much more complex than the binary it is often attached to; though as Coontz (1992) notes, portrayals of gender on television and film often purposefully ignore these complexities in favor of a specific archetype. These archetypes provide a look at hyper-idealized versions of society's stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (Coontz, 1992).

Media is one way in which stereotypes about different identities can be promoted and communicated to people in all different age categories (Corsaro, 2018; Genner & Süß, 2017; Smith, 2008; Stroman, 1991; Tobin, 2000). Messages sent to viewers through the media may not necessarily tell people *how* to think, though they suggest *what* to think about (Tobin, 2000), and media that is marketed toward children is no different. With DVD, Blu-Ray, and streaming

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platforms coming into more households, film is more accessible than ever before and often films are viewed repeatedly (Throop et al., 2014). Messages about a number of different concepts ranging from aspects of identity such as race, age, sexual orientation, and gender are being communicated to children via media that is marketed directly toward them (Corsaro, 2018; Roberts, 2004; Stroman, 1991; Tanner, Haddock, & Zimmerman, 2003; Tobin, 2000; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2008). Tanner et al. (2003) maintained that parents must be aware of the type of “social education” their children are receiving from consumption of media as well as active in discussing these messages with their children in order to understand how their children may or may not be affected by messages they are receiving through media, and the only way to allow for this to occur is to first identify and work to understand the content of media messages to which their children are being exposed.

Cabrera et al. (2000) state that research has not been conducted that describes pathways that boys take to become fathers and to conceptualize fathering, though these processes most likely begin during childhood. Media may be one source that messages about fatherhood and masculine gender role expectations are communicated to children while they are constructing their beliefs and attitudes about fatherhood and what it means to be a man. Johnson (2014) states that socialization happens as a reciprocal process between social systems and the individual, with many different factors at work to help someone develop their self-image, as well as their opinions on the people they interact with in their world. Given the importance of the media's role in socializing children (Bandura, 1971; Corsaro, 2018; Genner & Süß, 2017; Radesky, 2017; Quinn, 2006) and the continued research on the effects that this socialization has on the way children conceptualize roles, social norms, and identities (Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, & Stockdale, 2013; Tanner et al., 2003; Stroman, 1991; Tobin, 2000; Towbin et al., 2008),

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analyzing messages regarding fatherhood and masculinity that are being portrayed to children will provide a better understanding of how children may perceive these messages and use them when constructing their own beliefs about what it means to be a father and what it means to be a man. In order to address this gap, this project analyzed a sample of films selected from the top lifetime-grossing animated films released between 1989 and 2017 that have been marketed toward children and include fathers as main characters through semi-inductive content analysis.

This project asks the following questions:

1. What characteristics do fathers and father-figures display in children's animated films?
2. In what ways are fathers and father-figures in children's animated films representative of or different from societal stereotypes regarding fatherhood?
3. What kinds of differences (cultural, historical, etc.) exist in the way that fathers and father-figures are constructed and presented in children's animated films?

The present research project helps create a more detailed understanding of the different messages being sent to children in regard to fatherhood (and thus, masculinity) through animated films that have been released in the United States between 1989 and 2017, as children viewing these messages may potentially use them as one of the elements that help construct their self-identities, world views in respect to others, and subsequent behaviors.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Socialization and Observational Learning

Socialization is a process of learning and development that spans a person's life course where they learn how to exist within the social world around them by acquiring various necessary tools such as an understanding of social norms and expectations (Bandura, 1971; Dager, 1971; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Miller & Dollard, 1941). Albert Bandura (1971) argued that socialization occurs as people interact with a multitude of institutions with the most influential traditionally being one's family, community, and religion. His research posits that just about anything that can be learned through direct experiences may also be learned vicariously through the observation of both the actions of others as well as the consequences of those actions, before ever being performed by the learner directly. Through observational learning, people learn not only potential actions, but also potential consequences to these actions because they are typically able to also observe the corresponding reactions to this behavior from others. Miller and Dollard (1941) specified the following fundamental elements to imitative learning: the learner must be motivated to act, the learner must be provided with an example of desirable behavior, and the learner must be positively reinforced for modeling the desired behavior. Bandura (1971) expanded upon this with the specific concern of the formation of new response patterns based on the responses of others to establish observational social learning theory.

While Miller and Dollard's (1941) imitative learning requires the learner to imitate behaviors informed by actors in order to learn, Bandura (1971) argued that learners can absorb new behavioral process patterns by solely observing the actors' behaviors as well as the consequences of those behaviors without first imitating the behavior. *Social Learning Theory* (Bandura, 1971) established four subprocesses that allow for observational learning to happen:

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attentional processes, retention processes, motoric reproduction processes, and reinforcement and motivational processes. In order for observational learning to occur, a learner must be motivated to observe modeled activities, and this requires the attention of the learner. One major factor in the attentional processes is association as learners are only able to observe and learn from actors that they are exposed to in some way, and even then, there is not necessarily a guarantee that the observer will interpret the situation accurately. The behaviors that are most commonly experienced are the ones that observers will be able to most readily learn. Actors who possess interesting and attractive traits are most likely to be attended to, and unattractive actors may be outright rejected by the learner (Bandura, 1971). Retention processes are another major aspect of observational learning. An actor's response patterns must still exist in the minds of the learner in some form for there to be any chance of future imitation (Bandura, 1971). When an observer turns visual information into verbal information, a type of coding occurs within the brain that makes long-term retention of the information much more likely. These codes will later serve as a kind of guide for matching responses, or imitating behaviors in the future. In early childhood, imitation happens directly following modeling of behaviors, but in later years it is more common for behaviors to be imitated long after they are modeled. When people mentally rehearse or actively perform previously modeled patterns of behavior, they are less likely to forget these behavior patterns (Bandura, 1971).

Motoric reproduction processes are the third group of subprocesses involved with observational learning. These are the processes where the symbolic information created in the retention processes works as a guide for the learner to act in ways that have been modeled to them previously (Bandura, 1971). For this to happen, the learner has to put all of the pieces of information received when observing the modeled behavior together. In order for all of these

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subprocesses to come together from modeled behavior to continued performance, positive feedback is necessary. The observation of reactions to the behaviors of others is an important component of the learning process because it provides information regarding whether modeled behavior is rewarded or penalized. When a behavior is negatively received by the people who are there to witness it, it is less likely to be repeated (Bandura, 1971). Reinforcement and motivational processes are the fourth fundamental aspect of observational learning and is concerned with the feedback that either rewards or sanctions a behavior. When someone is rewarded for a behavior, they are more likely to express these behaviors again, and this may also influence the way they focus on modeled behavior in the future. This process of vicarious learning allows people to develop a system of self-regulation that somewhat acts to control their behavior (Bandura, 1971).

Beliefs and Expectations in the Context of Gender

One of the most fundamental concepts acquired during socialization is an understanding and comprehension of gender norms and expectations (Bandura, 1971; Eagly & Wood, 2012; Genner & Süß, 2017). These concepts are developed and understood on a cultural basis, and Eagly and Wood (2012) defined gender role beliefs as simply the attribution of observed behaviors to the sex of the actor. Expectations relative to one's gender are internalized and influence a person's gender identity, which in the US is often defined as a person's feeling of belonging to the feminine or masculine sides of the gender binary (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Gender is an aspect of one's identity that can be expressed through behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and one's physical appearance, and it is often aspects of a person's physical body that communicate to society whether or not that person is a masculine or feminine person. West and

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Zimmerman (2009) describe the transformation of masculinity and femininity from being “essential properties” of people to social aspects that occur within systemic relationships.

In their 1987 paper “Doing Gender,” West & Zimmerman explain the relationship between the physical body and the societal expectations of gender as a type of symbolic interactionism, and what results as one’s gender is a performance within this framework. What is considered to be the standard for both femininity and masculinity is often just a hyper-display of an ideal version of how society sees each of these concepts (Goffman, 1976; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As Francis and Paechter (2015) noted, the sexed body has always been a fundamental aspect of the construction of gender and one way that this is visible is in the way that all behaviors expressed by men are considered as falling into the spectrum of masculinity, and all behaviors expressed by women as somewhere in the spectrum of femininity. While this is how gender functions in US society, this is not necessarily true for the entirety of the world. Halgeson (2017) noted that there are many societies with gender beliefs and subsequent expectations that differ from the US, such as in Morocco (Hessini, 1994), Tahiti (Gilmore, 1990), and the Philippines (Estioko-Griffin & Griffin, 2013), emphasizing the normative nature and social construction of gender-specific expectations.

Masculinity does not refer to only one type of male expression, and there are different forms of masculinity within the masculine spectrum. *Hegemonic masculinity* is a term that is used to describe the forms of masculine expressions that have been traditionally venerated over both femininity as well as other forms of masculine expression in society (Paechter, 2006). Rosen and Nofziger (2018) identified behaviors characteristic of hegemonic masculinity including physical dominance, homophobia, hyperheterosexuality, and acceptance of violence. These behaviors are consistent with the variables used in Parent and Moradi’s (2009) Conformity

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to Masculine Norms Inventory scale, or CMNI-46, a 46-item inventory used to assess masculine gender role conformity. Additional characteristic behaviors identified by Parent and Moradi (2009, 2011) as being traditionally masculine were emotional control, primacy of work, risk-taking behavior, playboy behavior, power over women in relationships, self-reliance, and an unwillingness to accept or seek out help. Emotional control in the context of the CMNI-46 assesses the ability to control one's emotion and avoid emotional expressions. Primacy of work is a category of items within the CMNI-46 that assess the belief in work outside of the home as the primary "focus of life" (Parent & Moradi, 2011). Connell (1995) remarked that hegemonic masculinity is the "accepted answer to the problem of the legitimation of patriarchy" (p. 77). Men who are able to conform to the traditionally privileged type of masculinity, for example, through their economic success or physical stature, are typically more likely to be rewarded in society (Rosen & Nofziger, 2018).

In *The Gender Knot*, Johnson (2014) describes the United States as a patriarchal society, and he defines this patriarchy as a social structure where male privilege is promoted through four characteristics: male domination, male identification, male centeredness, and an obsession with control. Male identification is described by Johnson (2014) men being considered the standard or what is effectively "normal" (such as when "man" is used to describe the human race). These standards are often dependent on the presence of a woman/wife to be responsible for the family and home to allow for male successes in the public sphere. Qualities that Johnson (2014) equates male identification to strength, competitiveness, coolness under pressure, forcefulness, logic and rationality, self-sufficiency, and, most importantly, control. A patriarchal society that is male-centered, according to Johnson (2014), is the ways in which a society's attention is always on men and boys and their actions. He notes that movies with male leads often outperform movies

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with female leads regardless of content, and as such, most films are made with male leads. In a patriarchal society, men have to be shown in a way that is “larger than life” (Johnson, 2014, p. 12). Male dominance is present in a patriarchal society, and can be seen in the overwhelming number of men in powerful positions compared to the amount of women in the same positions (Johnson, 2014). When women end up in leadership roles in a patriarchal society, it is considered to be an exception to the rule. Male dominance also means that men’s failures are often times markers of their privileged status (Johnson, 2014), such as failing to participate in household chores or nurturing aspects of parenting in favor of spending more time working outside of the home. This male dominance creates an inherent power differential between men and women in all facets of society that is rooted in control (Johnson, 2014). Obsession with control, the fourth characteristic that Johnson (2014) attributes to a patriarchal society, disconnects men from the other people within society, as it is not only women that men are expected to control, but also other men that may “threaten” the patriarchal society through displays of their gender identity that are not in line with hegemonic masculinity. In a patriarchal society, all men benefit from this system regardless of whether or not they “believe” in it, or actively see themselves as participants, as even the least masculine man is still considered to be more credible in society than any woman (Johnson, 2014).

Hegemonic masculinity is a social construct that allows for men to maintain power and control over women in a patriarchal society such as in the United States, but men who express their masculinity in ways that are not in line with socially dominant masculinity (such as quiet men or men who are not physically aggressive) may also find themselves being penalized at the hands of hegemonic masculinity within this type of society (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Johnson, 2014; Rosen & Nofziger, 2018; Vogel et al., 2011). Connell (1995) argues that other expressions

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of masculinity that are not hegemonic, such as masculine expression for gay men, are often considered to be “subordinate masculinities” in society. One example of an alternate, or subordinate, masculinity is expressed in the domesticity often displayed by fathers. This is a form of heteronormative masculinity that can be considered much less attractive to both potential sexual suitors and children seeking same-gender role models (Meyers, 2012; Paechter, 2006; Pleck, 2010; Tobin, 2000; Wall & Arnold, 2007). Tobin (2000) identified a “middle-class masculinity,” expressed by a father in his clumsiness, deference to his wife and children, and lack of excitement. Tobin (2000) defined this domesticity as middle-class masculinity because for boys growing up in the middle class, it is often an “inescapable” expectation that they will align with this form of hetero-masculinity as they grow older and create their own families.

Men who do not behave in ways that correspond to hegemonic masculine expectations, such as men who are nonaggressive or are emotionally expressive, may be sanctioned by those around them from this deviation from the norm (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Rosen & Nofziger, 2018; Vogel et al., 2011). Johnson (2014) says that we are rarely aware of all of the ways that this happens, and that culture and society shape our sense of reality, and he describes the concept of “paths of least resistance” (p. 30) as the way people come to their behaviors through social systems guiding both their conscious and unconscious choices. Resistance presents itself when behavior warrants sanctions, which, in this context, means when men act in ways that people think are not “male,” social sanctions enacted by other people (as it is the people that make the social systems happen) provide sources of resistance. People often times will pick the behavior that warrants the least amount of backlash through the path of least resistance. Men are, however, very much aware of the social punishments such as rejection that they may receive in return for gender nonconformity, and as such will not deviate away from these desired behaviors (i.e.,

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paths of least resistance) unless they perceive the benefits of deviation to outweigh the potential costs (Eagly & Wood, 2012). For example, hegemonic masculine expectations of men to be stoic and unemotional may exist as a barrier keeping men from feeling comfortable seeking help or counseling services (Vogel et al., 2011).

This social retribution for deviating away from gender norms and expectations is not something that is exclusive only to adults. Rosen and Nofziger (2018) analyzed bullying amongst middle-school-aged boys in the United States and found four main themes: heteronormativity, physical dominance, social location, and acceptance of violence. Heteronormativity as a theme in adolescent bullying emerged through both homophobic displays and assaults on respondent's gender or sexual identities, both real and perceived. Physical dominance emerged through physical violence experienced by respondents as well as threats of violence. Male respondents commonly identified ways in which they were physically bullied by their peers including being "choked," "punched," and/or "kicked" (Rosen & Nofziger, 2018). The concept of acceptance of violence was present in that physically violent behavior was attributed to gender. In other words, the idea that "boys will be boys" was prevalent in their responses. The themes identified by Rosen & Nofziger (2018) are characteristics that are typically valued within the structure of hegemonic masculinity, which indicates that endorsement of hegemonic masculinity, something typically rewarded in society at large, may be influencing the bullying behavior of adolescent males. As Johnson (2014) notes, many times young boys are called "faggots" and "fairies," not because they display traits of being homosexual but instead as a sanction for deviating from what their peers consider to be normal maleness. This is done in an attempt to control behaviors that may threaten the societal reality of the bullying peers.

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With regard to gender and behavior, observers tend to minimize individual differences by explaining behavior as due to inherent sex and gender differences. Inevitably, these beliefs evolve into consensually shared gender stereotypes present within a society that are learned via the process of socialization (Eagly & Wood, 2012). When society in the Western world transitioned into an industrial powerhouse, it was men who were expected to go outside of the home to find jobs in order to secure better financial futures for their families, and women were expected to stay home to care for and nurture the children. In this way, the division of labor in US society has always had gender at its foundation. This division of labor in the public sphere is partially responsible for the set of normative, traditional expectations typically ascribed to men and women in the home as well (Lewis, 2001). In Parsons and Bales's (1955) analysis of female and male gender role expectations, the division of labor between husbands and wives both in the job market as well as at home was explained in the terms of men being proficient at more instrumental behaviors and women as being proficient at more expressive and emotional behaviors.

Toxic masculinity is a phrase that is used to describe attitudes and behaviors that fall on the furthest hegemonically rewarded side of the masculine spectrum. People who subscribe to the concepts of toxic masculinity believe that anything deviating away from hegemonic masculinity is explicitly feminine and exists as a threat to masculine identities. Toxic masculinity is something that has become a bit of a buzzword in the last 10 years or so because of things like Gamer Gate (Gray et al., 2017) appearing in the mainstream media, but there are genuinely people in our society who believe that liking a song by a female artist makes you less of a man, or having good hygiene means you are less masculine, and these types of beliefs and identities stemming from them cause harm to men.

Defining Fatherhood: Fathering

Fatherhood is often defined based upon the shared DNA between a man and a child who is the result of his coupling with a woman, though this definition excludes the experiences of men who have become fathers through other avenues such as legal adoption, assisted reproductive technologies (ART), or those who feel as though they have taken on the role of father for people that are not biologically related to them (social fathers). Fatherhood is also commonly defined in terms of how involved a father is with their families and what that involvement looks like, sometimes referred to as “fathering” (Barclay & Lupton, 1997,1999; Fletcher & George, 2011; Pleck, 2010; Wall & Arnold, 2007; Watson-Phillips, 2016). This definition of fatherhood allows for the inclusion of people who have become fathers in nontraditional ways such as ART or social fathers. There is significant overlap in the qualities that are considered representative of “good” fathering and qualities that are considered in line with hegemonic masculine expression such as the abilities to provide financial, informational, and instrumental support for their dependents (Barclay & Lupton, 1999; Connell, 1995; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Pleck, 2010; Solomon, 2014; Williams, 2008). The status of being a father for many becomes a major aspect of their identity that comes with specific role expectations. Hofferth (2003) and Barclay and Lupton (1999) both maintained that it is not uncommon for fathers to feel detached from aspects of fathering such as managing the child’s welfare, providing emotional support, and other forms of expressive parenting when they are the primary source of financial security for their family. Over time, society’s conceptualizations and beliefs regarding what fatherhood means and what fathering should look like have changed to some degree, though they have remained largely consistent (Adams et al., 2011; Banchevsky & Park, 2016; Cabrera et al., 2000; Finley & Schwartz, 2006; Lewis, 2001; Pleck & Pleck, 1997; Pleck, 2010).

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Traditional Fathering

One of the most conventionally fundamental aspects of fatherhood in the US has been the ability to financially provide for one's dependents (Banchefsky & Park, 2016; Cabrera et al., 2000; Lewis, 2001; Parent & Moradi, 2009; Pleck, 2010; Schmitz, 2016). While there are many explanations as to how this expectation has come about, one of the most common is the division of labor that emerged during the industrial revolution. As society in the US transformed into an industrial economy where work was taking place outside of the home as opposed to within the family, farms, and shops, it was men who were expected to take these jobs while responsibilities in the home were left up to the women (Lewis, 2001). Because men were not in the home as often as their female partners due to the nature of their new jobs, they were not expected to tend to the nurturing aspects of childrearing. A consequence of this division of labor has been the stereotyping of fathers as solely the "breadwinner" of the family, responsible for making sure that the bills are paid and the economic needs of the family have been met, but not necessarily involved in the nurturing aspects of family life (Barclay & Lupton, 1999; Cabrera et al., 2000; Lewis, 2001). This is one of the major components of what is considered to be the "traditional" view of fatherhood. Pleck (2010) indicated that it is a common occurrence following the birth of a child for fathers to increase participation in the labor force while mothers decrease theirs. Fathers with traditional views on gender roles who are experiencing unemployment may not only feel like failures in regard to their identity as fathers, but in regard to their masculine identity as a whole (Pleck, 2010; Strier, 2014).

Aside from the expectation to financially provide for their families, another traditionally central role expectation of the father that has remained consistent over time has been to provide instrumental and informational support for their dependents (Cabrera et al., 2000; Finley &

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Schwartz, 2006; Hofferth, 2003; Parsons & Bales, 1955; Pleck, 2010; Schmitz, 2016; Shafer et al., 2018; Quinn, 2006). Informational support has been defined as providing knowledge and skills that are relevant to problem-solving, such as feedback on actions or advice for future situations (Ko et al., 2013). House (1981) defined instrumental support as providing resources such as material items or money and emotional support as providing feelings of trust and love. Finley and Schwartz (2006) discussed similar paradigms in expressive involvement and instrumental involvement. Their research characterizes expressive involvement by caregiving, sharing activities, companionship, social development, emotional development, physical development, spiritual development, and leisure, as well as instrumental involvement by discipline, protection, financial support, keeping up with school work, moral development, ethical development, responsibility development, career development, and learning independence (Finley & Schwartz, 2006). In a series of semistructured interviews, Barclay and Lupton (1999) assessed how a sample of first time fathers adjusted to the change in their status and identity in relation to fatherhood during the five-to-six month period following the birth of their firstborn child. They found that in order to become skillful at nurturing behaviors and caring for their children, fathers must be able to invest both the time and the energy in order to familiarize themselves with the needs and responses of their children.

Progressive Fathering

The meaning of fatherhood and how it is viewed in society is not necessarily concrete. Where fatherhood has traditionally been defined by emotional distance and financial provision, progressive fatherhood is defined by comforting, nurturing, and bonding with one's child through time spent together. Barclay and Lupton (1999) showed that fathers often emphasized the importance of bonding with their child and "being there" when discussing what made

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someone a “good” father; though when asked to define what this means, they most commonly reported activities such as fishing and team sports as opposed to feeding their infant or cooking with their child.

One way fathers have traditionally been expected to provide for their children with informational support is through the role of disciplinarian (Cabrera et al., 2000; Finley & Schwartz, 2006; Parsons & Bales, 1955; Wall & Arnold, 2007), though some research indicates that this may be changing over time (Adkinson-Johnson et al., 2016; Hallers-Haalboom et al., 2015). When observed in parent-child dyads, Hallers-Haalboom et al. (2016) found that mothers were more likely to discipline their child than fathers. Mothers used distraction, commands, and physical discipline in response to non-compliance from their child more often than fathers. Hallers-Haalboom et al. (2016) found that a child's time spent with fathers was more commonly centered around play activities, which is one stereotypical aspect of progressive fathering. Adkinson-Johnson et al. (2016) found that in African American families, mothers and fathers differed in the ways that they provided their children with discipline, with mothers more commonly using intense discipline compared to fathers. Fathers were more likely to use less intense discipline models such as discussing behavior with their children than African American mothers, but Adkinson-Johnson et al. (2016) suggested that this may be a result of mothers needing to intensify discipline to represent the same level of authority over children as fathers.

