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Cory Dorfman January 11, 2023

# “I Am Not a Prize to Be Won”

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An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
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Abstract

"I Am Not a Prize to Be Won"
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The Disney Princess films of the Walt Disney Animation Studios (WDAS) are a staple of childhood for countless youths across the United States and the world, especially young girls (Orenstein 2011). As such, their characters serve as windows into hegemonic gender roles. In this study, I view the performance of gender roles in Disney Princess films through an examination of dialogue and screen time disparities by character gender. I find that while female characters (on average) speak more and appear on-screen more frequently than their male counterparts, they tend to have lower word-to-screen-time ratios (WSR values), signaling their potential objectification and deprival of vocal agency.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The Disney Princess films of the Walt Disney Animation Studios (WDAS) are a staple of childhood for countless youths across the United States and the world, especially young girls (Orenstein 2011). In fact, as of 2012, the franchise makes more than $3 billion a year, showing its extreme popularity (Goudreau 2012). As a result of its global influence, the representations of gender-roles that appear in Disney Princess films heavily influence the gendered lens through which children – and by extent, their adult counterparts -- view the world (Coyne et al. 2016). From the passive woman and the "damsel-in-distress" tropes of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) to the more proactive – but still somewhat male-dependent – Disney Princesses of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), to the present-day tropes of the capable warrior princess (i.e., Moana from the film of the same name), the Disney Princess franchise evidently expanded its representations of female characters beyond hegemonic femininities over time (Schippers 2007).

In this study, I examine the disempowerment of women through voicelessness in the media. In other words, I seek to uncover the impact of gender on the amount of dialogue and screen time for each character in the movies of the Disney Princess franchise, alongside the ratio between the two aforementioned variables, which I call the word-to-screen ratio (WSR). An analysis of Disney Princess films may reveal the ways in which gender roles manifest themselves in hegemonic American culture, and the production of such gender roles result in a frame for the organization of social systems that guide everyday activities (Ridgeway 2009). Previous studies show that children reproduce gender roles based on the cultural artifacts to which they expose themselves (Bussey and Bandura 1999; Gerbner et al. 1994; Hogg, Terry, and

White 1995; Martin and Halverson 1981). Because Disney Princess films serve as such an engrained part of culture among American youths (Watts 2001), they collectively act as ideal candidates for the in-depth examination of the impact of media on the reproduction of gender roles in American society (Coyne et al. 2016; Hine, Ivanovic, and England 2018; Wohlwend 2011).

While previous research examines the role of gender in Disney Princess films (e.g., Anderson and Daniels 2016; Coyne et al. 2016; Eisenhauer 2017; England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek 2011; Hine et al. 2018; Najla et al. 2020; Shawcroft et al. 2022), my study seeks to dig into the strength of voice among Disney Princess films' female characters, with a particular focus on their female protagonists. I do this through a full dialogue analysis of characters from Disney Princess films, which I model after Anderson and Daniels (2016) and Eisenhauer (2017). By examining the influence of voice, I am able to uncover the ways in which society silences women, especially the young girls who depend on Disney Princess films for lessons on how to perform their gender. In addition to an examination of dialogue, I also examine the screen time of each character, which allows me to see if a correlation exists between amount of dialogue and amount of screen time. This relationship is important because it allows me to better understand the ways in which gender roles manifest in Disney Princess films. For example, if men speak more than women and appear on-screen more frequently in Disney Princess films, what would that imply about how young girls should perform gender, and young boys by extent? Would the lack of female representation in both speech and screen time result in young girls muting themselves and trying to occupy less space? In addition to addressing these questions, my study attempts to close the research gap that previous studies neglect by

analyzing screen time in addition to dialogue, taking a generally quantitative approach, among other elements that previous studies fail to include.

My results show that, contrary to my hypotheses, women speak more than men and spend more time on-screen in Disney Princess films. However, the ratio of dialogue to screen time is lower for female characters, which has multiple implications that I explore in greater detail later. Primarily, this finding implies that women appear on screen for the objectification of the viewer rather than for what she has to say. As Coyne et al. (2016) and Hine et al. (2018) show in their respective studies, the aforementioned objectification of female characters in Disney Princess films may lead to dangerous repercussions in the real world, as women tend to replicate the self-objectifying patterns of their on-screen counterparts.

In summary, my study examines the ways that gender roles manifest in Disney Princess films and explores the implications that may have for individuals in the real world, who draw from said films for a glimpse into how they should perform their gender. I now turn to examine what past research indicates about the performance of gender in Disney Princess films and the effects that they may have off-screen.

**PAST RESEARCH**

In this section, I explore the existing literature on the manifestation of gender roles in Disney Princess films. Past research on the topic of interest indicates that women tend to speak less than their male counterparts in such films (Eisenhauer 2017; Anderson and Daniels 2016). I argue that a lack of dialogue allotted to female characters is one way in which gender stereotypes manifest in film, reiterating the common stereotype that women should be passive, compliant, and silent (Najla et al. 2020; England et al. 2011). The apparent voicelessness of female characters in Disney Princess films (and cinema as a whole)[1] has real-world implications, as studies show that gender roles portrayed in Disney Princess films may lead to the reproduction of those stereotypes in everyday life (Coyne et al. 2016; Hine et al. 2018). Therefore, it is important to unravel the gender roles presented in Disney Princess films over time and how they continue to impact viewers today, as I did in my study through an analysis of dialogue. I also analyzed character screen time, which other studies fail to do, in order to see if a relationship between the two variables (i.e., dialogue and screen time) exists, and what it might say about the ways in which Disney (Princess) films (and media more broadly) depict female characters.

The creators of the films that comprise the Disney Princess franchise – who are predominantly male (Smith 2022) -- gender their respective films by mirroring real-world gender roles in their culture (Shawcroft et al. 2022), which is, in this case, the gender frame of

[1] A report by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media indicates that women speak and appear on-screen less frequently than their male counterparts in a sample of the top grossing (non-animated) films of 2014 and 2015 (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media 2016).

hegemonic American culture (Ridgeway 2009) [2]. In turn, the gender roles that characters perform in Disney Princess films reproduce themselves among the adolescent audience that they target (Hine et al. 2018; Shawcroft et al. 2022; England et al. 2011; Coyne et al. 2016), dictating lasting gender roles and overseeing the formation of gendered symbolic boundaries (Lamont 2002).

