INTO THE UNKNOWN: A QUEER ANALYSIS OF THE METAPHORS IN DISNEY'S
FROZEN FRANCHISE

by

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ABSTRACT

MOLLY FARRIS. *Into the unknown*: A queer analysis of the metaphors in Disney's
Frozen franchise. (Under the direction of DR. JASON EDWARD BLACK)

This thesis examines *Frozen* and *Frozen II* for its queer themes communicated

through metaphors. After examining the queer metaphors in both films, the project

examines online public discussions about the Disney franchise to determine if these

opinions reflect the argument of the films as queer. Metaphoric criticism is used to

rhetorically analyze the messages within the films to determine their meaning before

elaborating on historical connections to the metaphors. This thesis argues the need to

queer dominant readings of artifacts by displaying one possible interpretation of these

Disney films. Furthermore, this thesis concludes that more transformative fairy tales and

more inclusive character development are important to the genre.

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INTRODUCTION

At the time of its release in 2013, Disney's *Frozen* was the highest-grossing film of all time (Graser, 2015). With that much success at the box office, it is not surprising that Disney wanted to keep the momentum going by releasing a sequel. When Disney announced its plans to create *Frozen II*, fans of the original film had a lot to say about what should be included in the new release. One of their requests was revealed in the hashtag #GiveElsaAGirlfriend that quickly became a trending conversation on social media platforms across the world. Many members of the LGBTQ community already viewed the first film "as a metaphor for the experience of coming out and accepting who you are" (Becker, 2015). Some fans hoped that with the traction and popularity that the hashtag gained, Disney would finally take steps to be overtly more progressive in the second film.

Every year, the Gays and Lesbians Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), an organization that supports cultural change and acceptance of the LGBTQ community, rates films based on their LGBTQ representation (Haikel, 2016). Based on Disney's very conservative views, it should come as no surprise that *Frozen* received a failing grade on the GLAAD report in 2013 (Becker, 2015). The organization claimed that the film featured no openly LGBTQ characters (Haikel, 2016). It was this GLAAD report of *Frozen* that sparked the beginning of #GiveElsaAGirlfriend. A twitter user named Alexis Moncada, after reading the GLAAD report, posted, "I hope Disney makes Elsa a lesbian princess; how iconic that would be?" followed by a second tweet that coined the hashtag, "Dear @Disney, #GiveElsaAGirlfriend" (France, 2016). It was not long before the hashtag grew in popularity. Soon other posters joined in the conversation:

Dear @Disney #GiveElsaAGirlfriend because girls need to know everyone can be a princess

--Ellie Joyner (@Ellie146) May 4, 2016

#GiveElsaAGirlfriend because LGBT kids deserve to know that there is nothing wrong with them

--Jeffrey Marsh (@thejeffrymarsh) May 1, 2016

#GiveElsaAGirlfriend because 1 in 5 kids are queer, but only 1 in 10 feel safe enough to come out.

--mimi (@miaruix) May 1, 2016

The original creator of the hashtag was both thrilled and overwhelmed with the popularity that her hashtag attracted. In a post she wrote on MTV's website, Moncada explained, "Growing up, I never saw a princess fall in love with another princess—and neither have girls growing up right now. The entertainment industry has given us girls who have fallen in love with beasts, ogres who fall for humans, and even grown women who love bees. But we've never been able to see the purity in a queer relationship" (Moncada, 2016, para. 1). By creating the hashtag, Moncada seemed to push Disney to become more progressive in its representation in all future works.

Although not alone in its apparent lack of LGBTQ representation, Disney does lead the pack for the worst representation among major entertainment studios (Avery, 2019). In 2018, Disney released ten films—including *Black Panther*, *Incredibles 2*, and *Mary Poppins Returns*. Not surprisingly, though, none of the 2018 films contained any openly LGBTQ characters (Avery, 2019). In fact, in the last eight years, Disney has not received a GLAAD score higher than adequate for any of their films (GLAAD, n.d.).

GLAAD explains, "Walt Disney Studios has the weakest history when it comes to LGBTQ inclusion of all the studios tracked" (GLAAD, n.d., para. 2). Disney has begun to portray LGBTQ characters in some of their television shows and has plans to include more LGBTQ characters on their new Disney+ platform (Ellison, 2019). Even still, the LGBTQ characters in Disney films seem to remain in the closet with very obscure cues.

In spite of this, though, some scholars believe that *Frozen* may mark the beginning of a new Disney renaissance that could usher in opportunities for greater LGBTQ representation (Matos, 2014; Salvatore, 2014). Angel Daniel Matos, a specialist in queer children's and young adult literature, describes this renaissance as "a period characterized not only by the adaptation of well-known tales, but also by an increased public interest in Disney films" (2014, para. 1). The last Disney renaissance brought films including *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and The Beast*. Reminiscent of a Broadway production, *Frozen* has been immensely praised for its animation, catchy songs, and altogether tight storyline (Salvatore, 2014). Because of this success, *Frozen* became a Broadway play just shy of five years after the film released (Paulson, 2016). Beyond its lengthy list of awards, the film has been seen by critics and the public audience alike as a gay allegory for a story about a confused girl coming out to the world.

Moreover, some fans wanted nothing more than for Disney to provide them with a queer princess in the second film. Because of its recent release (November 2019), there are no in-depth analyses that exist of *Frozen II* or scholarship that explores both films together. Furthermore, it has yet to be seen how the textual messages within the film's story stack up against what the public is arguing. Therefore, in this thesis, I aim to queer the dominant reading of the films and engage in a textual analysis of *Frozen I* and *Frozen*

II to decipher and define the queer metaphors that exist. I then explore public comments circulating about these queer interpretations. This thesis contends that *Frozen I* and *Frozen II* are, in fact, queer fairy tale stories. Subsequently, this has implications for how queer metaphors function within a metaphorical analysis and how queer individuals are seen and accepted within greater society.

In this thesis, Chapter 1 outlines the objects of study, the justification for the study, and the specific research questions that are addressed in the analysis of the discussed artifacts. Chapter 2 presents a detailed overview of relevant research within communication studies and the fairy tale genre. This review presents a foundation of previous scholarly work from which I build my own analysis. This research includes the basics of fairy tale stories, common themes in fairy tales, and queer themes within fairy tales.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of this thesis and discusses the metaphoric analysis that will frame the analysis that follows. Here, I outline the founding ideas of the critique and define necessary terms for better understanding. Chapter 4 provides context to *Frozen I* before unmasking the queer metaphors that exist within the film. I investigate the meanings of the magic powers, door, ice castle, gloves, and monster metaphors that repeatedly appear throughout the film and explain how they relate to a larger queer undercurrent. Chapter 5 builds context for *Frozen II* before connecting metaphors that existed in the first film. I investigate the magic powers, door, and ice castle metaphors that have carried through from the film and the Northuldra and unknown metaphors that have appeared in the second film that continue the queer argument. Chapter 6 explores how the public attends to *Frozen I* and *Frozen II* as potentially queer films. Here, I

investigate differing groups of online voices from Twitter, Facebook, popular news articles, and personal opinion blogs, and their views of the films.

Finally, in Chapter 7, I provide my concluding thoughts about this analysis. I explain the importance of queer representation in Disney films and the entertainment industry. Then I discuss the implications for queer metaphors as a subcategory to metaphoric analysis. I also discuss the concept of conditional acceptance of LGBTQ individuals and how it applies to this analysis. Lastly, I expound on limitations for this research project and future research in this area of interest.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background on Fairy Tales

Fairy tales have been around long before Walt Disney perfected the formula for a prototypal princess movie. And, certainly, they precede U.S.-based versions of these fantastical stories that, at once, communicate social values, but also do so by shrouding the messages in light-hearted play. Fairy tales belong to the larger folklore genre, which also includes myths and legends. Zipes et al. explain that "historically, scholars of folklore understood fairy tales as traditional narratives of wonder and magic transmitted not only orally but also informally, locally, and face-to-face within communities and social groups" (2016, p. xiii). These stories were created and used to teach moral lessons to listeners. Justice writes that "fairy tales—indeed all tales—are told for a purpose. They are a form of social education, a form that some scholars argue is older than civilization itself" (2014, p. 194). Originally, fairy tales were told orally and handed down from one generation to the next. Some tales in the West locate ancient roots dating back to 1500 A.D. Although most of the fairy tales that we know today in the western world are historically European, many other stories originate in ancient Greece, China, and African cultures (Bacchilega, 1997).

Historiographical lineages and contextual accounts of ancient Western and Eastern oral traditions, folklore, and fairy tales are impossible to craft, given the focus of this project. Therefore, the following discussion attends to such traditions in a U.S. public landscape. The most recognizable American fairy tales are often based on stories written by European storytellers such as The Grimm's Brothers, Hans Christian Andersen, and

George MacDonald. What we consider to be the original fairy tales likely came from oral tradition. However, as with typical folk customs based in orality, because we have no record of these stories, we often refer to the first written (i.e., recorded) versions instead (Zipes et al., 2016). Written in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, European fairy tales were much darker than the tales we know today. This is because fairy tales were originally intended as entertainment for adults or as teaching tools for children. It was not until the ninetieth and twentieth centuries that these tales became associated with children's fantasy literature (Zipes et al., 2016). Popular American authors, filmmakers, and pop-cult creators, such as Walt Disney, have transformed these dark, medieval tales into bright, airy, and playful stories that can be enjoyed by all ages over several generations.

Disney, the most famous American fairy tale creator, is considered a pioneer of animated cartoon films. His early work involved character development and short films (Walt Disney, n.d.). As he became more skilled in animation, Disney began to produce feature-length films. His first full-length film was *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* released in 1937. Over the years, Walt and his brother Roy Disney built an empire producing numerous characters and animated films (Walt Disney, n.d.). Many of Disney's films continue to be enjoyed by a variety of audiences today, and when they are re/released from the notorious "Disney vault" every decade or so, they sell just as strongly as they did upon previous releases (Taylor, 2017). Although Disney has been largely successful, the corporation has been met with criticism along the way. Many of Disney's films are often cited as following racial and gendered stereotypes including the so-called helplessness of women and the barbaric character of African Americans and

Middle Easterners (Azmi, 2016; Dundes et al., 2018; England et al., 2011; Walt Disney, n.d.). Although the Disney Corporation has shown some progress towards equality in their films, there is still a long way to go.

For many Disney fans, 2016 was considered the most progressive year to date when it came to inclusivity. Although there is some debate about this, Disney is believed to have attempted to appeal to the LGBTQ community by including a lesbian couple in one of their animated animal films, *Finding Dory* (Flynn, 2016). In a brief fifteen second scene of the undersea rescue film, Dory (a Pacific blue tang fish) and an octopus are shown riding in a stroller through a park when they accidentally run over a little girl, launching Dory off the stroller. One of the two women reaches down and picks up the cup that Dory is swimming in before quickly noticing the octopus pretending to be a baby. The two women swiftly turn around and walk away. Ellen DeGeneres, the voice of Dory, laughed at the idea of the two women being lesbians by saying, "One of the women has really short hair…And I have to say, it's not a great haircut because it was really chopped up in the back…I think people assume anyone with a bad short haircut is gay" (Alexander, 2016, para. 6). While some movie viewers still argue that the two women are in fact a gay couple, both Ellen DeGeneres and the Pixar company deny this idea (Alexander, 2016).

In October of that same year, The Richest, a popular online culture newspaper, released an article titled "15 Disney Characters You Didn't Know Were LGBTQ," wherein the author discussed characters who appeared in animated Disney films and their queer characteristics (Flynn, 2016). Although some more of a stretch than others, the list did include clearly identified characters such as LeFou from *Beauty and the Beast*, the

Genie from *Aladdin*, and Oaken from *Frozen I*, all of whom have been notably described as gay or queer by many scholars (Childs, 2018). Disney has yet to confirm or deny the queer identities of any of its animated characters, but many fans continue to speculate.

Thus far, in almost every Disney princess movie, there is a girl who needs rescuing by her heroic cis-het male suitor. For Disney, the term "'princess' has just been shorthand for 'girl at center of movie,' probably because women and girls have had to earn the right to even BE at the center of a movie—and being a princess was, for a long time, the only way for a woman to be seen as having a story worth telling" (Page-Kirby, 2016, para. 6). With the release of *Moana* in 2016, Disney took its first stab at a movie with a non-princess female protagonist (Page-Kirby, 2016). Hine et al. continues, "Moana represents an empowered female character, whose behavior profile is more balanced and whose behaviors are actually more masculine than feminine. Moreover, Moana is central to plot progression, is physically assertive and athletic, challenges other characters, and rejects not only traditional romantic outcomes, but interest in romance altogether" (2018, p. 2). Disney intimates, and the public at large seems to agree that Moana is just a simple teenage girl trying to save her island. Although her father leads the tribe, there is an altogether lack of royal blood tied to and assumed duty given to Moana.

As a female Disney character, Moana has been commended for being a lead role without obligatory duties or relationship requirements (Hine et al., 2018). Despite all of the praise for Moana's independence, she still requires the help of Maui, an overly masculine cis-het male character, to save her island. While she may not end up with a male character romantically, she still maintains the Disney princess trope of requiring help from a male character, particularly a demigod (Maui) (Streiff & Dundes, 2017).