Wall and Arnold (2007) discussed the idea that child-care duties for fathers have traditionally been expected to fit around the financial responsibilities. Because of this, men have been considered to be acting in a way that is supportive toward their partners when they take on more child-rearing in order to “allow” for their partners to pursue goals outside of the family, where mothers are rarely considered “supportive” for doing the same. Stay-at-home fathers have

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reported experiencing significant amounts of positive commentary from the members of their family members, friends, and members of their communities for taking on the role of primary caregiver for their children (Solomon, 2014). Stay-at-home fathers have reported feeling emotional closeness with their children and of being the most important caregiver in their child's life. Stay-at-home fathers have also emphasized the importance of physical affection and shared activities in their relationships with their children regardless of their child's age (Solomon, 2014).

Reconciling Masculine Expectations with Fatherhood

Fatherhood is an aspect of one's identity that is deeply intertwined with the construct of masculinity in US society (Banchefsky & Park, 2016; Cabrera et al., 2000; Hofferth, 2003; Pleck, 2010; Schmitz, 2016; Shafer et al., 2018; Tobin, 2000) despite the fact that there are aspects of fathering that sometimes seem to compete with masculine social expectations. Hofferth (2003) noted that the traditional gender-role theory standpoint informs parenting roles: that when people become mothers and fathers, their beliefs and values regarding gender role expectations will often dictate how much time they spend parenting and what their parenting looks like. Fathers may be expected to either fit their fathering into their preexisting ideas of masculinity by avoiding behaviors that they feel are not masculine such as physical affection with their child or alter their conceptualizations of masculinity in order to allow for these behaviors to align with their masculine identities. Hofferth's (2003) findings suggested that fathers who endorse traditional beliefs regarding gender and marriage are less likely to be actively involved in parenting their children than fathers who have more progressive or dynamic beliefs about gender and marriage (Hofferth, 2003). Shafer et al. (2018) indicated that men with a strong adherence to hegemonic masculine norms also tend to shy away from nurturing aspects

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of parenting behaviors such as engagement, positive control, emotional support, and warmth as they are incompatible with these norms. Petts et al., (2018) found that highly hegemonically masculine men are more likely to utilize spanking and yelling as discipline than less hegemonically masculine men.

According to Barclay and Lupton (1999), many first time fathers can feel as though they are being “left out” of the parenting in the early stages of their children’s lives. First time fathers may feel as though they do not have a place in early childhood, where children are most commonly in need of emotional support as opposed to informational or instrumental support, and report the belief that their parenting experiences will happen later in the child’s life, for example, when their children are able to play and be coached in sports (Barclay & Lupton, 1999). Coaching provides one way that fathers are able to provide informational support to their children at a young age. Banchevsky and Park (2016) mentioned that as more dynamic and progressive views of fatherhood emerge in the media and in academic research, men may feel greater sociocultural pressure to conform to these new expectations by participating in caregiving and nurturing activities with their children more often than they have before.

Though Banchevsky and Park (2015) discussed dynamic stereotypes of fathers, their research does not indicate that this is a result of men deviating from masculine definitions of fatherhood, but instead that what is considered to be representative of masculinity in society may be more flexible than in the past. Pleck (2010) suggested that there is a reciprocally influential relationship between the status and experience of fathering and men’s conceptualization of what it means to be masculine. Respondents in another study (Williams, 2008) remarked that fathers of today desire to be more involved with their children than fathers of the past, with the example of an old comic strip model of a father waiting in the waiting room while his wife is in labor with

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their child. Moving past the traditional model of fatherhood into a relationship characterized by more physical presence and close emotional bonds was a desire expressed by fathers in the interviews as well (Williams, 2008).

Media Socialization

As technology has become more intertwined in American life, media has evolved into a significantly influential agent of socialization for people of all ages (Bandura, 1971; Genner & Süss, 2017; Stroman, 1991). Television viewing on a regular basis was reported as beginning around age four in 1970, though today children are reported as regularly interacting with digital media as young as four months old (Radesky, 2017). In 2015, it was reported that most children used mobile devices daily at age two and had used mobile devices at least once at age one (Radesky, 2017). In *Social Learning Theory*, Bandura (1971) suggested that both adults and children can be influenced in their attitudes, emotions, beliefs, and behaviors via observational learning from media such as film and television in addition to observing social actors in person. Further, as media becomes a bigger part of the life of children, traditional role models may be less influential in the process of socialization (Bandura, 1971). However, media influence and traditional socialization influences are not mutually exclusive, and there is research to suggest that there are things that parents can do to act as mediators in the relationship between media exposure and behavioral outcomes with their children (Chen & Shi, 2019; Collier et al., 2016; Dalton et al., 2006; Kirwil, 2009; Ndolo, 1989).

Genner and Süss (2017) contended that children create their worldview and construct their social and cultural understandings through different interactions with agents of socialization, including media. Primary media socialization, as defined by Genner and Süss (2017), occurs when young children consume content via television, video, internet, and other

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media which communicate messages about the social and cultural world around them. There are three types of effects that media can have on the socialization process that have emerged in existing media socialization research identified by Genner and Süß (2017): potential for learning, cultivation of worldview and values, and long-term implications for behavior. The present study is most interested in two of these effects: cultivation of worldview, and values and long-term implications for behavior.

Cultivation of Worldview and Values

Stereotypes about different gender, racial, class, and ethnic identities are communicated to children through the media that they consume. By seeing people of different cultures and identities in the media, children are able to develop conceptualizations about what it means to belong to different identity groups even if they do not interact with diverse populations in their own lives (Roberts, 2004; Stroman, 1991; Tobin, 2000). Tobin (2000) suggested that when children are only able to use television and film to construct their understandings of what other races and cultures are like, it is likely that they will pick up on stereotypical representations of these diverse populations and apply them to members that they encounter in the future. Specifically, Roberts (2004) indicated that when children are presented with messages affirming Black identity and diverse family and cultural experiences, they may have an opportunity to learn about a culture or family structure that is different from their own or feel a sense of pride and identification in seeing their own nontraditional experiences celebrated on television. Roberts (2004) looked at two examples of children's television programming in order to consider the effects that these shows' messages regarding Black characters may have on children receiving those messages. In analyzing episodes of two popular children's television programs, she found two contrasting types of Black representation. With regard to one episode of the

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television show *Sesame Street*, Black children were portrayed in an affirming and realistic manner where they were celebrated for “fixing” their hair in the bathroom mirror, alongside other diverse portrayals of children doing the same. Roberts (2004) compared this type of affirming representation with the depiction of a Black character in *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* where the yellow ranger, a Black man, is not able to make decisions for himself and defers to the white ranger, a White man, to act as his savior. Stroman (1991) expressed concern that television may provide poor examples of role models for Black children that could have negative effects on their behavior and attitudes.

Tobin (2000) conducted focus groups comprised of 162 children ages 6-12 years old who were shown clips from two television commercials and clips from two popular movies in order to determine how the children interpreted different messages being sent to them through media. A unique theme in the results Tobin (2000) found was that stereotypical portrayals of gender, race, and class identities were not only grasped by viewing children but were commonly ascribed to the binary of “goodness” and “badness” and used to determine whether or not people were “good guys” or “bad guys” (Tobin, 2000). Other studies of children and media have not necessarily assessed how children conceptualize “good” or “bad” guys. Children identified “good guys” by their well-kept clothes, faces, and houses as well as their belonging to a family, compared to the “bad guys” who they perceived as the characters who did not have wives or children, were nomadic in nature, had non-White physical appearances, and attacked without provocation. Villainous men were often characterized by effeminate characteristics such as earrings or makeup (Tobin, 2000), conveying an association between “badness” and deviations from typical masculine expectations.

Media Content

Wilson et al. (2002) sought to investigate the nature and extent of violence portrayed in a sample of television shows marketed towards children ages 12 and under ($N = 2,757$) and found that television media targeting young children often portrayed more violence than programming targeted toward older audiences. According to their research, a child watching television for one typical hour will encounter an act of violence once every four minutes. Violence was most commonly committed by male characters, and they were rarely criticized by others nor remorseful for their violent behaviors. About 40% of perpetrators of violence were characters who could be seen as attractive role models by viewers, and 33% of their violence was justified in the contexts of the programs. Violence in children's television programs was glamorized and minimized in the sense that harmful behaviors were not followed by realistic consequences. Further, the perpetrators of violence in children's shows were often rewarded with material goods or praise following these acts (Wilson et al., 2002), which may communicate to child viewers that these behaviors will be rewarded in the real world as well.

In a similar study, Padilla-Walker et al. (2013) conducted a content analysis with the focus of prosocial behavior in Disney animated full-length films and found that prosocial behavior happened approximately once every minute. Actors of prosocial behavior were most often directing these behaviors toward friends and characters most similar to themselves, and rarely occurred in combination with aggression. Male characters performing prosocial behaviors were more likely to have public motivations, while female characters were more likely to be emotionally motivated, though there was no significant difference between genders in the amount of prosocial behavior displayed in the films (Padilla-Walker et al., 2013). Unattractive characters were reported as less likely to perform prosocial behaviors than their attractive

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counterparts as well as less likely to be on the receiving end of prosocial behavior. When unattractive characters did receive prosocial behavior, it was most commonly performed by another unattractive character (Padilla-Walker et al., 2013).

Media Exposure and Subsequent Behavior

Gentile et al. (2011) found that children who consumed violent media more often early in the school year were more likely to be verbally and physically aggressive later in the school year. Higher levels of violent media consumption also predicted higher levels of relational aggression and lower levels of prosocial behaviors in children (Gentile et al., 2011). Dillon and Bushman (2017) conducted an experiment to determine whether or not exposure to gun violence in a film clip would affect the reactions of children between 8 and 12 years old upon finding a handgun in a cabinet drawer when playing in a room with a familiar peer. Children who had viewed the gun violence clip were 280 times more likely on average to activate the trigger than children who viewed the film clip that did not have gun violence (Dillon & Bushman, 2017). Additionally, children who viewed the film clip with gun violence held the gun nearly 5 times as long as children who viewed the film clip without gun violence, suggesting exposure to the film clip with gun violence influenced the children's willingness and comfortability around handling the firearm.

A longitudinal study looking at media exposure, aggression, and prosocial behavior in a cohort of preschool-aged children conducted by Ostrov et al. (2006) found that media exposure could predict future incidents of physical aggression for boys and relational aggression for girls in school. Their research showed that violent media exposure was associated with higher levels of later verbal, physical, and relational aggression while violent media exposure was only associated with higher levels of later verbal aggression in girls (Ostrov et al., 2006). These

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gendered differences support the idea that boys and girls may be retaining different information from the media that they consume in regard to behavior. O'Hara et al. (2013) found that adolescent boys who were exposed to more alcohol use in films initiated heavy episodic drinking as well as sexual intercourse more often than adolescents with low exposure to alcohol consumption in films. Exposure to sexual content in films was shown to significantly affect adolescent males' future risky sexual behaviors and higher levels of alcohol consumption (O'Hara et al., 2013).

Implications for Long-Term Behavior. There is considerable research on the topic of media exposure and corresponding behavior in children, with a strong emphasis on risky and unsafe or unhealthy behaviors. When looking at media exposure as it relates to a child's behavior, it is important to consider both how much time the child spends consuming media as well as the types of media and messages being consumed (Cliff et al., 2018; Dillion & Bushman, 2017; Dalton et al., 2006; Gentile, Coyne, & Walsh, 2011; O'Hara et al., 2013; Ostrov, Gentile, & Crick, 2006; Rosen & Nofziger, 2018; Wilson et al., 2002). While media can be influential in a child's socialization, parental involvement has been shown to mediate some of the negative effects of these relationships (Chen & Shi, 2018; Collier et al., 2016; Dalton et al., 2006; Kirwil, 2009; Ndolo, 1989).

Parental Mediation

While media exposure may have influence on action and behavior, parental involvement has been shown to reduce some of the negative effects of media exposure (Chen & Shi, 2018; Collier et al., 2016; Dalton et al., 2006; Kirwil, 2009; Ndolo, 1989). In meta-analyses of 57 studies focusing on time spent consuming media, aggression, substance use, sexual behavior, and parental mediation, Collier et al. (2016) observed significantly lower levels of aggression, sexual

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behavior, and substance use when parents set restrictions on media time and content, as well as when they co-view media with their children. Similarly, Chen and Shi (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 52 studies in order to review the potential mediating effects of parental involvement in the relationships between media exposure and media-related risks such as violence and aggression. Their results indicate that restrictive mediation in the form of rules and guidelines that limit time spent consuming media had stronger effects on the amount of time children spent using media than active mediation strategies such as discussing media content.

Conversely, active mediation in the form of parent/child discussions and co-viewing were more effective than restrictions in mediating potential media-related risks. The authors suggest that these discussions may help children develop critical thinking and media literacy skills (Chen & Shi, 2018; Kirwil, 2009). Dalton et al. (2006) asked children aged 9-12 years whether or not they were allowed by their parents to watch R-rated films, as well as their attitudes and experiences in regard to smoking or drinking. Their results indicate that even when non-media parental monitoring variables are controlled for, children whose parents prohibited them from viewing R-rated films were at a lower risk of both smoking and drinking (Dalton, et al., 2006).

Fatherhood in the Media

Fatherhood is presented as major aspect of men's identities in many different forms of media. Messages about fatherhood appear via television (Caesar, 2008; Carter, 2010; Coontz, 1992, Smith, 2008), advertising (Tsai, 2010), online forums (Fletcher & George, 2011), films (Tobin, 2002) and rap music (Oware, 2011), amongst others. Coontz (1992) notes that media portrayals of fathers as overly present and involved in the post-war era were often misleading and ignored social realities in favor of a societal ideal "normal family." One way that this can be seen is in the expectation of men as a whole to be husbands and fathers, with single men and men

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without children being portrayed as immature and deviant, despite the fact that fathers in real-life working- and middle-class families were often not directly involved with home life to the degree portrayed on television sitcoms (Coontz, 1992). Wall and Arnold (2007) analyzed the discourse surrounding fathering within a Canadian newspaper series titled *Family Matters*. Their research found that a level of discomfort exists for some fathers when it comes to nurturing aspects of child-rearing because caring in this way is so strongly associated with femininity and does not necessarily fit into the hegemonic construction of masculinity. Similarly, fatherhood was closely tied to feelings of emasculation for men in Schmitz's (2016) content analysis, which analyzed a sample of 50 articles published between 2007 and 2011 in popular US parenting magazines. One article was quoted as saying there is a time in "every new father's life when he realizes he's not fully a man anymore" (Johnson, 2007, p. 17). These findings support the idea that fatherhood and the domestic masculinity that it is often equated with is something that exists outside of hegemonic, stereotypical masculinity. It also represents an incongruity between childcare and manhood.

Despite using the term "parents" to describe the targeted demographic of readers, the content of the articles in *Family Matters* was primarily related to mothering. According to Wall and Arnold (2007), fathers were mentioned and pictured less often than mothers in the articles comprising this series and fathers who were primarily responsible for childrearing are looked upon as exceptional. Most often, fathers were pictured in the company of mothers, and never as alone nor in the company of other fathers. Further, when fathers were mentioned in the articles, it was most commonly in the context of being described by mothers or reporters as opposed to their own accounts and they were mentioned more often as part of the background rather than as primary subjects (Wall & Arnold, 2007). This suggests that fathers are often portrayed as

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“secondary” parents who help out as opposed to members of the parental dyad who are equally responsible for their child(ren). Coontz (1992) notes that media portrayals of fathers as overly present and involved in the post-war era were often misleading and ignored social realities in favor of a societal ideal. One way that this can be seen is in the expectation of men as a whole to be husbands and fathers, with single men and men without children being portrayed as immature and deviant (Coontz, 1992).

Schmitz (2016) found that fathering was constantly being compared and contrasted with mothering in parenting articles as if mothering exists as the gold standard of parenting. Fathers were often portrayed as stupid or in need of a mother's help to provide childcare. Further, they were often mentioned as “auxiliary” or otherwise underrepresented as equally responsible for parenting in parenting magazines. The majority of the articles analyzed in her research emphasized men's masculine identities when discussing elements of fatherhood. Men's status as the breadwinner for their family was present in 20% of the articles studied, and Schmitz (2016) argues that by emphasizing this quality, fathers are at a disadvantage when it comes to relating to and emotionally connecting with their children. Her findings support the notion that fathers are typically held more responsible for providing their dependents with instrumental support, as opposed to emotional support. Fathers who stay at home to care for their children while their partners take care of the financial responsibilities are often framed as existing outside of the stereotypical conceptualization of masculine fathers due to their lack of breadwinning status in the home and these men are often expected to express their masculine identity in clear ways to avoid losing their masculine status (Schmitz, 2016). Similarly, a common theme in Wall and Arnold's (2007) data was the accompaniment of traditionally masculine characteristics of fathers with stories of their warm and nurturing childrearing, indicative of fathers' reconciliation of

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fathering expectations with masculine norms. Often this means highlighting a father's breadwinning status alongside their caring abilities or fathers being pictured as roughhousing with children or coaching their child in sports (Wall & Arnold, 2007).

Smith (2008) analyzed representations of Black fatherhood in two reality television shows. She found that the fathers with a high level of status in their careers were able to spend a significant amount of time at home without any negative impact on their masculine identities. In this way, any loss of masculine identity due to the amount of at-home involvement that the fathers have is neutralized by the extraordinary amount of breadwinning status achieved by the fathers. Smith (2008) found that both shows presented Black fathers in a light that is different from stereotypical portrayals due to their presence in the home, and this validates the Black father's involvement in the family. All of the fathers analyzed in this study emphasized the importance of education, a form of both instrumental and informational support. For example, the father Joseph Simmons in *Run's House* is portrayed as a strict disciplinarian who swiftly and harshly corrects his children when he disagrees with their behavior, but always has a strong teaching message behind his punishments. Emphasis on education as well as discipline represents two ways in which these fathers are able to be positive role models for their children through informational support, even in the context of being able to teach from their mistakes (Smith, 2008). Smith's (2008) findings also support Wall and Arnold's (2007) identification of the role expectation of disciplinarian that exists for fathers.

Masculinity and Fathering in Children's Media

There is limited existing research on the relationship between children's media and constructs of fatherhood and masculinity. Prior research regarding representations and characterizations of fatherhood has primarily looked at media that is marketed toward a majority

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adult demographic (Åsenhed et al., 2013; Caesar, 2008; Carter, 2010; Fletcher & George, 2011; Schmitz, 2016; Smith, 2008; Tsai, 2010; Oware, 2011) and analyses conducted on these constructs in children's media are often Disney-specific (Padilla-Walker et al., 2013; Rojek, 1993; Tanner et al., 2003; Towbin et al., 2008).

Masculinity

Towbin and colleagues (2008) established major themes that emerged in regard to what it means to be a boy/man in Disney feature length films. According to their research, when confronted with an emotional situation, men and boys were more likely to respond with physical and often violent reactions as opposed to utilizing words (Towbin et al., 2008). One exemption from this was the film *Aladdin* (1992), where Aladdin uses his humor and quick thinking to thwart Jafar as opposed to physical violence. Men portrayed in these films were unable to control their sexuality both in terms of aggression and numerous pursuit, were naturally strong and heroic, and did not typically do domestic work (Towbin et al., 2008). Men and boys in the films were "portrayed to be rescuers who save the day" (Towbin et al., 2008, p. 29) and often were depicted as saving women who were incapable of helping themselves. Responses from children in Tobin's focus groups (2004) when asked how to distinguish "good guys" from "bad guys" echo the importance of the ability to defend others, especially girls, from attacks in the characterization of "good guys." These qualities and behaviors are consistent with hegemonic masculinity and their presence indicates that messages perpetuating this specific form of masculinity exist in children's films.

While portrayals of hegemonic masculinity are looked at as fun or exciting, other forms of masculinity are not necessarily perceived the same way by viewers. Meyers (2012) analyzed four top-rated television shows that were popular amongst 5-11 year olds and described several

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non-hegemonic portrayals of masculine characters present in these television shows. While the high number of non-hegemonically masculine male characters (88% of characters studied) could be indicative of a change in masculine portrayals and societal ideas, more often than not these characters served to reaffirm hegemonic masculine standards by existing as the butt of the joke or commonly seeking affirmation explicitly from male characters who are more in line with hegemonic masculinity (Meyers, 2012). One non-hegemonic form of masculinity identified by Tobin (2000) is “domestic” masculinity. Domestic masculinity is present in many of the “good guy” characters identified by children and exists as a negotiation between domesticity and masculinity. In order to better illustrate this type of masculinity, Tobin (2000) described the father character in *Swiss Family Robinson*. This character is described as brave and strong, though in his necessity to live amongst his family, he has become oversocialized and desexualized. He does not display any kind of motivation, nor does he exhibit the daring behaviors displayed by his sons, who serve as more attractive models of masculinity despite the middle-class masculinity that will await them later in life.

These non-hegemonically masculine characters were interpreted as being gentle, emotional, and noncompetitive. Meyers (2012) described them as “heterosexual failures” (p.132) compared to the hyperheterosexual portrayals of masculinity they were regularly shown. An example of hyperheterosexuality is in Zack, an adolescent male character on the television show *Suite Life of Zack and Cody*. He is a twin brother to Cody and exhibits predatory sexual behaviors, even discussing his courting strategies in the language of a lion hunting gazelles. His successes with girls position him at the top of the hierarchy of masculinity, and boys falling outside of this construction remarked at how much they could learn from Zack (Meyers, 2012). An adult male character in *Suite Life of Zack and Cody* is mentioned to be small in size, which is

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meant to mark his failure to meet a hegemonic masculine body standard, and as such is teased by Zack. Other traits identified by Meyers (2012) as non-hegemonic revolved around intelligence, lack of athletic ability, and obedience.

Fathering

As Wall and Arnold (2007) noted, fathers are often otherized in the context of parenting and the expectation of childcare falls onto the mother. A content analysis of 26 feature-length Disney animated films conducted by Tanner et al. (2003) analyzed the messages sent from these films to young viewers regarding couples and families. Eleven of the films had representations of both father and mother characters, and out of these, four of the films showed fathers as marginalized from the family while the mothers were shown to be central to the family unit. This study found that within the films that were representative of single-parent households (10), there were more portrayals of single fatherhood than single motherhood, and over half of the films that portrayed single fatherhood had been released in the 13 years preceding publication (Tanner et al., 2003). Similarly, Quinn (2006) conducted a content analysis of Caldecott Award winning picture books released between 1938 and 2002 in order to gain a better understanding of how fathers and fathering has been represented in such books. Her findings indicate that the books published during the late 1980's illustrated a higher number of instances where fathers interacted with their children, and the number of books with fathers as the only parent increased as well. However, her study also indicates that upswings in the representation of interactive fathers have historically been followed by periods where they are low (Quinn, 2006).

