“FROM ZERO TO HERO”

Representations of Hegemonic Masculinity in Disney Films

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Pro Gradu Thesis
English Philology
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Autumn 2013
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1. INTRODUCTION

There used to be a group on social medium Facebook titled “Disney gave me unrealistic expectations of men”. The group’s message, presented with a hint of humor, was that the princes and their actions in Disney movies have, for decades now, spoiled female viewers since early childhood and that disappointment later in life is inevitable since no real, living, breathing man can ever come close to the ideal ‘prince charming’. All the men in Disney films are not princes but even the common men are usually very capable, athletic and good-looking, and hence possess an alpha male status. Naturally the men are almost always very much in love with the female protagonist and vice versa, at least towards the end of the film.

My childhood was spent watching Disney films and this was the case with most of the children of my generation. The 1990s were a golden era for Disney with one hit movie after another. The impact of a mass media product like Disney feature films is enormous. With a product like this, you do not just go to the movies but you collect the whole series to your home movie library. You watch the films over and over again – alone, with your siblings and with the neighborhood children. You even watch them as an adult (and not just for academic purposes). The morals and values the films present are a central part of the package, in addition to entertainment. As a side product for these morals and values come social conduct and gender roles.

In many of its films Disney uses an existing story and molds it to fit the ‘Disney fairy tale formula’ (McCallum 2002: 118). Zipes (1995a: 21) claims that the name ‘Disney’ has overridden the names of Hans Christian Andersen and the Brothers Grimm as the most memorable storyteller. Zipes articulates the idea that the aforementioned Facebook group wished to communicate:

The great “magic” of the Disney spell is that he [Walt Disney] animated the fairy tale only to transfix audiences and divert their potential utopian dreams and hopes through the false promises of the images he cast upon the screen (Zipes 1995a: 22).
Zipes (1995b: 110-111, as cited in McCallum 2002: 118) accounts the formula that normally consists of a young protagonist who is not content in her or his current state, goes on a quest or endures a training period to find her or his true identity and rightful place in the world. Before all can be well, the hero has to measure her or his strength with the evil in the story, and after this there is the reward at the end of the film where the hero gets married or at least has the prospect of a heterosexual relationship. Zipes (1995a: 40) accuses Disney films of subjecting the viewers to old-fashioned patriarchal order.

In this master’s thesis I aim to study how hegemonic masculinity is represented in four Disney films from the 1990s. In the next chapter I present the films that were chosen and why they were chosen. After presenting my corpus I move on to the most important theoretical framework used in this thesis that is R.W. Connell’s book Masculinities (1995, new edition 2005) where she formalizes the theory of hegemonic masculinity. Theoretical literature that can be associated with hegemonic masculinity is used to complement or contradict Connell’s works. All theoretical material that is used in the actual analysis of the films is not introduced in the section about the theoretical background. An important tool in analyzing the scenes in the films is Robyn McCallum’s paper “Masculinity as Social Semiotic: Identity Politics and Gender in Disney Animated Films” from the book Ways of Being Male: Representing Masculinities in Children’s Literature and Film (2002). Out of the four films used in this present thesis, her paper covers three. After presenting the theoretical material I move on into the analysis of the films and go through the scenes where the center male characters, that have been chosen as the research subjects, are present. A section is also devoted to a small sampling of other male characters. This thesis will end in a conclusion chapter where findings are analyzed and based on these findings it is determined whether the films in my corpus promote hegemonic masculinity or not.

My hypothesis is that the male characters in Disney films are representations of the same standards and ideals of hegemonic masculinity that we encounter in real life.
McCallum (2002: 117) argues that Disney films of the 1990s are “shaped by and filtered through the patriarchal and conservative metanarratives that dominate the Disney culture industry”. In subtle ways the male characters promote the traits of what is considered to be manly, masculine and accepted male behavior in our society. Havaste (1998: 30) claims that the entertainment industry has been an effective tool in producing masculinities and due to its large volume it can impact the values of the masses. The manner in which masculinities are represented either strengthens the stereotypes and showcases the ideal and desired form, or gives space to other types of masculinities to thrive. The manner of representation has an impact on the viewers of the films. As the viewers of Disney films are usually children who are gathering knowledge about the world and building their identities, it is significant what type of representations are included.
2. THE FILMS

There were a few reasons for choosing the films used in this study. The first reason for choosing these four films is that they were all made in the 1990s. Therefore they represent a specific and limited time period and it could be argued that they carry in them attitudes and approaches to subjects that are typical for this period of time. These attitudes or approaches – for example it could be the way that a joke is made – project the worldview of the film-makers during the process of making the film and they are an important issue to consider in retrospect. In that sense, time period was an important criterion when choosing the material to use in this study. These films are not, however, in any way outdated and they are still being reissued for new generations of children.

The second reason to choose the following four films is that these films have human characters. Disney has always used animal characters in its animated feature films. The animal characters usually have human traits and they conduct themselves emotionally like humans. There is also a visible gender divide even in the case of animal characters. For example, in *The Lion King* (1994) Simba, who is a lion, and Nala, who is a lioness, have different colored furs (the female Nala has lighter fur) and Nala’s eyes could be described as feline (and lined with eyeliner) whereas Simba’s eyes are big and round. Despite all this, it is justifiable to say that using films with human characters serves this particular study better than using animal characters that have human traits, or mixing films that have animal characters and films that have human characters. By films that have animal characters with human traits I mean, for example, *Robin Hood* (1973) where the foxes walk upright and wear clothes. By this definition the gorillas and other animals in Tarzan are not from this category, but from a category of films where humans are presented as humans and possible animals are presented as animals, even though appearing in the same setting.

There were also purely intuitive reasons for choosing the films and reasons that rely on dozens of viewing times. In my opinion the character of Gaston in *Beauty and the
Beast is the epitome of machismo and a perfect example of a man who is respected and admired by his peers because of his masculinity and everything related to it. In the case of Tarzan it was more a feeling that there could be something interesting in the way masculinity is portrayed in a character who is physically very masculine but lives in an environment that is detached from human society. Captain John Smith is a carefree daredevil and he is the character that I take into closer inspection when analyzing hegemonic masculinity in Pocahontas. This film also offers a dichotomy of wild versus civilized in the characters of Kocoum and John Smith. Comparing their behavior from the point of view of hegemonic masculinity seemed very fruitful for this study. Kocoum is analyzed in section 4.5. The heroic tale of Hercules was an obvious choice based on extrinsic factors: the bare skin, the impressive muscles and the association with athletics.

2.1. Beauty and the Beast

Beauty and the Beast came out in 1991 in the middle of a 5-year period when Disney released one feature film a year (Oliver and Company, 1988; The Little Mermaid, 1989; The Rescuers Down Under, 1990; Beauty and the Beast, 1991; Aladdin, 1992). The story is a traditional fairy tale that has taken many forms for hundreds of years. Although many elements in the backdrop of the story have changed in the hands of different authors or storytellers, the main components that make the story – the beautiful girl and the man transformed into a beast – have always remained. According to the Internet Movie Database (online), the Disney version has an animation screenplay writer (Linda Woolverton) but 11 other people are listed as story crew in addition to her. The story in Disney’s Beauty and the Beast is a collaborative effort rather than one writer’s interpretation of the classic.