There are four major theories that predominate in the discourse surrounding the reproduction and manifestation of gender roles through the medium of film, and the media more generally. Social cognitive theory of gender development argues that the life experiences of humans shape their construction of gender norms in their day-to-day lives (Bussey and Bandura 1999). Thus, Disney Princess films -- as a part of the life experiences of humans -- contribute to the reproduction of gender norms in society. Similarly, identity theory indicates that models of gender roles that manifest in the environment in which an individual comes of age results in the recycling and perpetuation of those same gender roles (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995). Likewise, gender schema theory argues that children acquire their manifested gender roles through their own interpretations of gender performance that they see reproduced in their lives, which they subsequently internalize into gender frameworks, or schemas, that guide their actions (Martin and Halverson 1981). Therefore, gender roles portrayed in Disney Princess films act as one of the many gender schemas at a child's disposal, and their interpretation of those roles influences the way they perform gender. In a slightly different approach, cultivation theory suggests that visual media such as films provides a

[2] What I mean by "hegemonic American culture" is the mainstream culture that predominates in the United States and permeates every aspect of American life. Common cultural artifacts include Hollywood films, the American flag, and other objects that promote group solidarity among most residents of the United States.

window into the sociocultural norms (i.e., gender norms) that dictate society (Gerbner et al. 1994). Thus, Disney Princess films provide children with a window into how gender manifests in the real world. Each of the aforementioned theories indicates that gender roles in society come to fruition at a young age and films -- especially family-friendly media such as Disney Princess films -- may influence and perpetuate gender stereotypes among youths. These theories lay the foundation for my research, as my study explores the gender roles that Disney Princess films reproduce.

In addition to providing working theories that argue the importance of conducting research on Disney Princess films, previous studies also reveal that Disney Princess films, and WDAS films more broadly, perpetuate the common media trope that places women in passive, demure roles. Najla et al. (2020) argue that the Disney Princess franchise puts forth an anti-feminist narrative that shapes the way that members of globalized societies influenced by those films "do" gender (West and Zimmerman 1987). They also argue that Disney Princess films reinforce traits that hegemonic American society, and other societies by influence, commonly associates with femininity, including passivity, emotionality, hygiene, and beauty (Najla et al. 2020). Similarly, England et al. (2011) find that characteristics such as kindness, submissiveness, and lack of agency are more prevalent among Disney princesses than more masculine-coded characteristics such as strength, stoicism, and lack of emotionality. Coyne et al. (2016) observe that these gender stereotypes portrayed in Disney Princess films have a damaging effect on young girls' notions of self-esteem, self-worth, body image, and proactive behavior. Thus, the literature indicates that gender roles depicted in Disney Princess films certainly reproduce misogynist stereotypes prevalent in Western societies. Additionally, it indicates that gender

stereotypes in said films clearly influence how individuals perform gender in their everyday lives, suggesting that on-screen roles have real-world implications. Thus, the oppression of female characters on-screen can lead to harmful consequences off-screen.

One method of oppression common in Disney Princess films which female characters often face is through symbolic annihilation (Shawcroft et al. 2022). The phenomenon of symbolic annihilation is relatively common in all forms of media, including Disney Princess films; it refers to the complete omission or the relative underrepresentation of a specific group of characters (in this case, female characters) in various forms of media (Shawcroft et al. 2022). In my research, I intend to discover whether Disney Princess films follow the media trend of symbolic annihilation through the uneven balance of dialogue allotted to male and female characters in their respective films (Shawcroft et al. 2022). In addition, I bridge the primary research gap, which is the omission of the analysis of screen time in order to understand if Disney Princess films objectify female characters by placing emphasis on their on-screen appearances rather than what they have to say.

In addition to my analysis of screen time, my study bridges three minor gaps in existing research. First, many of the studies that examine gender roles in Disney Princess films exclusively examine heroic characters (i.e., Disney Princesses and their male co-leads) as opposed to all major characters (Coyne et al. 2016; England et al. 2011; Hine et al. 2018; Najla et al. 2020). Shawcroft et al. (2022) even goes so far as to mention this as a flaw in previous studies (Shawcroft et al. 2022:347). It is important to analyze all characters because viewers draw cues on the performance of gender roles from every character, not just the protagonists.

Some characters may show viewers how *not* to perform gender roles, and those characters have an equally impactful influence on the replication of gender roles from the screen to reality. My study attempts to close this gap in past research through an analysis of all major characters that appear in Disney Princess films.

Secondly, the majority of previous studies take a qualitative approach as opposed to the largely quantitative one I take in my own research (Coyne et al. 2016; England et al. 2011; Hine et al. 2018; Najla et al. 2020; Shawcroft et al. 2022). By taking a quantitative approach, my study limits any outside influence that may skew my results, as I aim to test my hypotheses using statistical methods rather than through a comprehension of the experiences of the characters. While I draw from previous qualitative research along with my own qualitative analysis of the content of Disney Princess films to interpret my data, I use quantitative methods to process my data, thereby limiting biases in the data collection process.

Finally, most previous contributions to the literature fail to examine whether or not depictions of gender change over time in regard to Disney Princess films (Anderson and Daniels 2016; Coyne et al. 2016; Najla et al. 2020; Shawcroft et al. 2022). By studying change over time, my study allows me to support or contradict the common perception that Disney Princess movies progress in their representations of gender roles over time (Hine et al. 2018).

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

As I examine in the previous section, existing literature indicates that gender depictions in media (e.g., Disney Princess films) replicate in society. It provides a window into the importance of Disney Princess films (and other forms of media) as a cultivator for the reproduction of gender norms, especially among youths who rely on said films for lessons on how to perform their own gender identities (Coyne et al. 2016; Hine et al. 2018).

In my study, I seek to better understand the role of Disney Princess films in the construction of gender roles in hegemonic American society, and other societies by influence, by examining disparities in dialogue and screen time among characters appearing in the franchise. Three questions guide my research:

- R1: Do female characters speak less than male characters in Disney Princess films? Previous studies indicate that women have fewer lines of dialogue, but my study may produce differing results that lay the foundation for the succeeding research questions, so it is important to check for potential variability in results (Anderson and Daniels 2016; Eisenhauer 2017).
- R2: Do female characters in Disney Princess films have less screen time than their male counterparts? While little formal research exists on screen time in Disney Princess films, Shawcroft et al. (2022) indicate that a disparity in minutes of screen time indeed exists. Likewise, measures using the Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GD-IQ) indicate that films tend to allot less screen time to women than to men (Ryzik 2016).