When considering how messages about fatherhood are being presented in children's media, the presence of fathers in the media itself is one aspect of interest; however, the content of time spent fathering is equally important. In Quinn's (2006) findings, fathers were more likely

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to give verbal affection, to teach children skills, and to play with children than mothers. As a whole, fathers were represented as being less interactive with their children than mothers. In an analysis of the representation of parenting in best-selling pre-school children's picture books in the United Kingdom in 2008, Adams et al. (2011) found that mothers were significantly more likely to appear or be mentioned by children or by the narrator than fathers. Beyond that, portrayals of mothers touching and nurturing their children were significantly more prevalent than ones of fathers in the same contexts, and mothers were significantly more likely to express both positive and negative emotions (Adams et al., 2011). In another analysis of children's picture books, DeWitt et al. (2013) found that mothers outperformed fathers in nurturing and caregiving activities, while fathers outperformed mothers in companion behaviors such as physical play and taking the child on recreational outings and providing behaviors such as working outside of the home.

Chapter 3: Methods

Sample

The sample for this study is comprised of nine top lifetime-grossing animated films released between 1989 and 2017 that have been primarily marketed toward children selected through a stratified random sampling method, and the addition of *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989) for a 10th film. A list of top lifetime-grossing animated feature length films in this time period was sourced from Box Office Mojo, an Internet Movie Database (IMDb) company.¹ The top 100 movies were selected and represented a range of years from 1989 to 2019, sans re-releases of movies previously released before 1980. For the initial list of movies to analyze, Wikipedia and IMDb were used to review the plot/synopsis and the character list of each movie in order to determine whether they fit the following criteria: the film had at least one father mentioned in the character list, specifically indicating a paternal relationship (characters listed as “so-and-so’s father” or “so-and-so’s adoptive father), or the synopsis used the word “parents” where one or more was a male presenting character. The films that met these criteria are listed in Table A1.

From this list, a random sample of nine films were selected, and it was decided that *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989) would be included as the 10th film. As the oldest film on this top grossing list, it was important to include *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989) in our sample so as not to lose the potential historical context present in the film and ability to look at four decades of popular children’s animation. The final list of films analyzed and coded for this study can be found in Table 2.

¹ For the comprehensive movie list, see <https://www.boxofficemojo.com/genres/chart/?id=animation.htm&sort=gross&order=DESC&p=.htm>

Data Analysis

In order to analyze messages regarding fatherhood and masculinity, I have conducted a content analysis of top grossing (lifetime) children's animated films. This project primarily utilized a methodology informed by inductive qualitative content analysis, as this topic currently lacks a strong body of established research. Content analysis is a technique that allows researchers to derive and interpret meaning from messages (Cavanagh, 1997; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Thomas, 2006; Neuendorf, 2002). While messages are generally collected and analyzed through quantitative measures in order to establish patterns and systemic characteristics, the methodology can also be applied in more qualitative directions. Inductive qualitative content analysis uses the data analysis process to generate categories of codes that correspond to phenomena present in the data (Cavanagh, 1997; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Neuendorf, 2002). This is different from deductive analysis in that the codes are not based upon previously established theory, which allows this approach to be beneficial in situations where there is not an extensive body of existing research, such as in the present study. Thomas (2006) explained that inductive qualitative analysis is an advantageous approach to use when a researcher does not want to be limited by anticipated outcomes but instead wants to be able to describe the full contents of what is being analyzed, which is true in this study.

Thomas (2006) described some of the analytic strategies relevant in an inductive approach including the development of categories from the data that fit into preestablished models and frameworks, and analysis through open coding that allows for the creation of categories that do not necessarily fit into these structures. While this method allowed me to look at aspects of stereotypical fathering behaviors that have been outlined (instrumental or

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informational support, expressive, masculine physical qualities, etc.), I was also able to pick up on qualities and characteristics present in male-presented characters that do not necessarily correspond with these established frameworks. In an inductive qualitative content analysis of film, data is gathered by watching the films in the sample with a main, overall concept in mind, and utilizing a system of open coding. Elo and Kyngäs (2008) defined open coding as the process of writing down notes, headings, and any potential codes as characters appear and events occur in the films in order to describe all of what is present in the content. When data is analyzed in open coding, it creates a foundation to generate further knowledge on a topic and increase understanding of a given phenomenon (Cavanagh, 1997). This is the process that I have used to look at each of the 10 films in my sample individually to first identify the male-presented characters, what makes them up physically and personally, relationships with others and how they interact, and any other notable interactions or moments they have had with other characters in their films.

In the present study, each film established through the earlier selection process had first been viewed to determine the level to which father characters are present and active in the film as well as to get an initial idea of how many characters of interest are present and active in each film. A second viewing was necessary in order for detailed descriptions of each character of interest as well as their interactions to be first recorded and later to be coded. These descriptions have been coded so that traits and behaviors were recognized in categorical development of thematic codes. Additional viewings on a slower play speed with paper versions of each movie script and frequent pauses was then conducted for each film to ensure each film's characters had been coded with rich descriptions of their physical attributes and personality characteristics. Thomas (2006) identified five key features of categories derived from coding: category label,

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category description, data associated with the category, links to other categories, and the type of model that the category fits into. By categorizing the present codes, the data is organized in a simplified manner, as similar concepts are collapsed into broader ideas from which patterns have been established. This has made it easier to analyze the data as well as discuss the findings from each film and how they relate to each other in both historical and contextual content.

Content Coding

This study seeks to describe and analyze the messages being sent to children through popular animated films regarding what it means to be a father, and what it means to be a man. The present research investigated portrayals of men and fathers in animated children's films by transcribing detailed descriptions of the male-presenting adult characters and the interactions that they have with other characters in the films. This data was coded in order to gain a better understanding of how these representations fit into or deviate from stereotypical traits and characterizations of men and fathers in society. By coding all adult male characters as opposed to characters explicitly listed as a father, I was also able to pick up on characters who are not biologically related but effectively take on the role of father for someone (social fathers) to consider when constructing a list of characters of interest. On the film-level character sheets (see Appendix A), when a male-presenting character has many instances of behaviors typically considered as parenting (nurturing behaviors, informational/instrumental support, etc.), they are coded as mentors or advisors. In order to get a full picture of the ways in which fathers and other males are being presented in these movies, both the characters of interest themselves and the reactions to their behaviors and representations are important to note in regard to how these messages may be received by viewers.

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Using individual code sheets consisting of behaviors indicative of instrumental, emotional, and informational supports as outlined by existing research (Finley & Schwartz, 2006; House, 1981; Parsons & Bales, 1955) and physical traits typically ascribed to masculine men informed the categorical coding to identify patterns across films from an individual character level (see Appendix B). These codes provide insight to how closely these characters embody traditionally and hegemonically masculine stereotypes and expectations in a quantitative way. In addition to first transcribing and then open coding the data gathered from the sample of films, the individual code sheets for each character of interest consisting of behaviors and traits that have been previously established in literature were created as a way to help tie all of the open-coded data to these previously established frameworks.

Limitations

Such a study is not without its limitations. In a study where only one person is responsible for collecting data and exploring the meanings of this data, it is impossible to be entirely objective or “removed” from the analysis. It is because of this fact that I have worked to integrate several aspects of Guba and Lincoln’s *Fourth Generation Evaluation* (1989) into my methodology (discussed below). Beyond this, in a content analysis where I have sought to describe physical portrayals, behaviors, personalities, and interactions of frequently on-screen characters, I have been relatively unable to generate data on the absence of fathers in movies, or fathering that is indirect, such as it would be for a child with their father in the military or in prison, as these have not been represented. The film *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017) is a primary exception to this, as the father’s absence is a continued influence on the family and has massive implications for the plot. Outside of comparing these descriptions to real-world sociocultural research in the United States, I am also unable to evaluate how closely these portrayals are to

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fathers in the real world and the expectations that they face. Without direct interaction with children who are viewers of these films, it is impossible to tell whether they would pick up on these representations of masculinity and fatherhood or how these representations may or may not then help them structure their perceptions of their own fathers, or themselves as fathers.

Evaluation

Guba and Lincoln (1989) explained that when a phenomenon exists in different forms and is subject to change, in the way that masculinity does, validity and reliability in reference to the analysis of the phenomenon are concepts that mean nothing. Further, in a qualitative inquiry such as this, a complete separation between the researcher, the data, and the perceived meanings is impossible. In response, the authors define a framework for evaluation that parallels the traditional positivistic criteria for evaluation but is better suited for qualitative data, deemed as trustworthiness. Within the criteria of trustworthiness are four major components: credibility (which corresponds to internal validity), transferability (which corresponds to external validity), dependability (which corresponds to reliability), and confirmability (which corresponds to objectivity; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In order to meet a standard of trustworthiness as described by Guba and Lincoln (1989), strategies for attaining this criterion have been factored into the present study.

Credibility is the criterion constructed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) that parallels internal validity. While internal validity is used to ensure that a study is in line with an objective reality, credibility focuses on the link between stakeholders' experiences and the reconstructions of these experiences. This study has utilized the process of progressive subjectivity, one of six outlined techniques by Guba and Lincoln (1989), in order to establish credibility. As an individual researcher conducting a qualitative project, it is impossible to be objective and separated from

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the data I have collected. Guba and Lincoln (1989) note that all inquirers have beliefs that they come into a project with, and it is important to assess these biases to provide continuous checks that these beliefs and standpoints are not being given privilege. In order to address researcher biases in the present study, I have completed a prewrite exercise in which I recorded my beliefs and attitudes toward the topics of interest as well as addressing what I expected to find during this project. I have also periodically repeated this activity throughout the research process so as to “check in” with my attitudes and beliefs relative to this research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) explained that this process is beneficial because when a researcher only finds the kinds of data which they expected to find in the first place, it may indicate a lack of attention to other authentic constructions being presented, which minimizes credibility. Along with the prewrite exercise and continued check-ins, to use operationalized codes and code sheets has provided another mechanism to ensure credibility within this study. Managing data in this way has helped maintain consistency in the data.

Transferability is similar to external validity, or generalizability. The major difference between these constructs is that while generalizability is absolute, that is not true for transferability. Transferability is described as being always relative, heavily dependent on whether or not the conditions match, and may never be achieved entirely because the conditions may change (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In order for comparisons to be made in constructivist research, transferability has to be achieved between the contexts being compared. The main strategy for ensuring this standard is met is to use thick, rich descriptions. In describing both the constructions of the characters as well as the kind of sample that has been selected for this study, it will allow for transferability judgements. Transferability judgements will be made by the receiver on whether or not the research is comparable to situations in which they are interested

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in, and these judgements are best made when informed by thick descriptions including the time, place, context, and culture that are relevant to the research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

The final two criteria, dependability and confirmability, go hand-in-hand as both serve the purpose of working together to audit the research being conducted. Both of these criteria are satisfied in the present study via the review and audit process conducted with my committee throughout the project. This is a process that is modeled off of the fiscal audit process, consisting of two stages: the extent to which the process is established and trackable as a process, and to what extent the data is confirmable. Dependability is the criterion that parallels reliability and works as the first stage of the auditing process. This is the criterion that is related to a research findings' stability over time. In order for research to be dependable, the methodological process and changes that occur within this process have to be traceable. While it is not uncommon for methodological or theoretical reconstructions to occur as research matures, Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested that an outside reviewer should be able to probe not only the changes themselves but also the context of these decisions and interpretations. Confirmability is the criterion that is parallel with objectivity and functions as the second stage of the audit process. The focus of confirmability is that the research is established in "contexts and persons apart from the evaluator and are not simply figments of the evaluator's imagination" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 243). Confirmability shows that the findings of research are rooted in the data itself, apart from the values and beliefs of the researcher. By using code sheets and maintaining detailed records of the data I have collected, I have ensured that all data can be traced back to original sources and the process used to make sense of this data can be confirmed by future researchers and interested parties.

Chapter 4: Findings

The Little Mermaid (Clements & Musker, 1989)

The Little Mermaid (Clements & Musker, 1989) is a film that centers around a redheaded mermaid named Ariel, who is the daughter of King Triton, ruler of the sea. Ariel is fascinated with things above the surface of the water, which is the only place she is not allowed to go because it is not safe for her, as told by her father. Ariel and her best friend Flounder often find themselves in disastrous adventures when trying to push the boundaries of what they are allowed to do. Ariel falls in love with a human she sees at the surface, Eric, and is willing to give up her voice to the villain, Ursula, to spend time with him as a human. Ursula grants Ariel with legs so that she can be with Eric in the real world, even though it means having to give up her voice. In the end, it is Ariel's father that honors her wish to be human and provides her with the legs to be able to live with Eric above the surface, even though he knows it means he will lose her. In *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989), the characters that most likely appear to be male are Eric, King Triton, Sebastian, Flounder, Grimsby, and Scuttle. King Triton is the main father figure in this film, though Grimsby provides a mentor/social father figure to Eric, while Sebastian often fills the same role for Ariel.

King Triton, voiced by Kenneth Mars, is the first character that the viewer is introduced to in a fatherly context. He is shown as a large and powerful sea creature that is a fish on the bottom and a human man on the top, with fluffy white hair on his head and face, almost looking like clouds. While this hair signifies King Triton's age, it is almost certainly also meant to signify his wisdom as well. He wears an ornate gold crown that compliments his trident, and his tail is a clear and bright blue color. His human-half is extremely muscular and buff despite clearly being an older man, and his hands are massive against his trident. He also wears gold

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wrist covers that add some extravagance to his appearance. When King Triton moves about on the screen, he is brisk and moves with purpose. King Triton is a serious man, and he believes in tradition. King Triton is a “threatening character” in that he is meant to be attractive, aggressive, traditionally represented, and idealized. He has raised his daughters to be the same, and it frustrates him that Ariel does not seem to value the things that he wants her to. At the very beginning of the film, King Triton gets angry with Ariel because he expects her to be at the musical debut with his other six daughters (who are clearly more obedient than she is). This sets the tone for the nature of Ariel’s relationship with King Triton, and it is explained she is the youngest of his daughters.

When King Triton is unsure of his parenting style’s efficacy, he is seen speaking with Sebastian, a character who acts both as a trusty advisor for King Triton but also for Ariel when she is out on her adventures. Sebastian, voiced by Samuel E. Wright, is a small red crab and his “official job” is to be the composer to King Triton, though he takes on many other roles throughout the film. He has a very stern and commanding voice with a modulating pitch, in coordination with his dramatic personality, despite being the smallest-statured main character. He has a clear Trinidadian accent. When he is shaken or nervous, it is obvious because his voice gets much higher in pitch, and he rattles in his shell. He is quick moving in addition to being dainty and is always flittering about. Despite his small size, he has no problem conveying to Ariel when she is acting in a way that would disgrace himself or King Triton, and he often gets loud and aggressively animated with her in these contexts. Early in the film, Sebastian tells Ariel it is *her fault* that he is a disappointment to all of the other sea composers, as if her actions are a direct reflection of him in some way. When Sebastian feels he is in the right, he is snotty and pretentious speaking. Sebastian fills the role of a social father type character throughout the

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entire film for both King Triton and Ariel by providing informational and instrumental support in situations where they are actively looking for help, such as the scenes where King Triton is asking Sebastian directly for advice on Ariel, and situations where they have gotten themselves in over their heads. Regardless of this status as a moral or hypothetical advisor, Sebastian exists as a “nonthreatening character,” and that is portrayed in his silly voice, his small size, and the fact that he has no human qualities to potentially make him an attractive male ideal figure.

When Ariel finally reappears with King Triton, he is not only livid with her for not being at the celebration but for being so “careless” that she would spend time near the surface, where she could potentially be “snared by some fish eater’s hook.” He expresses how he is feeling with Ariel through his voice, and his physical actions. When he is angry with her, he is loud and booming, and he breaks things when he feels like he is losing control of the conversation. Because King Triton is not a human but a magical creature, this becomes a fantastical display of colorful and explosive anger that expands beyond what one would be able to emulate on their own. This is a common theme that appears in several other films that I analyzed during this project, though *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989) was the first film in my sample where this was true. Ursula, the main villain in this film, expresses that Ariel’s free-spirited nature as being a weakness of King Triton’s, and a way to take him down as the ruler of the sea. This is something that King Triton is probably aware of and plays into some level of his anxiety when he feels like Ariel is breaking away from the traditions that he has worked so hard to keep his older daughters subscribed to. He tries to use his magic and his anger as a way to keep Ariel living in a way that he feels is safe but does not realize that he is creating an unsafe and uncomfortable environment in the process. When Ariel declares that she is in love with a human, this is especially true, and still does not succeed in keeping Ariel’s behaviors controlled. When

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King Triton signs the contract toward the end of the film with Ursula to give up his power and give Ariel her freedom, he shrinks and shrivels down into a tiny sad version of himself and all of his big, white, fluffy hair is gone.

Comparatively, Eric is the love interest of the main character (Ariel) and as such, provides an idealistic standard for an adult man to the viewer, even without the context of explicit fatherhood. The idealistic nature of this representation is clear to viewers of all ages when Ariel dotes over how “handsome” he is. The character of Eric is voiced by Christopher Daniel Barnes, and is portrayed as a tall, tan, dark haired adult human man. He is typically dressed in clothes I could only best describe as “boat clothes,” being a deep-V-neck white collared shirt with rolled up sleeves, blue pants with the cuffs rolled high to accommodate his wader boots. He has bright blue eyes, black swooping hair, and despite being thin is still noticeably muscular and strong. His shoulders and chest are broad, and when he is near Ariel, it is clear he is larger than her in all aspects. He has a deep and strong voice, and is often seen side-by-side with his trusty dog, Max. His clothing and grooming are clean and neat, and his personality is rational and calm, going hand in hand. In many ways, Eric and King Triton are meant to convey the same type of masculine authority figure, and potentially this is why Ariel is meant to find him so charming, and in other ways they are meant to be clearly opposing characters, with King Triton representing tradition and status-quo and Eric representing everything that is novel and interesting about the wider world Ariel has yet to experience. Eric is also a “threatening character” in the ways King Triton is, and in the sense that he is directly threatening King Triton’s way of raising his daughter. Eric is someone that exists in opposition to the things that King Triton has wanted for his daughter, and he is attractive enough to Ariel to pose a real threat in that way.

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Eric can be seen throughout the film seeking informational support from Grimsby, an older male character that appears to be Eric's butler in addition to acting as a mentor and advisor. Grimsby is an older adult human man character that is voiced by Ben Wright. Grimsby is tall and lanky and has bright white thin hair that is pulled back in a professional looking low bun. He is dressed nicely in a fancy suitcoat and big, goofy looking shoes. His facial features are exaggerated, and his movements and mannerisms are as well. His nose and jaw stick out far when he is viewed from the side. He has a fairly high-pitched voice and speaks with an English accent. Grimsby is proud of himself, and he ties a lot of his self-worth and identity to the fact that he is adjacent to high society being Prince Eric's helper. When he gives Eric advice, it is because he wants Eric to maintain the status-quo and act in a way that is tied to tradition and traditional expectations. In some ways, Grimsby seems like he is trying to live his own life through Eric, in ways that he cannot for himself based on his own class status and social position. He has firmly guided Eric his entire life in these ways to help maintain these traditions and he sees that as his responsibility. He wants Eric to marry a girl quickly so that he can be the heir in line to the throne, but he is the voice of reason when Eric wants to go find Ariel as he says "Nice girls don't just swim around..." Grimsby represents a nonthreatening character and this can be seen in his age, social class status, and his high pitched voice.

Another nonthreatening representation of masculinity is shown through Flounder, voiced by Jason Marin. Flounder is represented by a yellow and blue vibrant tropical fish that is Ariel's best friend. Flounder is a small and chubby character that has a high pitched and nasally child-like voice. The stage notes in *The Little Mermaid* script describe his movements and mannerisms as "frantic" and he is always nervous. When he is truly afraid of something happening, his voice shrinks to a whisper. Often when exploring with Ariel, he is uninterested in the things she wants

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to explore, and he would rather hang back. Ariel indicates his nonthreatening status from the very beginning of the film when she calls him a “guppy” the way we might call someone a chicken or a scaredy cat and tells him he is afraid of going on an adventure. His physically clumsy nature means that Ariel often has to save him when they are out and about, but his clumsy tongue gets them both back into trouble with King Triton when he tells him about Ariel exploring the places that she is not supposed to be. His nasally and high-pitched voice as well as his scared and “frantic” nature indicate his nonthreatening status to the viewer.

Out of the six male characters in the film, three are human and three are not. Of the three human characters, two of them present as typically masculine males, and in ways that would be rewarded in the societal hegemony. Out of all six male characters, this is true for the majority (four of six) with the exception being male characters who have roles that are supposed to be considered “nonthreatening” such as Grimsby or Flounder. King Triton and Eric exist in this film in competition with one another for Ariel, and both of them are shown in ways that are threatening to one another and show that they are both fit for this competition. Eric and King Triton, while showing two different types of male hegemonic masculinity, both represent idealistic views of what a man “should be” in each of their age categories according to the societal hegemony, and this is potentially reflective of the time period when this film was released.

Beauty and the Beast (Trousdale & Wise, 1991)

Beauty and the Beast (Trousdale & Wise, 1991) centers around Belle and her two potential suitors, Gaston and Beast. Her Father, Maurice, is also an integral part of the film, and it is Maurice who is initially captured by Beast to be traded for Belle instead. Gaston is eyeballed by many women in the village, but he is most interested in Belle because she is the most

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beautiful to him. Belle is a wonder to all the different men in the village because she is smart, and different than many other girls because she is interested in books and learning as opposed to homemaking and traditionally feminine hobbies, but Gaston does not even see her for these things much less appreciate them, and instead only is interested in her for the way she looks. Belle is very protective of her father, and Gaston regularly makes jokes about how he is crazy or unwell, and even tries to get him committed to force Belle into marrying him. Gaston and Beast end up in a battle figuratively and literally for Belle's affection. The male-appearing characters in order of first appearance are Maurice, Beast, Gaston, Lefou, Lumiere, Cogsworth, Chip, and Monsieur D'arque.