There is a story within the story in the beginning of the film of a handsome and rich but vain and selfish prince whose lack of kindness is manifested when he refuses to give shelter to an old ragged woman. The woman transforms into a beautiful enchantress and turns the prince into a horrifying beast and curses him, his whole
castle and its inhabitants. The only way the spell can be broken is if the Beast learns to love and gets love in return. In a village near the castle, there lives a beautiful but eccentric Belle who dreams of something more than her provincial life. Belle has a suitor called Gaston, who is the most popular man in the village and admired by everyone but Belle. Events concerning Belle’s father take Belle to the Beast’s castle where she is taken captive. As time passes her being held hostage turns into a pleasurable stay and the Beast and Belle develop romantic feelings for each other. Gaston finds out about the Beast and is appalled to realize that Belle has feelings for the Beast and not for him. He convinces the people in the village that the Beast is dangerous and the villagers, led by Gaston, attack the Beast’s castle. In the climax of the film, Gaston and the Beast fight each other, ultimately for Belle’s love and affection. Gaston loses the fight and dies but for a minute it seems that also the Beast dies. The complete opposite happens when Belle declares her love to the Beast and he is metamorphosed into the handsome prince he once was.

2.2. *Pocahontas*

The story of the Native American princess Pocahontas is also a world-renowned classic. The term princess is used very loosely here for Pocahontas was the daughter of a Native American chief and not part of a monarchy in that sense. Pocahontas was a real person who allegedly was born in 1595 and died in 1617. She was in contact with the colonists (one of them was Captain John Smith) who came to the New World from England, married a man named John Rolfe and went back to England with him. (Historic Jamestowne: Pocahontas 2013.) Disney’s version focuses on the relationship of Pocahontas and Captain John Smith, although history does not confirm that they were lovers in the way Disney portrays them. John Smith’s depiction of the events where Pocahontas saved his life when members of her Native American tribe were about to kill him has lived on and inspired writers and filmmakers throughout centuries. The latest interpretation of the ‘Pocahontas story’ is the most commercially successful movie of all times, *Avatar*, which has been accused of lack of original ideas and recycling the old story. As an opposing argument, one
could say that a great story is worth telling over and over again. Furthermore, is Disney not the uncrowned king of remaking classic fairytales?

In a historically accurate manner, the Disney film (1995) starts with a Virginia Company ship departing from London in 1607. Meanwhile in the New World, the men of Pocahontas’ tribe return from a victorious battle. As the colonists arrive on the shores of America, John Smith goes on an expedition and meets Pocahontas. The allure between them is other-worldly and they seek to spend time together despite the opposition from both the Native American and colonist sides. Pocahontas teaches John Smith to appreciate the nature in all its richness in a musical scene that continues to be one of the most easily comprehensible ecological comments in movie history. She encourages him to view the world from another perspective and proclaims that owning material things is not everything that a person should pursue in life. This part of the film can be seen as a commentary on the ever-growing materialism in our society and the exploitation of natural resources.

The opposition that Pocahontas and John Smith face does not stop them from seeing each other and the situation escalates to Kocoum, a Native American warrior, getting killed and John Smith taken captive by Pocahontas’ tribe. Smith is almost killed by the chief but Pocahontas stops her father at the last minute and pleas that they should all try to live in peace. Governor Ratcliffe from the colonists’ side appears to the scene and takes a shot at Pocahontas’ father but Smith takes the bullet. In the end, Pocahontas and the injured John Smith must say goodbye since Pocahontas wants to stay with her tribe and Smith must get treated back in England.

2.3. Hercules

Disney’s Hercules (1997) stems from ancient Greek mythology. Hercules, or Heracles, is said to be the son of Zeus and a mortal woman. This makes him a demigod. To simplify the family relations that could have been confusing had they
been portrayed as in the mythology, Hercules’ mother in the Disney version is Zeus’ wife, the goddess Hera.

The dichotomy of good and evil has always been an essential part of Disney films and in *Hercules* the setting has Hades on the evil side and the gods of Olympus and mainly Hercules on the good side. Hades is a god who has been exiled from Mount Olympus and is the ruler of the underworld. It comes to Hades’ knowledge that in eighteen years of time he could set the Titans, that have been locked away by Zeus, free and return to Mount Olympus as its ruler. The only thing that could torpedo his plans is Hercules. Hades orders Hercules to be killed but his henchmen fail in this task. Hercules, however, does become a mortal being and falls down to earth and is raised there by a normal peasant family. The only divine thing left in Hercules is his enormous strength which he has trouble controlling.

As Hercules grows to be a youth his parents tell him the truth about his origin. After this he travels to the temple of Zeus and meets his real father for the first time after infancy. Zeus tells him that the only way he can return to Mount Olympus and become a god again, is to become a true hero. Hercules sets his mind on this task and seeks out Philoctetes, the trainer of heroes. Under Philoctetes’ training Hercules finds a way to control his physical powers but after meeting the beautiful Megara he has trouble controlling his heart. At first Hercules is not aware that Megara is a part of Hades’ evil plans and that Hades has leverage over Megara. Hercules and Philoctetes put Hercules’ heroism to test in the town of Thebes and succeed. This does not constitute being a true hero, however, and Hercules must continue his efforts. In the meantime, Hades tries to force Megara to get Hercules into a trap. Megara loves Hercules and declines to do so. This makes Hades realize that Hercules’ weakness is his love for Megara and Hades promises Hercules that Megara will be safe if he gives up his powers for the next 24 hours. Hades sends Megara to the underworld after his plans to take over Mount Olympus have been ruined by Hercules.

The climax of the story is when Hercules risks his whole being by going after Megara to the underworld. He catches her soul in the depths of it and saves her. This
unselfish and brave act makes Hercules a true hero and he is granted his status as a god once again. However, Hercules decides to continue his life as a mortal with Megara.

2.4. *Tarzan*

Disney’s *Tarzan* came out in 1999, while the story of *Tarzan of the Apes* had been around for almost a hundred years. The story and the character of the little boy raised by apes was concocted by Edgar Rice Burroughs and first appeared in a ‘pulp magazine’, a collection of short stories with a wide range of subjects, in 1912. (Edgar Rice Burroughs - creator of Tarzan 2000/2011.)

Disney’s version starts with a shipwrecked family consisting of a father, a mother and their little baby boy settling in the jungle somewhere in Africa. Not long after setting their life there, a leopard kills the mother and father and the only survivor of their family is the baby. A gorilla population inhabits the jungle and a mother gorilla, who has recently lost her own baby to the aforesaid leopard, takes the human baby in her care despite opposition from the gorilla tribe. As the boy grows he is at times painfully aware that he is different from the creatures that he lives with. He has trouble understanding his place in the tribe whose leader Kerchak shuns him.

As time passes, Tarzan becomes a man and learns to maneuver in the jungle almost better than the gorillas. Life in the jungle is interrupted when Professor Porter and his daughter Jane come there to study the gorillas and bring an entourage of other people with them. One of the people is Clayton who serves as a bodyguard for the professor and his daughter. When Tarzan sees the people who resemble him, he becomes immediately interested. While roaming in the jungle Jane gets herself into an uncomfortable situation with troops of baboons and Tarzan comes to her rescue. He seems to be baffled and intrigued when the realization of Jane being ‘his kind’ settles in.
Jane starts teaching Tarzan English and via a common language she shows him the way humans live in the place where she comes from. Professor Porter and Jane try to convince Tarzan to show the gorillas to them but Tarzan refuses, not wanting to put his gorilla family in danger. Clayton plots to see the gorillas as well but for completely different reasons than the professor and Jane. He wants to capture and ship them to England to be put in zoos. When the ship scheduled to take the professor and his entourage back to England arrives, Tarzan agrees to show the gorillas to professor Porter and Jane in order to make Jane stay. As Tarzan takes them to see the gorilla tribe, Clayton comes along and executes his plan. When the gorillas have been taken to the ship in cages, Tarzan’s animal friends rise to the occasion and free the captured. Tarzan fights Clayton and Clayton ends up being killed. Sadly also Kerchak ends up being a casualty. In his last moments he apologizes for shunning Tarzan, calls him his son and asks him to take care of the tribe after his passing. As professor Porter and Jane are leaving Africa, the professor talks to his daughter and makes her realize that she loves Tarzan and wants to stay with him. Eventually both Jane and her father stay with Tarzan and the gorillas.
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As the basis of the theoretical framework for my research I use R.W. Connell’s book *Masculinities*. The first edition of the book came out in 1995 and the second edition, which I am using, in 2005. R.W. Connell is a noted researcher in gender studies and has specialized in the social construction of masculinities. She is a rather controversial figure and it adds an interesting backdrop for her research if you take into account the fact that she was born male (Robert William Connell) but is now a transgender woman. *Masculinities* was published under the name R.W. Connell but since 2007 she has used the name Raewyn Connell in her published books.