- R3: How have gender portrayals in Disney Princess films changed over time? Hine et al. (2018) note a stark disparity in the portrayal of women in “old” Disney Princess films (as exemplified by *Sleeping Beauty*) versus “new” ones (as epitomized by *Moana*) (Hine et al. 2018:161).

**HYPOTHESES**

Guided by my research questions and the results of previous research, I hypothesize the following:

- H1: I propose that women speak less than their male counterparts in Disney Princess films, just as Anderson and Daniels (2016) and Eisenhauer (2017) conclude in their respective studies.
- H2: I posit that female characters from Disney Princess films receive less screen time than their male counterparts, just as the aforementioned GD-IQ shows is a pattern in the media as a whole (Ryzik 2016). Additionally, previous research indicates that such films tend to value a female character's physical attractiveness, placing a heavier weight on what they look like compared to what they do or say (this standard is especially true for Disney Princesses themselves) (Shawcroft 2022). Moreover, if a female character is frequently on-screen but does not speak often, it reinforces the notion that women solely exist on the screen for the viewer to see rather than hear, reinforcing the alleged superiority of hegemonic femininities (Schippers 2009).
- H3: I propound that the portrayal of women in Disney Princess films sees negligible improvement over time, as Eisenhauer (2017) and Shawcroft et al. (2022) predicate in their respective studies.

In sum, my hypotheses indicate that female characters in Disney Princess films have fewer words of dialogue but more seconds of screen time, which may lead to the

reproduction of unhealthy and generally unattainable gender stereotypes among viewers and society as a whole, and which stays relatively constant over the course of the franchise's history. I now examine the methods I used to conduct my study.

**METHODS**

To conduct my study, I utilized archival research over other methods of data collection (e.g., interviews) because it allowed me to draw information from its original source without the filter that human subjects place on information in, say, interview settings (Vogt et al. 2017a). Archival research permitted me to eliminate outside biases that may inform the results (Vogt et al. 2017b). It is important for the data for my study, as a quantitative study, to originate from relatively unbiased statistics, and drawing straight from the content of analysis allows me to eliminate many forms of bias from my results (Tufekci 2014).

In order to test my hypothesis, I collected quantitative research of archives (Vogt, Gardner, and Haeffele 2017b) originating from the twelve Walt Disney Animation Studios' (WDAS) films that comprise the official Disney Princess lineup as of December 2022 (see Table 1 for a full breakdown of included films; Stewart 2022). I omitted one official Disney Princess film (*Brave*) due to the fact that it is a Pixar production rather than one by WDAS.

| **Film Title** | **Year of Release** | **Princess** | **Number of Female Characters** | **Number of Male Characters** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* | 1937 | Snow White | 2 (18%) | 9 (82%) |
| *Cinderella* | 1950 | Cinderella | 5 (50%) | 5 (50%) |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Sleeping Beauty* | 1959 | Aurora / Briar Rose | 5 (63%) | 3 (37%) |
| *The Little Mermaid* | 1989 | Ariel | 3 (27%) | 8 (73%) |
| *Beauty and the Beast* | 1991 | Belle | 3 (27%) | 8 (73%) |
| *Aladdin* | 1992 | Jasmine | 1 (13%) | 7 (87%) |
| *Pocahontas* | 1995 | Pocahontas | 3 (25%) | 9 (75%) |
| *Mulan* | 1998 | Fa Mulan | 4 (27%) | 11 (73%) |
| *The Princess and the Frog* | 2009 | Tiana | 4 (29%) | 10 (71%) |
| *Tangled* | 2010 | Rapunzel | 2 (29%) | 5 (71%) |
| *Moana* | 2016 | Moana | 3 (43%) | 4 (57%) |
| *Raya and the Last Dragon* | 2021 | Raya | 5 (62%) | 3 (38%) |

Table 1: Film title, year of release, princess, number of female characters, and number of male characters.

To begin, I listed each prominent character from each of the twelve films I analyzed.[3] I then gendered each character according to their gender presentation, supported by how other characters identified them.[4] After attributing a gender to each character, I carefully analyzed the transcripts for each film and calculated the approximate number of words each character spoke in their respective film. While most characters were included, I focused solely on characters that spoke 50 words or more. Thus, characters who play a major role in the plot of the film will not appear if their total "word count" did not exceed the aforementioned threshold. It is important to note the operational definition I attributed to "word count." I included all spoken words, sung words and vocalizations, and interjections such as "Ah!" or "Mm-hmm." If a word was a compound of two or more standalone words (e.g., "goodbye"), I treated it as a singular word. If a character spoke two words demarcated by a hyphen between them (e.g., "a-gettin'"), I counted them as two individual words. I generally transcribed foreign language words with which I was unfamiliar (for example, the Algonquin words used in Pocahontas) based on syllable; so, a word such as "bashkadir" (which does not appear to be a real word in any language) would appear as three words due to its trisyllabic nature. I omitted all coughs, laughs, and sobs, but included vocalizations that many might transcribe as an interjectory remark (such as "Ahem" for the clearing of the throat or "Achoo" for a sneeze). I rounded each character's word count to the nearest ten to account for potential minor errors. I then compiled an estimate of the number of seconds that each character appeared on-screen.

[3] I determined a characters' prominence based on whether or not the character was named in the film and/or their voice actor appeared in the credits sequence

[4] As of the time of writing, no character in the WDAS canon presents themselves in the movie in which they feature as explicitly genderqueer and/or non-binary. I identified Mulan, who other characters refer to using male pronouns for part of the film, by the gender with which she identifies at the film's conclusion.

After calculating the "word count" of each character, I turned to examine the approximate number of seconds that each character appeared on-screen in their respective film. These estimates of screen time come from the website Screen Time Central, from which I directly draw my data (Screen Time Central n.d.). I listed a character as being "on-screen" whenever they appeared in a frame, whether they were active or not. As I did with the characters' word counts, I rounded each character's approximate "screen time" in seconds to the nearest ten.