Maurice, voiced by Rex Everhart, is Belle's father. Belle's mother is not present in the film, and it appears that Belle and Maurice are very close. Maurice has tan skin and bright, white, fluffy hair on his head and face. He is dressed in very plain clothes, his stature is small and portly, and he is often portrayed as working, which indicates his class status. Maurice is a character that has a nonthreatening masculine identity, though still being in line with hegemonic standards of manhood such as his work as an inventor. Other people in the village treat Maurice poorly, and that is the strongest indicator of this nonthreatening status. When Maurice mentions to the people in the pub that he wants to fight the Beast to get his daughter back, they all laugh at him instead of helping. When he is being chased by the wolves in the land surrounding Beast's mansion, he runs as opposed to standing his ground or having a weapon or something more "manly" in response. As a father, Maurice is supportive to Belle and tender with her. He speaks to her early in the film and reassures her that her being different is what makes her special, and that she should not feel odd or out of the ordinary for wanting to learn new things. When it is

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time for her to sacrifice herself for his freedom to Beast, he does not want her to do that, but ultimately, he knows that he does not have a choice and cannot stop her or Beast alone.

Beast is one of the two main male characters in this movie, and he is voiced by Robby Benson. Beast is large, muscular, and hairy and is described in the film as having “sharp, cruel fangs” and being “hideously ugly.” He has intense strong dark brown eyebrows, and thick brown hair all over his whole body. His voice is deep and growling, almost sounding like two people talking at once when he is angry, though when he is having normal conversations with Belle, he talks in a soft and gentle voice instead. Beast wants to be in control of everything around him, and the people are no exception. He kidnaps Belle and Maurice both to hold them prisoner in his home, despite being in love with Belle and Maurice appears to be deathly sick and clearly nonthreatening to Beast. In fact, when he catches Maurice sneaking around in his home as a stranger, he reacts with such an animated and viciously aggressive anger, Cogsworth the pendulum clock hides under a blanket. He is clearly ashamed of himself as Beast, and he notes that one of his favorite things about Belle is he feels like she sees him for who he really is and not for the monster that he has been turned into. Beast displays his explosive anger by breaking a bunch of furniture when he catches Belle lurking in his wing of the mansion, the only place he told her not to go (parallel with *The Little Mermaid* [Clements & Musker, 1989]), but still displays his protective side when she flees from the mansion and is attacked by wolves, and he saves her despite it requiring him to risk his life. Beast still finds himself seeking advice from others, especially when he wants to woo Belle. In these instances, he goes to Lumiere and Mrs. Potts for instrumental support as a means to get what he wants. Beast is a representation of the trope that male characters should be strong and protective, but he is still willing to compromise and find a middle ground with Belle when they have a conflict about dining.

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Gaston, on the other hand, is a character voiced by Richard White, and he is the other pursuer of Belle. He is a human character that is tall and muscular, with long black hair and strong eyebrows over bright blue eyes. You can see his muscles under his clothes, which are a deep V-neck shirt with short sleeves, and black pants with high brown boots. Everything about Gaston presents him as a threatening form of masculinity, and in line with what would be considered hegemonic masculinity. In the first scene where Gaston is present, he is seen shooting a bird out of the sky with a gun on the first shot, much to the pleasure of the onlookers, such as Lefou. He often positions himself standing above others, such as standing up steps when others are on the floor. When he is near Belle, his hands alone are larger than almost her entire body. Gaston is in love with himself, and he makes it clear to anyone who spends any time watching him on screen. One of the major musical numbers in the movie revolves around describing all of his manly and attractive features, making it extremely easy to see that he is being touted as the idealized standard of masculinity in this film. Belle describes him as being “rude and conceited” and “positively primeval” because he is so obsessed with himself. He is only focused on himself and his goals, and he never takes into consideration how other people might feel; this is especially true in the larger picture of his pursuit of Belle by any means necessary. He is not remotely interested in her on anything deeper than a surface level and still he is willing to demonstrate how gross and low he can go to get what he wants.

All of the things that he likes the most about Belle are how she looks, and how she makes *him* look. He is even distracted by his own reflection when he is trying to propose to her while putting his muddy boots on her books on the table. He is physically hulking over her when he proposes, as opposed to being on one knee and lower than her, and it is hard to think that this is not on purpose as it is in line with his personality. He goes on to tell Belle that it is wrong for her

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to read or think, and when she is not around, he takes every opportunity to participate in making fun of Maurice with the other villagers, despite trying to marry his daughter. When Gaston is sad about losing Belle, he drinks beer to cope with this loss. He expresses to Lefou that Belle's lack of interest in him is a "disgrace" on his image, as if her freedom and ability to make her own choices is somehow diminishing his image in the public sphere. Instead of using this time to reflect on what would make Belle think of him as a more suitable mate, instead he seeks out the man in charge of the local insane asylum, because he wants to have Maurice locked up until Belle agrees to marry him. Gaston's story ends when he falls to his death off a balcony when Belle decides to save Beast instead of him.

In some ways, Gaston works as a social father for Lefou, because Lefou follows him around and seeks to gain much knowledge from him as well as using him as a guide for his own masculine identity. Lefou, voiced by Jesse Corti, is a small character that is rather stumpy in stature, as well as having a nasally higher pitch voice. When he is shown in physical comparison to Gaston, he is tiny. His movements are often clumsy and sloppy. His clothes appear ratty, and too big for his small but chubby body. It is clear in all of the scenes he is present in that he idealizes Gaston and would like to be more like him. When Gaston shoots the bird out of the sky, Lefou is there on the ground after to try and catch the bird corpse, the way a hunting dog would. He misses the catch, and then applauds Gaston's display of brilliant masculinity. There are many scenes where Lefou is the butt of the joke, such as when Gaston lets a tree branch go and it hits him, or when he gets hit by a baritone, or the crowd falling onto him during the song about Gaston. All of these things add up to create Lefou's nonthreatening display of masculine identity, and his character exists solely to show a contrast to Gaston, to exist in comparison, and to show a non-hegemonic and less socially rewarded version of masculinity.

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Lumiere, Cogsworth, and Chip all function in a very similar way as Lefou in that they display male-type personalities without accompanying threatening male physical forms. Lumiere is a candelabra, Cogsworth a pendulum clock, and Chip is a small teacup. Out of these three characters, Chip is the only one that is explicitly portrayed as a child, but all of these characters serve a comparable purpose. They are all very small objects, with voices that vary in pitch as their personalities do. Lumiere has a mid-tone voice with a heavy French accent. HE is caring, and when he sees Maurice's poor condition, he wants to keep him in the mansion. He is romantic and spends time swooning the featherduster. Lumiere advises Beast not to be so violent and aggressive with Belle if he wants her to listen, as he will have better luck being sweet and not growling at her. Cogsworth is the most serious of the three, and he has an inflated sense of ego. He has a deep and accented voice, and he tries to be the voice of reason in all situations. When everyone is infatuated with how charming Belle is, he is not, but once she speaks to him personally, he is delighted and offers her the grand tour. Chip has a small, child-like, nasally voice. He is curious and interested in new aspects of his surroundings. He calls Belle "pretty" and wants to show her his baubles. In many ways, he represents childlike nativity, such as when he asks his mom what something means, and she replies, "I'll tell you when you're older."

This film has a total of eight characters who appear to be male, and five of them are human characters. I have chosen to include Beast in this count because, while he has an animal-like appearance, he is a human and that is a concept that is repeated throughout the film. This is a slight increase of male characters from the previous film and is the start of a trend that appears in the present sample where more male characters appear in films released in the more recent years. Out of these human characters, Gaston is the only one who is presented as an "ideal" or positive standard for a man. He is presented as a physically large man who is muscular, and his

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personality is of a leader who is not afraid to take charge in every situation. Gaston has many qualities that are unfavorable, such as his palpable narcissism and his inability to focus on anything besides himself and his desires, but other characters such as Lefou are always willing to show how much they idolize him. While it is true that Beast has many qualities that would be rewarded in a hegemonic masculine society such as a desire to protect Belle even when he is upset and being physically protective when it is necessary, his appearance is one that is meant to discourage a viewer from wanting to be like him or imitate him.

The Lion King (Allers & Minkoff, 1994)

The Lion King (Allers & Minkoff, 1994) is an animated film created by Disney that focuses on a pack of lions and other animals living in an African desert. Simba is the new cub born of Sarabi and the King Mufasa and is next in line to the throne much to the dismay of his uncle Scar, who had been the frontrunner up until the point of Simba's birth. When Mufasa is trampled, Scar makes it a point to blame Simba at every opportunity despite being solely to blame for Mufasa's death, and chases Simba out of Pride Rock to assume the throne. When he returns and tells the pack that Simba has died, it begins a tragic chapter in Pride Rock's history where Scar allows the hyenas to overhunt the area, and all of their resources dry up. Simba teams up with Timon and Pumbaa, a meerkat and warthog duo that help him learn how to live on his own with no responsibilities until they have a run-in with Nala, the lioness that had been chosen to be Simba's mate when they were born, who convinces Simba to return to Pride Rock and challenge Scar for power. The male characters in this film are Rafiki, Simba, Mufasa, Scar, Zazu, The Hyenas, Timon, and Pumbaa.

Rafiki is a baboon that narrates much of the film and plays a significant role in guiding Simba. Rafiki, voiced by Robert Guillaume, has a voice that is squeaky, but firm. He appears in a

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way that indicates he is a nonthreatening male character as he is old, feeble, and small. He stands hunched over holding his staff, and his hair on his head and face is white and wild. When the viewer is first introduced to Rafiki, he is climbing up onto Pride Rock during the opening of the film, and he holds his staff high as the sunlight comes up behind him to greet Mufasa at the announcement of Simba's birth. He moves in a way that shows he has purpose, and the viewer sees all of the other animals treating Rafiki as a honored member of their group as one of the most significant scenes in the film unfolds. Rafiki narrates much of the storyline of the movie for the viewer, but he is also the record keeper in the film itself, and this is indicated when he is the one to record the birth of Simba in the cave paintings. Rafiki seems to be entangled in the spirit world as much as he is in the physical, and he is the one who smells Simba in the wind when all of the other animals at Pride Rock think he has died.

Simba is the main character in this film, and the storyline encompasses his birth through young adulthood. Simba, a young lion voiced first by Jonathan Taylor Thomas and then by Matthew Broderick, is the son of Mufasa, and the nephew of Scar. When he is born to Mufasa, he becomes the second in line to the King, which effectively takes Scar's place in the family hierarchy. As a child, he is small, and other lions call him "scruffy." Scar refers to him as a "hairball" and Zazu calls him "fluffy," all ways to indicate that at this stage he was viewed and portrayed as nonthreatening to all other characters in the film. This is only true for "young Simba" though, as he is playful and curious. Even though everyone around him views him as a nonthreat, he is a boundary pusher that wants to be considered strong. He is easily embarrassed when he is caught making mistakes, and as a child this comes out in arrogance. The third scene of the film shows Simba going to wake up his parents, head-butting them and rubbing up against them once they have woken up. This is the same way he tries to "wake up" Mufasa when he has

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died. When he realizes it does not work the second time, he crawls under Mufasa's paw and begins to cry. When we meet Simba again as an adult, he is a spitting image of Mufasa. This is something that is brought up several times throughout the remainder of the film, with even Simba thinking he only sees himself in the water when he really sees his father. When he runs into Nala in the wild, he feels responsible for the fate of Pride Rock that has fallen to disrepair. When Simba learns that the rest of the lions in his pride miss him and think that he has died and they are not ashamed of him, he knows that he needs to return to them and make good on his responsibilities that he had previously abandoned. This is an important turning point for Simba and shows him truly growing up.

Mufasa, voiced by James Earl Jones, is a male lion that is the King of Pride Rock. Even though he is a lion, he is portrayed as handsome with a flowing dark mane, strong eyebrows, and wiry features that the other lions do not have. Early in the film, he provides informational and instrumental support when teaching him about the different parts of his environment and the different kinds of creatures that all make up their ecosystem. Many of his interactions are this way, teaching Simba how to be a successful hunter, and a ruler when it is his own time, as he knows this is a major responsibility he has in bringing a son into the family hierarchy. Mufasa is an honorable character, and he takes this position seriously. Because of Mufasa's untimely death in the film, there are not a lot of opportunities to observe his behavior.

Scar, voiced by Jeremy Irons, is a lion that is the little brother to Mufasa, making him Simba's uncle, and he is the leader of the hyenas as a result of him providing some level of protection and shelter for them. Despite being a lion like all the others in the pride, his mane is thick and black, and his eyes are a bright green that create a strong contrast with the rest of his appearance. These are both traits none of the other lions have and it immediately sets him apart

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from all of the rest. He has a large facial scar, and his nose is dark black instead of pink, like the rest of the pride. He speaks at an extremely quiet whisper, unless he feels like he is losing control of a situation, and then he gets much louder (one example being right before the stampede). This is one of many ways that Scar's manipulative nature is shown in his physical traits. His voice has an accent that is different from Mufasa or the other lions and when he growls, it is low and deep. When he is next to Mufasa, it is clear that he is smaller in stature and much thinner than Mufasa. Early on in the film, Scar tells Mufasa that he does not ever have to worry about Scar challenging him as he knows his place in the hierarchy, despite Scar already planning on killing Mufasa and Simba so that he could become the King. When Mufasa is dangling from the cliff and Scar has the opportunity to save him, not only does he fully commit to killing him, but he digs his claws into Mufasa's hands before tossing him from the cliff, an unnecessary display of cruelty toward his own brother.

Scar is a character that is threatening at every level and uses his sense of self-worth to make others feel stupid even when he is in a position to be their mentor or social father such as with the hyenas, or Simba when Simba is experiencing the loss of Mufasa. From the time that Mufasa announces Simba's birth to the rest of the animals living on Pride Rock, Scar has been resentful of the baby. He tries to get Simba killed as a young lion by telling him to go play in the Hyena lands, and in the one early instance where it seems that Scar is going to impart some type of wisdom to Simba, instead he is trying to get him into trouble. The contempt that Scar feels toward Simba is palpable in their every interaction, and Scar convincing Simba that the solution to his problems is running away is a clear display of this contempt. When Simba cries out for help for Mufasa, Scar is nowhere to be found, but when Scar can use Simba's emotional state as fuel for his own goals ("What will your mother think?") he is right there to rub Simba's nose in

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the death of his own father. In this moment, Scar could change his entire story by being the supportive social father Simba needs in this moment, to be able to show him how to be the ruler he needs to be for the Pride, and instead he chooses to try and have Simba killed by sicking the hyenas after him at his most vulnerable. When Simba returns to Pride Rock and Scar realizes that the hyenas did not succeed in killing him, he begins to threaten him and continues to try and emotionally manipulate Simba into feeling as though he was to blame for Mufasa's death and the following collapse of the ecosystem. Even at his last chance to leave with honor, he turns around and kicks hot coals into Simba's face when Simba turns his back.

The hyenas are a group of three voiced by Whoopi Goldberg (Shenzi), Cheech Marin (Banzai), and Jim Cummings (Ed). While one of the hyenas is voiced by a woman, it is never explicitly declared in the film that the hyena itself is female, so I have included them as a group for the purpose of this analysis. Similar to Scar, they have bright colored eyes and dark colored fur, creating a strong contrast in their appearance. They are extremely shady characters and every scene that they are in holds tension, implying that they are in some ways threatening characters. Their voices are high pitched and accented, with constant cackling and other dramatic additions to their speech. They are sneaky and quick in their movements. The hyenas follow Scar around, and he provides them with food and shelter as well as some level of protection, and they do not attack him the way they try to attack the other lions and animals from Pride Rock. Their laughing and sarcastic nature is used as a way to signal their deeper nature which is manipulative and greedy like Scar.

Zazu, Timon, and Pumbaa are three other characters that appear to be male in this film. These three characters serve similar functions in Simba's life at different times providing him with social fathers at various points in time. All three of these characters are portrayed in a way

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that is nonthreatening, as they are all small in stature and have high pitched and nasally voices. Zazu is a small blue bird voiced by Rowan Atkinson, with a large nose and a snotty attitude. He is an advisor and mentor to Simba when he is young and Mufasa is still alive. Zazu tends to accompany Simba on his different adventures and look out for him so that he does not cause too much trouble, such as when Simba tells Nala he wants to go exploring the borderlands (and not the water hole) they are told they can only go if Zazu accompanies them. When Zazu gets upset, his voice gets nasally. When he is accompanying the lions, he flies alongside the adult ones, or above the heads of the small ones. Zazu provides support to Mufasa at the beginning of the film as well when Scar is harassing him. Despite Simba being a baby when they first meet, Zazu always refers to him as “master;” indicating he understands his place in the social hierarchy. This is also indicated when he imparts wisdom to Simba and Nala about tradition, and how they are destined to be mates because of the hierarchy and the tradition of the way things are. Timon and Pumbaa appear later in the film when Simba is negotiating his adolescence. Timon, voiced by Nathan Lane, is a small meerkat while Pumbaa, voiced by Ernie Sabella, is a warthog. They are a best friend pair where Timon is the brains of the operation and Pumbaa is the more naïve but also more physically dominant one. The two of them are afraid of Simba at first, but Pumbaa’s caring nature implores him to help the lion that is “all alone.” Timon, on the other hand, is only willing to help take care of Simba when he realizes how it may be beneficial for him to have a lion that will “be on our side” though he is more than willing to take the credit when it comes time to make a good impression as Simba is waking up. Timon and Pumbaa teach Simba how the most important thing in life is to have no worries and no responsibilities. They also teach him how to eat bugs so that he does not have to hunt animals.

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In all, there are 10 characters in this film that appear to be male and there are no human characters, just variations of African animals. This film again shows an increase in the number of male characters and with these additional characters come additional versions of manhood, fatherhood, and male-male mentorship being represented. Mufasa and Simba (once he has grown out of his “scruffy” childhood) both display qualities that would be rewarded by hegemonic masculine society and represent ideal standards for what a man should be in society. Scar shows some of these qualities, though his scrawny physical stature and his sneaky and resentful nature clearly separate him from this ideal status. When Mufasa is alive, he is a strong ruler of the pride but also takes his responsibility of mentoring Simba very seriously. He defends Simba’s honor against Scar when Scar talks down on him, and in almost every scene he is imparting some type of wisdom to Simba. He is a very serious character and though he play-wrestles with Simba, he is doing so because it is teaching Simba important skills and not because he is trying to be silly. This is a major contrast from the way that Timon and Pumba show mentorship to Simba as a male-male mentor pair to him. They are also regularly imparting wisdom and skills to him to help him be successful without the support of his pride, but they often do so with a silly nature and plenty of jokes abound. This is a more complex representation of a male mentorship as *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994) shows that both a serious and less serious type of mentorship can accomplish the same result: a successful Simba who returns to Pride Rock to reclaim his status as the head of the lion pride and save the larger ecological community by restoring balance.

Mulan (Cook & Bancroft, 1998)

Mulan (Cook & Bancroft, 1998) is an animated film produced by Disney based on a traditional Chinese legend. This film centers around Fa Mulan, a Chinese girl who learns that her

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elderly and feeble father is being drafted for war. Fa Mulan worries that her father will die if he goes, so she swiftly chops off her hair and dresses herself in her father's armor before riding off to take his place. Mulan begins to live as a man named Ping and goes on to train in the army and fight in the Imperial City. Fa Mulan begins to fall in love with her commanding officer, and eventually tells him that she has been dishonest about who she is. He is more upset with her than she had expected but forgives her when she is lauded as a hero. The male appearing characters in this film are Ping, Li Shang, Shan Yu, Mushu, Yao, Fa Zhou, General Li, Chien-Po, Chi Fu, and The Emperor.

When the film begins, Mulan, voiced by Ming Na Wen, is living as a girl who is at the point of life where she is growing into a woman and the expectations of those around her have changed. The matchmaker tells her that she is "too thin" to be a good child bearer. She tries to wear makeup to the matchmaker to look more "feminine" but the matchmaker tells her that it looks bad. It is reinforced from the beginning of the film that a girl brings honor to her family is to find a good husband, and from this point it is clear that she is not succeeding in that regard. Thus, it comes as no surprise that she wants to fight in her father, Fa Zhou's, place in the army, as this may be her one chance at bringing honor back to her family where she feels she has already failed. This is when she becomes Ping. Ping is the name that Mulan takes when she begins to live as a man in the army. This decision to live as a man in the army is something that can be punished with her own death if she is caught and turned in. Despite any of this, Ping is hard-headed and determined and wears his hair up in a bun as he prepares to participate in the great battles ahead. As he is training for the army, Ping is often wearing armor and baggy clothing. This helps him disguise the sex characteristics such as large breasts and wide hips and assimilate better into the homogenous group of men in the army which he is aiming to blend into.

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When Ping is worried that he may not be “passing,” he is sure to deepen his voice and furrow his brow. Ping is an amalgamation of different stereotypical presentations of masculinity that Mulan has been exposed to because that is what she has as her tools to create this personal identity.

Neither Ping's hardheadedness is not inherent to his identity as Ping, as the same personality trait is seen when Mulan decides to ride off after the army before Fa Zhou is able to stop her. Ping is fearless and smart, and that is why he is able to thwart the attempts of Shan Yu to destroy the Imperial City.

Captain Li Shang, son of General Li, is a tall and strong Chinese warrior. Voiced by B.D. Wong, he is firm and stern in all of his decisions and actions. His character is one of the only idealized male human characters in any of the films that I have analyzed that have normal human proportions in terms of how broad his shoulders are, how large his head is, and the size of his hands and feet. Li Shang wants to make all of the right choices because he knows that he is responsible for the other men in the army, and he knows that his father sees all of his actions as a direct reflection of himself. This is important because Li Shang wants to follow in his father's footsteps and make him proud, but also be someone that brings honor to his family name on his own and not just as a shadow of his father. General Li is proud of who his son has become so far and wants to be able to give him more opportunities any time he is able to. General Li sees it as his own responsibility to give his son these opportunities while he is alive, and once General Li has died, Li Shang feels as though he has no one to turn to for guidance. When Li Shang finds out that Ping is really Mulan, he is ashamed and embarrassed, and this comes out as anger. Li Shang finds what Mulan/Ping has done to be dishonorable, and he feels as though he cannot trust Mulan/Ping after this betrayal. However, he spares Mulan's life and chooses instead to force her

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out of the army, inevitably forgiving her entirely once the rest of China comes around to that same conclusion.

Shan Yu, voiced by Miguel Ferrer, is the major villain of this film. He is a hulking man with large arms and hands and an extremely small head. He often is accompanied by his bird henchman. While Shan Yu is bald, his eyebrows and facial hair are thick and dark, and his brow hangs down low over his eyes. His voice is very deep and steady when he talks, and his eyes are glowing orange, and his sclera are black. Shan Yu provides a villain in the storyline because he is the leader of the opposing army, but he is not present in many scenes throughout the film. Shan Yu is stubborn and determined to win in every situation. It is specifically the emperor's claim that The Great Wall will be impenetrable that he takes personally and makes him so angry to decide to carry out attacks on the Imperial City. When Shan Yu is present, there is a sense of danger conveyed in the colors and musical tone of the scenes, indicating his dangerous nature.