Before introducing the theory of hegemonic masculinity as well as some other theories concerning masculinities, the term ‘hegemony’ requires some explaining. Leppänen and Rojola (2004: 79) write:

> Hegemony refers to those conventions, strategies and practices that help to maintain the world view and power of the dominant social groups. However, hegemony is not a static setting but a transitory one that constantly undergoes negotiations and even struggles. (My translation.)

The term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ has been used in gender studies since the 1980s but is theorized in *Masculinities* (2005/1995). The book consists of theoretical material as well as empirical research where four groups of men have been interviewed and analyzed in relation to the dynamics of masculinities. Connell (1988, as cited in Kaufman & Kimmel 1994: 271) explains that “hegemonic definitions of masculinity are based on independence, aggression, competition and the capacity to control and dominate”.

Connell (2000: 10-11) argues that the hegemonic form of masculinity is the ideal and revered one. It is not necessarily the most common form of masculinity, but it is the desirable form. Though the term ‘hegemonic masculinity’ is still relevant when discussing the culturally idealized form, Connell (2000: 10) claims that we should speak of ‘masculinities’, not ‘masculinity’ when referring to how the male gender is
constructed. This is because there is no universal pattern of masculinity that applies everywhere. Moreover, there are multiple ways of manifesting the male gender, its social aspects and dynamics – not just one. Also Segal (2007/1990: xxxiv) argues that by not using ‘masculinity’ but thinking and talking about ‘masculinities’ we generate understanding of the differences between men. The types of masculinities that – according to the theory of hegemonic masculinity – coexist, are produced simultaneously and are in tension with hegemonic masculinity, will be explained in the following paragraphs. Connell (2000: 11) reminds that most men live in a situation where they find their identities in tension with hegemonic masculinity and the expectations associated with it. Some men may also distance themselves from hegemonic masculinity in their culture.

Masculinities – how they are constructed, what is innate and what is learned, what are the crises and triumphs – have been approached from scholarly and non-scholarly circles. One of the very successful less scholarly works that is more a fairy tale, and indeed is based on fairy tales, is Bly’s Iron John (1990). With numerous fairy tales and legends Bly tells the story of a modern man who has lost his natural masculinity and who needs to tap into his core where a Wild Man lives to get it back. This Wild Man can help the contemporary man to find himself and be comfortable with the feelings he feels and what kind of a man he is. Basically the agenda is the emancipation of men. Coltrane (1994: 42) describes Iron John as a blend of mythical storytelling and pop psychology celebrating tribal male bonding. According to Connell (2000: 5) this type of pop psychology has some merits in promoting the importance of men’s emotional lives because “conventional middle-class western masculinity tends to suppress emotion and deny vulnerability”. Furthermore, Kaufman (1994: 148) argues that “the acquisition of hegemonic (and most subordinate) masculinities is a process through which men come to suppress a range of emotions, needs, and possibilities, such as nurturing, receptivity, empathy, and compassion, which are experienced as inconsistent with the power of manhood.”

Power is one of the most important terms, if not the most important, when it comes to hegemonic masculinity. Kaufman (1994: 144) claims that the key factor when it
comes to gender is that it is “a description of actual social relations of power between males and females and the internalization of these relations of power”. This is closely related to hegemonic masculinity as relations of power, also known as hierarchies, are present in the relations between divergent groups of men and different masculinities. Kaufman (1994: 148) lists the actions that men must carry out in order to have the kind of power that is associated with masculinity: “We’ve got to perform and stay in control. We’ve got to conquer, be on top of things, and call the shots. We’ve got to tough it out, provide and achieve.”

When discussing gender it is important to acknowledge that much of the research on masculinities relies on feminist theory. Gender is a dichotomy at its core and study on one inevitably will run into issues with the other. Connell (2000: 3) argues that the disturbance in the gender system that has been caused by the feminist movement in the recent decades has had an effect on numerous men.

In Connell’s *Masculinities* the chapter titled “The Social Organization of Masculinity” (2005/1995: 67) is the most crucial for my study. This is where the theory that is the basis of this thesis is formalized. In this chapter Connell describes hegemonic masculinity and explains the term hegemony and the other relations among masculinities, which are subordination, complicity and marginalization. Connell explains:

> At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than the others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (2005/1995: 77)

Since hegemony is a cultural dynamic where a group holds a leading position over other groups, we have to acknowledge these other groups and their position. Subordination is the term that Connell uses to describe these groups of men. An important example of this dominance/subordination is heterosexuals and homosexuals. Heterosexuality is considered to be part of the hegemony and gay
people fall to the subordinated category. The third term used by Connell in context with hegemonic masculinity is complicity. A brief explanation for this is to say that most men are not actively and fiercely acting out the role that hegemony has set for them. Connell (2000: 189) claims that for example the majority of men take part in commercial sport only as consumers of it. Furthermore Connell (2005/1995: 79) explains that a man is more prone to cheer for his favorite team in front of the television, passively, than playing the sport himself, actively. “Masculinities constructed in ways that realize the patriarchal dividend, without the tensions or risks of being the frontline troops of patriarchy, are complicit in this sense” (2005/1995: 79). The last term that Connell uses is marginalization. Her example of marginalization is a wealthy black athlete whose status in regard to hegemonic masculinity is high but does not translate into higher respect for the common black man. “Marginalization is always relative to the authorization of the hegemonic masculinity of the dominant group” (2005/1995: 80-81). Majors (1990, as cited in Dworkin and Wachs 2000: 49) argues that even though sometimes both dominating and subordinated males are said to enjoy male privilege and are viewed as superior to female athletes, marginalized masculinities are “indubitably stigmatized through comparisons with white middle-class norms”.

Connell (2009: 5) argues that huge events on television like Oscar night and Superbowl are orchestrated to affect people’s behavior. These events promote certain kinds of gender-appropriate ways to function by displaying certain examples of femininities and masculinities. Indeed, Connell (2005/1995: 77) claims that the most visible bearers of hegemonic masculinity are figures we constantly see in media representation, such as film actors or even made-up characters, such as the ones in this present thesis. It is not a coincidence what type of masculine, or feminine for that matter, behavior is promoted in the films that are used as the corpus of this thesis.

Though Connell and many of the other theorists promote the idea of there not really being an innate manhood, they do often refer to it in their texts.

We think of manhood as eternal, a timeless essence that resides deep in the heart of every man. We think of manhood as a thing, a quality that
one either has or doesn’t have. We think of manhood as innate, residing in the particular biological composition of the human male, the result of androgens or the possession of a penis (Kimmel 1994: 119).