After calculating the two aforementioned variables ("word count" and "screen time"), I determined the "word:screen ratio" (WSR) by dividing the total number of spoken words by the characters' "screen times." Subsequently, I calculated the mean of each variable ("word count," "screen time," and WSR) for each of the two genders in the binary gender frame, male and female (Ridgeway 2009). I then determined whether a disparity existed in any of the variables through a comparison of the average WSR by film for each gender.

Finally, to test my hypothesis that Disney Princess films do not improve over time in regard to each of the three variables, I calculated the mean of each variable for each gender by film era. I categorized the twelve films into three epochs: 1) the Era of Walt Disney (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*), 2) the Disney Renaissance (*The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*), and 3) the Revival (*The Princess and the Frog*, *Tangled*, *Moana*, and *Raya and the Last Dragon*).[5] After collecting my preliminary data, I examined evidence from the films themselves to support my findings. That

[5] England et al. (2011) also categorizes Disney Princess films into the three distinct eras I list above, albeit without the same titles.

is, I drew qualitative data from the films (i.e., instances which support my hypotheses within the films) in order to substantiate my claims. I now turn to discuss the results of my study.

**FINDINGS**

Through my research, I discover that female characters in Disney Princess films have a) more dialogue, and b) more screen time in their respective films. Additionally, I find that Disney Princess films do not improve their portrayals of gender over time. These first two findings, while not necessarily nullifying them, destabilize my hypotheses stating that female characters in Disney Princess films speak less than their male counterparts and have less time "on-screen." Rather, the results of my study suggest that female Disney characters speak more than their male counterparts and have more screen-time, on average. However, another finding reaffirms my first two hypotheses and alters them slightly: I find that, while women appear "on-screen" more than their male counterparts in Disney Princess movies and they speak more overall, they are more likely to be silent while "on-screen" when compared to their male brethren. In other words, female characters tend to say less at a time than male characters. I delve into the implications of this finding in greater detail in the forthcoming paragraphs.

As aforesaid, the results of my study indicate that female characters in Disney Princess films tend to speak more on average – that is, their "word counts" are higher -- than their male counterparts, contrary to the expectations of my initial hypothesis (supported by previous studies executed by Eisenhauer [2017] and Anderson & Daniels [2016]). Women average a higher total "word count" in ten of the twelve movies in this study (see Table 2 below). With an average of 774 words per character across all the Disney Princess movies, female characters say far more than men in those same movies, who average 510 words per character.

| | Average Word Count | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Gender | |
| | | MALE | FEMALE |
| Film | Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) | 428 | **940** |
| | Cinderella (1950) | 392 | **598** |
| | Sleeping Beauty (1959) | 320 | **578** |
| | The Little Mermaid (1989) | 468 | **510** |
| | Beauty and the Beast (1991) | 534 | **623** |
| | Aladdin (1992) | **949** | 820 |
| | Pocahontas (1995) | 479 | **650** |
| | Mulan (1998) | **344** | 300 |
| | The Princess and the Frog (2009) | 488 | **893** |
| | Tangled (2010) | 473 | **1710** |
| | Moana (2016) | 805 | **1063** |
| | Raya and the Last Dragon (2021) | 467 | **1024** |

Table 2: Mean "word count" by gender by film.[6]

Similarly, I find that women in Disney Princess movies occupy more screen time than men in those same films, once again proving antithetical to my original hypothesis. Women appear "on-screen" longer than men in all of their respective movies (see Table 3 below), with women averaging approximately 1101 seconds of screen time across movies compared to 627 seconds for men.

[6] The greater value is in bold for each film. This pattern of boldface remains the same for all subsequent tables.

| | Average Screen Time | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Gender | |
| | | MALE | FEMALE |
| Film | Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) | 844 | **1245** |
| | Cinderella (1950) | 570 | **600** |
| | Sleeping Beauty (1959) | 540 | **1036** |
| | The Little Mermaid (1989) | 574 | **950** |
| | Beauty and the Beast (1991) | 621 | **857** |
| | Aladdin (1992) | 903 | **1200** |
| | Pocahontas (1995) | 493 | **887** |
| | Mulan (1998) | 503 | **703** |
| | The Princess and the Frog (2009) | 511 | **983** |
| | Tangled (2010) | 636 | **2240** |
| | Moana (2016) | 718 | **1640** |
| | Raya and the Last Dragon (2021) | 613 | **1314** |

Table 3: Mean seconds of "screen time" by gender by film.

However, before any claims of gender parity (or, perhaps, female-favored *disparity*) can unfold, I must elaborate on my findings through an examination of the average "word to screen ratio," or the WSR as I abbreviate it, broken down by gender. In nine of the twelve movies I analyze in this study (see Table 4), female characters have a lower average WSR compared to male characters, averaging 0.74 words per second of screen time and 0.84 words per second of screen time, respectively.

| | Average Words Spoken to Screen Time Ratio | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | Gender | |
| | | MALE | FEMALE |
| Film | Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) | 0.51 | **0.76** |
| | Cinderella (1950) | 0.69 | **1.00** |
| | Sleeping Beauty (1959) | **0.59** | 0.56 |
| | The Little Mermaid (1989) | **0.92** | 0.72 |
| | Beauty and the Beast (1991) | **0.91** | 0.73 |
| | Aladdin (1992) | **1.05** | 0.68 |
| | Pocahontas (1995) | **0.97** | 0.73 |
| | Mulan (1998) | **0.68** | 0.43 |
| | The Princess and the Frog (2009) | **0.95** | 0.91 |
| | Tangled (2010) | **0.88** | 0.76 |
| | Moana (2016) | **1.12** | 0.65 |
| | Raya and the Last Dragon (2021) | 0.76 | **0.97** |

Table 4: Mean WSR by gender by film.