With each new wave of princess movies, Disney slowly moves away from the princess story trope that it so comfortably knows (England et al., 2011). The issue that remains, though, is that these characters still end up in the traditional female role of wife and/or caretaker. So, while Disney might be becoming more accepting, they seemingly remain comfortable with their stereotypical traditional gender roles.

In today's society, we identify fairy tales and fantastical stories as entertainment for individuals of all ages. What many people might not realize is that we use elements of fairy tale stories in our everyday lives. We understand that "people have the natural skill to formulate coherent stories from what they experience," and we deploy our lived experiences as tools to teach others about culture (Degh, 1989, p. 44). By nature, human beings are storytelling creatures, and we use this skill for more than just entertainment (Fisher, 1985). Storytelling and "fairy tales contribute to the formation of the boundaries of agency, subjectivity, and anticipated rewards. They are powerful cultural agents that tell us how to be" (Parsons, 2004, p. 136). So, while they may not be supremely overt to everyday listening, American fairy tales are still deployed, in part, to teach critical cultural lessons to this day.

Themes in Fairy Tales

As mentioned before, fairy tales and storytelling can be used to teach cultural values and virtues, often subconsciously. Throughout these fairy tales, reoccurring themes exist that teach and reinforce important cultural expectations. The most notable theme taught through fairy tales is the construct of beauty. For example, "when the heroine is beautiful, she need not do anything to merit being chosen by the prince; she is chosen simply because she is beautiful. As this message is repeated story after story, we

come to accept as natural the notion that passive, beautiful females are rewarded"

(Parsons, 2004, p. 137). Women and girls learn the importance of maintaining beauty in

the hopes of being rewarded by society. For instance, Parsons contends that "In our high-

tech, mass-media culture we are surrounded by the… perpetuation of romance ideology,

the binary positioning of women and men, and women's and girl's obsession to manifest

socially defined beauty" (2004, p. 135). Behemoth companies, like Disney, have

capitalized on the princess ideal and the constant desire of American women to live up to

these highly unnatural and unattainable standards (Wilde, 2014). Kennedy (2018) argues,

"the markers of princesshood (grand gown, jewelry, conventional femininity, and

exceptional beauty) are all highly constructed, surface attributes; none are natural or

found within the self" (p. 436). As much as women might claim that they do not follow

the "princess ideal" just by buying into the desire to fix and maintain youthfulness and

beauty, they are falling into the princess construct. In reality, the princess ideal is just

another cover for maintaining hegemony. Dana Cloud (1996) argues that hegemony is

"the process by which social order remains stable by generating consent to its parameters

through the production and distribution of ideological texts that define social reality for

the majority of people" (p. 117). Fairy tale stories are ostensibly ideological texts that

reaffirm hegemonic beauty ideals for American women.

In early fairy tales, it was common for the heroine to be seen as a passive,

domestic woman. Hynes (2010) argues that "domesticity is a definite goal for early

Disney's heroines" (p. 210). Take, for example, Snow White, the earliest Disney

princess. She is depicted as the perfect housewife, cooking, and cleaning for the seven

male dwarfs while maintaining her exterior appearance with perfection. Moreover, as

England notes, "The prevalence of domestic work is an important theme in the Disney princess movies, and a substantial change that Disney incorporated overtime was the temporary discontinuation of domestic work as a symbol of femininity" (2011, p. 563). While more progressive fairy tales, like Beauty and The Beast and Mulan, have put some space between the connection of domesticity and femininity, the construct still exists today. Wholwend (2009) argues that the Disney princess brand "amplifies the discourse of emphasized femininity by bringing together the eight heroines, homogenizing them, highlighting their common beauty ideal and washing out their slight variations in personality and power to control their own destinies" (p. 66). One was considered a good and worthy woman if she participated in traditional domestic tasks. It is important to note, though, that domestic ability did not matter if you did not or could not maintain your "natural" beauty at the same time.

A theme that still remains in many stories today is the idea of transformation. Terri Windling (1998) explains, "Only rarely, by contrast, do young women stride off simply to seek their fate. Instead, fate comes knocking on their door in the form of crisis, betrayal, or magic, propelling them forcibly onto the path to transformation" (Para. 5) For traditional American fairy tales this meant "the… individual's ascent from anonymity to recognition, from poverty to wealth, from ugliness to beauty, from singlehood to marriage and from nothingness to power" (Degh, 1989, p. 51). The meeting of a male protagonist most often caused the transformation. No matter how the heroine or princess came to the point of transformation, she almost always had to give up her rebellious ways and become a more controlled, feminine woman. In most cases, there arises a point of realization that the heroine is different from other women, and she must conform to

traditional values to be seen as beautiful and worthy of marriage.

Gender in Fairy Tales

Gender portrayal is one of the most widely discussed and analyzed aspects of fairy tales because of the naturalized patriarchal views that fairy tales often promote. When fairy tales were originally told, western societies were unabashedly patriarchal and sexist, certainly more so than current cultures are gendered (Justice, 2014, p.196). The foundations of the patriarchal family system were originally developed in early Christian Europe with many feudal elements of gender roles surviving into society today (Degh, 1989, p. 48). While some critically aware modern-day Americans may realize that there is nothing natural about patriarchal systems, "The tales that form our popular canon have been edited and selected to reflect and reproduce patriarchal values" (Parsons, 2004, p. 137). We know that men are not the only ones who can create and articulate stories. In fact, history shows that storytelling was often done by the elder women of a culture (Parson, 2004). Due to the lack of education among women leading to the inability to write these stories down, "the lack of feminine collaboration perpetuates patriarchal values by separating women from men and from other women as well" (Parsons, 2004, p. 138). The written stories that we do have are predominantly written by men and, in turn, maintain a more patriarchal view of the world.

One of the primary goals of gender construction in patriarchal cultures is to prepare young girls for romantic love and heterosexual practices. Parsons explains that "Girls come to know that their value lies in men's desire for them and the characteristics and qualities that will assure their desirability are revealed in cultural storylines" (Parsons, 2004, p. 136). Commonly these fairy tales are criticized for the passive and

submissive portrayal of women, especially in relation to other characters (Wilde, 2014).

Hynes argues that "stereotypes of women, in the overarching patriarchal narrative,

determine the female character's roles in Disney films instead of being determined by the

characters own intentions" (2010, p. 207). Simply being a female character in a Disney

film was once enough to know what her role would be and how she would act. Similarly,

in patriarchal stories, "Women are also often sexualized or subordinated in various ways,

and portrayed as fulfilling traditional roles such as homemaking, as non-professionals, as

wives or parents, or as sexual gatekeepers" (Hine et al., 2018, p. 2). Such fairy tales

reflect the value system of a so-called true woman's honorability and respectability that

continued into the late twentieth century (Wilde, 2014).

It is obvious that these gendered stereotypes and behaviors are still very

prevalent in the Disney princess series. So often, "these tales present a picture of sexual

roles, behavior, and psychology, and the way of predicting outcome or fate according to

sex" (Lieberman, 1972, p. 384). Part of this fate is the development of an inevitable

heterosexual romance that is often central to the conclusion of early princess movies

(England et al., 2011). In American culture, "the separation of the sexes, and the

projection of gender distinction, begins immediately after the birth of children. The script

of the life-roles males and females are expected to play is written in relation to each

other, as two parts of one whole procreative system" (Degh, 1989, pp. 47-48). Every

member of society has some kind of life script or guideline to follow. Individuals strive to

follow their script as carefully as they can to fulfill the social expectation proscribed to

their gender identity (Degh, 1989).

In more recent years, feminists have begun to reclaim powerful women in fairy

tale stories (Parsons, 2004; Wilde, 2014). For instance, in her masterful remake of traditional fairy tales to feminist fairy tales, Barbara Walker (1996) explains:

> Traditional fairy tales are drawn from many sources, including ancient mythology, pagan religion, political allegory, morality plays, and Orientalia. Most such tales have filtered through centuries of patriarchal culture and show little respect for women, except as young and beautiful "princess." Only to be decorative is the customary female function in these old stories. Girls without beauty are automatically also without virtue, happiness, luck, or love (p. ix).

To put it simply, as a female, one's physical attributes are the only thing that counts, and everything else one might be or do does not matter.

Feminist fairy tales attempt to place women in positions of power to gain independence and respect beyond their looks. Michael Maculuso (2016) argues, "if a female 'succeeds' of her own accord in a Disney film, then surely feminism has succeeded in penetrating a traditionally male-dominated field" (p.77). Unfortunately, though, this idea of self-success in female characters is not always well received by in American culture because of the deep-rooted connection of powerful women to villains (Justice, 2014). Of this point, Parsons argues that "[t]he traditional tales do equate feminine power with being unwomanly if not inhuman. They tell us that it is not natural for a woman to be active or powerful" (Parsons, 2004, p. 138). In traditional tales, the male protagonist is the one in a position of power, and that power is often used to dominate and rule others (Parsons, 2004). Moreover, these powerful female characters "seem to encompass all the qualities which women are taught not to possess. The villainesses in the Disney Princess films differ from their corresponding princesses in two

main capacities—their active role in their own destinies and their overt sexualization"
(Hynes, 2010, p. 212). Given the oral traditions of fairy tales, though, many women
believe it is now time reclaim fairy tales in an attempt to disrupt binary gender
construction and to re-envision possibilities for women and men (Parsons, 2004; Wilde,
2014).

Lessons Learned

The moral teachings found in oral stories have filtered through into today's
literature and cinema. Anggard (2005) explains, "both fairy tales and popular culture for
children have strongly gendered-stereotype features" (p. 551). Part of the importance of
fairy tale stories is the possibility that exposure to gendered material may influence
children's gender role acquisition and expression (England et al., 2011). For example,
"consistently portrayed gender role images may be interpreted as 'normal' by children
and become connected with their concepts of socially acceptable behavior and morality"
(England et al., 2011, p. 557). Because of the repetitive nature of these gender role
portrayals, children tend to follow the gender characteristics portrayed in their favorite
movies (Azmi et al., 2014). Hynes (2010) explains, "television programs can be viewed
as instructions. Like a pupil, the child learns from the content of the television and
emulates the behavior of the character with who she identifies with, for example, a
Disney Princess" (p. 210). With this in mind, entertainment media, such as Disney
movies, may be designed and produced specifically to be consumed through a gendered
lens and appeal to children (Hine et al., 2018).

For decades, Disney and its princesses have been identified as a powerful
influence on children's media and product consumerism (England et al., 2011). As Wilde

(2014) explains

> Entertainment is information, and young adults could interpret these ideologies of what is deemed masculine and feminine. Males are always heroes and females always subordinate, or else undesirable and wicked. Thus, these fairy tales execute stringent guidelines for young adults…the underlying theme of romance and finding the one true love, is still evident in most of the princess narratives (p. 136).

The perceptions that children have of social roles and gender identity may be influenced by this media and the stereotypes portrayed (England et al., 2011).

As children learn about the division of men and women, they also realize that they have to choose the 'right' gender to be accepted (Anggard, 2005). England et al. (2011) explain, "the constructivist approach proposes that children develop beliefs about the world based on their interpretations of observations and experiences and therefore view stereotyped or egalitarian depictions of gender roles will influence children's ideas about gender" (p. 557). Moreover, fairy tales are a conduit used during the process of socialization and learning in children. "Socialization refers to the processes by which people come to adopt the behaviors deemed appropriate in their culture" (Burr, 1998, p. 38). These fairy tales work as teaching tools to show children which behaviors are culturally appropriate for their gender. Hynes (2010) argues that "children are born sexed, but gender is something which is learned. Individuals are taught to be masculine or feminine" (p. 206). Simply put, children are socialized towards the gender that matches their sex. Any deviation from this socialization is considered inappropriate social behavior.

Gender is always present in a child's everyday experiences. To be a child "also means being a girl or a boy, and children are in that way constructors of gendered children" (Anggard, 2005, p. 540). Although fairy tales are not the only form of acculturation of children, they are an essential part of "the complex layering of cultural stories and influences that affirm and perpetuate cultural norms" (Parsons, 2004, p. 135). It is through the extensive layer and accessibility of the fairy tales that children can learn gender without even realizing it.

Whether intended or not, fairy tales remain a cultural tool for children to learn about the world around them. This is why "Disney princess movies are suitable to be used as learning materials as the animation is especially designed to suit children's interested where important messages are conveyed through exciting characters and songs" (Azmi et al., 2014, p. 235). Not only do children find out what happens to their favorite fairy tale characters, they also learn value systems, behavioral patterns, and consequences of acts or circumstances (Lieberman, 1972). Children tend to copy the characteristics seen in the movies that they watch because they believe that it is an acceptable way of behaving (Azmi et al., 2014). For example, "a young girl noticing that all Disney Princesses look a certain way, act a certain way and all get married. This is then stored in their long-term memory through repeatedly watching the Disney movies and/or singing the Disney songs" (Hynes, 2010, p. 207). It is through the repeated exposure that young children learn overarching cultural messages. Over time as a child's understanding develops, the simple messages about gender construction become more unobtrusive. For instance, "Since girls are chosen for their beauty, it is easy for children to infer that beauty leads to wealth, that being chosen means getting rich" (Lieberman,

1972, p. 386). The more these messages are circulated, seen, and retrenched, the more likely children will be to accept and mimic them.