All this suggests that ‘true masculinity’, that most of the theorists regard as a false belief and an insufficient way to explain the intricate layers of constructing masculinities, is still a powerful concept in our society. Indeed, one does not need to look very far in everyday life to find evidence of this ‘true masculinity’ (and its stereotypes) manifesting itself – it can be found in representations of men in advertising, television, Hollywood films, cartoons and in other media contents. Thus, I will begin my analysis of the four Disney films that have been chosen for this study.
4. DEFINING THE MASCULINE

In the films that have been chosen for this research there is some variation in the male characters. The protagonists that have been picked for closer examination, however, are all white, heterosexual men whose outer appearances are in unison with the requirements of the idealized masculine form. The small deviations from this hegemonic setting are in the supporting characters. There are no African-American or homosexual male characters but the deviation is mostly manifested by outer appearance that does not correspond to the hegemonic ideal or by behavior that is not considered to be manly. In the latter cases the men who do represent hegemony define these norms of ‘manly behavior’. In racial diversity the Native Americans in *Pocahontas* are the only example.

Some of the protagonists in the films portray hegemonic masculinity in a very straightforward and underlined way that is easy to analyze based on the theoretical background on masculinities. In some of the films, however, the protagonist possesses different characteristics and his behavior and appearance are on different levels of hegemonic masculinity in certain settings. Disney films being in question there is also the aspect of good and evil fighting against each other. Hegemonic masculinity is somewhat neutral to this dichotomy as traits of it can be found in both the ‘good guys’ and the ‘bad guys’. In the following four sections one male character per section from all of the four films is discussed. Out of the main male characters, the one that was found potentially most valuable in terms of hegemonic masculinity, was chosen. All the scenes in the film where the character is present are systematically examined and some stills from the film are also included. In section 4.5 some of the other male characters in the films are discussed in regard to hegemonic masculinity.
4.1. The Macho Man

*Beauty and the Beast* and the character of Gaston is taken into inspection in this section. Connell (2005/1995: 46) criticizes the theorists who offer a sociobiological explanation of natural masculinity that men’s bodies supposedly are bearers of. A list of this natural masculinity includes “tendencies to aggression, family life, competitiveness, political power, hierarchy, territoriality, promiscuity and forming men’s clubs” (Connell 2005/1995: 46). The sociobiological school could possibly use Gaston’s masculinity as an argument for their point of view, since comparing the list to Gaston you can merely check off traits from the list one by one.

The scene where Gaston is first introduced to the viewers is a musical scene where Belle wanders through her village. He literally comes in with a bang because he is hunting in his first scene. His adoring sidekick friend LeFou collects a shot bird and takes it to Gaston. It is immediately clear that Gaston is the alpha male. He is tall, muscular and oozes self-assurance. LeFou says to him: “Wow, you didn’t miss a shot, Gaston! You’re the greatest hunter in the whole world!” Gaston’s reply is: “I know.” He is shown with a gun posing with some prey under one foot, which is a physical representation of power over others, in this case his prey (image 1).

Image 1: Gaston with his prey
Gaston is considerably taller than LeFou – twice as tall in fact – and also towers over the other villagers. Hegemonic masculinity can be conveyed through height amongst other things. Tall men are seen as powerful and capable of protecting those that are shorter and weaker than they are. In other cases tall, muscular men can also create a threat, but these are really just two sides of the same coin. A tall man is a statuesque, unmissable, powerful presence wherever he goes. According to Connell (2009: 52) some physical attributes of males and females overlap. One of these attributes is height. Connell reminds that not all men are taller than some individual women, and not all women are shorter than some individual men. Furthermore Connell claims that we are socially accustomed to the image of a man with a woman that is shorter than him (Connell 2009: 52). This image is constantly presented in media and therefore fortifies the stereotype, to a degree that it affects people’s behavior and they live out the stereotype in their own lives.

Throughout his first scene Gaston is ranting to LeFou that Belle is the most beautiful girl in the village and that he is going to obtain her, as if she were a thing that can be owned. In Gaston’s opinion only Belle is a match for his beauty. As Belle walks through the busy streets of the village, Gaston climbs over rooftops to keep up with her. Climbing on the roofs of houses is a physical performance and physical performance is in the realm of hegemonic masculinity. Gaston catches Belle reading a book and scolds her about it. He says: “It’s not right for a woman to read! Soon she starts getting ideas and thinking.” Although hegemonic masculinity is not the same thing as misogyny, in some cases machismo goes hand in hand with male chauvinism. Gaston’s comment on how women should not be reading because it would get them thinking is straightforward subordination of women. Connell cites a newspaper article and the psychologist interviewed for the article right at the beginning of her book: “Women also don’t understand that men view having information as a form of hierarchy – so people with more information are further up the hierarchy…” (Connell 2005/1995: 3-4) This would go in line with the masculinity that Gaston represents. His behavior can be viewed as patriarchal to say the least.
The next scene with Gaston is when he goes to Belle’s house to make her his wife. Very certain that Belle could not turn down his proposal Gaston has arranged a wedding to take place right then and there. As Gaston goes inside to propose to Belle he paints a picture of their possible future together (image 2).

Image 2: Gaston planning the future

Gaston: “Picture this: a rustic hunting lodge, my latest kill roasting on the fire, my little wife massaging my feet while the little ones play on the floor with the dogs. We’ll have six or seven.”

Belle: “Dogs?”

Gaston: “No, Belle! Strapping boys like me!”

Gaston uses the term ‘little wife’ and by this reveals the type of relationship he is looking for. He is the alpha male and his wife will be in a small and subordinated servant role catering to her husband and their all-male pack of offspring. As he has previously pointed out, she should not read because this would put ideas into her head and she might start thinking for herself. According to Connell (2009: 7) there are many situations where women are excluded from the main action and forced to the sidelines or they are seen merely as objects of desire for men. Gaston is portrayed as a very harsh stereotype of a macho man in this scene who does not see women as equal to men.
As Gaston has proposed to Belle in his self-assured manner, he is waiting for an answer. In Belle’s living room he is menacing in his determination and he will not let anything stand in his way. This can be seen very concretely when Gaston knocks over a chair that is between him and Belle (image 3). He looks threatening, and purposely knocking over a chair that stands in his way is a violent act. Connell (2005/1995: 45) once again talks about the natural masculinity and the conceptions about the relation of biology and the construction of gender:

True masculinity is almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body. Either the body drives and directs action (e.g., men are naturally more aggressive than women; rape results from uncontrollable lust or an innate urge to violence), or the body sets limits to action (e.g., men naturally do not take care of infants; homosexuality is unnatural and therefore confined to a perverse minority).

The scene ends with Belle suddenly opening the door as Gaston is rushing towards her. He flies out the door and into a ditch. Even after this Gaston thunders: “I’ll have Belle for my wife! Make no mistake about that!”
Gaston’s third scene is in the tavern where he has, figuratively speaking, gone to lick his wounds. He is sitting in front of the fireplace in a throne-like chair covered with animal skin and adorned with antlers (image 4).