The disparity in mean WSR for male and female characters may implicate that the female characters (specifically the leading ladies; see Table 5) in Disney Princess films resort to the stereotype of women as silenced actors who exist passively in a realm of male domination. These Disney women are often the focus of the film (with the exception of Jasmine from *Aladdin*, who is not the focus of her film's story arc), which means that their actions drive the narrative. As such, they are active in their own films, often acting in direct opposition to the hegemonic patriarchy governing their society (e.g., Pocahontas, Jasmine, and Ariel from

*Pocahontas, Aladdin*, and *The Little Mermaid*, respectively, rebel against their fathers, who represent the domineering, patriarchal social order under which they live). However, at the same time, while they are on-screen in many or most of the scenes in their films, they do not speak as frequently as their male counterparts. Of course, overall, they have more dialogue, but that is because they are present in a greater number of scenes, being the center of their respective films' plotlines. In other words, their dialogue is more spread-out. They are more often listeners than speakers. Moreover, Disney heroines may be active in their movies through their cross-movie presence but may not speak as frequently as men in those same scenes.

| | Words Spoken to Screen Time Ratio | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | MALE LEAD | FEMALE LEAD |
| Film | Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) | 0.36 | **0.71** |
| | Cinderella (1950) | 0.37 | **0.81** |
| | Sleeping Beauty (1959) | 0.30 | **0.45** |
| | The Little Mermaid (1989) | **0.54** | 0.44 |
| | Beauty and the Beast (1991) | 0.45 | **0.61** |
| | Aladdin (1992) | **0.82** | 0.68 |
| | Pocahontas (1995) | 0.75 | **0.76** |
| | Mulan (1998) | **0.51** | 0.40 |
| | The Princess and the Frog (2009) | **0.78** | 0.76 |
| | Tangled (2010) | **0.93** | 0.66 |
| | Moana (2016) | **0.97** | 0.57 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Raya and the Last Dragon (2021) | N/A[7] | **0.74** |

Table 5: Mean WSR for the male lead and the female lead in each film.

Finally, my findings show that the WSR of Disney Princess films actually deteriorates over time (see Table 6). The three earliest Disney Princess films (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*) have a ratio of about 1.28 words per second of screen time for each female character for every word per second of screen time assigned to a male character. With *The Little Mermaid* ushering in the so-called Disney Renaissance (which also includes *Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*), the average WSR per movie increased significantly for men but declined for women, resulting in a ratio of about 0.73 words per second of screen time for women for every word per second of screen time assigned to a male character. The Disney Revival period (which consists of *The Princess and the Frog*, *Tangled*, *Moana*, and *Raya and the Last Dragon*) continues the trend started by the Disney Renaissance, albeit to a slightly lesser degree: female characters had approximately 0.88 words per second of screen time for every word per second of screen time given to male characters.

[7] Raya and the Last Dragon does not have a clear male lead and will not be included in my analysis of this table as a result.

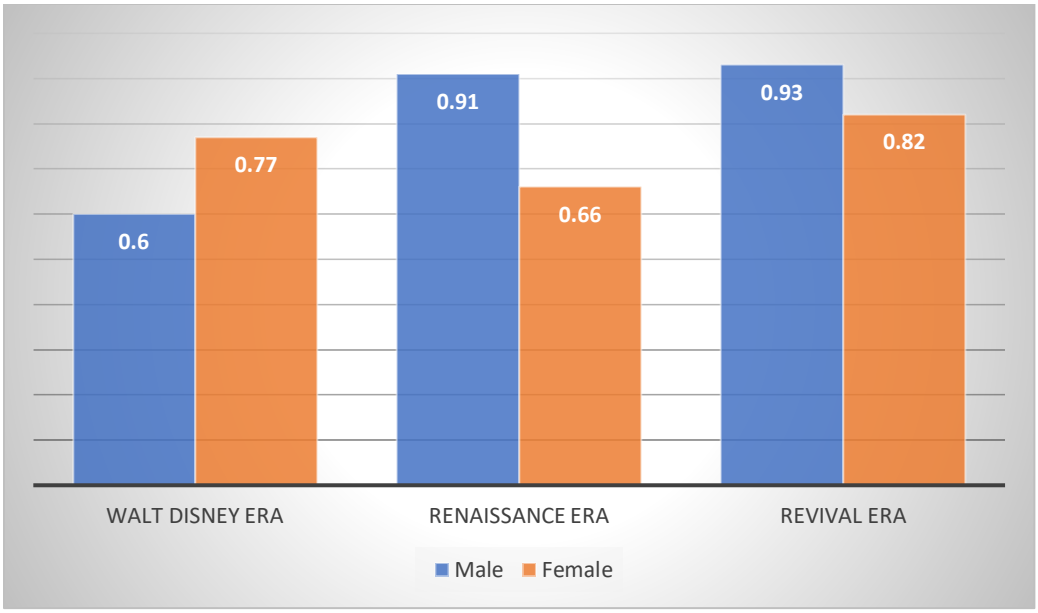


Table 6: Mean WSRs by gender for each film era.

In summary, I find that, despite the fact that female characters from films in the Disney Princess catalogue tend to speak more and appear "on-screen" more frequently in their respective movies overall, they speak less frequently in the scenes in which they appear; that is, they have a lower WSR value. I draw two potential outcomes resulting from these findings, which I explore in detail in the succeeding section. In addition, I find that Disney Princess films actually deteriorate in regard to the WSR values of their female characters over time. I will explore the implication of this deterioration in the next section as well. To conclude, the results of my study fail to support my first and second hypotheses (H1 and H2, while they seem to support my third hypothesis (H3).

**DISCUSSION**

My research shows that women speak and appear on-screen more frequently than their male counterparts, while simultaneously having a lower average WSR. There may be two potential implications that these findings might have: firstly, it might signal the objectification of female protagonists in Disney films by allowing them to be subject to the male gaze (Mulvey 1975) without a speaking voice to defend themselves from it. That is, they appear on-screen to look pretty rather than to speak their mind. An example of this objectification of Disney heroines comes from the film *The Little Mermaid* (1989). The film's primary antagonist, the sea witch Ursula, explicitly tells Ariel that she should use her body rather than her voice to woo the subject of her affections in an effort to convince Ariel to surrender her euphonious vocal weapon in exchange for a chance to live on land with Prince Eric. Ursula explains how Ariel should perform her gender in the human world as she sings:

*The men up [on land] don't like a lot of blabber*

*They think a girl who gossips is a bore*

*Yes, on land it's much preferred for ladies not to say a word*

*After all, dear, what is idle prattle for*

*Come on, they're not all that impressed with conversation*

*True gentlemen avoid it when they can*

*But they dote and swoon and fawn on a lady who's withdrawn*

*It's she who holds her tongue who gets her man*

(Clements and Musker 1989).