Even with all the criticism surrounding fairy tales and their patriarchal messages, Disney, or any large entertainment company for that matter, has yet to overtly experiment with non-heteronormative relationships, sexualities, or non-cisgender identities (Hine et al., 2018). The open discourse surrounding sexuality in society has increased with more awareness and understanding. Mainstream media has responded favorably to these messages, and many scholars have argued that, while not overt, some newer movies contain "significantly more androgynous princess characters" (Hine et al., 2018, p. 4). Even with this positive support, "The most current Disney princess film still retained messages that are reminiscent of traditional roles and there are many contradictory gender messages in the later movies that should not be discounted despite evidence of overall improvement in egalitarian content" (England et al., 2011, p. 563). The strongly gendered messages continuously presented in these movies only reinforces the desirability of traditional gender conformity (England et al., 2011).

Included in these reconceptualized fairy tales is the need for representation of queer experiences. Alexander Doty (1993) writes of the importance of queer readings of popular culture products, arguing that queer marks "a flexible space for the expression of non- (anti-, contra-) straight cultural productions and receptions" (p. 3). Queer readings of popular culture entertainment are necessary to destabilize heteronormativity.

Queer Fairy Tales

Fairy tales, by their tradition and generic components, are open to a variety of different interpretations. A story can take on different meanings depending on how the

audience perceives the messages. Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill (2012) write that "queer theory quite fittingly emerges in our focus on the fairy tale genre's frequent refusal to confine sexuality to strictly heterosexual norms. As we have continued to think about queering the Grimms' over the years, we have come to feel that the tales scream out for queer and trans theory" (p. 13). Stories such as "Clever Gretel," "Fitcher's Bird," and "The Maiden Who Seeks Her Brothers" are just a few of the Grimms' Brothers' original tales that have been interpreted as queer (Turner, 2012). Furthermore, within the past two decades, scholars have dedicated more attention to fairy tales and their possibly queer storylines. Also, as acceptance of the LGBTQ community has continued to grow, the demand for authentic queer fairy tales has increased (Whitehead, 2017). While the overall amount of original queer stories is still overwhelmingly lacking, the re-invention and retelling of traditional tales as queer is a step in the right direction of inclusivity.

For almost as long as they have existed, fairy tales have been seen as a template for traditional heteronormative relationships and love stories. Lewis Seifert (2015) explains, "It is undeniable that fairy tales have been—and continue to be—used to enshrine normative heterosexual love. But this is precisely the reason we need queer fairy-tale studies" (p. 18). To understand Queer theory, it is vital first to understand the meaning of queer. "The term queer is multivalent, and necessarily so, because its proponents insist on keeping its meanings open" (Seifert, 2015, p. 16). Queer theory, then, aims to dismantle traditional cis-heterosexual narratives and critique the story beyond the overtly entrenched hegemonic messages. Teresa de Lauretis, one of the originators of Queer theory, argued that there were three main parts of the theory. These included refusing heterosexuality as the benchmark for sexual formation, believing that

lesbian and gay studies are one subject, and a focus on the many ways that race shapes sexual bias. Eve Sedgwick expands on de Lauretis by disrupting the binary character of romance. Homosexuality was once believed to be gendered as either masculine or feminine (Sedgwick, 1990). The traditional definition of sexuality is highly dependent on the gender of an individual's partner. This leads to the belief that the gender that one individual is and the gender that they are attracted to is the more important element of sexuality. Sedgwick (1990) argues that this definition does not allow for sexual variations that exist, like genderqueer, non-binary, or transgender individuals, and the importance of how sex-gender identities are shaped and analyzed.

   Judith Butler, the theorist most commonly identified with Queer theory, discussed the ideas of essential truths as they relate to gender. She writes that viewing gender as the ultimate truth reinforces heterosexuality and the gender binary of being either male or female. Butler (1990) argues that gender performativity can be used as a way to resist this truth by poking fun at traditional gender norms within society. Moreover, she explains that gender performativity is not the same as gender performance. Butler (2004) explains,

   If gender is performative, then it follows that the reality of gender is itself

   produced as an effect of the performance. Although there are norms that govern

   what will and will not be real, and what will and will not be intelligible, they are

   called into question and reiterated at the moment in which performativity begins

   its citational practice. One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms

   can be significantly deterritorialized through the citation. They can also be

   exposed as nonnatural and nonecessary when they take place in a context and

through a form of embodying that defies normative expectations. What this means

is that through the practice of gender performativity, we not only see how the

norms that govern reality are cited but grasp one of the mechanisms by which

reality is reproduced and altered in the course of that reproduction (p. 218).

In essence, there is more to gender than the traditional binary structure.

Overall, queer theorists seem to agree that analyzing texts with and through a

queer perspective could potentially undermine the structure on which identity relies.

Queer theory is about more than just sexuality. It takes into account social status, gender,

and identity. Because of this, Queer theory remains a more open theory allowing for more

perspectives.

As previously mentioned, the original fairy tales of oral tradition were not meant

for children. Turner and Greenhill (2012) explain, "perversity in the fairy tales arises

because when sex and sexuality are involved or implicated, they do not necessarily take

the form of mainstream heterosexual practices. Certain tales present a choice to turn away

from heteronormativity" (p. 9). Doty (2000) expands the definition of queer into its

various uses:

1. As a synonym for either gay, or lesbian, or bisexual.

2. In various ways as an umbrella term

a. To pull together lesbian, and/or gay and/or bisexual with little or no attention

to differences (similar to certain uses of "gay" to mean lesbians, gay men, and

sometimes bisexuals, transsexuals, and transgendered people)

b. To describe a range of distinct non-straight positions being juxtaposed with

each other.

c. To suggest those overlapping areas between and among lesbians, and/or gay, and/or other non-straight positions

3. To describe the non-straight work, positions, pleasures and readings of people who don't share the same "sexual orientation" as the text they are producing or responding to…

4. To describe any nonnormative expression of gender, including those connected with straightness

5. To describe non-straight things that are not clearly marked as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, or transgendered but that seem to suggest or allude to one or more of these categories (pp. 6-7)

Simply put, "queer theory's defining principles problematize sex, gender, and sexuality. They require the possibilities of relationality along lines that challenge fixed or normative categories but also address concerns about marginalization, oddity, and not fitting into society generally" (Turner & Greenhill, 2015, p. 11).

Within the genre of fairy tales, there is a limited number of queer-focused stories. When fairy tales were being written one hundred years ago or more, the term queer meant something vastly different than what it does today. For example, George MacDonald, a famed Victorian fairy tale writer, understood queer to mean "that which is puzzling or confusing, that which confuses. Synonyms are 'strange,' 'odd,' 'peculiar,' even 'different'" (McGillis, 2003, p. 88). Fairy tales at this time were created to give people an escape from their reality. Creating strange worlds full of even stranger characters gave readers the excitement that was lacking in their mundane lives. Within the last thirty or so years, queer began to take on a gendered and sexualized context. Therefore, it would be

unfair to lump early fairy tales into today's queer fairy tales.

Within the past decade, many authors have taken classic fairy tale stories and rewritten them to be queer narratives. These tales include characters who, while odd and different, like the traditional definition of queer, take on non-heteronormative identities (Pennington, 2016). These retellings are often of the most popular stories like Cinderella, Peter Pan, and The Snow Queen. For example, Ash by Malinda Lo is an updated spin on Cinderella where a young girl, Ash, loses her father and has to endure an evil stepmother. Ash meets a huntress to the king, Kaisa, and eventually falls in love with her instead of the traditional prince. Another rewrite, Peter Darling, by Austin Chant, takes Peter Pan and turns him into a transgender boy who must learn to embrace his true self after returning to Neverland. Unfortunately, these retellings, and the very few and far between original queer tales, have yet to gain the popularity that the original fairy tales have received (Pennington, 2016).

This review of literature is foundational for the analysis that follows, while concomitantly exposing some spaces that seem unexamined. This project aims to occupy some of those previously unexamined spaces, particularly the interstices of fairy tales and Queer theory. First, previous examinations of Disney princess films have yet to acknowledge public perception of the arguments within their analyses. It is only within the last decade or so that scholars have been able to determine public opinion through the use of social media. Even still, it was not until the release of *Frozen I* in 2013 that Disney fans even began questioning and arguing discrepancies publicly in easily accessed forums or sites such as Twitter.

Second, although scholars have explored gender in Disney films and queer

identities in original folk tales, less has been done looking at the queer identities of recent Disney princess films. This examination will rhetorically show how *Frozen I* and *Frozen II* are queer princess films through the metaphors that exist in the underlying story. This literature informs and guides the analysis by providing a grounded understanding of previous examinations and overall queer theory that will be used to investigate the *Frozen* films. First, in order to explore the ways that metaphors are used to queer code the films, the overall storyline and context to the films must be established. Then, through the use of conversational and lyrical texts and visual imagery, queer metaphors will be identified and explained. Second, once the metaphors that display the queer messages within the films are established, the project moves to discuss how the greater public views the films in the framework of queer messages. Together, the metaphors and public perceptions navigate this trip, as Elsa might sing, "Into the Unknown."

METHODOLOGY

Before delving into the analyses, it is imperative to present an overview of the scholarship pertinent to the rhetorical examination that follows. More specifically, metaphoric criticism in the field of rhetorical studies makes up the framework for this thesis.

Metaphor Criticism

Metaphoric criticism has long been used to analyze artifacts in the field of rhetoric. Carl Burgchardt (2005) argues that "metaphoric criticism is not a unified method; rather, it is a perspective that places metaphors at the heart of rhetorical action. The metaphoric critic, however, believes metaphors are more than superficial ornamentation: they are the means by which arguments are expressed. Moreover, metaphors may provide insight into a speaker's motives or an audience's social reality" (p. 305). Metaphors are more than just flowery language. They themselves are arguments that elaborate on a rhetor's words. Using metaphoric criticism allows me to explore "how symbolic action comprised of a combination of words, images, moving pictures, and sounds across a myriad of cultural artifacts shapes our identities and communities" (Hoerl, 2016, p. 269). Through these techniques, I will explore and shed light on the rhetorical messages – overt and covert, unintended and intended – found within the *Frozen* films.

Aristotle defined μεταφορική έννοια, or metaphor in English, as the application of a term transferred from its genus and applied to another term (1997). Robert Ivie (1987) argues, "Metaphor is at the base of rhetorical invention" (p. 166). Essentially, metaphors add aesthetic appeal and add to the persuasiveness of a communication

message. Metaphors, although not necessary, add "clearness, charm, and distinction to the style" (Aristotle, 1937, p. 187). In contemporary rhetorical theory and criticism, metaphors can be used as the structure of an argument instead of merely support for an argument. Because of this, metaphors are reframed and used to change an audience's perception of an artifact or message. Kaplan (1990) argues that "metaphors enable us to comprehend concepts by highlighting some aspects of experience and suppressing other aspects" (p. 39). Moreover, metaphors act as a lens through which we view the world, and depending on an individual's understanding of a metaphor, the view of reality is shaped differently (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Metaphors give shape to our perceptions, conceptions, and behaviors (Cohen, 1998). Lakoff & Johnson (1980) explain

> what is real for an individual as a member of a culture is a product both of his
> social reality and of the way in which that shapes his experience of the physical
> world. Since much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and
> since our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical, metaphors play
> a very significant role in determining what is real for us (p. 146).

Essentially, metaphors are a tool to understand and shape the world around us through rhetorical messages.

Often considered as just a device to make comparisons, metaphors are actually much more complicated and intricate. Sonja Foss (2018) explains, "metaphors are nonliteral comparisons in which a word or phrase from one domain of experience is applied to a different domain" (p. 285). They are used to help an audience visualize what is being said. This is what Michael Osborn (2009) would call the "rhetorical depiction." He explains that the "most basic function of rhetorical language—including metaphor—is

to control perceptions: how we see and encounter the world in which we live, including the universe within ourselves" (p. 83). Metaphors are not always explicit and obvious. Stefan Larsson (2011) argues that metaphors "are analogies which allow us to map one experience… in the terminology of another experience" (p. 26). It is both explicit and more covert (or hidden) metaphors and meanings that I aim to discover in my artifacts.

There are two important aspects of a metaphor. The tenor, or target domain, is the topic or subject that is being explained (Foss, 2018). The vehicle, or source domain, is the lens through which the topic is viewed. It is important to understand that "the target domain is often a more abstract topic, something difficult to understand, or something with a variety of possible meanings, and the source domain is usually a commonly understood, more concrete image" (Foss, 2018, p. 285). Together, both domains create a system of association, particularly when a third step – explanation between tenor and vehicle – links the comparison of nonliteral words and phrases. Furthermore, Cohen (1998) argues that "the two parts of a metaphor may share a literal or imaginative relationship" (p. 56).

Beyond their literal explanation of application, metaphors can be used to improve a given message visually. David Cisneros (2008) argues, "not only are they essential cognitive tools but metaphors participate in creating fundamental understandings of texts and the rhetorical contexts in which they are situated" (p. 570). Metaphors can improve the entire picture of what an audience is seeing and enhance understanding. In addition to clarifying an understanding, "metaphors that are widely circulated in popular discourse can conventionalize unfamiliar or controversial values and practices, rendering them less vulnerable to scrutiny and criticism" (Kaplan, 1990, p. 38). This is especially important

because often, metaphors are introduced and circulated throughout public discourse as a response to some kind of historical situation or to a particular need that a certain community happens to have at a given time.