Image 4: Gaston on his throne

The tavern is Gaston’s hall of fame with dozens of antlers and animal heads on the walls. It is made clear in the scene that the animals have been hunted by Gaston. He is depressed by Belle’s rejection but his way of dealing with the situation is saying: “No one says no to Gaston!” LeFou starts singing a song to him that is a rhapsody to Gaston’s masculinity and excellence. The song can be seen as a list for how to be a real man and earn respect. During the song Gaston exhibits his physical strength, shows off his muscles and demonstrates the skills mentioned in the song (image 5). The lyrics of the song are as follow:

Gosh it disturbs me to see you, Gaston / Looking so down in the dumps / Every guy here'd love to be you, Gaston / Even when taking your lumps / There's no man in town as admired as you / You're everyone's favorite guy / Everyone's awed and inspired by you / And it's not very hard to see why / No one's slick as Gaston / No one's quick as Gaston / No one's neck's as incredibly thick as Gaston's / For there's no man in town half as manly / Perfect, a pure paragon! / You can ask any Tom, Dick or Stanley / And they'll tell you whose team they prefer to be on / No one's been like Gaston / A kingpin like Gaston / No one's got a
swell cleft in his chin like Gaston / As a specimen, yes, I'm intimidating! / My what a guy, that Gaston! / Give five "hurrahs!" / Give twelve "hip-hips!" / Gaston is the best / And the rest is all drips / No one fights like Gaston / Douses lights like Gaston / In a wrestling match nobody bites like Gaston! / For there's no one as burly and brawny / As you see I've got biceps to spare / Not a bit of him's scraggly or scrawny / That's right! / And every last inch of me's covered with hair / No one hits like Gaston / Matches wits like Gaston / In a spitting match nobody spits like Gaston / I'm especially good at expectorating! / Ten points for Gaston! / When I was a lad I ate four dozen eggs / Every morning to help me get large / And now that I'm grown I eat five dozen eggs / So I'm roughly the size of a barge! / My what a guy, that Gaston! / No one shoots like Gaston / Makes those beauts like Gaston / Then goes tromping around wearing boots like Gaston / I use antlers in all of my decorating! / My what a guy, Gaston!

Image 5: Gaston showing off his muscles

“You're everyone's favorite guy / Everyone's awed and inspired by you / And it's not very hard to see why.” These lyrics of the song communicate that being everyone’s favorite guy, and being an inspiration and the object of adoration is closely linked to extrinsic factors and certain actions. This perception is taken even further: “For there's no man in town half as manly / Perfect, a pure paragon.” Gaston is referred to as the perfect example of what it is to be a man and what all men should aspire to be. Gaston’s physical attributes manifest a violent side as well: “No one fights like Gaston […] In a wrestling match nobody bites like Gaston!” The passage “For there's no one as burly and brawny / As you see I've got biceps to spare” accentuates how crucial being not only in shape, but in bodybuilder shape, is for the epitomes of
hegemonic masculinity when it comes to physical form. “No one hits like Gaston / Matches wits like Gaston” suggests that Gaston is not a pure paragon only physically but intellectually as well.

After the song Gaston’s spirits have lifted. A moment later Belle’s father barges in the tavern and begs the villagers to help free Belle from the horrifying Beast. Gaston concocts a plan claiming Belle’s father is insane to get Belle for himself. In this scene hegemonic masculinity surfaces as plotting, which could be argued to require some intellect (the lyrics in the song about Gaston’s wits), and exploiting the weak. There is even more plotting in Gaston’s next scene. He meets with the director of an asylum to get Belle’s father admitted. He delegates the task of waiting for Belle and her father to LeFou. In this scene it is also clear that no one says no to Gaston.

In the next scene with Gaston, Belle and his father have returned to the house and the asylum director has come to take Belle’s father. Gaston tries to blackmail Belle into marrying him but Belle remains adamant (image 6).

Image 6: Belle is not impressed by Gaston

As Belle shows the Beast from a magic mirror, Gaston starts intimidating the villagers that the Beast will harm their children. Gaston is jealous of Belle’s feelings for the Beast and enraged. He wants the villagers to attack the Beast’s castle. Gaston is the natural leader in the scene and the villagers believe him. He is convincing and
intimidating. On the way to the castle Gaston is the only one on a horse. This accentuates his leader status. As they reach their destination, Gaston lets the crowd know that the grand prix, the Beast, is his to kill. Gaston finds the sad and defeated Beast who at first does not even want to fight back because he thinks that Belle has deserted him. Gaston is not satisfied with an opponent that will not make an effort to combat. A walkover is not something he expects. In the song that LeFou sings in the tavern, it is proclaimed that ‘no one fights like Gaston’ and he is eager to demonstrate this aspect. The Beast’s lack of will to fight makes Gaston scream: “Too kind and gentle to fight back?” which suggests that Gaston thinks that kindness and being gentle are not parts of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is here demonstrated by Gaston’s competitive spirit and mocking the Beast’s sensitivity. However, after the Beast sees Belle returning to the castle his will to survive returns and he fights Gaston. The final battle scene with Gaston and the Beast is a testosterone-fueled combat. In the end Gaston falls to his death after literally backstabbing the Beast.

Gaston as a character is one the most blatant representations of hegemonic masculinity in Disney films. He is a macho man whose comment about women reading and getting ideas for example is strongly on the chauvinistic side of the spectrum. He is also more on the villain side of the storyline rather than a hero. Therefore it can be argued that the values in Beauty and the Beast will not be as easily transferred via Gaston as they would be via “one of the good guys”. However, he is one of the main characters in the film and his appearance and actions convey hegemonic masculinity.

4.2. The Fearless Conqueror

At the beginning of Pocahontas the Virginia company ship is ready to depart from London and men are saying farewell to their families. In regards to hegemonic masculinity it must be noted that Segal (2007/1990: 143) writes that the dominant masculinity is white, heterosexual and – to the Victorian mind – also English.
Captain John Smith is the first of the main characters in the film who is introduced. When he enters the frame in the first scene, he is pictured from behind and from a low angle to indicate his importance (image 7). He arrives alone in nomadic fashion with just a tiny bag of belongings and a gun and a sword on his back. His attitude and equipment exude independence. Two sailors on the ship converse about John Smith taking part on the voyage to the New World and one says: “You can’t fight Indians without John Smith!”

Image 7: Captain John Smith arrives

After the sailor’s appreciative comment Smith flashes a grin and exclaims: “That’s right! I’m not about to let you boys have all the fun.” In this statement he verbalizes his enthusiasm towards fighting, using his weapons and violence overall. He likens fighting the Native Americans to having fun. In hegemonic masculinity this kind of behavior can be seen at a very early age. Little boys play cowboys and Indians or form battling teams that go to war against each other. Like captain John Smith, they consider it fun. Many fathers encourage this behavior and advise their offspring to fight back if they are mistreated rather than flee the situation. Supposedly it is a man’s job to defend himself and many little boys learn this culture at a very young age. Often it is not acceptable for a boy who grows up in an environment that is loaded with hegemonic masculinity not to show his ability to defend himself. Connell (2009: 4) addresses this as well by arguing that boys in Australia are
encouraged to play competitive sports, like football, and other sports where physical abilities are crucial. This type of encouragement comes from their fathers, from their schools and from the media. These boys also experience peer pressure to be tough and brave as opposed to being a ‘sissie’.

As Smith has declared that he will be joining the crew he effortlessly jumps on a cannon that is being lifted aboard and flies through the air on it while the sailors leaning against the railing admire the captain’s grand entrance (image 8).

Image 8: Smith’s arrival attracts admirers

From the serene and hopeful atmosphere of the first scene there is a drastic change to the second scene where the ship is caught in a storm. Smith’s fearlessness is perhaps most on display in this scene than in any other scene in the movie. First he is balancing on the mast tying a sail. After Thomas screams that the cannons are breaking loose Smith swings himself on the deck with a rope. When he is once again flying through the air he has a fierce look on his face. On the deck he is yelling orders to the men and helping to tie the cannons. He offers consoling words to Thomas and assures they are going to get the cannons tied down. Part of hegemonic masculinity is being a leader in a situation where others are losing direction, are paralyzed with fear or in despair. Although this kind of behavior can seem obnoxious
at times it can also prove to be life-saving when hegemonic masculinity has molded a person to be fearless in a life-threatening event.