Ariel follows Ursula's advice and, in the film's conclusion, does indeed win the affections of Prince Eric, as Ariel's physical attractiveness and, eventually, her *singing* voice, infatuate the young prince. The fact that her *singing* voice is what attracts Eric is significant, as it implies that a woman is only worthy of a voice if she can sing beautifully (which all Disney princesses can). Additionally, Ursula's advice ended up displaying some degree of accuracy in the film, despite the sea witch's malintent; because viewers (especially children) look to Disney characters, especially heroes like Ariel, for advice on how to perform their gender, they are likely to believe that they can only appropriately perform femininity by following the standards set by Ariel, who in turn uses advice from Ursula to win the subject of her affections. In other words, *The Little Mermaid* might convince a young viewer that someone can only love them if they play the role of a woman the same way that Ariel does.

Likewise, Aladdin's infatuation with Jasmine in the titular film *Aladdin* (1992) stems from physical attraction, as he first falls in love with her before he even speaks to her, citing his lust for her "eyes that just… and this hair, wow!... and her smile!" to the Genie as reasons for wanting to woo her (Clements and Musker 1992). While their relationship grows more complex than mere physical attraction, much of it does stem from Jasmine's objectification in the eyes of Aladdin.

In a second implication, the primary finding from my research (that women have a lower WSR than men in Disney Princess films) suggests that women have slightly less cultural capital

than men in terms of the power of their voice. To expand upon the Bourdieusian concept of linguistic capital – that is, the idea that language acts as an indicator of power (Bourdieu 1991) -- I find that women in Disney Princess films possess less power in their films, as many female Disney characters speak less in their respective scenes and are, therefore, vocally-passive actors in their own stories, with the male heroes and villains speaking the bulk of the movies' dialogue. *Moana* (2016) provides an excellent example of this phenomenon. While critics rightfully hail *Moana*'s depiction of gender roles as progressive (e.g., Hine et al. 2018), her male co-star (Maui) doubts her at the beginning of the film. She repeatedly tells him that she is "Moana of Motunui" and that he must "board [her] boat, sail across the sea, and restore the heart of Te Fiti" (Clements and Musker 2016). However, Maui repeatedly interrupts and dismisses Moana's mission statement. Eventually, Moana earns Maui's respect, but it is not through her words, it is through her actions. After saving him from death at the claws of Tamatoa (the giant crab) in Lalotai (the realm of monsters), Maui sees Moana's worth, which is a crucial shift in his character arc. However, the fact that Moana's voice could not accomplish what her actions could indicate her lack of vocal capital. While this may not necessarily stem from female objectification – as Maui and Moana part ways as friends rather than romantic partners – Moana's lack of vocal agency compared to her male co-lead is on full display in the film. In fact, Maui speaks 0.97 words of dialogue for every second he appears "on-screen" compared to just 0.57 words of dialogue for Moana.

My final finding shows that the average WSR values of female characters in Disney Princess films has a downward trend over time. This finding implies that, as Disney Princesses grow to embody more versions of femininity aside from hegemonic ones (Eisenhauer 2017;

Hine et al. 2018), they also grow more objectified. Thus, I conclude that, despite Walt Disney Animation Studios' attempts to correct the stereotypes of their female characters in their early films, they may continue to perpetuate the objectification of women through more subtle means. It is likely that this objectification is not a conscious effort on the part of the films' creators. Rather, the objectification of women is so deeply entrenched in the fabric of American society that it is implicit in the creation of media. Differing displays of womanhood exist in the media because they already exist in society, and vice-versa. Thus, the filmmakers draw from societal gender norms for the portrayals of gender in their films, and society in turn borrows from those films to reproduce gender roles.

## CONCLUSION

My study, while covering the grounds of gender in Disney Princess films, fails to encompass race, class, and other dimensions of identity, as variables of interest. I recommend that future studies replicate my research along racial, socioeconomic, and other lines, in order to attain a more intersectional view of dialogue and screen time among the characters of the Disney Princess franchise. Additionally, further research may determine whether or not women in Disney Princess films speak more frequently when talking with male characters or when conversing with other female characters. Should such research find that women speak less frequently when male characters share the screen with them, it would substantiate my aforesaid claim that women are de-voiced and act passively when confronted by hegemonic masculinity as embodied by the Disney hero.

My research faces several limitations. For one, its quantitative nature does not show the effect of gender portrayals in Disney Princess films on real-world women (and those of other genders as well); instead, I rely on previous research to draw conclusions regarding the effects of gender roles in Disney Princess films. Additionally, my study does not account for the reasons that some characters may speak more (or appear on-screen more) than others. For example, Gaston's domineering nature is central to the conflict of *Beauty and the Beast*. Likewise, Ariel giving up her voice for a chance to live on land is a key part of the plot of *The Little Mermaid*. Also, my study does not account for outliers where female characters may speak far more than other male characters (e.g., the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella*) or where male characters may

speak far less than their female counterparts (e.g., Chien-Po from *Mulan*). However, the limitations of my study pave the way for future research on gender in Disney Princess films.

In sum, the results of my study show that women speak more frequently and appear more frequently "on-screen" when compared to men in Disney Princess films. While their higher absolute words of dialogue and seconds of screen time provide a glimpse of hope, they still speak less frequently while "on-screen" than their male counterparts. I attribute this disparity to female characters being subjects of the male gaze and lacking vocal capital. Additionally, my findings indicate that frequency of dialogue per second of screen time does not improve over time, with evidence suggesting it may actually decrease.

What does this say about young girls who seek to use their voices to fight oppression? My study produces implications that likely have a devastating effect on consumers of Disney Princess media, especially young girls who look to Disney Princesses as role models. If the media silences women on-screen, previous research (Coyne et al. 2016; Hine et al. 2018) shows that women will encounter silencing in the real world as well. The first step is to admit the problem exists. I aim to do so in this paper. The next step is to change studio practices by giving women a voice behind the screen so that female characters can have a voice "on-screen," so young girls may have a chance to acquire vocal authority in order to dismantle patriarchal norms (Shawcroft et al. 2022).