The process through which a critic analyzes metaphors present in an artifact can vary. Cohen (1998) describes the process simply, "the critic moves systematically through the texts, identifying clusters of metaphoric vehicles that carry a common tenor" and if desired, "the critic interested in ideologies, or belief systems, explores the relationships with and between clusters" (p. 58). Although valid, Cohen's process description lacks the details of a thorough investigation within a text. Instead, I use the following guidelines outlined by Ivie (1987) to analyze my artifacts:

First, familiarizing oneself with the speaker's text and context is essential to interpreting any particular selection of his or her discourse…Second, representative texts are selected for a series of close readings undertaken to identify and mark vehicles employed by the speaker… the third step is to arrange the complete set of marked vehicles into subgroups by clustering those with similar entailments. Each cluster, it can be tentatively assumed, represents one of the "metaphorical concepts" featured in the speaker's discourse, and the clusters together indicate the speaker's "system of metaphorical concepts"…Fourth, a separate file of vehicles and their immediate contexts is compiled for each cluster of terms, i.e., one file for every metaphorical concept… Finally, the "concept" files complied in step four are analyzed one-by-one for patterns of usage within and between clusters thereby revealing the speaker's systems of metaphorical concepts (pp. 167-168).

By following this process, I will be able to understand and shed light on the present metaphors more critically and deeply.

As previously mentioned in the literature review section of this thesis, the idea of transformation within fairy tales is exceptionally important. Transformation and its importance carry over into metaphoric criticism. Cohen (1998) argues that "the conceptual vocabulary for a critical reading of metaphors includes analyzing the parts of a metaphor, as well as considering a wide variety of metaphoric relations. Overall, the concept of "transformation" is a useful way to describe how metaphors make meaning, because it captures the idea of something actually becoming something else" (Cohen, 1998, p. 56). By understanding the transformation that is happening in the metaphor, the transformation that is happening within the character becomes more meaningful.

Finally, it is crucial to understand the purpose of metaphoric criticism and its intended outcome. Cohen (1998) explains, "The study of metaphors, similar to the study of style and sign systems, is not always critically insightful. The final questions that should be asked from within any perspective, are (a) does the perspective give us a better understanding of communication? And (b) does the perspective lead us to a decision about who we are, what we should believe, and how we should act?" (p. 59). With this in mind, I will use metaphoric criticism to look at the queer identities of the characters within the movies *Frozen I* and *Frozen II*. Because these movies were created for children, the sexualities and gender identities of the characters are not overtly described and, instead, are only made visible through metaphors. In essence, the metaphors I will describe within the *Frozen* movies helps the adult audience visualize the authentic sexualities and gender identities of the characters.

FROZEN I ANALYSIS

Frozen's origin story is inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale "The Snow Queen." However, like its princess movie counterparts (i.e., *The Little Mermaid*), *Frozen* has undergone "Disneyfication" or "the process of Americanization and a systematic sanitization of violence, sexuality, and political struggle" (Baker, 2018, p. 483). At the time of the movie's release, President Barack Obama had just begun his second term in office, which many considered "Obama's post-evolutionary America" (Geal, 2016). This post-evolutionary America witnessed more tolerance toward and even respected understanding about a variety of issues, including teen pregnancy, the legalization of marijuana, and acceptance of same-sex marriage (Newport & Dugan, 2017). No other president in U.S. history had supported or had done more for the LGBTQ community than Obama (Terkel, 2017).

Conservative critics felt that *Frozen* held a liberal agenda "to normalize the practice [of homosexuality]" (Geal, 2016, p. 100). While many of these more conservative critics believed that any queer messages were meant to be the story all along, the producers remain steady in the belief that the viewers can interpret it however they want (Duffy, 2018). When asked in an interview with the Huffington Post, *Frozen* producer Jennifer Lee explained,

> It means the world to us that we're part of these conversations. Where we're going with it, we have tons of conversations about it, and we're really conscientious about these things. For me… Elsa's every day telling me where she needs to go, and she'll continue to tell us. I always write from the character out, and where Elsa is and what Elsa's doing in her life, she's telling me every day.

We'll see where we go (Bradley, 2018, para. 4-5).

The producers took the movie through multiple rewrites, but none of them have yet to include an openly queer character.

The movie is set in the fictional Scandinavian-inspired country of Arendelle. The viewers learn at the beginning of the movie that princess Elsa possesses magical powers that allow her to create and control snow and ice. Early in the movie, she deploys these powers to entertain her younger sister, Anna, before accidentally zapping Anna with her powers and injuring her. The king and queen take both girls to a group of trolls who heal Anna, but also remove the memories that Anna has regarding Elsa's powers. Grand Pabbie, an elder troll, warns Elsa, "Listen to me, Elsa, your power will only grow. There is beauty in your magic…but also great danger. You must learn to control it. Fear will be your enemy." To protect both girls, the king and queen isolate the sisters in the castle, where Elsa then chooses to shut Anna out completely. Elsa struggles to control her powers and only manages to suppress them.

During a later trip abroad, the king and queen die at sea in a storm, leaving the kingdom in the hands of the young sisters. When Elsa comes of age at 21, she is crowned Queen of Arendelle. She remains in fear that the kingdom will find out about her powers and fear her. The coronation unfolds without any major issues, but Elsa remains distant from her sister. Anna, who, compared to her sister, is thrilled with the idea of a party, meets Prince Hans, and immediately falls in love. When Hans proposes to Anna on the spot, Elsa objects to the marriage and accidentally unleashes her powers out of anger before her party-goers. One of the guests claims that Elsa is a monster, which forces her to flee to the North Mountain, where she can finally accept her powers. She creates a

palace made of ice, where she plans to live out her life as an isolate. In the process, Elsa accidentally pushes Arendelle into an eternal winter.

Meanwhile, Anna insists on finding her sister to try and end the winter, leaving her now fiancé in charge of the kingdom. During her journey, she meets Kristoff, an ice harvester, and his reindeer, Sven. She convinces them to take her to the mountains. On their ride up the mountain, the trio is attacked by wolves leaving Kristoff's sleigh in a pile of flames, forcing the group to continue on foot. While trekking through the snow, they meet Olaf, a cheerful snowman created by Elsa. Olaf is a memory from Anna and Elsa's childhood when Elsa was not afraid of her powers yet. He offers to lead the travelers to Elsa. During the same time, Anna's horse returns to Arendelle without her, leading Hans to search for both Anna and Elsa.

Once Anna, Kristoff, Olaf, and Sven reach the castle, Anna tries to explain to Elsa what has happened to Arendelle. Elsa becomes upset and accidentally freezes Anna's heart, poisoning her. Elsa then creates a giant snowball monster to chase off Anna and her other rescuer friends. Realizing that something has happened to Anna during her interaction with her sister, Kristoff immediately takes her to the trolls, who adopted him when he was a young boy. Grand Pabbie, the troll who saved Anna earlier in the movie, explains that the only way to unfreeze her heart is an act of true love. Kristoff immediately races Anna back to Arendelle so that Hans can give her a true love's kiss. At the same time, Hans reaches Elsa, where he captures her and brings her back to Arendelle to put her on trial for the assumed murder of her sister. Upon his return, instead of saving Anna, Hans reveals his plan to take the throne by eliminating both sisters. Hans locks Anna in a room to die, manipulatively convincing other dignitaries that Elsa has killed

her. He then orders Elsa's execution only to discover she has already escaped.

Olaf manages to free Anna and reveals that Kristoff is in love with her. The two of them venture out into a blizzard to find Kristoff and fix Anna's heart. At the same time, Hans confronts Elsa, explaining how she has killed Anna. Elsa immediately breaks down, causing the storm to come to a sudden stop. Nearly frozen solid, Anna sees Hans about to kill Elsa and leaps in front of her sister, freezing over and stopping Hans. Elsa throws herself onto her sister, hugging her and mourning over her. Anna begins to thaw out from her heroic act of true love. Elsa then realizes that love is the key to controlling her magic and ends the winter. Hans is arrested and exiled from the kingdom. Kristoff is rewarded with a new sleigh from Anna, and the sisters are reunited. Elsa gives Olaf his own snow cloud, so he does not melt in the heat. The movie ends with sisterly love instead of traditional romantic love. Elsa promises never to lock the gates of the castle again, and all five characters live happily ever after in the castle.

Analysis

Throughout the film, there are a number of metaphors pointing to the portrayal of Elsa's queer sexuality. Some more overt than others, these metaphors represent Elsa's lesbianism. The following is an in-depth analysis of the magic powers, door, ice castle, gloves, and monster metaphor as it relates to a particular theme.

The Lesbian Ice Queen

Elsa has been praised by many critics as the first post-feminist princess, meaning she breaks out of the traditional gender and storyline role found in most Disney films (Rudloff, 2016). Post-feminism, in this sense, refers to:

a belief that the construct of feminism is no longer needed, that its politics are a

thing of the past in light of the many celebratory narratives proclaiming feminism's success. This sensibility regarding pastness of feminism undermines—and to a certain extent replaces—earlier feminist goals for the neoliberal auspices of individualism, empowerment, and choice (Macaluso, 2016, p. 74).

While Elsa may be more post-feminist than her princess predecessors, she must still give up love and happiness to be seen as the individualistic powerhouse that Disney wants her to be. Not only does she lack a heroic partner, but she also avoids male attention at almost any cost. Her identity as a lesbian can be seen in a variety of metaphors throughout the movie.

Magic Power

Elsa is the most powerful princess Disney has ever created (Strieff & Dundes, 2017). She moves past merely being able to talk to animals or to use her beauty to win over men. She is a queen who can conjure up an entire snowstorm with the literal snap of her fingers. Looking deeper, though, the idea of magic powers in relation to Elsa can also be seen as a metaphor to represent her sexual identity. Early in the movie, when Elsa accidentally zaps her sister with her powers, her whole family travels to see a colony of trolls. The elder troll, Grand Pabbie, warns Elsa, "There is beauty in your magic… but also great danger. You must learn to control it. Fear will be your enemy." This interaction can be understood as Grand Pabbie warning Elsa not to expose her true sexual identity. Similar to queer individuals in American society, Elsa feels that she must protect her secret identity from her people because she knows they will fear this radical sexual stance. Later in the movie, Elsa confesses to her father, "I'm scared. It's getting

stronger." She fears her sexual desires because she knows many people will not understand. Though she may try, she cannot suppress her sexual identity and the strength of her feelings as they only continue to grow (Strieff & Dundes, 2017).

Not surprisingly, "powerful women in animated Disney movies are typically portrayed by evil, old, disfigured or altogether villainous characters" (Primo, 2018, p. 4). The first of her kind, Elsa defies the traditional hyper-heterosexuality typically equated with a primary Disney character. Amanda Putnam (2012) explains that usually, "the primary characters reveal heterosexual goals by offering stereotypical and exaggerated portrayals of a traditionally gendered appearance…these static identifications carefully craft a unified portrayal of happy heterosexism, which is clearly marked as the path to contentment and goodness" (p. 147). Placing her sister Anna at center stage demonstrating these traditional gendered appearances only makes Elsa's differences more apparent. Putnam continues by explaining, "in contrast to the heterosexist leads, many of the villains display transgendered attributes depicted as women with either strong masculine qualities or as strangely de-feminized" (pp. 146-147). At the beginning of the film Elsa seems to lack the femininity of a traditional princess and, instead, appears conservatively covered up, mimicking the de-feminization of a Disney villain. Similarly, Elsa is famous for one mantra that she repeats to herself as a way to keep control over her powers. She sings, "Conceal. Don't feel. Put on a show. Make one wrong move and everyone will know." She uses this phrase to remind herself that she must act like a gender normative princess and hide her sexual preference from those around her. She tows the line between being a powerful Disney villain and a feminine Disney princess. Viewing Elsa's magic power as a metaphor for her lesbian sexuality allows the viewer to

grasp a more progressive understanding of Elsa as a Disney princess.

Door

In American society, before an LGBTQ individual reveals their true identity to the world, they are often considered to "be in the closet" (Borgstrom, 2020). In the case of *Frozen*, this metaphor is extended to include the door. Early in the movie, after the trolls remove all of Anna's memories of Elsa's powers, Elsa locks herself away from Anna. In an attempt to get Elsa to play with her, Anna sings, "I never see you anymore. Come out the door. It's like you've gone away." The door hides Elsa and her secret powers, and Anna's desperation to play with her sister emphasizes this. In another scene before the coronation ball, a duke remarks, "Ah, Arendelle, our most mysterious trade partner. Open those gates so I may unlock your secrets and exploit your riches." The viewers are able to see this stark contrast between, Anna, who is on the inside yet still locked out and an outsider who wants in. This desire to be let in emphasizes Elsa's yearning to keep everyone out.

In the scene where Anna and Elsa are arguing at the coronation ball, Anna exclaims, "Why? Why do you shut me out?! Why do you shut the world out?! What are you so afraid of?!" She feels locked out of Elsa's life, and the repetition of the locked door metaphor highlights the pressure of Elsa's secret. In a later scene, after Anna and Hans ask Elsa for her blessing on their marriage, the following conversation occurs:

Elsa: You can't marry a man you just met.

Anna: You can if it's true love.

Elsa: Anna, what do you know about true love?

Anna: More than you. All you know is how to shut people out.