Mushu is a dragon character that is voiced by Eddie Murphy and serves as a social father and mentor to Ping. Mushu is a nonthreatening male character, and this nature is portrayed through his small size, his silly and joking nature, and his high-pitched voice. Officially, Mushu is a small dragon who is responsible for waking up the spirit guides when they need to guide someone on a journey. Because he messes this up, he decides he is capable instead of being the spirit guide for Mulan and sets off for the task on his own. He is tiny, which helps him sneak around and get away with things that he would otherwise get caught doing. He is supportive of Mulan because he knows that is what he needs to do, but there are instances where his support wears thin, such as when he refers to Ping as "Ms. Man" and refers to her sacrificing herself for her father as "taking her little drag show on the road." As an adult viewer, I thought this remark was incredibly gruff for a children's film. Despite this, Mushu still teaches Ping how to "be a

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man” and walk and act in a way that will help him get away with the disguise of a warrior.

Eventually, Ping goes from the stereotypical framework of a man that Mushu has presented him with into his own identity, but all of this was with Mushu’s help along the way.

Fa Zhou and General Li are the two biological father characters in this film. Fa Zhou, voiced by Soontek Oh, is Mulan/Ping’s father. Fa Zhou is thin and long, and his features are thin. He is portrayed in the film as a nonthreatening male character through his quiet voice and soft nature, though his past as an army veteran does complicate that perception. Fa Zhou smiles often, and he often speaks very soft and gently, being sure to encourage Mulan such as when she is embarrassed after the matchmaker. While Mulan is feeling sorry for bringing dishonor to her family by not being suitable for a good husband, her father is there to encourage her to find the right path and try being more feminine even though she may be a “late bloomer.” The viewer gets a glimpse at his deeper nature when Chi Fu comes to announce that people are being drafted and Mulan attempts to argue with him in the village center. When Mulan yells at Chi Fu for suggesting Fa Zhou go back to war, he tells her she should “learn her place,” and Fa Zhou is ashamed to have his daughter act this way in front of others as he feels this is a direct reflection of his fathering. This is the only time where Fa Zhou seems disheartened with his daughter, and after this interaction he tells Mulan that it is time she learns her place in society, as he knows his. At some level, Fa Zhou may feel like Mulan’s failures are his, and that may be why he feels he needs to be so stern in this moment. Comparatively, General Li Shang feels as though all of his son’s successes are also his. Voiced by James Shigeta, General Li Shang’s character looks nearly identical to his son, and they both have similar stern and serious personalities. When Chi Fu suggests that Li Shang may not be ready to be a captain, General Li reinforces the many reasons

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why he feels that he is. Before they depart, Li Shang still calls the General "Father," signifying how important that relationship is, even when they are both in a professional setting.

Yao and Chien-Po are two recruits that join the army along with Ping. In many ways, these characters portray both threatening and nonthreatening characteristics. Yao, voiced by Harvey Fierstein, is the feistier of the two, and he is willing to be strong in the face of danger. In one of the first scenes where Yao is present in the film, Mushu sees Yao and describes him as "tough." In order for Ping to be able to make friends with Yao, Mushu advises Ping to "punch him, it's how men say hello!" so that Yao can see Ping as an equal. When Ping does this, they begin to tussle, and Chien-Po notes that Yao has made a new friend, indicating that Mushu's plan to communicate friendship has worked for Ping. There are instances where jokes fly above Yao's head, indicating his character is supposed to be more muscle than brains. When the men sing "A Girl Worth Fighting For," Yao remarks that his perfect girl "will marvel at my strength, adore my battle scars." This shows that Yao feels as though his identity is tied to his strength, and the aftereffects of being in the war. In this same song, Yao goes on to say that she will believe that he is perfect, and that is what is most important about her to him, showing he is not very concerned about the kind of person his perfect girl may be. Chien-Po, voiced by Jerry Tondo, on the other hand, is the calmer of the two characters. He is much larger than both Ping and Yao physically both in height and in width. He resembles the smiling Buddha in that he is bald and often pictured smiling, with a large, bulbous belly that sticks out regardless of whether he is dressed in armor or his robes. During "A Girl Worth Fighting For," Chien-Po sings that his dream girl will be a great cook, and as long as she is, he will not care what she looks or dresses like, indicating where his values are. While Yao is the hothead of the group, Chien-Po is the calming one, both in his own demeanor and in his interactions with others. When Yao is upset

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and raging, turning red and steaming from the ears, Chien-Po picks him up to rock him like a baby, in order to calm him down. These two represent vastly different types of masculinity but are able to get along together with Ping to create “The Gang of Three” despite all of these differences.

The Emperor and his council, Chi Fu, are both characters that appear in the film and represent older male characters that are not biological fathers, but have immense social responsibilities over other young men and serve as social fathers to some degree and role models in others because of these positions that they are in. Neither of these characters show any threatening characteristics of masculine identity in themselves, even though they both hold a lot of power in the form of people like the General. The Emperor of China, voiced by Pat Morita, is a slender old man with long white facial hair and a bald head covered by his ornate cap. The Emperor's voice is deep and steady, and this is representative of his position of importance, and with his responsibility to keep all of the men and women and children of China safe from the Hun and Shan Yu. The Emperor wears robes of gold and red and black and he is always shown in an elegant context. This is a strong contrast from the way that Chi Fu, voiced by James Hong, is portrayed as he is often the butt of the joke such as in a musical number when something explodes or spills. While Chi Fu is the official council to The Emperor, he also functions as an informer to General Li when he is alive, and as an advisor to Li Shang before and after the death of his father. Chi Fu is a character that is portrayed as scrawny and small, with missing teeth and wiry facial hair. Despite having a close relationship with Li Shang, Chi Fu does not feel as though he is a capable leader, and he threatens to tell his father this. Because Chi Fu implies that Li Shang is going to fail and holds this over his head, Li Shang feels Chi Fu's doubt in him once General Li has passed away, and it changes their relationship forever.

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Chi Fu expects that the people around him are seconds away from catastrophic failure, revealing that he has no faith in others, and affecting the way that he treats those people as a result. Chi Fu does not have any semblance of a sense of humor, and takes everything exactly at face value, making him feel as though he is a beacon of objectivity in all situations, even though his own biases are especially clear at the end of the film. When Mulan has defeated Shan Yu as herself, Li Shang calls her a hero, and Chi Fu snaps back immediately that because she is a woman, she is definitely not a hero, and instead is a “creature” that is “not worth protecting” and “a woman” that will “never be worth anything!” This comes to great distaste of the Emperor, and he declares in that moment that she is to be made a member of the Emperor’s council in Chi Fu’s place. This shows that his inability to accept Mulan’s hero status is the downfall of him, and the root of him losing the job that he pulls so much of his identity from.

This film has a total of 10 male-presenting characters: nine human characters and one a small dragon. It is important to note that in all of the descriptions I have used the phrase “male presenting” as often there are not direct indicators of a character’s sex (such as other characters using gendered pronouns to address them, remarks about physical anatomy, etc.) though in this description, one of these characters is someone who has been assigned female at birth (AFAB), but lives and presents socially as a man for the majority of the film. This detour from a conservative representation of one’s gender is a progressive concept for a film that was released prior to 2000, though it does not go without skepticism even from within the film itself. While this is not presented in a way that is relative to gender identity (Mulan is only being Ping to get her father out of indentured military servitude and not due to explicit dysphoria relative to her AFAB status), to ignore Ping as a male-presenting character when a major plotline of the film is

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his ability to blend in with the other soldiers in a paper seeking to identify and characterize male presentation and how movies portray what it means to be a “real man” would be negligent.

Out of these male-presenting characters, four of them are presented in ways that align with the hegemonic masculine ideal standard in society. Li Shang, Shan Yu, General Li, and The Emperor all represent idealistic views of men at different stages of their life. Li Shang is a young and handsome man who is up and coming in his career field while emulating the vision of manhood his father, General Li, has shown to him. In the same fashion, Ping tries hard to emulate the strong man that his father has been before him. While General Li is firm and harsh, Fa Zhou is soft spoken for most scenes that he is in and displays a different type of strength for his family. Even though Shan Yu is an antagonist in this film, he is presented in a way that is still potentially attractive to a viewer in that he is physically strong and a successful warrior. This is different and makes his character more complex from say, Scar in *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), potentially indicating a change in the way Disney believes children are able to analyze messages about “good” and “bad” characters.

Finding Nemo (Stanton, 2003)

Finding Nemo (Stanton, 2003) is an animated film produced by both Disney and Pixar released in 2003. The film centers around a nervous and overbearing clownfish dad named Marlin that is traversing the ocean while he tries to find his son, Nemo, who has been stolen out of the water by fisherman on his first day of school. Nemo, a small clownfish with a disfigured fin, has been dropped off into a fish tank at a dentist's office after being scooped up by scuba fisherman, and meets new friends in the aquarium that decide to help try to reunite him with his dad. Meanwhile, back in the ocean, Marlin has teamed up with a blue tang fish named Dory, as they travel to try and find Nemo. Eventually, Dory reunites Nemo and Marlin but is then nearly

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captured herself. Marlin allows for Nemo to do something risky to save Dory, revealing that he understands it is important to give Nemo his own space to grow as an individual. The characters in this film that appear most likely to be male are Nemo, Marlin, Mr. Ray, Gill, Crush, Squirt, the three father and child pairs from Nemo's school, Bruce, Chum, and Anchor.

Nemo, voiced by Alexander Gould, is the one of the main characters of this film. He is a small orange and yellow clownfish with black stripes on the edges of his fins. His right fin is smaller than his left fin, and he and his dad call it his "lucky fin." This is a birth defect, but Nemo is quick to let everyone know that it does not slow him down. He has giant eyes in comparison with the rest of his body, and this is common with the child characters in this film, likely to represent their youth. Nemo is energetic, excitable, and has a curious nature. He is ready to go at full speed from the first minute he wakes up in the morning. In the first scene where the viewer meets Nemo outside of his egg, he is waking Marlin up to help him prepare and leave for his first day of school. In the midst of all of the first day excitement, Nemo flings himself headfirst into a barnacle and gets stuck. This sends Marlin into an absolute panic, even though Nemo is able to wiggle himself free. Nemo feels confident in his abilities, even when Marlin does not echo this confidence, and sometimes it causes contention between the two when Nemo feels as though Marlin is treating him like a baby. When Nemo and Marlin get to where Mr. Ray is going to pick up all the kids for school, Nemo wants to go off and play with all of the other kids, but Marlin feels as though they are being given too much freedom for how young and inexperienced, they are in the ocean. This makes Nemo upset, because he feels embarrassed by his father's paranoid and worried nature. Like most kids, Nemo is embarrassed even more when he realizes in other situations how much alike his dad he is, and how much they resemble each other. Nemo is naïve, and he does not realize the kinds of dangers that lurk in the ocean because

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he has been so sheltered throughout his life thanks to Marlin. On his first day of school, embarrassed that his dad has brought up his small fin, he rebels by swimming out to a boat he sees floating at the surface. Trying to show his dad and everyone else how capable he is, Nemo finds himself being scooped up into a bag to be transported to a dentist office. This is terrifying for young Nemo, but he finds some solace with the other aquatic creatures he meets in the fish tank. One of the fish, Gill, decides that the fish in the tank and Nemo can all help each other by escaping one day when the dentist goes to manually clean the fish tank water. When Nemo has to push himself through the filter in the aquarium, it is scary and he is afraid, but he pushes himself to do it anyway. When he finds out that Marlin has been trekking through the ocean to find him through all of the different scary situations, he is proud to be his dad's son, and he realizes that his dad is much braver than he realized before.

Marlin is Nemo's dad. Voiced by Albert Brooks, he is worrisome and fearful more often than he is not. Marlin looks nearly identical to Nemo, except his eyes and head are more proportionate to each other, and he is larger. There are many reasons besides Marlin's fairly small size that he is perceived in a nonthreatening way. In terms of personality, though, Nemo and Marlin are very different. In the introduction of the film, it was clear that Marlin was paranoid and afraid for his clutch of eggs, even before losing most of them and his mate to the barracuda. Because of this experience, though, he ends up feeling validated in his fears and pushing a lot of those feelings into his relationship with Nemo. Marlin is not just concerned about the things out of his control though, he is also concerned with whether or not he is being as good of a clownfish as he should be in all regards, such as in the beginning of the film when he is making sure that Coral is happy with their living arrangements and their neighborhood for their kids that are still eggs, and he is worried whether or not his massive amount of eggs (400

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according to the script) will turn into kids that like him or dislike him. Coral reassures him that out of the lot, "one of them is bound to like" him. This is the kind of reassurance he needs to feel better and secure, and Coral knows how to provide him with this support. Unfortunately, Marlin experiences a horrific loss when a barracuda eats Coral and 399 of his eggs. If Marlin did not already understand his responsibility to keep the one left safe, he certainly does after losing everyone else. Because Nemo is the last baby left for Marlin, he is worried about every aspect of his upbringing. Marlin wants to make sure that he can keep Nemo safe at every turn, even when it puts them both at a disadvantage. From Nemo's first day out of the egg, Marlin reinforces to him that the ocean at large is extremely dangerous, and things past the drop-off are especially so. Marlin is reluctant to send Nemo to his first day of school because he is worried about Mr. Ray having too many other kids to watch, and he does not believe that Nemo will be able to hold his own if things get out of control. There is part of this fear that seems to come from his worry that if something happens, everyone will look at him as a bad dad. When Marlin and Nemo show up to the drop-off to meet Mr. Ray, the other dads make fun of Marlin for never leaving his anemone, and for always being so worried. When Marlin is not anxious, though, he is playful and silly, and he shows this with Coral at the beginning of the film and with Dory throughout the film. Another instance where Marlin gets to demonstrate his silly attitude with Nemo at the end of the film, where instead of the familiar scene of Nemo waking Marlin, Marlin is waking Nemo for school, teasing him and making jokes to the other dads at the drop-off.

Mr. Ray and Gill are two characters that serve as social fathers in this film for Nemo at different points in time. Mr. Ray, voiced by Bob Peterson, is the teacher of the children and as such is responsible for them every day and making sure that they are safely returned to their families each day. Mr. Ray is portrayed as nonthreatening, and he is goofy and silly with the

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children that he is teaching. Beyond this, he is responsible for their learning, and making sure that they are learning each day. All of the other parents are used to trusting Mr. Ray with their kids, even though Marlin implies that one more (Nemo) may be just too many to handle. Even though Mr. Ray and Gill fill similar social roles, their personality and demeanors could not be more different. Gill, a large wild-caught Moorish Idol fish voiced by Willem Dafoe, advises all of the different fish in the dentist's aquarium. He is a strong social father for Nemo in Marlin's absence, and from how much he sticks his neck out for Nemo at the beginning of their relationship, it seems that he sees some of himself reflected in Nemo. It is Gill that suggests initiating Nemo into the aquarium through a proper initiation and reception, indicating from the beginning of their relationship that Gill has a soft spot for Nemo. Gill has a large scar on part of him, and his fins are shredded. It is clear from his appearance that he has had a hard life before the aquarium and has had to make sacrifices and decisions to get himself where he is. When Nemo is trying to navigate the aquarium filter intake, he cries out for help at one point, but instead of stopping it, he instructs Nemo verbally on how to free himself, which he does. Even though Gill does not think they should rescue Nemo, he clearly considers himself responsible for the outcome and he is concerned for the fate of Nemo. When Nemo tries again, though, he ends up almost getting sucked into the impeller, which is an event that is traumatizing for all of the aquarium fish, and they all work together to help free him. When Nemo is finally freed after being scared, Gill apologizes to him for putting him in a situation that made him uncomfortable. Instead of just pretending that it is fine, Gill acknowledges that he should have known better than to put Nemo in that position and that it was a selfish move on his own part. While it may have been selfish, Gill knew when it was time to stop, and when it was time to apologize.

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Crush and Squirt, and the three pairs of fathers and sons from Nemo's school function in very similar ways during this film in that they show four other model examples of what son and father relationships look like physically and interpersonally. For Crush and Squirt, both sea turtles voiced by Andrew Stanton, the first indication of their father and son relationship is the fact that they look identical, with the exception of a size difference and the much larger eyes of Squirt, the son. The butterfly fish, seahorse, and squid father and son pairs from Nemo's school follow that same formula with their appearance, and the personalities of the sons are also extremely similar to that of their fathers. In the case of the butterfly fish, they are obnoxious and loud, the seahorses are pretentious and bullies, and the squids are easy going and "along for the ride." For Crush and Squirt, they have California surfer stereotypical personalities, saying "like" and "dude" every few words. Both Crush and Squirt are easy going, but Squirt is curious and adventurous because he is young and learning, while Crush is old, wise, and experienced at 105 years old. Crush and Squirt also provide a unique learning experience for Marlin by allowing him to see Crush's willingness to let Squirt explore and learn on his own, because everyone has to be able to do that on their own time as part of growing up. When Squirt finds himself in a situation that could be potentially dangerous, Marlin instinctively wants to snatch him up, but Crush explains to him that Squirt has to learn on his own and it is good for all of them to see what he does on his own first before rushing in to save him. This leads to an important exchange between Marlin and Crush where Marlin asks how you know when your kid is ready to go on their own, and Crush replies that "you never really know" but they will tell you on their own when they are ready.

Bruce, Chum, and Anchor are the three shark characters in this film, voiced by Barry Humphries, Bruce Spence, and Eric Bana. Bruce is a great white shark, while Chum and Anchor

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are mako and hammerhead sharks respectively. All of them have very sharp visible teeth, and snappy quick movements across the screen. All three of these characters appear in extremely threatening contexts even though none of them are meant to, as when they meet Marlin and Dory for the first time, they explain that they do not eat fish and they are recovering fish eaters. Each of the characters has a different accent, but all of them speak with accented voices. Despite their attempts at changing behaviors, it is clear to the viewer that Chum has eaten the fish friend he brought to the meeting during the meeting, and it works as an indicator that Chum and Anchor may not be as dedicated to their recovery as Bruce, even though Bruce appears to be the most dangerous of the three as he is the largest and has the sharpest and most teeth. Bruce commends Marlin for looking for his son, because he experiences an emotional breakdown at the thought of how he never knew his own father, and Chum and Anchor feel like that is why Bruce has so many outbursts. Inevitably, Bruce gets a whiff of fish blood and goes after Marlin and Dory in an extremely violent nature, and Chum and Anchor try to excuse this behavior by reminding Dory and Marlin that Bruce does not have a dad.

In this film, there are 17 individual male-presenting characters, none of which are human. Of these 17 characters are five father-son dyads, the most of any film analyzed in this sample. This may indicate that Disney has changed the way they feel child viewers will take interest in father-son relationships. Unfortunately, these relationships are only presented in the absence of a mother; another nod to the Disney trope that has appeared in their stories since their inception. The main plotlines of this film revolve around the similarities between fathers and sons and the differences as well, with male mentorship being a large part of the movie's message, something that is similar to *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994). The fathers in this film are largely involved with their sons and this is a progressive stereotype of fathers that would align with

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society's ideas about fatherhood changing from just being present or providing instructional support to taking time to play and engage in recreation with their sons.

The Incredibles (Bird, 2004)

The Incredibles (Bird, 2004) is a film produced by Pixar and released by Disney that centers around a family of superheroes that are living undercover as “normal” people and those in their circles, with Bob Parr (Mr. Incredible) and his friend Lucius Best (Frozone) still often working as superheroes at night. When Bob realizes that one of his friends, also a former superhero, has gone missing it starts an adventure that brings the whole family (except JackJack) and their superpowers to center stage, and it is up to them to save the world from Syndrome and his Omnidroid. The male characters in this film are Bob Parr, Dashiell Parr, Buddy Pine, Lucius Best, Bomb Voyage, and JackJack Parr. JackJack is a tiny infant that is included in very few scenes, as he is left at home during the bulk of the film, so I have not analyzed him below.

The Incredibles (Bird, 2004) starts out in a documentary style, with a young Bob talking to the camera. Bob Parr, also known as Mr. Incredible, is voiced by Craig T. Nelson. Bob is the husband to Helen, and the father of JackJack, Dash, and Violet. When he is dressed as a superhero, his super suit is red and black. He is tall and muscular with a wide chest when he is a superhero, and in the beginning of the film when they are showing nostalgic clips of long before he is a father and a husband, he is very conventionally good looking, with slicked back blonde hair and blue eyes. His facial features are small and take up a small amount of his actual face, so his chin and forehead appear very large. The filmmakers describe Bob in the script as being a “dashing, golden-haired man” in his 20's at the beginning of the film. At this point, he talks a lot about how he works alone, and would not want to be on a team of heroes or a pair of

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superheroes. In these first scenes, he discusses superheroes and their desire to use a secret identity in the normal day to day world. He explains that nobody would want the pressure of being “super” all of the time. This is followed by a montage of Mr. Incredible saving the day at various points, making sure to stop and tell the police he is “just there to help” when he thwarts a bank robbery. Bystanders watch on in amazement at Bob time and time again, and he attracts the attention of a young boy who wants to be super just like him, though he does not have his own superpowers. Buddy tries to be Bob’s sidekick, but Bob is very firm and aggressive at telling Buddy that he does not work as a team, and he does not want those responsibilities. Later, once Bob has become a father and settled into a more sedentary work environment at an insurance agency, he gains weight and loses muscle. When he reappears later in life, he is a more typical looking middle-aged man with a large round belly and wrinkles all over his face. He is still a large man, but his proportions have changed, and he is not the youthful and bright looking 20-something-year-old man that was shown in the mockumentary.