As waves hit the deck other men let out yelps but John Smith remains collected. A big wave sweeps the deck and flings Thomas overboard. In a matter of seconds, as another crew member has already given up on Thomas, Smith has made up his mind to rescue him. Smith ties a rope around himself, runs through the deck and jumps in the ocean. He catches Thomas, carries him in the water and the men on the deck pull the pair up (image 9).

Image 9: Smith saving Thomas

After this heroic rescue Thomas and Smith are lying on the deck and as Thomas seems worn out, cold, tired and scared and the men throw a blanket on him, Smith is in good spirits and does not really show any signs of weakness. It becomes somewhat of a trademark of Smith’s in the film to jokingly undermine his courageous efforts. In this scene he answers the “Are you crazy?” –yelps of the sailors by simply saying “Well that was refreshing” and grinning (image 10). In hegemonic masculinity these almost superhuman tasks are treated like ‘no big deal’. They are considered to be normal masculine behavior. Kaufman and Kimmel (1994: 271) claim that many men are willingly or even eagerly engaging in high risk behavior so that they would not be considered as cowards.
The critical situation of Thomas almost drowning is followed by a motivational speech from governor Ratcliffe and after the speech the crew bursts out in song about fighting the Indians in search for gold. The song also includes praise for captain John Smith.

When the ship arrives on the shores of the New World John Smith is anxious to make an excursion to his new surroundings. The men, including Smith, are dumbfounded by the land they are about to explore. They are silent with mouths wide open as they observe the nature around them. While the other men row the little boat in the fog, John Smith is at the bow making him the apparent leader of the expedition (image 11). The colonists in *Pocahontas* are, indeed, all men. Connell (2009: 92) claims that imperialism is a gendered system to the core. It is that from the moment the colonists come to conquer a new land, using a workforce consisting of men performing different tasks, to the colonial societies that are inbuilt with racial hierarchies.
On dry land John Smith cautiously inspects the place they have landed on. He is curious and adventurous and while the other men are busy with the ship, Smith has already found a more interesting occupation. He climbs the rocks and trees effortlessly and Pocahontas is seemingly intrigued by this wanderer. As Pocahontas’ raccoon friend Meeko bumps into Smith, he instinctively draws his knife as he is ready to battle with the Natives. Pocahontas is reluctant to meet John Smith at this stage and her animal friends act as a decoy for the time being.

Hegemonic masculinity demands males to always be ready to defend themselves in case they are attacked, as John Smith was when he drew his knife when Meeko bumped into him. According to Connell (2000: 213-214) violence is predominantly practiced by males when you look at the big picture. Approximately 93 per cent of the people in jails in the United States in 2007 were male (2009: 4) and it is usually men who beat up other men, either as an act of violence or in the name sport (2000: 214).

In the next scene where Smith is present he is talking to governor Ratcliffe who is encouraging Smith to explore the land further and to find out the whereabouts of the ‘savages’. Smith takes on the task enthusiastically. As he ventures on to mountains
and cliffs he sings: “All of my life I have searched for a land like this one. A wilder, more challenging country I couldn’t design. Hundreds of dangers await and I don’t plan to miss one. In a land I can claim, a land I can tame the greatest adventure is mine!”

By a waterfall Pocahontas is secretly observing John Smith but he spots her and the need to defend himself makes him grab his gun. He lurks behind the waterfall in order to surprise attack his opponent (image 12). He is disarmed after seeing who he is up against.

Image 12: Smith ready to take the shot

Pocahontas flees the scene but after a short race Smith convinces her to stay with him. He assures he is not going to harm her and they introduce themselves to each other. Smith is spending time with Pocahontas while there is an outburst of violence between the natives and the colonists. Pocahontas and Smith compare their languages, customs and at the same time their values and views of the world. Smith’s perception is that the colonists have come to bring civilization to the ‘savages’. He explains the wonders of his world to Pocahontas in an all-knowing way while dangling in a tree to express his physical power and unaffected nature (image 13).
Smith offends Pocahontas by implying that her people are uncivilized savages who do not know how to make the best of their land. Pocahontas challenges Smith’s prejudice and explains that her people’s way is to co-exist with nature without trying to exploit everything in it.

In the colonist fort Smith is pensive and quiet and soon goes to see Pocahontas again to spend more time with her. With her he seems at ease and careless, and he tells her he has not really ever belonged anywhere. This fortifies the image which was given of Smith at the beginning of the film where he traveled light like a nomad. His expressions hint out that he wants a reaction from Pocahontas. The pair talks to grandma Willow and as the tree spirit points out that Smith is handsome, Smith says “Oh, I like her”. In hegemonic masculinity good looks go hand in hand with physical strength. A man does not need to be beautiful but a trained body is always more good-looking in hegemony than a body that is out of shape and rundown.

When Smith returns to the fort, he learns that governor Ratcliffe has decided to attack the Natives. Smith objects to the governor’s plan and tries to explain that the colonists could benefit from the natives’ knowledge of their land and their navigation skills. Smith goes against the governor’s authority and also this is a sign of
hegemonic masculinity. Strong individuals oppose the rules and orders given to them if they believe in their own cause more. At night Smith escapes the fort to meet Pocahontas. Thomas witnesses this and governor Ratcliffe sends him to follow Smith and gives him an ultimatum to succeed this time as he has been such a poor soldier and man before. Smith warns Pocahontas about the colonists’ plans to attack her tribe. Pocahontas convinces Smith to come and talk to her father in order to handle the situation in a peaceful manner. Kocoum witnesses Pocahontas and Smith kissing and attacks Smith. Thomas shoots Kocoum to save Smith and the Natives capture John Smith after he tells Thomas to flee the scene.

Pocahontas goes to see John Smith when he is held captive and when she exclaims she is sorry, Smith once again jokingly undermines the situation by saying “For what, this? I’ve gotten out of worse scrapes than this. Can’t think of any right now, but…” He used the same coping mechanism after saving Thomas. Smith looks as though he is unaffected by the unfortunate situation he is in and his expressions are calm and even playful (image 14).

Image 14: Smith is calm in a difficult situation

Smith assures that he would rather choose death than having never met her. At sunrise when Smith is supposed to die, Pocahontas runs to go against her father and
to save Smith. Pocahontas convinces the chief that violence is not the answer and the path of hatred has to end. Governor Ratcliffe is dissatisfied with this peaceful outcome and tries to shoot the chief but Smith saves the chief and takes the bullet himself. Wounded Smith needs to be taken back to England and he and Pocahontas must say their farewell. Once more Smith uses his undermining mannerism when he states that he has been in worse pain than the one he is experiencing after being shot (image 15).

Image 15: Smith is cheerful even after being shot

Captain John Smith is a happy-go-lucky representation of hegemonic masculinity and is definitely “one of the good guys” when it comes to the dichotomy of good and evil in Disney films. He is a daredevil who excels under pressure and in dangerous situations. Smith does not let anything break his spirit and remains in a good mood at all times. The other side of this coin is that he does not show weakness. He is respected and admired as a man, a fighter and a leader. Even though he accepts the role of the leader and is good at it, he is a lone wolf at heart.
4.3. The Greek God

Hercules is introduced as an infant at the beginning of the film but his teen years and adulthood are going to be under closer inspection since they are more relevant when it comes to hegemonic masculinity. Hercules is abnormally strong even as a baby and even though Hades plots a way to make him mortal, this ability stays with him (image 16).