This scene not only extends the locked door metaphor but also plays with the dynamic of Anna's desperation for love and Elsa's avoidance of it. This dynamic is seen again when Anna approaches Elsa's ice castle. Before Anna can knock, the door swings open, and Anna exclaims, "Ha. It opened. That's a first." The door is open because Elsa has accepted her identity and is not trying to hide it. Furthermore, Elsa's ice castle is her closet. It is the one place where she feels safe enough to truly be herself.

  Ice Castle. Before coming out to the world, many LGBTQ individuals feel they need to control how they act and who they are around (Dym et al., 2019). When Anna takes off up the mountain to find her sister, even Kristoff remarks, "You know, most people who disappear into the mountains want to be alone." While he may not realize Elsa's actual reasons for isolation, he does understand that Elsa is trying to control who can access her by locking herself in an ice castle. In the most recognizable song of the movie, Elsa sings:

> A kingdom of isolation, and it looks like I'm the queen. The wind is howling like
> the swirling storm inside. Couldn't keep it in, heaven knows I tried…Don't let
> them in, don't let them see, Be the good girl you always have to be. Conceal,
> don't feel, don't let them know. Well, now they know. Let it go! Let it go!

Although Elsa is technically queen of Arendelle, she also recognizes the fact that because she has isolated herself, she can be the queen of her isolated kingdom as well. She talks about the need to conceal her true feelings and act like the gender-normative queen that she is supposed to be. She repeats her mantra one last time before freeing herself from the secret because she feels safe in her own figurative closet, the ice castle. Her song continues with, "Turn away and slam the door. I don't care what they're going to

say…the fears that once controlled me can't get to me at all… That perfect girl is gone."

In the safety of her ice castle, she releases control of her powers, finally accepting that

she is not the queen everyone wants her to be, and she is happy with herself in her

isolated kingdom.

Once Anna finally makes it to Elsa's ice kingdom, she tries to reason with her

sister:

Elsa: …You belong in Arendelle.

Anna: So do you.

Elsa: No, I belong here. Alone. Where I can be who I am without hurting

anybody.

Although Elsa has given up some control over herself, she refuses to authentically be

herself except when she is alone in her ice castle. Anna explains how Elsa has frozen all

of Arendelle, which sends Elsa into a complete meltdown. Elsa sings angrily, "I'm such a

fool! I can't be free! I can't control the curse!" Realizing that she has let everyone see a

glimmer of who she really is, she reverts back to her old ways feeling the burden of her

true identity as a curse. After Elsa forces Anna out, she is seen pacing, "Get it together.

Control it. Don't feel. Don't feel, Don't FEEL!" Even by herself, Elsa feels that her

sexuality is something that must be controlled and kept hidden.

Gloves. An extension of the door and ice castle metaphor can be seen with the use

of Elsa's white gloves. After the visit with trolls, the king gives Elsa a pair of white

gloves:

King: The gloves will help. See? You're good…Conceal it. Don't feel it.

Elsa and King: Don't let it show.

The gloves are used as a mask to hide the secret that Elsa has. They maintained her purity and clean aesthetic. Throughout the 19th century much of society held the belief that LGBTQ bodies were both deviant and dirty, requiring physical separation from cis-heterosexual individuals. Elizabeth Ettorre (2010) explains

> Deviant social behavior including LGBT[Q] behavior consistently manifests itself in the substance of the deviant's (i.e. LGBT[Q]'s) body. These bodies are seen to deviate from heteronormativity and perceived as socially and morally inferior. Our social and moral troublemaking is embodied as we are constituted as a 'menace' in society (p. 310).

Individuals believed that LGBTQ bodies held an infectious substance causing them to be deviant.

This idea became especially apparent with the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the latter half of the 20th century. Alexandra Howson (2013) argues that heterosexual responses to HIV were largely symbolic, and their function was to reinforce social boundaries between what was considered clean and innocent (the bodies of haemophiliacs) and dirty (the bodies of gay men and drug users). The intention of such boundary-drawing was to reduce the perceived threat of physical contamination (the blood supply) and of symbolic contamination (e.g., the idea of homosexuality). Therefore, pollution beliefs about the body can be used to make social distinctions between categories of people (p.100). As the HIV epidemic grew throughout the 1980s and 1990s, in a pre-AZT era, physicians and nurses were commonly seen wearing gloves when interacting with LGBTQ individuals to prevent supposed contamination (Feldman, 1989). Instead of using the

gloves to protect herself from LGBTQ contamination, Elsa's gloves were used to maintain her cis-heterosexual mask.

At the coronation ball, the two sisters, Anna and Elsa, get into an argument where Anna grabs Elsa's hand and pulls off one of her gloves. Elsa spins around, reaching for the glove in panic. She exclaims, "Give me my glove!" as Anna holds the glove away from her. Elsa fears that the exposure of her hand could reveal her secret. Donning the gloves maintains Elsa's secret sexual identity. She believes that the only way to hide her secret is to use an ordinary object synonymously used to prevent queer contamination.

Monster

In American society today, it is common for conservative individuals and social traditionalists to see LGBTQ members as freaks or monsters (Geal, 2013). More specifically, in academia, "the very word queer means, among other things, 'bizarre,' 'strange,' ' grotesque,' 'bent,' and 'twisted,' and as such as been used as an insult for homosexuals," more specifically, queer is understood "as a menace to the notion of the normal and the natural precisely because it designates whatever is disgusting, monstrous" (Crowder, 2007, p. 494). This metaphor of an LBGTQ person as a monster is used towards Elsa throughout the movie. After the scene where Anna takes Elsa's glove, Elsa accidentally erupts with panicked anger and releases giant icicles through the ballroom. A duke who is at the party remarks, "…Sorcery. I knew there was something dubious going on here. Monster…Monster!" Elsa immediately flees the kingdom with Anna chasing after her. With no chance of catching her sister, Anna returns to the kingdom to come up with a plan to help her sister. At her arrival back into the courtyard of the castle, the same duke approaches Anna:

Duke: You! Is there sorcery in you, too? Are you a monster, too?

Anna: No. No. I'm completely ordinary…And my sister's not a monster.

The duke lacks the knowledge to understand that power, or in this case, sexuality, is a very individualized thing.

In western society, women who do not act in traditional gender ways are often seen as a danger to society. Crowder (2007) argues, "By refusing to become or remain women, lesbians are seen as monsters by society in which there are only men and women. They cannot be assimilated because they are not, or are no longer like the others, that is to say women" (p. 493). Much later in the movie, after Hans has told everyone that Elsa has killed his beloved Anna, the duke remarks again, "There can be doubt now; Queen Elsa is a monster and we are all in grave danger." The duke, an older, wealthy, white male is the perfect representation of conservative ideals that do not accept non-traditional sexualities. It is no surprise, then, that he would repeatedly claim that asexuality makes Elsa a monster.

It is not until the end of the movie that Elsa begins to accept her authentic identity after she cuts all ties with the duke. She has to remove the conservative shadow that exists in her kingdom to finally be free to be the first lesbian Disney queen.

Conclusion

Through this analysis, I have queered the dominant reading of the film and expanded the understanding of the queer identities within *Frozen I*. Focusing on the metaphors that exist within the film reinforces the importance of queer interpretations and readings within the academic world. So many individuals within the LGBTQ community are desperately searching for mainstream media characters to connect and relate to.

Because of this apparent lack of overtly queer characters, many LGBTQ individuals have had to learn to read deeper into films to find the queer messages that exist. Analyses such as this one open up the possibility of multiple interpretations of a single text. These alternative readings can reveal the existence of queer messages and help affirm the individuals who are searching for them.

FROZEN II ANALYSIS

Frozen II picks back up roughly three years after the end of the first film. The sequel opens with King Agnarr of Arendelle telling a story to his young girls, Elsa and Anna, about their grandfather, King Runeard. The story explains a treaty established between King Runeard and the neighboring Indigenous tribe of Northuldra, whereby Arendelle was to build a dam in the Enchanted Forest. Suddenly, a fight breaks out between the Northuldra tribe and the Arendelleans, resulting in Runeard's death. The battle enrages the elemental spirits of Earth, Fire, Water, and Air in the Enchanted Forest. The spirits quickly disappear, leaving a wall of mist and trapping both the Arendellean and Northudran combatants inside the forest. A young Agnarr, the now-King of Arendelle and eventual father to Anna and Elsa, escapes with the help of an unknown person who is never shown.

The film jumps forward to three years after Elsa's coronation. The kingdom of Arendelle, including Anna, Olaf the snowman, Kristoff the ice harvester, and Kristoff's reindeer Sven, are shown celebrating autumn. After the celebration, everyone goes to bed when Elsa hears a mysterious voice singing to her. She follows the voice and unintentionally wakes the elemental spirits by freezing ice pieces suspended in the air the appear to represent each spirit. When the ice pieces crash to the ground, the spirits sweep through Arendelle, forcing everyone in the kingdom to evacuate. After all the residents have evacuated to a cliff, Grand Pabbie, the elder troll, and his colony meet up with the Arendelle citizens. Grand Pabbie informs Anna and Elsa that to set things right, they must discover the truth about the kingdom's past.

Elsa, Anna, Olaf, Kristoff, and Sven head out to find the mysterious voice. The

group finds the wall of mist that appears to be impenetrable until Elsa touches it, creating an opening into the forest. The explorers timidly enter the mist when suddenly they are pushed further into the woods and locked into the inside of the mist wall. While they are exploring, the Air spirit sweeps the group up into a tornado before dumping everyone but Elsa out. Elsa stops the tornado by using her powers, creating a set of ice sculptures as a result. Anna and Elsa quickly realize that the sculptures are images from their father's past. Suddenly, the explorers find themselves in a standoff between Northuldra tribe members and Arendellean soldiers. When the two groups try to attack the explorers, Elsa freezes the ground causing everyone to slip. Olaf jumps in, introducing himself and providing a quick synopsis of the first film and how he and his friends got to the forest. Just as Olaf finishes his story, the Fire spirit attacks, spreading a bright flame all over the forest. Everyone flees from the Fire spirit while Elsa fights to put the flames out. She chases the spirit down and realizes that it is only a salamander. Once the salamander realizes Elsa does not want to harm him, he settles down and jumps into her hands. The mysterious voice calls out again, and this time, both Elsa and the Fire spirit hear it. Just as Elsa is about to take off north to follow the call, Anna wraps Elsa up in a hug and covers her with their mother's scarf. The Northuldra leader realizes that the scarf is a Northuldra scarf. Anna and Elsa quickly realize that the girl in the ice sculpture with their father is their mother. The realization that Anna and Elsa's mother is Northuldran causes the Arendelleans and Northuldra tribe to form a truce. Elsa then promises to save Arendelle and set the forest free from the mist.

Anna and Elsa want to keep moving north, but the Northuldra leader convinces them to camp out for the night. The leader warns that the Earth giants roam the woods at

night, and it would be much safer to travel during the day. Back at the camp, Elsa is

having a conversation with a Northuldra woman who explains that there is a fifth spirit.

Elsa believes that the voice she keeps hearing must be the fifth spirit. Meanwhile,

Kristoff works with a Northuldran man to create an elaborate marriage proposal for

Anna. Suddenly, the Earth giants begin roaming near the camp. The tribe leader explains

that they never come this far south. Elsa believes that the Earth giants must have sensed

her, and to keep everyone safe, she must keep moving north. So Anna, Elsa, and Olaf

continue their trek north to find the voice. A little while later, Kristoff attempts to

propose to Anna before quickly realizing that who he thought was Anna walking towards

him is actually the Northuldra leader. She explains that Anna, Elsa, and Olaf have already

left, and everyone else is packing up to move farther west. Sad and confused, Kristoff

begins to question if Anna loves him as much as he loves her.

During their trek north, Anna, Elsa, and Olaf come across the shipwreck of their

mother and father's boat. Remembering that water has memory, Elsa forces the water out

of the wood to show the trio what really happened. They quickly realize that the parents

were trying to sail north to find answers about Elsa's powers, but the waves of the sea

quickly became too much and consumed them. Distressed, Elsa realizes that she must go

to Ahtohallan to find the answers. Ahtohallan is a place described by Anna and Elsa's

mother that supposedly holds all the memories and answers to life far above the North

Sea. Anna begs to go with her, but Elsa knows it will be too dangerous and sends Anna

and Olaf racing south in a canoe made of ice. This only angers Anna and Olaf, who

realize they must figure out a way back to Elsa.

On the beach of the North Sea, Elsa continually attempts to reach Ahtohallan by

running across the water. The Water spirit appears and tries to prevent her from crossing.

Elsa manages to tame the water spirit and rides on the back of it, following the voice.

Once she reaches Ahtohallan, she comes across her own memories and realizes that the

voicing she is hearing is from her mother. When Elsa tries to find out what went wrong in

the forest, she learns that King Runeard wanted to control the Northuldra by creating a

dam. The dam limited the Northuldras' resources and their reliance on magic, which

King Runeard hated. When the Northuldra leader tried to reason with him, Runeard

murdered the unarmed leader. Following the truth, Elsa goes too deep into Ahtohallan,

causing herself to freeze from the blistering cold. She manages to send the truth to Anna

before she freezes solid. After learning the true story of their ancestral shame, Anna and

Olaf set off to help Elsa, but not before realizing that something terrible has happened.

Olaf slowly melts away, leaving Anna by herself in a dark cave.