Bob is a strong minded and determined, energetic man at the beginning of the film, but once he has spent time working in an office and not as a superhero, he has become worn down and tame. He sits at his desk hunched over and lets his boss talk to him disrespectfully. Despite having to give up his abilities and identity as Mr. Incredible, he tries to find ways to be super for people in their daily life anonymously, or by helping them navigate his complex insurance job. At his house, he keeps a small room full of superhero memorabilia where his kids cannot find it, so that on his own time he can retreat into there and relive some of what seems to be his more glorious days. Bob resents the world that does not favor superheroes, and he feels like he is at a disadvantage for not being able to be who he truly is in public when he wants to be. This is an attitude and belief that he imparts to his son, Dash. When Mirage reaches out to Bob to come to

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fight the omnidroid as Mr. Incredible, he lies to wife about where he is going because he does not want her to know that he is out living his superhero life again, and he does not want his family to put themselves in danger because he feels responsible for keeping them all safe. His sad demeanor all changes, though, once he goes off on his first superhero trip, because he comes back feeling more energetic, paying more attention to Helen and playing with the kids more. Bob returns being more engaged during dinner conversation than before Helen felt he was withdrawn from. As an adult viewer, it almost comes off as the trope of a man who has come back after having an affair. When the family is reunited and Bob learns that they have all come to make sure he was safe, he is emotionally vulnerable with them about how nice it is to be part of a team. He explains to his family that he was so hyper focused on his past, that he did not stop to realize how much his family factors into who he is now. Bob tells Helen and his kids that “you guys are my greatest adventure.” While Mr. Incredible is always out to help, and Bob is always soft with his family, there is a moment of weakness where he grabs Mirage and threatens to squish her in his hand, because his hand is almost bigger than her entire body. Syndrome does not stop him, but he lets Mirage go, because it would not be the right thing to do.

Dashiell (Dash) Parr, the oldest son of Bob, is voiced by Spencer Fox. Dash looks a lot like his dad but with more of the blonde hair. Dash has a big head, and like his father, his features are closely concentrated in the center of his face. There are also features of Dash's that resemble Buddy, as they have the same hair shape, and both have larger bottom jaws (underbites). While Dash is not muscular like Bob, he is extremely fast due to his own superpower. Everything about Dash is fast, from his movements to his speech, and that is true even when he is not actively using his superpower. Dash takes after Bob in terms of his resentment to the society they live in for not letting them express their superpowers. Dash wants

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to join the track team at school, and he promises that he will not use his whole superpowers, just enough to get second or third place, but Helen and Bob know that they cannot risk Dash showing off and exposing them. Dash's arrogance and strong sense of self-confidence in all situations mirror much of how his father acted as a younger man. Even though he cannot actively use them in public, Dash knows that his powers are nothing to be ashamed of because Bob has taught him to be proud of who he is. At school, when Dash feels that a teacher is picking on him and singling him out for being different, he starts to cause trouble. This is the same as when Dash wants more attention from his parents, he will act out to get it, as if bad attention and good attention are equally beneficial to him. Dash is not afraid to get into a little bit of trouble, and this causes some contention between he and his older sister, Violet. At one point in the movie, Violet and Dash are stuck in a cave together, and Dash screams as loud as he can, so the echo reverberates, and at this exact moment Syndrome is setting off a rocket so there is a large explosion and Violet attributes the shaking and aftereffects of the rocket to Dash because he is typically causing so much destruction. This scene resembles the stampede scene from *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994) with Violet filling the role of Scar and Dash resembling Simba, where youthful arrogance is the cause of an irreversible amount of devastation.

Buddy Pine, or Syndrome, is voiced by Jason Lee. Buddy looks a lot like Dash and Bob, except he has red hair and freckles instead of the more attractive blonde hair of the Incredible boys. Another difference in his appearance from Bob and Dash is that his teeth are crooked in his mouth, while neither Dash nor Buddy have crooked smiles. Buddy first appears in the film as a young boy looking to be Mr. Incredible's understudy, but he is shamefully rejected by Bob at every attempt. While he does not honor the designation, Buddy is looking for Mr. Incredible to function as a social father for him, but this is not something that Bob is willing to do for him.

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Despite these rejections, Buddy's tenacious nature shines through because he is motivated and determined even to a fault. When Bob has effectively broken his heart, he decides his new purpose is to kill off all of the superheroes so that he can defeat the pretend villain he created and then appear to be the best superhero in the whole world. When Buddy feels he has been rejected by Mr. Incredible, he lashes out and is determined to become his nemesis. This resembles Dash's tendencies to lash out and look for trouble when he is not getting enough acknowledgement from the people around him that he cares about. Buddy grows up to be Syndrome, once he comes to the realization that he "cannot count on anyone, especially your heroes." Syndrome feels as though Mr. Incredible only pays him attention once he realizes that he has become such a threat to his family and their way of life. Even though he tries to act like he is not continuously affected by his rejection from Mr. Incredible, he screams out "Am I good enough now?" when he is fighting Mr. Incredible, showing that it clearly still bothers him. When Mr. Incredible uses his strength to act like he is going to snap Mirage, Syndrome calls his bluff because he knows that Mr. Incredible would never hurt a woman, it is not in his personality. When Mr. Incredible drops her instead, Syndrome calls him "weak" and remarks that he has "outgrown" looking up to Mr. Incredible. Buddy's story ends when he is sucked into the turbine of his jet plane.

Lucius Best and Bomb Voyage are two other male characters in this film, and though neither one of them are in the film for very long, they represent important aspects of masculinity, identity, and social male relationships. Lucius, voiced by Samuel L. Jackson, is Bob's best friend and often his personal confidant. When they are fighting crime as superheroes, Lucius is known as Frozone. Lucius is a tall, thin black man who, as Frozone, wears a flashy white and blue super suit. His superpower is to use the humidity in the air to create ice. Lucius's personality is funny and sarcastic, and he is loud and demanding when he talks to his wife or other people. When he

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gives Bob advice, though, it is emotional and heartfelt. Lucius acts as a support system for Bob, and a place for him to turn when he feels like his family and society do not understand him.

When Bob sneaks out to be Mr. Incredible, Lucius does too, and the two of them bond in the fact that they share that secret with each other. Bomb Voyage, voiced by Dominique Louis, is a small villain character that has a thick French accent, and pointy/wiry facial features. His character is very much fashioned after what a street mime looks like, as he wears tight fitting clothing. This is another instance where a thick accent is used to denote a villain character, as well as feminine traits such as tight-fitting clothes and higher pitch voice.

This film has a total of six male-presenting characters, with all of them being “human.” In the beginning of the film, Bob is the gold standard of what an attractive man is physically, and once the film has caught back up with him after he was no longer working full time as a superhero, he has lost much of his athletic body and looks more like what a viewer may expect their father to look like. In this film, the main male character is a father of two boys, and his relationship with them (or lack thereof) is a large portion the underlying message in this film. Dash looks up to his father and wants to be just like him so that his father will be proud of him, and this is a feeling that many viewers may feel as though they relate to. When Bob feels the worst in the film, it is because he feels as though he has failed as a father and a husband and not because he feels like he has failed as a superhero. This is important as it emphasizes his human nature, and potentially allows child viewers to contemplate feelings that adults have that they do not express to their children (as Mr. Incredible is first reflecting on these things outside of their presence.)

Additionally, Syndrome, as Buddy Pine, seeks mentorship from someone he looks up to and gets rejected, causing him to feel so resentful toward someone he once admired that he

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becomes the sworn enemy of Mr. Incredible and all of his superhero friends. This may be Disney attempting to acknowledge feelings a young boy may feel when he does not have the “ideal” relationship with his own father or father figure. Although Buddy Pine is not described as Bob Parr’s son, he is strikingly similar looking physically both to Bob Parr and his son Dash, and these physical similarities have been used in this film and others to acknowledge familial relationships, so it does lead one to wonder about the true nature of their relation. Of the sample of films that I have analyzed, *The Incredibles* (Bird, 2004) is the first with easy to digest references to familiar social stereotypes of manhood and fatherhood. The only other film that draws so heavily on these concepts and stereotypes is *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017), a film that was released over a decade later about a specific subculture of North Americans (Mexicans) that may not be as familiar to viewers.

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs (Lord & Miller, 2009)

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs (Lord & Miller, 2009) is a film that was produced by Sony based on a children’s book about an inventor, Flint Lockwood, who creates a machine that turns water into food, eventually allowing for it to rain different foods. This machine creates unruly situation after unruly situation to the point where Flint must destroy the machine in order to save the world. At the beginning of the film, he is living with his father, Tim, who encourages him to give up inventing and find a real job so he can be his own man. This causes some contention between Flint and Tim because Flint feels Tim does not support his endeavors. Even when other people think that Flint’s invention is incredible, his father is unwilling to embrace technological change and does not see the value. The male characters in this film are Flint and Tim Lockwood, “Baby” Brent McHale, Mayor Shelbourne, Earl and Cal Deveraux, Manny, and Patrick Patrickson.

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Flint Lockwood is the main character in *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Lord & Miller, 2009). Flint, voiced by Bill Hader, is an aspiring inventor who wants to help solve problems to save the world, but he does not always think his ideas all the way through. Flint has wild brown hair and big blue eyes and is often seen with a smile on his face even as things are going wrong. When the film begins, Flint is just a child in school with the same personality he has as an adult, curious and genuine albeit a little nerdy. As Flint's own voice as an adult narrates a scene of him as a child, he is explaining that he always felt as though he has something to offer the world, but nobody would listen to him. The other kids at school pick on Flint because he is nerdy and they do not understand why he is so different, and this makes Flint internalize their comments and resent some aspects of his own personality that he feels make him different. Even though Flint is physically larger than most of the other kids in his class, they bully him because his personality is nonthreatening. When he is little, his mom encourages Flint to stay true to who he is, and not feel like he has to change for other people. To help Flint feel like he is truly who he is meant to be and reawaken his sense of individuality, she gifts him a real full size adult lab coat that he wears all of the time as an adult once he has fully grown into it.

Flint's mom passes away when he was younger and Flint continues to struggle with his sense of self as an adult as well, because the people around him do not appreciate his differences. Before his major invention is a success, Flint is feeling like he has taken the wrong path in life, and his father Tim tells him that it may be time to give up inventing and work at the family business, a tackle shop. This hurts Flint's feelings and he tells Tim that he has never understood him the way his mother used to, and this hurts both of them. Flint just wants to feel like Tim is proud of him, and at every turn tries to force his inventions and technologies onto Tim so that Tim can see how incredible he is, but Tim is resistant to all of these different changes, and Flint

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takes that as a sign that he is not proud of him. Most of the people around Flint do not acknowledge any of his inventions as beneficial contributions to society until he creates the FLDSMDFR, a machine that uses moisture to create any kind of food. Flint meets Sam Sparks, a weather intern, as a result of his FLDSMDFR altering the climate patterns, and for the first time since his mom has passed away there is someone in Flint's life that appreciates him for his quirky personality and does not just want to change him. When the two of them are trying to figure out how to stop the FLDSMDFR because it has gotten out of control, Sam comes to a scientific realization before Flint does, but they look at each other uncomfortably and both act as though it had really been Flint's idea, because he is supposed to be the smart scientist. Flint does not really like taking credit for Sam's ideas, but they both feel as though this is the "right way" they are supposed to act. Once Flint starts getting attention from other people and Sam is not his only friend, he acts like she does not know what she is talking about even though he knows she is really smart. The way he interacts with Sam once other people are nice to him indicates how much of his attitude and behavior are seeking for someone to provide him with approval, whether it is strangers or his father.

Tim Lockwood, voiced by James Caan, is Flint's father. When there are clips in the film of past inventions of Flint's that have gone wrong, typically Tim is the person who is most affected by these failings, with things falling onto him or ruining his day. He is a very large and brooding man, with a large wide nose and almost invisible eyes hidden beneath a thick brown unibrow that is typically lowered over his small eyes in a disapproving expression. His arms, hands, and shoulders are all sturdy in appearance. Even though Tim and Flint do not have much in common, he tries to spend time with him anyway. Tim is old-fashioned and he believes that things should stay the way they are. He encourages Flint but wants him to be successful in life

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and thinks it would be best if he spent his time focusing on taking over the family tackle shop. In many ways, even when Tim does not agree with the choices Flint makes, he supports him anyway and just keeps his disapproval to himself. When Flint is especially dejected, Tim can frequently be found trying to give his son encouraging words of advice using things he knows and understands, such as fishing metaphors, but in a way that Flint can apply to his own difficult situations. Flint is resistant to his father's desire for him to take over the family tackle shop as he does not want to work in this type of job for the rest of his life and he sees the changing nature of their environment and the community's lessening interest in sardine fishing, so this causes stress in their relationship. Eventually, Tim feels like he needs to use "tough love" and get Flint to see things his way, as this is the only thing Tim has not tried and he wants Flint on the right track.

When he thinks he has finally gotten through to him, he is disappointed to learn that Flint has been sneaking around behind his back and still spending a significant amount of his time working on his inventions in private, leading him to ruining a town event and getting arrested in the wake. As the movie continues and Flint's FLDSMDFR is captivating the attention of everyone across the world, Tim still feels as though this is not "the right path" for his son, and he worries about the way things around him are changing. Because Tim values things that are traditional and the way things have been in the past, he is afraid to see the many changes in technology that are representative of the larger changes in the world around him. These things remind Tim that he is getting older, and that the things he used to be able to count on as being consistent in his environment are not going to look the same in the future as they have in the past and this scares him, so he is especially resistant when Flint's inventions bring those feelings to the surface. Flint takes this as being a personal rejection of himself as Tim's son, where it is really a representation of Tim's own personal fears of obsolescence. This shows up in the scene

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where Tim and Flint have gone to a restaurant to eat food created by Flint's machine, and Tim is horrified at the steaks falling onto the patron's plates. Tim tells Flint he does not want to eat any of the "techno food," but wants to bond with him over things that he understands like the tackle shop. Tim has a hard time expressing what he is truly feeling with his words, and his facial expressions tend to always look disapproving, and these things combine to give Flint a hard time understanding where they stand with each other. With Flint always seeking his father's approval, and his father not knowing how to express his feelings and thoughts to his son in a detailed way, they both assume the worst out of each other. At the end of the film, an invention of Flint's that allows him to talk with his monkey creates an environment where Tim's deeper feelings are expressed. This allows for Flint to know that his father does love and appreciate him, and he is proud of him even if they do not have a lot in common or he does not always understand Flint and his inventions. This is everything Flint has wanted to hear from his father, and it helps him not resent him for his traditional views and thoughts.

Brent "Baby Brent" McHale, voiced by Andy Samberg, is one of Flint's peers. When Brent is a child, he is the posterchild for the sardine brand that has made their town famous, and he bullies people at school, such as Flint, because of this status. In the very beginning of the film when Flint is trying to show off his spray-on-shoes, Brent tells him that it is lame to be smart and makes him feel embarrassed for who he is as a person. As an adult, the most noticeable things about Brent that have changed is that he is now overweight and slouchy. He has blonde hair and blue eyes, and a big white smile. It is clear that Brent does not realize he is no longer "Baby Brent" and is instead a grown man, so he walks around bullying people as an adult the same way he did when he was younger, especially Flint. Often, he is shown walking around with unnamed female characters, using them as props to make himself look better and more "manly." When

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Flint becomes popular in the town and people begin to pay him more attention than Brent, he absolutely cannot stand it and begins to resent Flint even more than he had before, instead of just joining in and becoming friends. In the scene where Flint is taking his father out to eat, Brent is outraged to find out that Flint is able to get a seat in the fancy restaurant before he is, despite being “Baby Brent.” Brent is a “has been” and he represents the town’s nature as the same thing; once something that was popular and attractive that is now often forgotten about and uncared for by others.

Mayor Shelbourne, voiced by Bruce Campbell, takes a social fathering role over Brent, and Brent seeks his approval in the same ways that Flint seeks out the approval of Tim. Mayor Shelbourne is a corrupt politician modeled after a 1970’s gameshow host or a used car salesman who is only interested in doing what serves him best at the time in the eyes of the people keeping him in office. This is obvious when he refers to his own town as a “hell hole” and says that it is too small for him. Mayor Shelbourne often talks about how stupid everyone in his town is, and how much better he is than them, and when Brent asks where he fits into that, Mayor Shelbourne realizes he needs to correct himself. This manipulative nature means that the Mayor is always looking to sell someone a dream. For Brent, this means that as he is younger and popular, Mayor Shelbourne wants everything to do with him because it puts him in the spotlight and makes him look good. Unfortunately for Brent, this also means that once Flint is the hot topic, Mayor Shelbourne is willing to push Brent to the side because they did not have an authentic relationship. Mayor Shelbourne looks to appeal to Flint by explaining to him that “geniuses are never understood by their fathers,” offering him a social fathering relationship where he may feel like Tim is lacking. This is manipulation on the part of the Mayor because he is only looking to advance his own reputation by using something that he perceives as a

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weakness of Flint's. He tells Flint that he does not need the approval of his own father when he can have the approval of a lot of strangers, and this is yet another way he is trying to manipulate his way into that role in Flint's life. Before the big reveal, Mayor Shelbourne gives a speech and wants Flint to cut the ribbon, so he refers to Flint as his "metaphorical son" even though they have barely had a relationship for any amount of time. When the Mayor takes the ceremonial scissors and will not let Brent cut the ribbon, he makes a fool of himself because he feels like he is losing his entire identity as the town's favorite, and as The Mayor's favorite. Once this happens, Brent realizes his fame and attention were all just an illusion in his mind, and that now it was up to him to find out who he really is as a person because he had never taken the time to do that.

Earl and Cal Deveraux, voiced by Mr. T and Bobb'e J. Thompson respectively, are a father and son pair where Earl is a police officer and Cal is his young son. Cal acts a lot like his dad despite being so small and has a lot of the "too cool" attitude of his father. Even though Cal is cool, he is still nice and wants Flint to feel included in a snowball fight even though he has never been part of one. Earl is strong and muscular, with wide shoulders and a broad chest. His shoulders and arms are usually visible with his muscles sticking out as he is always shown in his police uniform. Cal is small and is shown in a black winter jacket with a fur hood cuff, and jeans with tennis shoes. There is a scene early in the film where he tackles someone who is jay walking across the street as a way to display his strength and physical ability. During the town's first ceremony at the beginning, Earl expresses to Flint that he is taking it as his own personal responsibility that Flint does not ruin the town's big day and he will do anything he can to stop that, which Flint should heed but still ruins the big day anyway. On Cal's birthday, Earl asks Flint to use his FLDSMDFR to make it rain ice cream, so that Cal can know that his dad loves

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and appreciates him. This grand gesture is especially funny considering Cal reminds his dad that Earl tells him he loves him every single day. Even though Flint's invention causes the town so much trouble, when everyone wants to exile Flint, Earl reminds them that they need to take responsibility for their own parts in the catastrophe as well, and that Flint only did what he was asked to do from others over and over again. When Cal goes into a food coma and Earl is worried that he will lose him, he seeks medical help from Manny. When Manny is able to revive him, he is so excited that he has to tell him he loves him as soon as he wakes up, and after Cal leans over to puke from being sugar sick after his food coma, Earl kisses him right on the mouth.

Manny and Patrick Patrickson are two other male characters that appear in *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Lord & Miller, 2009). Both of these characters exist around Sam, with Patrick being the anchorman on the television news while Sam is in the field, and Manny being Sam's videographer/producer, but functioning much more like Sam's babysitter. Manny does not speak in almost any of the scenes he is present in, and we as the viewers do not get to learn anything about him until nearly the end of the film. He is short and his camera takes up almost as much space as his body. He wears a hat over his eyes, and the camera covers his mouth, so the viewer only sees Manny's body, hat, camera, and large nose. Manny, voiced by Benjamin Bratt, is a Guatemalan man who immigrated from home, as he explains in the film when he is helping Cal. Manny had been a doctor, comedian, and a pilot when he lived back home before "coming here for a better life," clearly said with a snide sense of sarcasm. When Sam is driving and distracted, Manny is the one that grabs the wheel and fixes it so that she can stay on the road. Patrick Patrickson, voiced by Al Roker, is the anchorman at the weather station. Patrick is dressed like a typical weatherman and keeps a charming smile when the cameras are rolling on him. He makes fun of Sam for wearing her hair up and having glasses on when she is giving

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weather coverage of the giant spaghetti tornado that is threatening to destroy the town, showing that he does not see her as someone who is giving important information and only instead as an object.

In all, there are 10 male-presenting characters in *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Lord & Miller, 2009) and all of them are human. There are two father-son dyads in this film and another dyad of a man and his male mentor. Of the six male characters that are present in the majority of the film, Flint is the only character that does not have any glaringly obvious attractive features, either physically or relative to his personality. The other five main male characters all represent aspects of fatherhood or manhood that should be revered, such as his father Tim being physically large and intimidating as well as a hard worker; Brent's success in media and the attention he receives from women that flock around him; and Earl's physical strength and no-nonsense attitude. Even Mayor Shelbourne is characterized in a way that aligns him with stereotypically successful politicians, namely his perfectly manicured appearance. Flint is the main character of this film, and it is a main point of the film that he is not the kind of man that people would think of as an ideal, nor would he be a man that was typically rewarded by his form of masculinity in the hegemonic society that is prevalent here in North America. His physical appearance is wiry and lanky and even as a child, his peers single him out for being obsessed with science and thus "nerdy" or weird. His peers belittle and bully him from childhood on, and this has a large effect on how Flint feels about himself. It is not until he has created his device that people begin to treat him good, and this may be something that is relatable to viewers watching the film.

Flint is one half of one of the father-son dyads, and his relationship with his father is often strained through the film, though he and his father Tim come to understand each other

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despite their many differences in the end of the film. Tim is unable to vocalize how he feels about Flint and that he is proud of him, so the only things Flint ever hears from him are the ways he wants him to change. This leads to Flint feeling a disconnect in their relationship, and this may be something that is relatable to a viewer who feels as though their relationship with their father is based on the ways that the father wants them to be different. This is contrasted by the way that Earl interacts with Cal, as it is obvious to everyone both in the film and viewing that Earl thinks Cal is great, and he continuously gives his son accolades to pump up his self-esteem and self-worth making it easy for Cal to feel comfortable in who he is, like a positive reinforcement loop between the father and son. This gives another representation of a father-son relationship and helps provide representation of a different type of father-son relationship where the father is not withholding of physical affection toward his same-sex child. This is a progressive typification of fatherhood that may indicate a changing attitude in society about what a father and son relationship looks like, particularly amongst Black men and boys where there is often a societal stereotype of absence.

Brave (Andrews & Chapman, 2012)

Brave (Andrews & Chapman, 2012) is an animated film produced by Pixar and released by Disney. The film centers around Merida, a princess who is sixteen and just realizing that she is being expected to marry the son of a neighboring king who seeks to avoid this compulsory arrangement. Merida is told that if she does not follow the tradition and marry someone for the sake of the kingdom, it will be the detriment of her father. The three heirs from the three neighboring kingdoms all come to compete for Merida's hand in marriage, though she has other ideas. While the majority of the film centers around Merida herself and her interactions with her mother who has been turned into a bear, her relationship with her father is a pivotal aspect of the

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main storylines for both characters. All of the adult men in this film are fathers, and all of the male characters have present biological father relationships. The male characters in this film are Fergus, Hamish, Hubert, Harris, Lord Dingwall and his son, Lord MacGuffin and his son, and Lord MacIntosh and his son.