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## METHODOLOGICAL APPENDIX

| FILM NAME | CHARACTER NAME | GENDER OF CHARACTER | WORD COUNT[8] | SECONDS OF SCREEN TIME[9] | WSR[10] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ALADDIN (1992) | | | | | |
| | ALADDIN | MALE | 2010 | 2440 | 0.823770491803279 |
| | GENIE | MALE | 1890 | 1050 | 1.8 |
| | IAGO | MALE | 510 | 760 | 0.671052631578947 |
| | JAFAR | MALE | 1160 | 1230 | 0.943089430894309 |
| | JASMINE (ALADDIN) | FEMALE | 820 | 1200 | 0.683333333333333 |
| | PEDDLER | MALE | 290 | 150 | 1.93333333333333 |
| | RAZOUL | MALE | 120 | 110 | 1.09090909090909 |
| | SULTAN | MALE | 660 | 580 | 1.13793103448276 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 948.571428571429[11] | 902.857142857143[12] | 1.050632911392 41[13] |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 820[14] | 1200[15] | 0.6833333333333333[16] |
| BEAUTY AND THE BEAST (1991) | | | | | |
| | BEAST | MALE | 570 | 1260 | 0.452380952380952 |
| | BELLE | FEMALE | 1200 | 1960 | 0.612244897959184 |
| | CHIP | MALE | 120 | 270 | 0.444444444444444 |
| | COGSWORTH | MALE | 750 | 680 | 1.10294117647059 |
| | GASTON | MALE | 1070 | 800 | 1.3375 |
| | LEFOU | MALE | 520 | 490 | 1.06122448979592 |

[8] I round all word counts to the nearest ten words.
[9] I round all screen times to the nearest ten seconds.
[10] I calculate the WSR for each character by dividing the character's word count by their screen time.
[11] I calculate the average male word counts by dividing the total male word count (the sum of all word counts for male characters) by the total number of male characters.
[12] I calculate the average male screen time by dividing the total male screen time (the sum of all screen times for male characters) by the total number of male characters.
[13] I calculate the average male WSR by dividing the sum of the WSR values for each male character by the total number of male characters.
[14] I calculate the average female word counts by dividing the total female word count (the sum of all word counts for female characters) by the total number of female characters.
[15] I calculate the average female screen times by dividing the total female screen times (the sum of all screen times for female characters) by the total number of female characters.
[16] I calculate the average female WSR by dividing the sum of the WSR values for each female character by the total number of female characters.