Anna knows the dam must be destroyed even though it will send a massive flood

towards Arendelle. She goes to wake up the Earth giants and gets them to follow her

towards the dam. As she nears the dam, the giants begin throwing boulders, causing the

dam to break. As the dam falls, Elsa instantly thaws. She rides on the Water spirit

towards Arendelle, where she freezes a wall of water, causing it calm. With the wrong

righted, the mist in the forest begins to lift, freeing everyone from the forest.

Elsa reunites with Anna, Kristoff, and Sven before reviving Olaf back into his

solid form. The sisters realize that Elsa is the fifth spirit, becoming the bridge between

the spirits and humanity. Kristoff finally manages to propose, and Anna gleefully accepts.

In the end, Anna becomes the new queen of Arendelle. Elsa chooses to stay in the forest

where she is needed by the spirits. The sisters remain in touch, and Elsa promises to visit

often. Anna, Kristoff, Sven, and Olaf live happily ever after in the kingdom.

Analysis

Released more than six years apart, *Frozen II* manages to extend many of the metaphors found in the original film and add some new metaphors that enhance the queer sexuality of Elsa argued in the previous chapter. The following analysis will queer the dominant reading of the film and explore the metaphors that relate to Elsa's sexuality as a lesbian.

The Lesbian Ice Queen

Elsa is arguably the queerest princess that Disney has ever created. Although the creators continue to avoid confirming or denying Elsa's sexuality, there are many moments within the movie where Elsa herself demonstrates the argument (Allen, 2019). Throughout the entirety of the second film, Elsa seems to lean on and be drawn to female characters more than male characters. The following metaphors display Elsa's sexuality as a lesbian.

Magic Power

The magic power metaphor that existed in the first film only continues in the second film. At the end of the first film, the kingdom of Arendelle seemed to be accepting of Elsa's powers. This sentiment is continued in the opening of the second film. Only Elsa seems to be wary of her magic powers. After the flashback vignette, the film begins by showing Elsa standing alone on a balcony, looking out into the fjord. She is suddenly startled by one of her servants, freezing her hands to a railing. Visually, the audience can see her embarrassment and attempt to compose herself before reentering the party. It is as if she isolates herself because no one in the party understands her. This is

the first time Elsa hears the mysterious female voice calling to her.

It is not until Elsa wakes the elemental spirits and disrupts the peace within the kingdom that the concern for Elsa's powers creeps in again. In a conversation between Grand Pabbie and Anna, Pabbie whispers, "Anna I am worried for her. We have always feared Elsa's powers were too much for this world." Pabbie, a father figure to Anna and Elsa, understands the danger of Elsa's powers. Her magic powers work as a vehicle to represent her sexuality. Furthermore, Arendelle and the troll colony were not bothered by Elsa's magic powers until it disrupted their daily lives, forcing them out of their homes. This interaction displays the idea that society accepts queer individuals until they disrupt the peace.

When Elsa finally makes it to Ahtohallan, she truly begins to accept her magic powers. In her song "Show Yourself" when Elsa fully comes out to the world, she and her mother sing,

Elsa and Iduna: Show yourself. Step into the power. Grow yourself into

something new!

Iduna: You are the one you've been waiting for

Elsa: All of my life!

Elsa and Iduna: Oh, show yourself!

It is in this moment that Elsa fully comes into her own, accepting herself and showing the world who she truly is. She literally steps into her identity and grows into who she was always supposed to be.

Only after Elsa accepts herself is she able to find out the truth. While she is wandering through her memories in Ahtohallan, she hears the following interaction

between her grandfather, King Runeard, and one of his men:

> Soldier: Sir I don't understand
>
> Runeard: We bring Arendelle's full guard
>
> Soldier: But they have given us no reason not to trust them
>
> Runeard: The Northuldra follow magic, which means we can never trust them.

Magic makes people feel too powerful. Too entitled. It makes them think they can defy the will of a king.

Surprised, Elsa argues back, "that's not what magic does. It's just your fear. Fear is what can't be trusted." King Runeard, a cis-heteronormative white male, does not understand magic and, therefore, chooses not to trust it. This train of thought is something that, sadly, occurs often in American society. When traditional cis-heteronormative individuals do not understand something, like LGBTQ individuals, they choose to fear and not trust it. For example, in an interview, Dr. Buster Wilson, the former general manager of the conservative Christian group American Family Association claimed, "simple 'equality' is not the goal of the gay activists. They want total domination in some cases…not just to 'accept them' but to bow to them and their wants" (Obeidallah, 2017, para. 8). Just like Wilson, King Runeard fears equal rights and power for all, believing that LGBTQ individuals will not just stop at equal. Many individuals fear that LGBTQ individuals want all the power and control to the detriment of cishet people's liberties.

The Northuldra. Similar to Elsa, the Northuldra people have the ability to use magic. Because of this, I would argue that the Northuldra people represent the LGBTQ community, even in the least, in terms of being "different" than the "normative" citizens

of Arendelle. Towards the middle of the movie, after Elsa has calmed the fire spirit, she pulls out her mother's scarf and wraps it around Anna. The Northuldra people are all in shock:

Yelena: Where did you get that scarf?

Ryder: That's a Northuldra scarf.

Anna: What?

Honeymaren: This is from one of our oldest families

Anna: It was our mother's.

In this interaction, the Northuldra people are surprised that someone from Arendelle would have this scarf. The scarf can be seen as the Northuldra's pride flag. It represents all of their identities in one. Back at the camp, Honeymaren, one of the Northuldra tribe members, explains the scarf's significance to Elsa during an intimate conversation, "I want to show you something. May I? You know air, fire, water, and earth. But look, there's a fifth spirit. Said to a bridge between us and the magic of nature." Essentially, each of the five elemental spirits represents one of the five different identities within the LGBTQ community. At the end of the film, after Elsa has freed the forest and realized her true identity, Honeymaren says to Elsa, "You know, you belong up here." Elsa responds, "I took an oath to always do what's best for Arendelle. Luckily, I know just what that is." Honeymaren has been considered to be Elsa's girlfriend by many fans of the film (VanDerWerff, 2019). She contains no importance to the plot other than encouraging Elsa during intimate moments. In the end, Elsa chooses to stay in the forest with Honeymaren and the Northuldra people because they understand her and her power. The enchanted forest is a safe place for Elsa to be who she wants to be and not fear what

others think. The Northuldra people are her people because they all use magic. Anna

becomes the queen of Arendelle, in part, because she is heterosexual and understands

Arendelle (i.e., traditional society) better than Elsa ever did.

Door

As noted in Chapter Four, the door has been a representation of being in "the

closet." In the first film, the door was often employed in relation to Elsa hiding her

identity and not coming out to the world. This idea remains in the second film. In one

scene, after playing family charades, Elsa excuses herself for bed. Anna senses that

something is bothering her sister. She knocks on the door:

> Elsa: Come in.
>
> Anna: *sighs* Yup something's wrong.
>
> Elsa: With you?
>
> Anna: No with you. You're wearing mother's scarf. You do that when something
>
> is wrong. *Gasps* did we hurt your feelings?! I'm so sorry if we did! You know
>
> very few people are actually good at family games. That's just a fact.
>
> Elsa: No that's not it.
>
> Anna: Then what is it?
>
> Elsa: There's this…*sighs* I just don't want to mess things up
>
> Anna: What things? You're doing great *sighs* Oh Elsa when are you going to
>
> see yourself the way I see you?

In this interaction, Elsa can be seen emotionally locking herself away because she is

afraid of expressing what is really going on. Physically, Elsa uses her mother's scarf as a

device of protection and concealment. Just as Elsa is about to tell Anna about the voice,

she pulls the scarf in closer around herself as if to conceal the truth. The scarf mirrors what handkerchiefs were used for in the 1970s. In the gay community, handkerchiefs were used as a signal to let other men around them know that they were gay (Peoples, 2019). Because LGBTQ individuals were not accepted at the time, many would use the handkerchief code as a safer way to communicate their preferences. Elsa uses her mother's scarf in a similar way. The scarf then becomes an extension of Elsa's "closet" and tool that she can carry with her when she needs to protect her identity.

When Anna, Elsa, Sven, Kristoff, and Olaf find the enchanted forest later in the movie, the group is pushed through the mist into the forest. Anna, the character that has been locked out the most, exclaims, "And we're locked in. Probably should have seen that one coming." Anna seems to have connected being locked in, or out, with magic. The mist has locked the group inside, away from the outside world, almost as if to protect what is inside the forest.

Towards the end of the movie, when Elsa makes it to Ahtohallan, she sings the song "Show Yourself," which is essentially her coming out song. Early in the song, she sings, "Show yourself, I'm dying to meet you, show yourself, it's your turn. Are you the one I've been looking for all of my life? Show yourself, I'm ready to learn." Elsa has followed the siren's voice to Ahtohallan, where she is finally ready to learn who she is. She even goes as far as to ask the siren if she is the one that she has been looking for her whole life, potentially as a love interest. Elsa continues by singing, "I've never felt so certain, all my life I've been torn. But I'm here for a reason, could it be the reason I was born? I have always been so different, normal rules did not apply. Is this the day? Are you the way, I finally find out why?" Elsa acknowledges that she is different from those

around her. She feels torn because she knows she is supposed to become a heteronormative queen, and yet her heart yearns for something different. Right before her coming out transformation, Elsa sings, "Come to me now; Open your door; Don't make me wait; One moment more; Oh, come to me know; Open your door; Don't make me wait; One moment more." It is after this moment that Elsa can see all of the secrets and memories that Ahtohallan holds and realizes that it is okay to be who she wants to be. Essentially, once Elsa has opened the door in Ahtohallan, she is freed and allows herself to be the lesbian ice queen she always wanted to be.

Ice Castle. In the first film, Elsa created a castle out of ice to isolate herself from everyone. When Olaf recaps the first film in the forest, he even exclaims, "Slam! Doors shutting everywhere! Ice palace for one! Ice palace for one! Get out Anna!" Even as an internal character, Olaf recognized Elsa's isolation and desire to hide her identity. I argue that Elsa's ice castle of isolation morphs to become the kingdom of Arendelle by the end of the first film. Early in the film, when Elsa hears the mysterious voice, she sings, "Everyone I've ever loved is here within these walls. I'm sorry, secret siren, but I'm blocking out your calls. I've had my adventure, I don't need something new. I'm afraid of what I'm risking if I follow you." In ancient mythology, the siren is often known as a temptress of sorts that draws its victims in through melodious sounds. Interestingly enough, "the siren's acoustic power and its capacity to affect the external world span centuries and cultures, ultimately encompassing both genders. In some ethnic myths and legends, the mermaid and other siren-like figures can adopt male or female form and seduce earthly women as well as men" (Naroditskaya & Austern, 2006, p. 4). Furthermore, the sirens are created based on the desires of the one that is listening. For

example, "the sirens…often provide their creators with as much angst as desire, offering dreams of virgin-whores to make the men [or women] who market or consume them feel intensely alive, aroused by sex, fear, and music" (Naroditskaya & Austern, 2006, p. 8). Elsa is being drawn in by a female "siren" who knows her inner desires and fears. Instead of isolating herself from everyone as she did in the first film, she is isolating herself from the outside world. Elsa's kingdom has accepted her for who she is, and she feels safe within her kingdom walls. By leaving the kingdom and following the siren's voice, Elsa would be entering "the unknown" and coming out to the whole world, essentially leaving her safe, normative life behind.

The Unknown

If Elsa's mantra of "Let It Go" was not enough in the first film to point to the queen's non-normativity, then her constant desire to tread "Into the Unknown" in *Frozen II* surely is enough of an indicator of her sexual identity. From a queer perspective, Elsa's "Let It Go" was essentially her saying to the world that she is tired of hiding who she is. In the song, Elsa sings, "The wind is howling like this swirling storm inside. Couldn't keep it in, heaven knows I've tried. Don't let them in, don't let them see. Be the good girl you always have to be. Conceal, don't feel, don't let them know. Well, now they know." In this part of the song, Elsa explains how she has tried to hide who she is and the feeling she has. She eventually let's go of these feelings and gives up trying to hide her powers. In the song "Into the Unknown," Elsa intimates that she is comfortable with who she is, but she is still unsure of herself and feels like she does not quite belong. She sings, "What do you want? 'Cause you've been keeping me awake. Are you here to distract me so I make a big mistake? Or are you someone out there who's a little bit like me? Who knows

deep down I'm not where I'm meant to be?" At first, Elsa considers the siren song a distraction, but then she shows some hesitation as to the actual motives of the siren. She continues, "Every day's a little harder as I feel my power grow. Don't you know there's part of me that longs to go. Into the unknown? Into the unknown!" At this point, Elsa fully recognizes that she is still unsure of who she is and wants to go into the unknown to find answers. In essence, the unknown is a metaphor for finding herself and coming out to the world. Elsa can feel her sexual desires growing (i.e., her powers) and wants to experience them by coming out to the world fully.

Conclusion

Frozen II magnifies the queer messages from the first film. It is through the metaphors in the film and the songs that the audience can see Elsa's sexuality as a lesbian. This film, as did the first, reinforces the importance of queer readings of artifacts like Disney films. There is often more to the story than what appears on the surface.