King Fergus is the father of Merida, Hamish, Hubert, and Harris. Voiced by Billy Connolly, Fergus is a no-nonsense mammoth-sized man with a small head. He is married to Queen Elinor, and she the “thinker” while Fergus believes in reacting to situations with his physical strength. Hamish, Hubert, and Harris are King Fergus’s youngest children, and they are a set of young triplets that have his bright blue eyes, albeit much bigger, and curly fluffy hair. Merida remarks in the opening scenes of the film that they are allowed to get away with everything, while she can never get away with anything. King Fergus does not believe in magic and tells Merida that she should not waste her time with fairytales and pretend stories such as the will-o-wisp. When King Fergus is in early scenes with young Merida, his hands are larger than her entire body. He and all of his children have curly red hair that is big and fluffy and makes the five of them all look like relatives. Fergus has a wide nose and small eyes that sit underneath bushy red eyebrows. He is missing his left leg because he had been attacked by an extremely large bear (Mor’du) when Merida was a young child. This bear becomes King Fergus’s white whale, and he becomes obsessed with the idea of hunting him down and getting his revenge. Fergus knows that it is his responsibility to keep Elinor and Merida safe when Mor’du comes around, and he takes this job seriously while trying to defeat him. Fergus is a brave man and is not afraid to fight Mor’du even after he has ripped his leg off. The King is firm and stern; he is not afraid to be stubborn with his wife or anyone else when he feels he is right, such as when he gifts Merida with her very own bow and arrow.

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Queen Elinor feels as though it was wrong for Fergus to get Merida her own bow and arrow, and she feels it will encourage her to be less ladylike in the future, but Fergus believes that it is extremely important for everyone to know how to defend themselves in a fight, “even a princess.” Later in the film, when the lords all gang up on Merida, King Fergus’s first instinct is to step in and defend her, until he realizes that she is able to defend herself and does not need him to protect her in that moment. While Fergus has to be responsible for keeping his own family safe, he is also responsible for the safety and security of the kingdom as a whole. It makes King Fergus happy that his young daughter is interested in things that he likes, such as archery, rock climbing, and horseback riding, but this does not translate to him being happy that as she gets older, she is still more interested in these things than getting married and forming a stronger alliance with a neighboring kingdom. Because this is the way things have always been done (woven into the tapestry), King Fergus and Queen Elinor cannot fathom any other way of doing things, even though Merida has her own agenda to push.

It is clear to the viewer that King Fergus is closer with Merida than Elinor is because they have grown up spending a lot of time together and bonding, so when the Queen wants to have a difficult conversation with Merida, she feels as though she does not know how to talk to her. King Fergus responds to this family situation by helping Elinor practice the conversation she wants to have and roleplaying as Merida. King Fergus wants to help Elinor feel comfortable having an emotional conversation with Merida because it will be good for both of them, so he provides her with the support he thinks that she needs to make that happen. Even though King Fergus has a close relationship with the women in his life, there are plenty of instances where he does not listen to their judgements or what they think is best in a situation. Whether it is when Merida is trying to explain she does not want to get married or when Fergus interacts with his

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wife when he gets a bow for Merida, because he cannot understand that there may be a problem with his own judgement, he is completely dismissive of her concerns and shuts them down.

When Merida is trying to explain to him that the gigantic bear later in the film is not Mor'du but is Elinor who has magically been turned into a bear, he is unwilling to accept this explanation because it is not in line with what he believes reality to be.

Lord MacIntosh, Lord MacGuffin, and Lord Dingwall and their heirs are three father-son pairs in *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012). The heirs and their fathers come to Fergus's kingdom because the heirs are competing in an archery contest for Princess Merida's hand in marriage. Each of the Lords introduce their heirs in a "Presentation of the Suitors" where they attempt to make their sons sound like the most desirable of them all. Lord MacIntosh, voiced by Craig Ferguson, is the first to introduce his son. Lord MacIntosh is tall and thin, with bushy dark hair that is curly and unruly. His eyes have an intense stare, and his eyebrows are large and dark. After all of the heirs have been introduced, Lord MacIntosh remarks that Lord Dingwall is a liar (despite all of the Lord's embellishing), and "at least we have hair! And we don't hide under breeches," before referring to another Lord as a "grumpy old troll." Lord MacIntosh thinks he is smarter than the people around him, and his attitude comes across as pompous. He claims that his son has defended their land from invaders, and has "with his own sword, stabbed and vanquished thousands more." When young MacIntosh appears in the crowd, he is a little more handsome than his father but also tall and wiry. He has an athletic build, but his arms are very thin, and his legs are mostly hidden beneath his clothing. He has long, curly dark hair like his father. As he steps into view after his father's introduction, he shows off uncoordinated sword techniques and Merida does not seem to be interested. When things go wrong for young MacIntosh during the competition, he gets extremely angry and throws a tantrum, throwing his

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bow into the crowd. Merida remarks how unattractive this tantrum was, but that he has a good arm, and Fergus replies jokingly about how “lovely” and “flowing” young MacIntosh’s hair is.

Lord MacGuffin, voiced by Kevin McKidd is the second up to introduce his heir. Lord MacGuffin is a large man with broad shoulders and a wide chest. He has blonde hair that is tied up in two pigtales on each side of his relatively small head and his thick full facial hair is the same sandy blonde color. In Lord MacGuffin’s introduction of his heir, he proclaims that his son has “scuttled Viking war ships with his bare hands” and “vanquished 2,000 more!” At this point, his son appears amongst the crowd to snap a plank of wood in half, with a response of cheers from the onlooking crowd. He is the first of the heirs to participate in the archery contest, and when he shoots his arrow, it barely hits the edge of the target. This delights Merida as she does not want any of the boys to do well, so she knows she will not have to worry about marrying Young MacGuffin.

When it is time for the final neighboring clan presents their heir, Lord Dingwall, voiced by Robbie Coltrane, introduces his son to the crowd. He exclaims that his son had been “besieged by 10,000 Romans and he took out their whole armor [...] with one arm, he was steering the ship and the other [...] held his might sword and struck down a whole attacking fleet!” When he drags his son to the front of the crowd, he is small and scrawny. This solicits Lord MacIntosh to claim he is a liar, and the Lords all begin to argue amongst themselves. Once Lord MacIntosh refers to the Dingwalls as bridge trolls, Lord Dingwall instructs his son to attack young MacIntosh and so Wee Dingwall latches onto young MacIntosh and bites a chunk of his arm, starting a brawl amongst everyone that needs to be broken up by Fergus, though it is eventually only ended by the presence of the Queen. Even Lord MacIntosh is too embarrassed to conduct himself violently in front of Queen Elinor, and all of the Lords adjust their behavior

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when she arrives. When it is time for Wee Dingwall to shoot the bow, he can barely hold it steady and high enough to shoot. Somehow, he manages to hit the target and wins the archery contest, despite being the tiniest and least athletic of all of the competitors.

In total, there are 10 male characters in *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), with all of them being both human and either father or son characters. This is something that makes this film different from any of the other films analyzed during this study. Out of these 10 male characters, only King Fergus is representative of any ideal standard, though all of the father characters are present for their sons and advocate for them during the competition. King Fergus is a character who is extremely manly, losing his leg defending not just the lives of his family but the lives of his entire kingdom from a massive bear. Even with this injury he is strong and strikes fear into all due to his brave nature and willingness to be strong and fearless in every situation. These are all characteristics that align King Fergus with societal ideal standards of both a man and a father despite the film being based around Scottish culture.

Moana (Clements & Musker, 2016)

Moana (Clements & Musker, 2016) was produced and released by Disney that focuses on a young Polynesian girl named Moana who has been chosen by the ocean to return a special stone to the Goddess of Creation, Te Fiti. In order to accomplish this, she must go on a voyage across the ocean, something that nobody from her island has ever done before. She is assisted by a demigod, Maui, that must teach her how to read the waves so that she can return the heart to Te Fiti. The characters that appear to be male in this film are Maui, Chief Tui, and Tamatoa.

Maui, voiced by Dwayne Johnson, is a demigod that carries a giant magical fishhook. His body is large and muscular, and he appears to be in extremely good shape. He wears a grass skirt, and he is covered in cultural tattoos in intricate patterns all over his body. His hands, arms,

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and shoulders are extremely large, but his head is disproportionately tiny and covered in big, fluffy, curly hair. He wears a necklace low on his chest with shells and teeth and bones all attached. When he first encounters Moana, he assumes that she is a fan of his that wants an autograph. He is stubborn and uninterested in most of the things that Moana has to say. When she explains to him that he needs to restore the heart of Te Fiti, he throws it as far as he can back into the ocean, but the ocean spits it back to them. Maui is good at pretending he does not have emotions, such as when Moana asks him if he is afraid of the heart, but the little tattoo of himself that he has reveals his true feelings. Maui teaches Moana many different things during their time together, the first being when he imparts wisdom to her regarding the ocean. Moana expects the ocean to help them, because it has always helped her in the past, but because Maui has had different experiences, he exclaims to her that they must help themselves. Maui eventually tries to understand more about her and her people so that he can better understand why she is so determined to complete this mission. What he does not realize are the many ways that he and Moana are similar, from their stubborn nature to their desire to do what needs to be done to save the world.

Chief Tui is the other main male character in *Moana* (Clements & Musker, 2016). Voiced by Temuera Morrison, Chief Tui is stern and serious when he speaks. He is Moana's father, and she will be the chief of their village when it is her time. Because of this, the Chief needs to pass down as much of his wisdom to her as possible, and it is important for her to understand that the people in their village are counting on her to keep them safe and have the things that they need to survive. Chief Tui is a tall and strong looking man who is covered in cultural tattoos. He is both physically and mentally strong and believes in following through on his personal responsibilities. When his mother is telling the young children about how it will be someone's destiny to return

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the heart to Te Fiti, he stops her because he does not want the children to get the idea in their heads that it is a good idea to leave the island and go into the ocean. He explains that they are safe there, with no monsters or anything like what is beyond the reef. He cannot understand why anyone would want to leave the island when it is such a paradise, but his mother exclaims to him that it is the legend that was set in place before their time and they cannot change it, it is just how things go.

When the Chief sees Moana exploring near the edge of the ocean as a baby, he quickly scoops her up and brings her back to the center of the island where he thinks it is safer. He explains to his daughter that this is “where she is meant to be” and she needs to learn that so that she can be an effective leader of their village. Chief Tui imparts to Moana the many ways that she can keep the people of her village safe and supported, by staying away from the ocean and staying close to the village as the people there need her. When he catches her going to the ocean as a teenager, he grabs her by her shoulders and lifts her and firmly puts her down on the sand. When this happens, it is clear how much physically bigger he is than her, and that he is using his physical strength and ability over her as a way to regain control that he feels he is losing. This scares everyone, including Moana, when it happens, because Chief Tui has always been so nice and warm toward the members of his family.

Tamatoa, voiced by Jemaine Clement, is a purple and blue reef crab that is in possession of Maui's magical fishhook. He is greedy and stingy, and he has a horde of glittery valuables. He even coats himself in things that are glittery so that his shell is shiny and pretty, despite the fact that he has gross spots all over his teeth and barnacles in other places. Maui explains that Tamatoa loves to talk about how great he is, and Moana replies that he and Maui must have this in common. When he realizes that Moana is interested in learning more about him, he begins to

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sing a song about himself. His voice fluctuates in tone when he speaks and goes back and forth from high to low pitch. He has a different accent from everyone else, something that has signified villain status in previous movies as well. Even though he is singing nearly the entire time he is present in the film, he is extremely tough and gives Maui a run for his money when they two of them are fighting over the fishhook.

This film has a total of three characters that are male presenting, one of which is entirely nonhuman and another that appears to be human but is a demigod in human form. Even though Maui refers to Tamatoa as “he,” it is clear that his personality is not one that would align with any traditionally masculine stereotype or ideal. Tamatoa, while not being a human character, is presented as a villain and his purple and pink outside appearance coupled with an accented, high pitch, nasally voice ties into this villainous status. Chief Tui is the only male character that is actually human, and he represents many ideal standards of masculinity as well as fatherhood in that he is both muscular and strong and remains protective of both his family and the village as a whole. He is also wise and knowledgeable, telling all of the children the history of their tribe so that their stories are not forgotten, and they remain safely within the reef. Maui, though not actually human, appears as a physically intimidating man that has gigantic muscles and a tiny head. His proportions are meant to emphasize what is important to him, and that is his physical size/strength. While Maui acts as a social father to Moana through much of the film, he does so resentfully and often will mock her or tease her for not knowing how to do something, though eventually teaching her these skills.

Coco (Unkrich, 2017)

Coco (Unkrich, 2017) is a film that was produced by Pixar and released by Disney. This film portrays a Mexican family and their traditions surrounding death and ancestry by focusing

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on their customs for Día de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead. As explained in the film, this is a Mexican holiday when it is believed that our loved ones who have passed away are able to come and be with us in the world of the living instead of residing where they are usually stuck in the land of the dead. In order for someone to be able to return to the land of the living, they must have a living relative that remembers them and displays their photo on their family's altar, or *ofrenda*. A young boy named Miguel gets stuck in the land of the dead and must navigate the desires of his ancestors and his family history in order to better understand his place in the land of the living. The characters in this film that appear to be male are Miguel, Hector, Ernesto de la Cruz, Papá, and Papá Julio. Neither Papá nor Papá Julio are shown as significant characters in the film, and I have excluded them from my analysis below due to lack of scenes with them present.

Miguel, voiced by Anthony Gonzalez, is a young Mexican boy living with his extended family and he is one of the main characters in *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017). Miguel is about 12 years old, and he wears jeans that are cuffed at the bottom over brown leather shoes, outfit made complete with a tee shirt and hoodie. He has shaggy dark brown hair, big brown eyes, and a wide toothy smile. He is curious and interested in learning things that appeal to him but becomes easily distracted and bored when being exposed to information he does not relate to. Miguel is very fast, in all his physical movements, his speech, and his decision making. He lives with many members of his extended family, and he loves to spend time with all of them, especially his great grandma, Coco. Miguel and Coco spend a lot of time together because Miguel makes sure to include her in any way he can when he is doing something. Miguel often talks with Coco, despite her suffering from memory loss, and often takes care of her basic needs such as feeding. Even though Miguel loves his family and learning about his ancestry and traditions, he is resentful

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because his family does not believe in playing music or singing or dancing. Miguel jokes that they must be the only family in Mexico that does not love music, but his mom explains that her a relative left to pursue music and it nearly ruined the family, and they have never gotten over it. Miguel understands the hurt that his family has gone through, but as a young teenager he is intrigued by the mariachis and finds himself longing to play guitar and sing, the way everyone's musical idol, Ernesto de la Cruz did on television.

Miguel has his rebellious streak, and it shows when Miguel sneaks off to practice music in private, with a little guitar he has decorated to look like Ernesto de la Cruz's, watching him perform on television and singing along. Inevitably, he is caught, and his family is angry and disappointed with Miguel for him sneaking around and playing music when he knows how his ancestors have felt about it. His family members begin to yell at Miguel, and when he doubles down on his desire to sing and play music, they destroy his guitar so that he cannot play it any longer. This is heartbreaking for Miguel, and he does not understand why his family will not just let him live his own life and be who he feels like he is born to be, and so Miguel runs away. This causes Miguel to accidentally bump his family's ofrenda, Grandma Coco's picture with her mother falls off and the frame breaks, revealing that her father had an embellished guitar in his hand behind Grandma Coco and beside her mother. Miguel realizes that this guitar is the one he has seen Ernesto de la Cruz with on television so many times and takes this to mean that he is Ernesto's great-great-grandson. This also means that Grandma Coco, somebody that Miguel has such a close relationship with, was abandoned by her father because he wanted to tour and play music. Even though Miguel is so close with Grandma Coco, even this cannot stop his desire to participate in the town square talent show, and it does not matter to him that his family has destroyed his guitar.

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Miguel feels as though his family does not understand him, and he feels like he knows what is best for him better than his relatives do. This is the same way he feels when he and Hector do not see eye to eye about the best course of action to take when they are trying to return Miguel to the land of the living. Miguel does not mind taking Hector's advice and guidance when they want the same things, but he is not above letting his youthful stubbornness get the best of him when he thinks he knows what is best. Such is often the case when Miguel is frustrated with Hector before he realizes who Ernesto really is, and because Miguel sees himself as aligned more with Ernesto during this time, it is easy to see how Miguel may justify this behavior. When Everyone has turned against Miguel and the only "person" on his side is his dog Dante, he lashes out against him as well. Even though Dante is just trying to help keep Miguel out of trouble, he is the last one around and the easiest target for Miguel to take out his own negative feelings. It is not that Miguel is mean spirited or bad natured, the viewer knows this because of the soft and tender moments with Dante and Grandma Coco, but he tends to be impulsive and let his negative feelings get the best of him.

Hector is another main character in the Disney film *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017). Voiced by Gael Garcia Bernal, Hector is a skeleton that has passed away and exists only in the land of the dead. He is able to communicate and befriend Miguel when Miguel gets trapped on his side. Hector is very tall, and even though he is a skeleton, he appears lanky and long. Part of this especially lanky appearance is because his clothes are too small for him, making his wrist stick out of his long sleeve (on one side only) and his ankles pop out of the bottom of his pants. His appearance overall is very worn, with bare feet and crooked teeth; he does not appear to spend a lot of time worrying about his clothes or how he is physically presenting himself to the world. Hector is struggling because the living members of his family that remember him in life are

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passing away, and only his daughter remains. Because she has not shared stories of her father with her own children, she is the last person alive with memories of him. As Hector explains, when his daughter passes away, he will no longer get to be in the land of the dead and he will pass away forever, never getting to reconnect with her in the afterlife. Because of this, it is imperative that Miguel is able to get back to the land of the living before the end of Día de los Muertos so that Hector can travel to his daughter and apologize for leaving when she was little. While his daughter has lived her whole life thinking that he abandoned her, in reality Ernesto de la Cruz murdered him and kept him from being able to return to his family.

Hector spends a lot of time teaching Miguel different things while they are traversing through the land of the dead together. These topics range from musical things to Mexican traditions to personal anecdotes and things Hector had wished he had paid more attention to in life. These things are important for Hector to impart to Miguel because Hector feels as though he did not get to be the father to his daughter when he was alive that he had wanted to be. Being with Miguel in the land of the dead allows for Hector to exercise his fathering skills that he has had time to think about in death and it provides him a lot of comfort for this reason. In many ways, Hector is tender hearted, and this is shown in the compassion he feels for Miguel being lost in an unfamiliar place, and in the nostalgic scenes where he is singing "Remember Me" to a young Coco. When Miguel performs in the talent show in the land of the dead, Hector is proud to see how well he does especially because he is performing a song that Hector wrote, and it makes him feel emotional to see someone perform that actually cares about the music itself instead of always Ernesto who only cares about himself. When Hector is proud of Miguel, he tells him so, and Miguel does not have to wonder whether or not he feels positively about him. Another aspect of Hector's personality is that he is often trying to con his way into what he wants, and he

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is willing to do whatever it takes to put himself where he wants to be. The first scene where Hector is introduced to the viewer, he is trying to trek into the land of the living by dressing up in a disguise as renowned artist Frida Kahlo. Because of this aspect of his nature, it is easy for Miguel to dismiss him when he claims that he has really authored Ernesto's songs and wrote "Remember Me" for his daughter. Despite this aspect of his own personality, Hector is distressed when he realizes that he has been lied to by Miguel, and he feels sad as opposed to only angry. Hector is desperate to get back to the land of the living so he can apologize to his daughter, and even when Miguel jeopardizes his last opportunity to make this happen, Hector does not lash out at him and instead just resigns himself to his circumstances.

Ernesto de la Cruz, voiced by Benjamin Bratt, is the main antagonizing male character in *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017). Ernesto de la Cruz is in the land of the dead, so like Hector, he is only a skeleton instead of a complete human body. Despite being literal bones, Ernesto wears heavy stage makeup that brightens his skull and makes it a perfect white, and dark blacks around where his eyes go that look much more dramatic than the natural skeleton appearance of Hector's eyes. Ernesto de la Cruz dresses extravagantly in life and in death, and he has a special custom guitar that matches his embroidered outfits. In life, he was Hector's best friend and band mate before he murdered him. Hector had a family at home and Ernesto felt as though they were holding their musical act back, so he killed Hector and stole all of the songs that he had written so that he could be the center of attention and take all of the credit. This is why Hector's family goes on believing that Hector had just left. Miguel is under the impression for much of the film that he is his great-great-grandson, but he finds out that instead it is really Hector he is related to. Miguel goes looking for Ernesto de la Cruz because he believes they have this family relationship, and he wants Ernesto to act like a social father to him. This is something Ernesto is willing to do at

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the beginning when he thinks that it will serve him well to have Miguel around, but once Miguel poses a threat because he knows the truth of who Ernesto really is, Ernesto wants to punish him, and so his behavior does a complete about-face.

Ernesto de la Cruz is a greedy man that is used to always being the center of attention, and it is not just his clothing and guitar that is extravagant. He is an egomaniac that thrives off the attention that he has gotten as the most important musician to ever live, and even in death he is still going off of the things he had done in life as opposed to creating new good music or continue accomplishing things. He wants all of the attention to be on him at all times, but only if people are going to be looking at him in an adoring fashion. A contrast from Miguel, Ernesto does not feel like all attention is good attention, and he is especially concerned with the way he is perceived by the public. There are giant statues and landmarks dedicated to Ernesto in both the land of the living and the land of the dead because so many people love him from his music and television performances. Ernesto makes sure that his image is carefully guarded, and he keeps many secrets close to the vest. As soon as Ernesto can throw someone under the bus, he will, and he proves this time and time again in life and in death from killing Hector to be the most important musician to kidnapping Miguel and trapping him when Ernesto worries that he may tell everyone his secrets. As soon as it does not serve Ernesto to interact kindly with someone, he stops and turns cold.