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | LUMIÈRE | MALE | 870 | 820 | 1.0609756097561 |
| | MAURICE | MALE | 570 | 590 | 0.966101694915254 |
| | MONSIEUR D'ARQUE | MALE | 70 | 60 | 1.16666666666667 |
| | MRS. POTTS | FEMALE | 590 | 510 | 1.15686274509804 |
| | WARDROBE | FEMALE | 80 | 100 | 0.8 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 567.5 | 621.25 | 0.913480885311871 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 623.333333333333 | 856.666666666667 | 0.727626459143969 |
| CINDERELLA (1950) | | | | | |
| | ANASTASIA | FEMALE | 350 | 350 | 1 |
| | CINDERELLA | FEMALE | 1260 | 1560 | 0.807692307692308 |
| | DRIZELLA | FEMALE | 260 | 310 | 0.838709677419355 |
| | FAIRY GODMOTHER | FEMALE | 510 | 240 | 2.125 |
| | GRAND DUKE | MALE | 690 | 550 | 1.25454545454545 |
| | GUS | MALE | 190 | 820 | |
| | JAQ | MALE | 530 | 900 | 0.588888888888889 |
| | KING | MALE | 470 | 360 | 1.30555555555556 |
| | LADY TREMAINE | FEMALE | 610 | 540 | 1.12962962962963 |
| | PRINCE HENRI | MALE | 80 | 220 | 0.363636363636364 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 392 | 570 | 0.687719298245614 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 598 | 600 | 0.996666666666667 |
| MOANA (2016) | | | | | |
| | MATAI VASA | MALE | 220 | 50 | 4.4 |
| | MAUI | MALE | 1950 | 2020 | 0.965346534653465 |
| | MOANA | FEMALE | 2270 | 3990 | 0.568922305764411 |
| | SINA | FEMALE | 150 | 280 | 0.535714285714286 |
| | TALA | FEMALE | 770 | 650 | 1.18461538461538 |
| | TAMATOA | MALE | 540 | 360 | 1.5 |
| | TUI | MALE | 510 | 440 | 1.15909090909091 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 805 | 717.5 | 1.1219512195122 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 1063.33333333333 | 1640 | 0.648373983739835 |
| MULAN (1998) | | | | | |
| | CHI-FU | MALE | 350 | 450 | 0.777777777777778 |
| | CHIEN-PO | MALE | 120 | 590 | 0.203389830508475 |
| | EMPEROR OF CHINA | MALE | 210 | 260 | 0.807692307692308 |
| | FA LI | FEMALE | 80 | 270 | 0.296296296296296 |
| | FA MULAN | FEMALE | 900 | 2250 | 0.4 |
| | FA ZHOU | MALE | 140 | 340 | 0.411764705882353 |
| | GENERAL LI | MALE | 130 | 100 | 1.3 |
| | GRANDMOTHER FA | FEMALE | 130 | 180 | 0.722222222222222 |
| | GREAT ANCESTOR | MALE | 100 | 210 | 0.476190476190476 |
| | LI SHANG | MALE | 530 | 1030 | 0.514563106796117 |
| | LING | MALE | 210 | 600 | 0.35 |
| | MATCHMAKER | FEMALE | 90 | 110 | 0.818181818181818 |
| | MUSHU | MALE | 1570 | 920 | 1.70652173913043 |
| | SHAN YU | MALE | 170 | 380 | 0.447368421052632 |
| | YAO | MALE | 250 | 650 | 0.384615384615385 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 343.636363636364 | 502.727272727273 | 0.683544303797469 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 300 | 702.5 | 0.427046263345196 |
| POCAHONTAS (1995) | | | | | |
| | BEN | MALE | 440 | 480 | 0.916666666666667 |
| | CHIEF POWHATAN | MALE | 690 | 500 | 1.38 |
| | GOVERNOR RATCLIFFE | MALE | 1210 | 620 | 1.95161290322581 |
| | GRANDMOTHER WILLOW | FEMALE | 340 | 630 | 0.53968253968254 |
| | JOHN SMITH | MALE | 1090 | 1450 | 0.751724137931034 |
| | KEKATA | MALE | 110 | 120 | 0.916666666666667 |
| | KOCOUM | MALE | 80 | 200 | 0.4 |
| | LON | MALE | 320 | 450 | 0.711111111111111 |
| | NAKOMA | FEMALE | 240 | 230 | 1.04347826086957 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | POCAHONTAS | FEMALE | 1370 | 1800 | 0.761111111111111 |
| | THOMAS | MALE | 260 | 460 | 0.565217391304348 |
| | WIGGINS | MALE | 110 | 160 | 0.6875 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 478.888888888889 | 493.333333333333 | 0.970720720720722 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 650 | 886.666666666667 | 0.733082706766917 |
| RAYA AND THE LAST DRAGON (2021) | | | | | |
| | BOUN | MALE | 560 | 650 | 0.861538461538462 |
| | CHIEF BENJA | MALE | 440 | 590 | 0.745762711864407 |
| | DANG HU | FEMALE | 90 | 80 | 1.125 |
| | NAMAARI | FEMALE | 590 | 1130 | 0.52212389380531 |
| | RAYA | FEMALE | 2450 | 3290 | 0.74468085106383 |
| | SISU | FEMALE | 1740 | 1790 | 0.972067039106145 |
| | TONG | MALE | 400 | 600 | 0.666666666666667 |
| | VIRANA | FEMALE | 250 | 280 | 0.892857142857143 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 466.666666666667 | 613.333333333333 | 0.760869565217392 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 1280 | 1314 | 0.974124809741248 |
| SLEEPING BEAUTY (1959) | | | | | |
| | AURORA | FEMALE | 480 | 1070 | 0.448598130841121 |
| | FAUNA | FEMALE | 450 | 1100 | 0.409090909090909 |
| | FLORA | FEMALE | 930 | 1250 | 0.744 |
| | KING HUBERT | MALE | 520 | 540 | 0.962962962962963 |
| | KING STEFAN | MALE | 230 | 380 | 0.605263157894737 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | MALEFICENT | FEMALE | 540 | 540 | 1 |
| | MERRYWEATHER | FEMALE | 490 | 1220 | 0.401639344262295 |
| | PRINCE PHILLIP | MALE | 210 | 700 | |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 320 | 540 | 0.592592592592593 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 578 | 1036 | 0.557915057915058 |
| SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS (1937) | | | | | |
| | BASHFUL | MALE | 500 | 1170 | 0.427350427350427 |
| | DOC | MALE | 980 | 1320 | 0.742424242424242 |
| | EVIL QUEEN | FEMALE | 630 | 730 | 0.863013698630137 |
| | GRUMPY | MALE | 680 | 1270 | 0.535433070866142 |
| | HAPPY | MALE | 520 | 1140 | 0.456140350877193 |
| | HUNTSMAN | MALE | 60 | 70 | 0.857142857142857 |
| | MAGIC MIRROR | MALE | 90 | 60 | 1.5 |
| | PRINCE FLORIAN | MALE | 90 | 250 | 0.36 |
| | SLEEPY | MALE | 380 | 1070 | 0.355140186915888 |
| | SNEEZY | MALE | 550 | 1250 | 0.44 |
| | SNOW WHITE | FEMALE | 1250 | 1760 | 0.710227272727273 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 427.777777777778 | 844.444444444444 | 0.506578947368422 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 940 | 1245 | 0.755020080321285 |
| TANGLED (2010) | | | | | |
| | BIG NOSE | MALE | 130 | 100 | 1.3 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD | MALE | 80 | 130 | 0.615384615384615 |
| | FLYNN RIDER | MALE | 2290 | 2450 | 0.93469387755102 |
| | HOOK HAND | MALE | 170 | 230 | 0.739130434782609 |
| | MOTHER GOTHEL | FEMALE | 1160 | 1080 | 1.07407407407407 |
| | RAPUNZEL | FEMALE | 2260 | 3400 | 0.664705882352941 |
| | SIDEBURNS STABBINGTON | MALE | 120 | 270 | 0.444444444444444 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 558 | 636 | 0.877358490566038 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 1710 | 2240 | 0.763392857142857 |
| THE LITTLE MERMAID (1989) | | | | | |
| | ARIEL | FEMALE | 870 | 2000 | 0.435 |
| | CARLOTTA | FEMALE | 70 | 60 | 1.16666666666667 |
| | CHEF LOUIS | MALE | 200 | 160 | 1.25 |
| | ERIC | MALE | 450 | 840 | 0.535714285714286 |
| | FLOUNDER | MALE | 290 | 620 | 0.467741935483871 |
| | KING TRITON | MALE | 420 | 400 | 1.05 |
| | SCUTTLE | MALE | 500 | 410 | 1.21951219512195 |
| | SEBASTIAN | MALE | 1460 | 1340 | 1.08955223880597 |
| | SIR GRIMSBY | MALE | 360 | 250 | 1.44 |
| | URSULA | FEMALE | 1100 | 790 | 1.39240506329114 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 525.714285714286 | 574.285714285714 | 0.91542288557214 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 680 | 950 | 0.715789473684211 |
| THE PRINCESS AND THE FROG (2009) | | | | | |
| | CHARLOTTE LABOUFF | FEMALE | 640 | 570 | 1.12280701754386 |
| | DARNELL | MALE | 50 | 90 | 0.555555555555556 |
| | DR. FACILIER | MALE | 950 | 610 | 1.55737704918033 |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ELI LABOUFF | MALE | 130 | 180 | 0.722222222222222 |
| | EUDORA | FEMALE | 270 | 320 | 0.84375 |
| | HENRY FENNER | MALE | 80 | 70 | 150 |
| | JAMES | MALE | 190 | 140 | 1.35714285714286 |
| | LAWRENCE | MALE | 270 | 490 | 0.551020408163265 |
| | LOUIS | MALE | 490 | 690 | 0.710144927536232 |
| | MAMA ODIE | FEMALE | 630 | 370 | 1.7027027027027 |
| | PRINCE NAVEEN | MALE | 1560 | 1990 | 0.78391959798995 |
| | RAY | MALE | 1040 | 750 | 1.38666666666667 |
| | REGGIE | MALE | 110 | 100 | 1.1 |
| | TIANA | FEMALE | 2020 | 2670 | 0.756554307116105 |
| | MALE AVERAGE | | 487 | 511 | 0.953033268101761 |
| | FEMALE AVERAGE | | 890 | 982.5 | 0.905852417302799 |