PUBLIC OPINION

The *Frozen* franchise has been one of the most publicly discussed film duos Disney has ever created (Dickson, 2017). When the first *Frozen I* film released in 2013, it quickly became the highest-grossing movie of all time for its premiere weekend. Critics have argued that the film reminds viewers of the original Disney classics such as *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and The Beast* because of its Broadway inspired musical numbers and intricate animation (Zuckerman, 2013). *Frozen I* – like *Beauty and The Beast* – is now a Broadway production. Beyond that, the film was praised for messages of female empowerment. Marria Nagra (2018) argues

> The Disney princess franchise generally projects terrifying and misogynistic fairy tales for obvious economic concerns…the Disney princesses own little control and agency. They are coerced to sacrifice essential parts of their personalities for men (for example in The Little Mermaid, there is loss of voice), or are coerced to serve their evil hearted stepmothers for years (Cinderella and Snow White)…In *Frozen*, Disney seems to have paid attention to some of these gender tropes and critiques (Paras. 3-5).

Although reminiscent of original Disney princess nostalgia, *Frozen I* seems to have considered its previous downfalls with the way it presents female characters.

Similar to its predecessor, *Frozen II* not only broke the record for the highest-grossing movie during its premiere weekend but also became the highest-grossing animated movie of all time raking in just over $1.32 billion since its release (Whitten, 2020). Long before the film was even released, fans began voicing their hopes and thoughts about Elsa's sexuality in the second film. When the #GiveElsaAGirlfriend

began trending on twitter, not only did it gain support by fans who wanted to see a queer queen, but it also gained even more backlash from conservative groups demanding Disney not to "give into the pressures of the liberal agenda" and continue to "follow its normal trend and create a Prince character to fall in love with Queen Elsa" (Sieczkowski, 2016, para. 4). In the following sections, I unpack both criticism and support for queer messages within *Frozen I* and *Frozen II*. In this chapter, I examine the public perception of *Frozen I* and *Frozen II* before showing how it intersects with my previous two chapters' analysis regarding the queering of Elsa.

Queer Criticism of *Frozen I* and *Frozen II*

Of all the individuals who have voiced their distaste for the films, it seems conservative parents and grandparents have had the most to say. It all began when a conservative grandmother voiced her opinion of the first film on her blog claiming, "this beloved movie, with its top-notch animation and its catchy theme song doesn't just have homosexual undertones but is 108 minutes of pure gay propaganda" (as cited in Dickson, 2017, para. 2). Skagg, a devoted Mormon woman, could not handle the messages of the film after being forced to go see it not once but three times. She continues by saying "it is apparent that the very best talent within the industry was called upon for every facet of producing and bring [*Frozen*] to the big screen: illustrators; animators, writers, composers; singing artists; actors; etc., in order to woo its intended audience, parents, into a frozen-state, which would then allow liberalism to indoctrinate children" (as cited in Dickson, 2017, para. 3). Skagg argues that the film was created for more than entertainment purposes. She believes Disney wanted to use the film as a tool to teach children about LGBTQ individuals. Skagg seems to understand the teaching ability of

fairy tales due to their catchy songs and approachable characters towards children.

Although the blog has been removed, Skagg claimed that Disney producers were trying

to pull one over on Christian families by trying to brainwash children with messages of

normalization of same-sex behaviors and relationships. She fears the messages being

presented in the film and the effect that they might have on impressionable children, thus

leading to her critical disapproval of the film.

      Colorado-based pastor, Kevin Swanson, seemed to echo Skagg's argument in a

radio show he produces. Swanson and his co-host, Steven Vaughn, discussed the issues

of homosexuality and bestiality during their show:

> Swanson: Man, how many children are taken into these things and how many
>
> Christians are taking their kids off to see the movie *Frozen*, produced by an
>
> organization that is probably one of the most pro-homosexual organizations in the
>
> country? You wonder sometimes, I'm not a tinfoil hat conspiratorialist, but you
>
> wonder sometimes if maybe there's something very evil happening here. If I was
>
> the Devil, what would I do to really foul up an entire social system and do
>
> something really, really, really evil to 5- and 6- and 7-year-olds in Christian
>
> families around America?
>
> Vaughn: I would make a movie.
>
> Swanson: I would buy Disney. If I was the Devil, I would buy Disney in 1984,
>
> that's what I would have done.
>
> Vaughn: Then you would start making all these nice little movies that throw little
>
> things in there that make sin look enticing, in fact some of the worst of sins, make
>
> it look enticing or at least to start to indoctrinate slowly, turn the heat up on the

frog in the pan.

Swanson: Friends, this is evil, just evil. I wonder if people are thinking: "You know I think this cute little movie is going to indoctrinate my 5-year-old to be a lesbian or treat homosexuality or bestiality in a light sort of way." I wonder if the average parent going to see *Frozen* is thinking that way. I wonder if they are just walking in and saying, "Yeah, let's get my five-year-old and seven-year-old indoctrinated early." You know they're not, I think for the most part they're oblivious. Maybe they do pick up on pieces of it but they just don't get up and walk out (As cited in Tashman, 2014).

Not only do Vaughn and Swanson argue the intention of the messages in the film, but they also think that Disney is a pro-queer organization even though it has already been established that Disney is one of the least representative entertainment studios of LGBTQ characters (GLAAD, 2018).

Furthermore, the two radio hosts critique the film to discuss sins that are seen in the film and what they could teach young children. Historically, homosexuality and bestiality have been lumped together and considered "fornication against nature" (Rydstrom, 2000, p. 244). By biblical standards, relationships were to occur between a man and a woman mostly for reproduction. Anything outside of this description was considered wrong and punishable by law. Swanson and Vaughn uphold this train of thought in their discussion, furthering the connection. Even in today's society, individuals have made the connection between homosexuality and bestiality, claiming that heterosexuality is the only universal norm of sexuality (Leland, 2016). Finally, the two men criticize parents for not picking up on the messages within the film and walking out

of the theater as protest.

These Christian individuals believe that film was created as Satanic propaganda to corrupt American society. Furthermore, they believe that Disney supports a pro-homosexual agenda and prays on the innocence of children. Although these conservatives disapprove of the queer messages within the film, their discussions of the matter still reinforce the existence of *Frozen I*'s queer perspective.

When Disney announced the production of *Frozen II* and fans began begging for a queer queen, the religious right lost its mind. As a counter-argument to #GiveElsaAGirlfriend, many social conservatives began tagging #CharmingPrinceForElsa. The conservative group, CitizenGo, claimed:

> We're suggesting a much better idea…An idea that promotes solid family values to our children and represents the natural family. Sign our petition, now, to Disney asking that Elsa fall in love with a prince. #CharmingPrinceForElsa. The alternative idea is frightening. Last week, the LGBT[Q] lobby and liberal Hollywood stood together demanding Disney create Queen Elsa's character into a Lesbian. If fact, they claim, based off of her views in *Frozen*, she is already a lesbian and now only needs a girlfriend (Mertz, 2016, paras. 2-3).

The group's message reinforces the cis-hetero rhetoric that only heterosexual relationships are natural. By reinforcing this idea, they also insinuate that any families of non-heterosexual couples do not hold solid family families. This harkens back to the idea that homosexual individuals are morally corrupt by biblical standards. The CitizenGo group set a goal of five hundred thousand signatures claiming, "it is important that Disney not use the influence of a film to feed our children with a political message.

Please use your film to send a positive message to children, not divisive political propaganda only supported by a portion of the world" (Mertz, 2016, para. 6). The petition leads readers to believe that LGBTQ individuals are in the minority, and more individuals would rather see Elsa in a traditionally hegemonic cis-heterosexual relationship.

CitizenGo is not the only group arguing for a stop this popular demand. Franklin Graham, the son of minister Billy Graham, wrote on his Facebook saying, "In the social media campaign for this, one proponent tweeted, 'little kids need to learn that there's nothing wrong with being gay.' What a lie! This reveals their agenda to get the LGBT[Q] message to young children and influence their lives" (Graham, 2016). Graham, like CitizenGo, seems to believe that children should not be exposed to these messages because they are morally corrupt. Many supporters of Graham and CitizenGo have noted their concern for teaching their children about LGBTQ individuals and not knowing how to explain it. Even with all the backlash from conservative individuals, it should be noted that not all Christians felt this way.

Some Christians saw the film's story, not as a tale about Elsa's sexuality, but instead as a reflection of their faith. On a mother's blog site, one mom posted, "For Christians who are planning to see *Frozen 2*, I hope you thoroughly enjoy it – the gorgeous animation, the hilarious laugh-out-loud scenes, and the characters that invite us to reflect on our own relationship with love, fear, and the power of redemption. Moreover, I hope that you take the opportunity to ask your kids, your spouse, and your community the kinds of questions that focus on how we love like Jesus rather than how we judge" (Harvey, 2019, para. 5-6). The post explains to readers that the movie did not include the speculated issues that surround sexuality. Instead, the poster challenged

Christians to ask themselves, "How does traveling 'Into the Unknown' grow our FAITH"

(Harvey, 2019, para. 8). Of those that have voiced their criticism against the films' queer

messages, all of them seem to be conservative Christians. This is mostly due to the

interpretation of the messages as it relates to the teachings in the bible. Since these

Christians lean so heavily on the word of God for what is good and right, anything that

goes against this must be wrong. The film created a panic among Christians about the

morality in the film and what it is teaching young children. Even with all this criticism of

the film, the support for queer identities with *Frozen II* was still astounding.

Queer Praise of *Frozen I* and *Frozen II*

Many critics have argued that *Frozen I* is the most progressive Disney movie

ever created (Luttrell, 2014). It includes Kristoff, a male character who is content leading

next to a strong female lead, an openly gay couple, and, of course, female empowerment.

Beyond all of this, fans of the film quickly began to pick up on the queer messages within

the film in similar ways that the conservatives did. Instead of fearing the messages and

warning audiences of the corruption that could ensue from the film's messages, those in

favor began to explore and pressure Disney for more. For instance, Angel Daniel Matos

argues:

> Queen Elsa is approached by some viewers as a queer or gay character, not only
>
> because she doesn't engage in a romantic relationship in the film, but also because
>
> she is forced by her parents to suppress and hide the powers that she is born with.
>
> Although the movie implies that her parents desperately try to conceal Elsa's
>
> powers because of the danger that they impose to herself and to others, this does
>
> not justify the degree to which they prevent Elsa from having any human contact

whatsoever. Furthermore, the fact that Elsa's parents view suppression and

isolation as solutions further emphasizes notions of the infamous queer closet–

rather than assisting Elsa in learning how to hone her powers, they teach her how

to "conceal, not feel." I think it's also worthy to point out that Elsa's treatment is

also eerily reminiscent of practices that take place during the process of gay

conversion therapy, in which subjects are conditioned through meditative and

repetitive processes to suppress certain urges and desires that occur naturally

(2014, para. 2).

In this post, Matos echoes the primary reasons that many viewers thought the film was

queer in the first place. LGBTQ individuals could not help but see their experiences of

feeling isolated and being closeted in Elsa. The parents of Anna and Elsa are seen as

traditional conservative individuals who do not know what to do with someone who is

gay. Instead of trying to help Elsa with her feelings, they chose to hide her away from the

world. They feared the judgment of outsiders for producer a daughter who is different.

Unlike previous princess films, LGBTQ saw their experiences explicitly in the film and

felt a connection to Elsa.

Furthermore, Elsa's famous ballad, "Let It Go," has been interpreted as a coming

out anthem by many individuals in the LGBTQ community (Smith, 2019). LGBTQ

individuals have related to the messages in the song about giving up the act of pretending

to be someone else and letting go of the worry of what others might think. Between the

film and fan speculations, the hashtag #GiveElsaAGirlfriend began appearing online.

Many LGBTQ rights activists began petitioning Disney to give Elsa a girlfriend when

they announced the production of *Frozen II* (Wong, 2017). Even Idina Menzel, the

actress who voices Elsa, was amenable and happy to spark the conversation. She

explained, "Maybe at first I was a little surprised because it's Disney, but I can say that

I'm excited that the conversation is happening…I can't promise anybody that that's

what's gonna happen…But deep down am I really happy that it's causing people to talk

about it and have these kinds of conversations? Yeah, I am" (As cited in Wong, 2017,

para. 3). Menzel has had a long-standing fan base of LGBTQ individuals because of her

previous works in Rent and Wicked, iconic queer Broadway musicals, so it should come

as no surprise that she supports the queer messages within *Frozen I*. With the release of

the second film, the debate only gains more attention.