Image 16: Hercules has superhuman strength as a baby

When Hercules is made mortal an elderly man and his wife find him lying on the ground. They take this as a sign from the gods that this baby is meant for them because they do not have children of their own.

As Hercules grows up, he has trouble controlling his strength and causes havoc wherever he goes. In the first scene, we witness Hercules as a teenager, as he tries to help out his father when they are taking a load of hay to the marketplace. Though he means well, he just ends up doing all the wrong things with his powers. He wants to throw the discus with other boys of his age, but when they see him they immediately announce that the team is full (image 17). The other boys make fun of Hercules and
call him “Destructo boy”. At this point Hercules is not very high in the hierarchy of masculinity.

The kind of behavior described above is common in today’s physical education where a leader for a team is chosen and this team leader picks out the other members of the team. The boys that demonstrate hegemonic masculinity (i.e. are athletic, strong and competitive) are usually chosen first and the weaker status boys are picked last. This phenomenon is well depicted especially in television shows and movies about American high school life and hence affirms stereotypes.

Hercules feels miserable after the incident at the marketplace and being called a freak. He explains to his father: “But pop, they’re right. I am a freak. I try to fit in. I really do. I just can’t. Sometimes I feel like, like I really don’t belong here. Like I’m supposed to be someplace else.” After this Hercules sings a song about dreaming of a place where he is welcomed and crowds cheer his name. He dreams of popularity that is common for famous athletes and rock stars in today’s society. Hercules’ father and mother decide to tell him how they found him and that around his neck was the symbol of the gods. Hercules decides to go on a journey to Zeus’ temple. He assures his adoptive parents that they have been the best parents imaginable but that he needs to find answers. His journey to the temple of Zeus is like a rite of passage. He sings
about going the distance and that every mile will be worth his while because he is going to a place where he feels he belongs. Initiation rites are still relevant in some primitive communities and through these rites a boy becomes a man. Oddly enough, these rites of passage are also used by modern day gangs, clubs and societies when they accept new members. The prospective members must go through the initiation before they can become fully authorized members of the gang. These initiation rites, that are very much in the realm of hegemonic masculinity, may include (depending on the legality or on the other hand notoriety of the club) measuring one’s strength, completing hard tasks or fulfilling demands as extreme as killing people.

Hercules meets his real father Zeus at his namesake temple and finds out he must become a true hero in order to return to Mount Olympus. Hercules sets out to find Philoctetes, the trainer of heroes. As Hercules flies through the sky on his flying horse Pegasus he sings: “I will face the world fearless, proud and strong.” These characteristics are associated with being a true hero. This ‘true hero’ is the epitome of hegemonic masculinity. Heroism is the ultimate form of being truly masculine. A hero is not scared, he is not shaken by his opponents, he can go on when others give up; he will literally be the last man standing. This kind of imagery is well known from action films and heroic tales of the sort.

Hercules finds Philoctetes on a nearly deserted island that displays the remnants of its former glory when Philoctetes used to train heroes. He is reluctant to train Hercules and recalls all his former trainees that had weaknesses that prevented them from being true heroes. Weakness is seen as a defect in their masculinity. In the end Philoctetes agrees to train Hercules to become a true hero. At first Hercules does not show any signs of turning into a hero (image 18). Then in the blink of an eye he has transformed into a ridiculously good-looking, extremely muscular, gracefully moving man that sails through the difficult obstacle course Philoctetes has prepared for him. McCallum (2002: 121) describes this as: “[…] showing the active male body as spectacle […]” According to McCallum the montage concentrated on Hercules’ training to become a hero is exhibiting his body in motion and his physical
development and the progress he makes is “literally measured by the increasing size of his biceps” (McCallum 2002: 119) (image 19).

Image 18: Hercules at an early stage of his hero training

Image 19: Hercules at a later stage of his hero training

Havaste (1998: 22) claims that in entertainment aimed at boys the characters are rarely boys themselves and that grown men are offered as role models and points of reference. Disney films are not ‘gender-coded’ but nevertheless, the male characters spend a relatively short time (in Tarzan and Hercules) or none at all (Pocahontas and
Beauty and the Beast) as children. In Tarzan and Hercules it is also the awaited turning point when the awkward outcast child turns into the athletic male spectacle.

When Hercules physically meets the requirements of a hero he begs Philoctetes for a chance to put his abilities to a test and become a true hero fighting monsters and rescuing damsels. McCallum (2002: 120) writes that this ideal heroic male is a construction that can be attained by behaving in a certain way and mastering certain skills, such as using weapons and rescuing women. Hercules performs these acts in the film. One of the traits of hegemonic masculinity is to subordinate women to a degree and ‘rescuing damsels’ could be viewed as that. It is a double-edged sword since on the other hand this can be a positive trait and manifest itself in gallantry and gentlemanly behavior and on the other hand it can be very negative in the form of chauvinism, patronizing women and seeing them as weak individuals who cannot accomplish things by themselves.

Philoctetes tells Hercules that they are going to Thebes and when Hercules inquires what is in there, Philoctetes answers: “A lot of problems. It’s a big, tough town. Good place to start building a rep." A reputation of being a real man can sometimes be even more important than actually being one. If a man cries and no one sees it, did it even happen? In hegemonic masculinity the degree of how manly one is strongly relies on the performance of masculinity. These performances can include going to the gym five times a week, bench-pressing one’s own weight and more, running a marathon, killing a moose and a vast number of other male performances. Judith Butler is known for her theory of gender as a performance (Butler 1990). Gender performances, when witnessed by other individuals, build a reputation. They paint an image of a man’s masculinity.

As Hercules and Philoctetes are making their way towards Thebes flying on Pegasus, they hear a shriek which immediately leads them to believe that there is a damsel in distress. Before Philoctetes has had the chance to say yea or nay Hercules is on his way towards the lady in trouble. Near a waterfall they find an enormous male centaur who is harassing a woman. We later find out that this woman is Megara. Philoctetes
advise Hercules to assess the situation and not barge in without thinking it through first. His words fall on deaf ears as Hercules is furious about the way the centaur is treating Megara. The anger can be seen from his expression when he observes the situation (image 20). Hercules has trained his body to a masculine shape and with this body he has the abilities to express his anger and beat his opponent.

Image 20: Hercules is very angry at the centaur who is harassing Megara

Hercules bravely stands in front of the centaur who is more than twice his size. He takes a stance that oozes confidence and power, legs wide apart and hands on hips. However, there is an element of surprise in the scene because even though Hercules seems ready to fight, he takes a very gentlemanly approach, calls the centaur ‘sir’ and asks him to release Megara. Hercules himself is surprised when Megara informs that she does not need assistance and accentuates her message by calling Hercules ‘junior’. For a second Hercules is taken aback by Megara’s beauty and attitude but bounces back quickly and suspects that the lady is too close to the situation to fully comprehend the peril she is in. At that moment the centaur punches Hercules and he flies through the air and head first into the water. Philoctetes is not impressed and orders Hercules to get his sword. Hercules looks for his sword in the water and at the same time mumbles: “Rule number 15: a hero is only as good as his weapon.” Heroism and masculinity are linked to fighting and using weapons. Hercules fails this part miserably as he tries to fight the centaur with a fish he has mistaken for his sword. The centaur punches Hercules again and sends him flying through the air,
again. Pegasus is eager to help Hercules but Philoctetes states: “He’s gotta do it on his own.” Heroism is usually a solo act with no room for sidekicks. Philoctetes also advises Hercules to use his head and it is obvious that he means the next move should be a conscious one, preceded by a thought process. Hercules, in a testosterone high, takes the advice very literally and barges towards the centaur head-first and this time sends the half-man-half-horse flying through the air. When the centaur is out of the picture for awhile Hercules picks up Megara who has fallen into the water midst all the fighting. Hercules only has time to apologize to Megara when the centaur is rushing towards them once more. This time Hercules is prepared and pounds and twists the centaur until the creature is completely knocked out.