Coco (Unkrich, 2017) has a total of five main characters that present as male, with all of them having been human at some point. Of these characters, only Ernesto de la Cruz is presented as an ideal, and this is why Miguel and society as a whole idolize him. Miguel is a very stereotypical representation of a young boy and has qualities that make him very easily relatable to a viewer, even if they are not necessarily familiar with the Mexican heritage and culture

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further explained in the film. This is another film that relies heavily on stereotypes of fatherhood, and representations of mentorship between a boy and man. Miguel's entire family has abandoned music and dancing for generations because they believed that one of their ancestors had abandoned his wife and daughter in favor of playing music on the road. This plays off stereotypes of absent fathers in society and is something that may feel relatable to a viewer. This ancestor's absence has consequences that go beyond the world of the living into the world of the dead and threatens to curse his family forever until Miguel is able to learn that in reality, the ancestor was murdered and did not leave by choice.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

To reiterate, the present research analyzes 10 top lifetime-grossing animated films (1989-2017) children's films that feature father characters specifically looking at male-presenting characters to see how masculinity and fathering identities are represented in these films. When children consume any type of media, they are using it to learn and make assessments about the world that they interact with daily even if the environment they are observing does not look the same. In order to create a more detailed understanding of messages sent to children relative to masculinity and fathering, the three questions I sought to answer by conducting this research were as follows:

1. What characteristics do fathers and father-figure/social fathers display in children's animated films?
2. In what ways are fathers and father-figures in children's animated films representative of or different from societal stereotypes regarding fatherhood?
3. What kinds of differences (cultural, historical, religious, etc.) exist in the way that fathers and father-figures are constructed and presented in children's animated films?

What Characteristics Do Fathers and Father Figures Display in Children's Animated Films?

The fathers in the 10 films I have analyzed are represented in different ways ranging from extreme physical differences to extreme behavioral and parenting style differences. There were father characters that were humans and father characters that were animals, but most of the variations amongst them were in their personality traits. In some of the films such as *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989), *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), *The Incredibles*

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(Bird, 2004), and *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), fathers of the main character are portrayed as stereotypically masculine and tough patriarchs in their families that are responsible for keeping everyone safe. In *Mulan* (Cook & Bancroft, 1998), General Li fits this description as well. They are the largest members of their family, they are stern in their beliefs and attitudes, and they all exhibit deep and steady voices that personify traits such as their emotional control and make them more observable for young viewers. In these films, the reputation and identity of fathers are directly impacted by the behaviors of their families in public, and the father characters in both films are very much aware of this. The fathers in all of these films expect a standard of conduct from their children to reflect positively on them, and people who are interested in deceiving or harming the father characters may use their children as potential ways to exploit them. In fact, for King Triton, Mufasa, and nearly Mr. Incredible, their love for their family and desire to be the best possible patriarch is their ultimate undoing and all of their respective nemeses know that this is the easiest point to destroy them.

In the film *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Lord & Miller, 2009), Tim is a father character who has much of his face hidden by his eyebrows, the same as Fergus in *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012). This allows for them to be portrayed as having an intense level of emotional control as they are not often making observable facial expressions, either positive or negative. In all of these films where fathers are portrayed in a typical masculine fashion, father characters often exhibit soft control over the people they are responsible for, but when they are confronted with resistance, they use power and force to regain control, such as when King Triton uses his magic to destroy Ariel's human belongings, or when Miguel's father destroys his guitar. In *Moana* (Clements & Musker, 2016), when Maui gets upset with Moana he begins to scream and yell and destroy things, a stark contrast from his typically happy-go-lucky nature and

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attitude. This is of course absolutely terrifying for Moana, but Maui feels justified in his behavior because he feels as though Moana is not respecting appropriate boundaries.

In the films *Beauty and the Beast* (Trousdale & Wise, 1991) and *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), the fathers are portrayed much differently. Both of these films present father characters that have nervous qualities, and appearances that may not be considered attractive or desired. In *Beauty and the Beast* (Trousdale & Wise, 1991), Maurice is a very old man who has odd interests and is not physically fit. When it comes time to protect Belle, Maurice is unable to fight off Beast by himself and instead must let Belle stay with him in his place. The people who live in the same village as Maurice and Belle often make fun of him for being a “crazy old man” because he spends a lot of time working in his workshop on his inventions. He does not represent any kind of ideal masculinity the way the fathers in the previously discussed films do, and he does not serve as a role model that a child would potentially see and want to emulate because he is punished for his identity and behaviors whenever he interacts with people other than Belle. In *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), Marlin is a very nervous parent who is constantly concerned both with whether or not he is being perceived as a good father and whether or not he is actively keeping Nemo as safe as possible. Marlin is a small fish who does not have anything particularly special about him (such as the squid or the sharks) and there is nothing about him that would potentially be able to physically protect Nemo aside from their anemone. He is quick to panic, and his constant state of worry surrounding every situation only serves to create a hostile environment where Nemo resents his father for not letting him do things which inevitably leads him to getting into more trouble as his rebellious nature takes hold. This is similar to Miguel's experience with his father in *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017) after he breaks Miguel's guitar and Miguel

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runs off and breaks into Ernesto de la Cruz's monument, ending up trapped in the land of the dead.

Overall, most of the male characters who were main characters in the films and meant to portray attractive characteristics were more traditionally masculine and in line with hegemonic standards in society. When male characters were presented as deviating from these ideal standards, it was either to offer comedic release from tense situations or to provide a comparison by which more traditionally masculine characters were able to elevate their own social status. Three instances where this was not true were *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Lord & Miller, 2009), and *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017) where there were main characters with less ideal traits than ideal ones who still manage to be the hero of the story. It is clear that there are more complex representations of manhood, mentorship between boys and men, and fatherhood in the more recent films and this may be a trend that continues as more films centered around male characters are released, such as *Luca* (2021) which was released after the data collection for this paper had concluded.

It is a common occurrence that sons and their fathers look extremely similar or even identical as they age. This is a present theme in *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), *Mulan* (Cook & Bancroft, 1998), *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), *The Incredibles* (Bird, 2004), *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), and *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017). In *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), Simba and Mufasa are a father and son pair that are nearly interchangeable in appearance. When Simba is small, he does not look like Mufasa, but when he reappears as an adolescent, he looks identical to him. Upon returning to Pride Rock, Nala and Sarabi are stunned to see Simba and they think he is Mufasa at first. Similarly, when Simba sees his father in the water, at first, he is convinced it is just his own reflection. In the case of *Mulan* (Cook & Bancroft, 1998),

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General Li and Li Shang look nearly identical as well, though General Li is more wrinkled and worn as a sign of his age and wisdom. Even Mulan resembles her father more when she cuts her hair and wears her armor as Ping. In *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003) and *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), all of the father and son pairs are nearly identical with the exception of youthful features such as exaggerated child-like large eyes and pimples. Showing sons as identical versions of their fathers conveys a sense of belonging and similarity even to young viewers who otherwise may struggle to pick up on these aspects.

In What Ways Are Fathers and Father-Figures in Children's Animated Films

Representative of or Different From Societal Stereotypes Regarding Fatherhood?

Across all the films analyzed for this research, there were father characters that both supported and did not support stereotypes of fathers that exist in our larger American society. One major stereotype regarding fatherhood in our society is that fathers are expected to be the head of their households, and in the sample of films it can be observed how this sometimes extends to being patriarchs outside of the home in society as well. Such is the case in *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989), *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), *Mulan* (Cook & Bancroft, 1998), *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), and *Moana* (Clements & Musker, 2016). It may be easier for young viewers to understand the level of expectations and responsibility for these father characters when they see King Triton's crown or are able to see General Li take control of his army. It is a stereotype that fathers are overly protective and preoccupied with the physical safety of their children and those they are responsible for, and this is something that is observable in all of the films analyzed here. Even in the films where fathers are not portrayed as threatening, ideal, or typically masculine, such as *Beauty and the Beast* (Trousdale & Wise, 1991) or *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), every character that has been described as a father or a

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social father displays immense concern regarding their family's safety and whether or not they are able to keep them safe.

Another stereotype about fathers that exists in society is that their lives revolve around their jobs instead of their kids, and they use work as a way to escape from domestic responsibilities. This goes beyond the basic expectation of being able to financially provide for their families into a space where they are choosing work over their family whenever possible. When Bob Parr returns from his superhero secret getaway and acts as though he is having an affair in *The Incredibles* (Bird, 2004), it drives this stereotype home. In *The Little Mermaid* (Clements & Musker, 1989), *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), *The Incredibles* (Bird, 2004), *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Lord & Miller, 2009), and *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), parenting is an important part of each father's life, but the most important focus for them is often on their responsibilities to the larger world. In *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* (Lord & Miller, 2009), Tim wants his son to take over at the family-owned tackle shop that has been passed down from generation to generation. When Tim does not want to be around Flint, he uses work as an excuse to get away from him or to get away from his inventions. Tim spends the majority of his time at work and is always pictured in his work uniform. This is in line with Parent and Moradi's (2011) research on masculine traits regarding the primary focus of life for men being work outside of the home as a uniquely masculine trait.

On the other side of the fathering stereotype coin, there is this concept of "progressive fathering," which is characterized by a father taking a more attentive role in the child rearing process. In society, progressive fathering is often portrayed as spending time together, fostering an emotional relationship through bonding, and participating in shared activities together. Interestingly, the father-child relationship that I feel most closely resembles this description is

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that of King Fergus and his daughter Merida in the film *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012). Even though this film is set in a much more traditional time period, King Fergus is the only father in the sample of films I have analyzed that encourages activities of his child that are leisurely and spends time with her doing these things. Mufasa teaches Simba how to hunt and stalk and do functionally beneficial things in *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), but they are not portrayed as interacting in any lower stakes activities where important information is not being imparted.

It can be argued, though, that Marlin and Nemo present as a progressive father and son pair because Marlin has been raising Nemo entirely by himself. Initially, I did not consider this to be the case because Nemo and Marlin are not together throughout the film, so as a young viewer this may not be something that would be noticed, but as I have worked on this project and thought about each film in detail, I have thought about Marlin and Nemo's relationship outside of the confines of the film itself, and his status as a single father is enough in itself to represent progressive fatherhood imagery. This is also true for *Beauty and the Beast* (Trousdale & Wise, 1991), where Belle and Maurice have a very close relationship and that is clear in their interactions, but they are not portrayed as a loving or nurturing father-daughter pair throughout significant portions of the film, so it can be easy not to think about Maurice as a portrayal of progressive fathering. It is a bit of a trope throughout Disney's catalog to have the main character exist in a world without a positive maternal influence, and both of these paternal relationships do fit into that narrative, though Belle's father can be set apart from, say, Cinderella's in the sense that Belle does not end up with an overbearing stepmother as her father remains single. Similarly, in *Finding Nemo* (Stanton, 2003), even in the end of the story when everyone is

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getting along and seemingly has gotten over their burdens, Marlin is still rearing Nemo in a single-father anemone (household.)

It is impossible to discuss stereotypes of fatherhood in an exhaustive fashion without mentioning stereotypes of fathers as absent, inconsistent, or as the parent that does not have to carry the hard weight of parenting. Many of the biological and social fathers observed in these films exist to defy these negative stereotypes, but that is not the case for all of them. In the example of *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017), viewers are first confronted with the idea of a father who has caused a generational curse on his family because he chose music over them, only to find out that he was taken away from them by no choice of his own instead. In *The Lion King* (Allers & Minkoff, 1994), Mufasa passes away early in the film, and so he is not there for Simba when he is growing up and learning how to be his own lion. When Simba sets off on his own, he ends up coming across Timon and Pumbaa and he is willing to let them take the role of social father for him and teach him how to survive on his own because he needs someone to provide this support for him. Both of these instances demonstrate that it is not always a black and white situation on whether or not a father is good or bad based on their presence, and that the details may be more complex than we understand. This can be an important message for younger viewers who may be experiencing their own complicated absent father situation to see representation in movies that they watch.

What Kinds of Differences (Cultural, Religious, etc.) Exist in the Way That Fathers and Father-Figures Are Constructed and Presented in Children's Animated Films?

The sample of films analyzed for this study span a broad range of historical and cultural contexts both in their contents and in when they themselves have been created, released, and popularized. Six of the 10 films selected for this research have been released over the last 18

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years, and it would appear that there are more films in recent times that present fathers and their relationships with their families as integral aspects. Male role models in the form of social and biological fathers appear to interact with their children more in the more recently released films such as *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), *Moana* (Clements & Musker, 2016), and *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017). This may indicate that society is more comfortable viewing adult male-child alliances than in the past, supporting the idea that more involved and present fathering is something that is becoming more normalized.

The sample of films analyzed for this research also provided an opportunity to see representations of fathering in families living all over the world, from the United States and Mexico to China and Scotland. The film *Mulan* (Cook & Bancroft, 1998) is set in ancient China, in the time of the Huns. Mulan's father, Fa Zhou, is quiet. He has served in the military in the past and is spending his older life relaxing in the comfort of his family until he is conscripted. Mulan's father wants for her to be happy, but he also wants for her to be a proper Chinese woman. Mulan gets down on herself because she is taught that bringing home a good husband is the best thing that she can do to show honor to her family, and Fa Zhou reemphasizes to her that when she is charming and delightful, a good husband will come for her. Inevitably, even though Mulan goes off on her own and joins the army as Ping, because she is able to save the Chinese empire, a good husband still comes her way. Fa Zhou teaches Mulan how to be a respectable person, and he is upset with her when she disgraces him in the town square. Fa Zhou feels as though it is a poor representation of him for his daughter to act that way in front of other men, and he explains to her that she does not know her place in society. Fa Zhou is imparting to Mulan the customs of the Chinese people, and these things factor into her own personal identity. Mushu takes much of this responsibility over for Fa Zhou when Mulan goes off into the army,

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and he makes sure to still teach her new things about Chinese customs and traditions (such as his own position as a “spirit guide”) and not just how to be a man.

Coco (Unkrich, 2017) is another great example of a film that teaches the viewer about different cultural customs while still being relevant to the plot and remaining fun and engaging for young viewers. Because the entirety of the plot revolves around Día de los Muertos, it is important for any viewer to have a working knowledge of this holiday and the customs that go along with it. By explaining this to the audience, it helps make sense of parts of the movie that otherwise may not, such as why Miguel needs to complete his tasks by midnight, the makeup and costumes that people are wearing in both the lands of the living and dead, and why all of the different families have ofrendas set up on the same day. Even though Miguel does not spend much time with his own Papá during the film, there are many instances throughout where a viewer can observe cultural expectations regarding fatherhood. From the very beginning of the film, fatherhood is at the forefront of the conversation as Miguel explains how one of his ancestors had run away from the family and abandoned his responsibilities in order to pursue a life of music. The family has not recovered from this, and as a result, Miguel is not allowed to listen to or perform music at all, as his family worries that it will draw him to a bad lifestyle. When Miguel's father realizes he is sneaking around and practicing music, he is a strong disciplinarian, and this indicates that may be a cultural expectation of him as a father.

Hector and Miguel's relationship in *Coco* (Unkrich, 2017) also provides a look at expectations and standards of fatherhood in Mexican culture, as Hector functions largely as a social father for Miguel during the bulk of the film. Hector explains the way the ofrendas work in the land of the dead, and he expresses the importance of passing along stories of your loved ones to your children, both of which are Mexican cultural traditions that go hand-in-hand with the Día

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de los Muertos theme of the rest of the film. By imparting these traditions and customs, Hector strengthens the bond between he and Miguel and reinforces that he cares about Miguel through this informational support. Miguel goes to the land of the dead seeking this type of relationship from Ernesto de la Cruz, and he expects that Ernesto will embrace this social fathering relationship with open arms based on his warm and caring persona, but Miguel quickly finds out that this is not the case. Even though Ernesto is the more physically appealing adult for Miguel to emulate and use as a role model, it is clear to Miguel that Ernesto is not the kind of person he wants to be in his life, and instead finds himself learning from and emulating Hector. Of course, Miguel realizes near the end of the film that in reality it was Hector that had been his relative all along.

Brave (2017) gives viewers an example of families in medieval Scotland and the way that their family ties influence things in their larger society. King Fergus is the father of four children, and there are three other father-son pairs in the film as well, so fatherhood as a concept is something that is presented heavily even though no fathers nor sons would necessarily be considered the main characters. Each of the other clan's patriarchs is responsible for introducing their heirs during the competition for Merida's hand in marriage, all aspects of their tradition and heritage. When Merida is telling her father about the different things she has done throughout the day, he retells her about old Viking tales, imparting wisdom to her about their culture and their beliefs. In the scenes where Merida and Queen Elinor are arguing over whether or not she should have to become engaged at sixteen, Elinor explains that it is woven in their tapestries and is the way things have been done where they are from since the beginning of time. All of these are instances where their Scottish heritage comes through the plot to explain each person's position

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in society. It is King Fergus's responsibility to host the clans to compete, and to host everyone to celebrate afterwards, and he reminds the Queen of this.

Many children watch movies and television shows daily, and for hours at a time, and it would be difficult to think that they are participating in this activity without absorbing and digesting the messages presented to them in these forms of media and applying them to their own lives, identities, and relationships, even if it is something that is happening subconsciously. This is a concept that has been studied at length when the conversation is tailored to how these films affect girls who watch them and grow into adults, but at the time that the present research was proposed, there had not been any published, peer-reviewed academic research specifically looking at these messages being sent to young boys. This project sought to address this literature gap and begin the process of outlining and describing what some of these characters and their relationships with others in their respective films look like so that future research can better examine how these messages are interpreted and used by child viewers to develop ideas about the world around them. Children viewing these characters and the messages portrayed about masculinity and fatherhood in film may be using them to develop ideas about their own family and relationships between family members and what it means to be or have a father as well as who they are as a person in the instance of young boys. This study provides a starting point for future researchers to engage families who have experience viewing these types of films to learn more about how children are actively absorbing and digesting these messages.

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Table 1

Presently Analyzed Sample of Top-Grossing Animated Films, 1989-2017

Film Title	Year Released	Lifetime Gross
1989	<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	\$111,543,479
1991	<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	\$218,967,620
1994	<i>The Lion King</i>	\$422,783,777
1998	<i>Mulan</i>	\$120,620,254
2003	<i>Finding Nemo</i>	\$380,843,261
2004	<i>The Incredibles</i>	\$261,441,092
2009	<i>Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs</i>	\$124,870,275
2012	<i>Brave</i>	\$237,283,207
2016	<i>Moana</i>	\$248,757,044
2017	<i>Coco</i>	\$209,726,015

FATHERING AND MASCULINITY IN CHILDREN'S FILMS

Table 2

Sample of Top-Grossing Animated Films, 1989-2019

Film Title	Year Released	Lifetime Gross	
	1989	<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	\$111,543,479
	1991	<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	\$218,967,620
	1992	<i>Aladdin</i>	\$217,350,219
	1994	<i>The Lion King</i>	\$422,783,777
	1995	<i>Pocahontas</i>	\$141,579,773
	1998	<i>Mulan</i>	\$120,620,254
	1999	<i>Tarzan</i>	\$171,091,819
	2000	<i>Dinosaur</i>	\$137,748,063
	2003	<i>Finding Nemo</i>	\$380,843,261
	2004	<i>Shrek 2</i>	\$441,226,247
	2004	<i>The Incredibles</i>	\$261,441,092
	2004	<i>Shark Tale</i>	\$160,861,908
	2005	<i>Chicken Little</i>	\$135,386,665
	2006	<i>Happy Feet</i>	\$198,000,317
	2006	<i>Over the Hedge</i>	\$155,019,340
	2007	<i>Shrek the Third</i>	\$322,719,944
	2007	<i>Ratatouille</i>	\$206,445,654
	2008	<i>Kung Fu Panda</i>	\$215,434,591
	2008	<i>Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa</i>	\$180,010,950
	2008	<i>Dr. Seuss' Horton Hears a Who</i>	\$154,529,439

FATHERING AND MASCULINITY IN CHILDREN'S FILMS

Table 2 cont.

Film Title	Year Released	Lifetime Gross
2009	<i>Monsters vs. Aliens</i>	\$198,351,526
2009	<i>Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs</i>	\$196,573,705
2009	<i>A Christmas Carol</i>	\$137,855,863
2009	<i>Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs</i>	\$124,870,275
2010	<i>Despicable Me</i>	\$251,513,985
2010	<i>Shrek Forever After</i>	\$238,736,787
2010	<i>How to Train Your Dragon</i>	\$217,581,231
2011	<i>Kung Fu Panda 2</i>	\$165,249,063
2011	<i>Rango</i>	\$123,477,607
2012	<i>Brave</i>	\$237,283,207
2012	<i>Ice Age: Continental Drift</i>	\$161,321,843
2012	<i>Hotel Transylvania</i>	\$148,313,048
2013	<i>Frozen</i>	\$400,738,009
2013	<i>Despicable Me 2</i>	\$368,061,265
2013	<i>The Croods</i>	\$187,168,425
2013	<i>Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs 2</i>	\$119,793,567
2013	<i>Epic</i>	\$107,518,682
2014	<i>How to Train Your Dragon 2</i>	\$177,002,924
2014	<i>Rio 2</i>	\$131,538,435
2014	<i>Mr. Peabody & Sherman</i>	\$111,506,430
2015	<i>Inside Out</i>	\$356,461,711

FATHERING AND MASCULINITY IN CHILDREN'S FILMS

Table 2 cont.

Film Title	Year Released	Lifetime Gross
2015	<i>HOME</i>	\$177,397,510
2015	<i>Hotel Transylvania 2</i>	\$169,700,110
2015	<i>The Good Dinosaur</i>	\$123,087,120
2016	<i>Finding Dory</i>	\$486,295,561
2016	<i>Zootopia</i>	\$341,268,248
2016	<i>Moana</i>	\$248,757,044
2016	<i>Trolls</i>	\$153,707,064
2017	<i>Coco</i>	\$209,726,015
2017	<i>The Boss Baby</i>	\$175,003,033
2018	<i>Incredibles 2</i>	\$608,581,744
2018	<i>Spider-Man: Into the Spideverse</i>	\$190,241,310
2018	<i>Hotel Transylvania 3</i>	\$167,510,016
2018	<i>Peter Rabbit</i>	\$115,253,424
2019	<i>How to Train Your Dragon: The Hidden World</i>	\$160,346,875

Appendices

FATHERING AND MASCULINITY IN CHILDREN'S FILMS

Appendix A: Movie Character Code Sheet

Character photo	Name	Voice Actor	Relationships	Physical Descriptors	Personality Traits	Other things to note:
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FATHERING AND MASCULINITY IN CHILDREN'S FILMS

Appendix B: Character Code Sheet Hegemonic

Movie:

Release Year:

Character Name:

Character Race (if human):

Father (biological, step, adoptive)

Social Father

Male Presenting

Character

Compassionate	Leisure /Sharing Activities	Moral development	Intelligent
Caregiving	Discipline	Ethical development	Rational
Athletic body	Financial support	Responsibility development	Sweet personality
Social Development	Protecting	Career development	Gentle confidence
Teaching Independence	Keeping up with schoolwork	Emotional development	Perky
Tall	Giving	Short Hair	