Frozen II has only been out for about three months, leaving much less time for the

public to give their opinion on the film. With that said, though, plenty of individuals have

provided their opinion of the movie, many of whom support the queer messages within

the film. To start, many LGBTQ individuals who considered the song "Let It Go" from

the first film as a coming out song are claiming the song, "Show Yourself" is "every bit

gay as hell if not more so" (Wakefield, 2019, para. 2). Fans on Twitter have been

commenting:

> If you haven't seen the movie, listen to this gay as hell song and be filled with
>
> queer energy.
>
> --Koo: New Year, New Horizons. (@Koomasters) November 28, 2019
>
> Show yourself from motion picture frozen 2 is just a euphemism for coming out
>
> as a hot and sexy lesbian
>
> --buu (@foxdears) November 27, 2019

Grouping the films together, many fans have made the connection that "Let It Go"

represented Elsa shedding her fears of what others think. In the second film, "Into the Unknown" was Elsa expressing her desire to figure out who she is, and "Show Yourself" is her actual coming out song. Connecting all three songs shows Elsa's full journey of coming out. Even before *Frozen II* was released to theaters, fans were raving over "Show Yourself" and the messages that it contained (Wakefield, 2019). It was more than just the soundtrack that keyed many fans into Elsa's queer identity. The relationship between Elsa and Honeymaren left fans begging for a *Frozen III*. Some of these fans said:

> @alittlejelee just saw #Frozen2 it was incredible, amazing job! Definitely saw the queer undertones with Elsa and Honeymaren, hopefully in the next installment they actually get together and y'all finally #GiveElsaAGirlfriend and give queer girls the representation we need!
>
>   --Jamie Margolin (@Jamie_Margolin) November 21, 2019
>
> So are we gonna talk about how Elsa literally has a girlfriend #Frozen2 we got everything we wanted out of this movie.
>
> --Goal (@lgbtholliday) November 21, 2019

Fans are raving over the fact that Honeymaren has no other purpose than to be Elsa's love interest. Elsa remaining in the forest at the end of the movie only reinforces this argument. Furthermore, as a whole, fans are connecting the smaller queer messages together to realize the bigger picture of the movie. For example, VanDerWerff writes that "many of the scenes with Elsa in Arendelle early in the film underline how she doesn't seem quite at home there, in Anna's heteronormative paradise. She's gotta follow the voice! Of a beautiful lady! To another place! Where she feels more at home" (2019, para. 27). Viewers cannot help but read these underlying messages and see the queer identity

of Elsa, if the pro-queer messages are any indication. In the end, "*Frozen 2* doesn't tell us that Elsa's gay, but it all but begs writers like me to say things like, 'Elsa from *Frozen* is queer and I can prove it." And that should be enough…*Frozen 2* gives viewers more than enough to conclude that Elsa is, indeed, Disney's first queer princess and Honeymaren her queen! That's sufficient" (VanDerWerff, 2019, para. 28). Whether Disney wants to openly confirm it or not, fans of the *Frozen* films have all the proof they need to realize that Elsa is a lesbian.

Conclusion

Both criticism and praise from the public reinforce the interpretation of queer messages within the *Frozen* films. There is an overwhelming number of tweets and popular news articles that talk about the queer messages that are seen in the film. Many of these comments reflect the messages argued in the previous analytical chapters. Moreover, those that oppose the queer messages within the films seem to reconnect with the traditional cis-het normative messages that are often contained in traditional fairy tales but are lacking in this progressive Disney franchise. While it may never be confirmed by Disney whether Elsa is a lesbian or not, both the fans and the producers are relishing in the fact that these films have opened up conversations about alternative interpretations and where to go next.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

On February 1, 2020, Saturday Night Live (SNL) aired a skit that depicted a fake commercial for the DVD release of *Frozen II*. In the skit, Elsa, played by Anna McKinnon, is shown in the enchanted forest searching, "Hello? Is anyone there? Anna? Kristoff? Olaf? I'm Gay?" As the skit continues, Anna enters and sings a song titled "We All Know," essentially telling Elsa that everyone has known all along that she is gay. The skit as a whole pokes fun at the idea that the public notices these messages within the movie exist even though Disney refuses to acknowledge them.

Both *Frozen I* and *Frozen II* have made an impact on the LGBTQ community and the greater public. The songs within the films alone have become more than catchy tunes to sing in the car. "Let It Go" and "Show Yourself" have both been lauded as coming out songs for the LGBTQ community (Wakefield, 2019). We use storylines, characters, and song lyrics to explain and understand our own experiences. Fairy tale stories such as *Frozen I* and *Frozen II* are able to transport audience viewers into another world where they can be free to explore themselves.

Returning to the central question of this research (how do the metaphors within queered readings of *Frozen I* and *Frozen II* relate to the overall public's perceptions of the franchise?) some interesting and important conclusions can be drawn regarding rhetoric and culture. First, in addressing the initial analysis of *Frozen I*, the metaphors that are argued within the film show the experience of a confused queen not only trying to figure out who she is, but also how to maintain a visage of normative heterosexuality. As she experiences pressure to conceal her powers and, by extension, her sexual identity, she must work harder to stay closeted and not let anyone into her secret world. Through

all of this, Elsa realizes she is not a cis-heteronormative princess and, instead, has desires other than those traditionally ascribed to a Disney princess. To the average viewer, the film may appear to maintain traditional fairy tale elements, such as forced transformation of and passivity within the lead female character. By queering the dominant reading of the film and examining the metaphors, though, the storyline becomes less about a power-wielding princess trying to figure out how to be a natural leader and, instead, a story about a confused queer queen attempting to navigate her experience as a lesbian woman. By examining the metaphors that exist within the queer interpretation of the storyline, viewers are able to see a tale that mirrors a queer coming out journey faced by many individuals in American and other societies.

In the analysis of the second film, Elsa's identity crisis only seems to be exacerbated by external pressure from elemental spirits. She can feel, internally and externally, that she is called for something else and to be someone else. At face value, the film is just an extension of the first movie except Elsa is already queen and must work to find the secrets that exist about her kingdom. During the journey, Elsa happens to discover that she is, in fact, an elemental spirit herself and chooses to be one with the forest and give up her crown to her sister. Delving deeper into the queer reading, the story is less about a queen unlocking the secrets to her kingdom and more about unlocking the secrets within herself. While the first film showed Elsa testing the waters of coming out to the world, it is not until the second film that her transformation truly occurs, and she comes out completely to the world. The film manages to maintain major elements of the fairy tale by showing a transformation of the lead character and also sacrificing power to be with the one she loves.

As discussed in an earlier section of this thesis, transformation is an integral part of any fairy tale. Traditionally, the princess is transformed because she meets her true love. In Elsa's case, she chooses to transform when she is ready, breaking the norm of transformation in fairy tales. Elsa enters the forest as the Queen of Arendelle, confused and unsure of who she is. She knows that she is different from those around her, but she does not know why. It takes her meeting the Northuldra, a representation of the LGBTQ community, to realize that her feelings are not wrong or strange. So often, Disney princesses must shed the traits that are considered strange. Instead, Elsa does the opposite and embraces what makes her different, thus challenging the traditional fairy tale trope. In the end, she becomes the fifth spirit, an open lesbian, and truly becomes the person she always knew she was supposed to be.

When it comes to the public opinion of the films, there was a great deal of support for the queer interpretation. Viewers of the films reflect the arguments throughout Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 that the metaphors display a queer story of a lesbian ice queen. LGBTQ individuals are recognizing their own experiences in Elsa and praising the songs that show her evolution. Those who supported the messages even went so far as to beg Disney to make Elsa an open lesbian in the second film, pushing for more progressive representation. While it remains unknown whether Disney will continue the sequel with a third film, queer and queer-affirming fans cannot help but be excited for the momentum that has been created with this interpretation.

Not all viewers of the films supported the queer messages. Christian conservative individuals had a lot to say about the morality of messages in the films. Many were concerned with the lessons that were being taught to young children and the

sins that go against the word of god. Because of their strict adherence to what the bible says, Christians interpreted the messages in the films as wrong or immoral. These individuals reinforce the cis-hetero ideas that are so often included in fairy tale stories. They want to maintain the traditional hegemonic structure, and that extends into the entertainment industry.

Not only does this analysis of *Frozen I* and *Frozen II* queer the dominant readings of the films, it also provides some interesting implications for American culture. Traditional fairy tale stories maintain the idea that if there exists a romantic relationship in the storyline, it must be between a male and female character (England et al., 2011). Within the last few years, Disney has started to make moves away from the traditional princess template to create films that focus on a singular female character without a cis-hetero romantic relationship (Page-Kirby, 2016). Although this is a progressive step forward for Disney, the issue of equal romantic representation still arises. In American society, relationships are so commonly understood as a binary relationship between a male and a woman (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). If something in that equation changes, it is no longer understood as a traditional monogamous relationship. On this point, Lewis Siefert (2015) argues

> As forms of resistance to the heteronormative order, queer genders and sexualities aim to destabilize the binaries (such as masculine-feminine, heterosexual-homosexual, dominant-submissive, active-passive) that are so central to upholding normative categories. Queer erotic and affective relationships also contest the privilege granted to the nuclear heterosexual family unit and seek to expand the spectrum of relational arrangements. If there are no such things as a

natural gender and a natural sexuality, then affective and kinship relationships are

likewise not determined by any natural order (p. 16).

While Disney is essentially disrupting the binary by creating characters who do not have

an equal half, the complete lack of sexually diverse characters continues to alienate an

entire population of American society. Instead, LGBTQ individuals are forced to dig for

scraps of evidence that they are being represented in the American entertainment

industry. Looking deeper into films and tv shows for queer messages and images is not

enough to be considered represented. Similarly, revisions and rewrites to American

classics are not the same as original content that intentionally places queer characters at

the forefront. Disney, and all entertainment companies for that matter, need to be more

progressive in their representation of characters, especially main characters.

Another implication of this research involves the idea of conditional acceptance.

Sumerau et al. (2017) define conditional acceptance as "the process whereby people

respond to increased social tolerance of minority groups by expressing acceptance of

such groups in limited or partial ways" (p. 63). In many instances, an individual may say

that they do not mind the beliefs of an individual or a group of individuals, but once these

people disrupt the status quo, the acceptance dissipates. This idea was very obvious

throughout both *Frozen* films, especially as it related to cis-hetero men. The most

apparent interaction was with the Duke from the first film and his acceptance of Elsa.

Early in the film, he expresses excitement and interest in meeting the new queen and

explore Arendelle. He is accepting of Elsa as the queen, even though a king traditionally

leads a kingdom. Once Elsa releases her magic in the ballroom, the Duke retracts his

acceptance of Elsa and turns it to fear and anger. The Duke has conditional acceptance of

Elsa in this instance. He excepts her when she is a heteronormative queen keeping to herself, but when she shows her magical side and disrupts the peace, he no longer accepts her. Conditional acceptance is something many LGBTQ individuals face in their daily lives (Sumerau et al., 2017). The experiences shown in the *Frozen* films only brings to light what many individuals have already experienced.

Moreover, it is imperative that scholars open up and create new reading structures. Analyses, like this one, show that there are many alternative readings and interpretations to a single text. Most readers are not conditioned to see or understand the myriad of possible interpretations. As responsible human beings and citizens, it is important for us to engage in conversations like this one to open up space for the queering of other dominant readings.

Finally, this analysis stresses the need for a sub-category for metaphorical analysis. I argue that queer metaphors need their own structure and guide for analysis because of the deep layering that so often occurs in a cis-het cultural context. Queer metaphors move beyond just defining a vehicle and tenor of a word or phrase. They allow space for the experiences connected to the words to come to light. For example, the door as a metaphor for the closet only allows viewers one level of understanding. Creating the category of queer metaphors allows viewers to understand that there is more meaning than what is on the surface. The closet is an experience for LGBTQ individuals, and merely creating an overlapping metaphor dilutes the experiences. Analyzing traditional metaphors separately from queer metaphors allows for a more open interpretation, in a similar to sense to how queer is defined.

Limitations

This analysis is also subject to some important limitations, the first of which includes finding scripts of the films. When films are released into theaters, it is often six or more months before they become available to the public on streaming or DVD. Similarly, the transcript of the film is typically not released until a year or two after the film goes out on DVD. Because the first film was released in 2013, access to both the film and transcript were fairly easy. The film could easily be rented or recorded on most television or streaming platforms. To verify that the transcript matched the film, I watched the film with the script in front of me to make sure the lines match and that there were not any discrepancies. I then watched the film a second time for any visual messages that may have appeared.

This process was not as simple with the second film. Since the film was only released about three months ago (November 2019), there are currently no public transcripts or DVD versions of the film. To remedy this, I went to the theater to see the film a number of times over the course of December 2019. I saw the film for the first time about a week after it was released and took notes on any visual messages that stood out. After the film was over, I wrote down any big takeaways or immediate metaphors that stood out. I saw the film a second time where I transcribed dialogue from the movie while it played in the theater. The lyrics to the songs were already publicly available, so my main focus was on the character conversations. During a conversation that I considered to have metaphors in it, I also hand transcribed the conversation as best I could. Once the film was over, I compared my handwritten notes to the phone transcription before I began analysis.

Future Research

This thesis can be used as an inspiration and guide for future research on queer metaphors and critical examinations of fairy tales. This examination of queer metaphors combined metaphoric analysis with queer theory. It displayed the importance of metaphors and the possibility for alternative interpretations. Future research may benefit from the concept of queer metaphors as its own type of analysis. LGBTQ individuals have long used coded language as a way to communicate and identify with each other. Looking at queer metaphors more specifically can shed light on the experiences of these individuals and ways to be more inclusive. Furthermore, scholars can continue to examine alternative interpretations of dominant readings to create new tools to help readers open their eyes to new possibilities.

Frozen I and *Frozen II* are films that are more than just about sisterly love. They are also queer stories about finding oneself and coming out to the world. Elsa's experience mirrors that of millions of LGBTQ individuals all over the world. The exploration of her journey and experience reinforces those of individuals all around us. As cultural artifacts worthy of critical rhetorical analyses, viewers identify and hold tight to the story that Elsa presents. Whether one accepts the queer identities examined in the analysis chapters, these films prove that it is okay to "Let It Go" and travel "Into The Unknown," proving that it is okay to find yourself in fantastical stories.

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