After a telling-off from Philoctetes about rookie mistakes Hercules wants to get acquainted with Megara. This sparks up feelings of jealousy in both Philoctetes and Pegasus. Hercules is attracted to Megara which makes him nervous and inarticulate. He is trying to impress Megara with his physicality which can be seen from the way he stands next to her. This pose is a well-known trick for men who work out and discreetly want to show off their biceps (image 21).

Image 21: Hercules showing off his muscles

Connell writes about this kind of physicality in regard to hegemonic masculinity: “Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex
“Muscular shapes and tensions, postures and ways of moving are strongly represented in Hercules. They are very much present in all the films of my corpus but especially in Hercules the references to heroism, physical strength and athletic abilities are in the foreground.

In the next scene of the film Hercules offers Megara a ride where she wants to go but she declines saying that she is a big girl who can take care of herself. Hercules is infatuated with her and Philoctetes has to strongly remind him that he has a mission in Thebes. In the next scene – when Hercules, Philoctetes and Pegasus have left for Thebes – it is revealed that Hades holds the power over Megara and he wants to use her to destroy Hercules once and for all.

Hercules and his entourage arrive at Thebes and they are amazed and intimidated by the big city. The people of Thebes talk about the natural disasters and monsters they have encountered recently and Hercules thinks that his arrival there is as if on cue. The citizens are skeptical even though Hercules confidently tells them he is a hero. He lacks concrete evidence of heroic acts and the last straw for the people is that his trainer is Philoctetes who has trained the fallen heroes of the past. Suddenly Megara appears reporting of two little boys that have gotten trapped in a gorge by a landslide. Hercules is overjoyed that he has gotten his chance to prove that he is a real hero. As the doubtful citizens of Thebes observe, Hercules lifts an enormous rock that is preventing the little boys from getting out (image 22).

Image 22: Hercules lifting a gigantic rock
Saving the little boys (that are Hades’ little helpers in disguise) is not enough heroic effort for one night, and Hercules has to fight a monster that emerges from the gorge. It becomes clear that Hades is responsible for the monster appearing. The beast and Hercules fight and after beheading, the dragon-like beast seems beaten, the crowd cheers for Hercules for the second time and Philoctetes escorts the tired champion off the arena. However, Hades’ monster grows more heads and Hercules has to return to battle it. For each decapitated head grows an infinite number of new ones and Hercules has to come up with a new tactic. He punches the walls of the gorge and the monster is buried under a landslide. For awhile there is a sad atmosphere suggesting that Hercules has also perished but in a traditional heroic tale manner he resurfaces, looking worn-out but absolutely invincible (image 23). In this image there is an uncanny resemblance to action figure and comic book hero – and truly the epitome of hegemonic masculinity – He-Man (appendix 1).

Image 23: Hercules making a heroic appearance

From this moment on Hercules’ status truly changes. The musical number that follows his victory over the monster is the most important scene in the film when it comes to hegemonic masculinity. “Zero to hero” underlines the characteristics and physical abilities that Hercules did not used to have – back when he was called a
freak and Destructo Boy – but which he has gained and therefore has become a masculine man and a hero.

The lyrics of the song are as follow:

Bless my soul / Herc was on a roll / Person of the week in every Greek opinion poll / What a pro / Herc could stop a show / Point him at a monster and you're talking S.R.O / He was a no one / A zero, zero / Now he's a honcho / He's a hero / Here was a kid with his act down pat / From zero to hero / In no time flat / Zero to hero / Just like that / When he smiled the girls went wild / With oohhs and aahhhs / And they slapped his face on every vase / On every 'vahse' / From appearance fees and royalties / Our Herc had cash to burn / Now nouveau riche and famous / He could tell you what's a Grecian urn / Say amen / There he goes again / Sweet and undefeated and an awesome ten for ten / Folks lined up just to watch him flex / And this perfect package packed a pair of pretty pecs / Hercie, he comes, he sees, he conquers / Honey, the crowds were going bonkers / He showed them moxie, brains and spunk / From zero to hero / A major hunk / Zero to hero / And who'd have thunk? / Who put the glad in gladiator? / Hercules! / Whose daring deeds are great theater? / Hercules! / Is he bold? / No one braver! / Is he sweet? / Our favorite flavor! / Hercules, Hercules! / My man! / Bless my soul / Herc was on a roll / Undefeated! / Riding high / And the nicest guy / Not conceited! / He was a nothing / A zero, zero / Now he's a honcho / He's a hero / He hit the heights at breakneck speed / From zero to hero / Herc is a hero! / Now he's a hero! / Yes indeed!

The popularity of athletes and rock stars is referred to from a financial point of view: “From appearance fees and royalties / Our Herc had cash to burn / Now nouveau riche and famous”. Wealth is one of the attributes of hegemony and how it is sustained. Power is in many cases held with the means of financial wealth. The physical factors and being perfect are mentioned: “Folks lined up just to watch him flex / And this perfect package packed a pair of pretty pecs” but the intellectual side as well: “He showed them moxie, brains and spunk”. All in all, “Zero to hero” in Hercules is along the lines of the song LeFou sings about Gaston in Beauty and the Beast. The physical attributes mentioned in these songs can be also be found in Doty’s (1996: 282) paper where he lists the contemporary male body codes/types. Doty writes that in media representations (his focus is on advertising) the male body is presented as active, large and hard (Doty 1996: 282-283).
During the song Hercules is shown in situations his new life as a hero has offered him. In addition to being shown conquering numerous monsters and beasts, Hercules is portrayed as a superstar admired by masses of people. He is getting a lot of female attention and this reinforces the setting of heterosexuality being the norm in hegemonic masculinity. Hercules has his own soft drink and in its commercial he poses with three blonde bombshells that definitely accentuate the gender stereotypes often seen in media.

Image 24: Hercules advertising his soft drink with three sexy blondes

Another important scene in “Zero to hero” is where Hercules is regarded as an athlete. He is depicted having his own athletic shoe brand and there is a large mosaic of him running in his ‘Air-Herc’ shoes (image 25). This is a clear reference to Nike Air Jordans, a line of shoes from American basketball player Michael Jordan (appendix 2). Michael Jordan is one of the most popular athletes in the world and his Air Jordan shoe line is wildly successful. According to Connell (2005/1995: 54) sport has come to be the leading definer of masculinity in mass culture. She points out that in sport there is a continuous display of men’s bodies in motion. She adds that there are elaborate and carefully monitored rules that bring bodies into stylized contests with each other. Connell (2000: 189) claims that the realm of professional sport is dominated by men. Moreover, commercial competitive sport is the most visible symbol of hegemonic masculinity and this march seems to go on (Connell
Therefore, Hercules is shown to be the ultimate athlete because celebrated sport stars are one of the highest form of hegemonic masculinity. All the merchandise shown in the “Zero to hero” montage is very familiar to us from sport culture. All the big athletes, especially male athletes, have their own range of merchandise that can include toys, sportswear, footwear and collaborations with food and beverage industry, to name a few. McCallum (2002: 120) also sees this as Disney’s way to laugh at themselves since Disney too is known for having a sea of merchandise for every film, character and television show.

Image 25: Air-Herc mimics Air Jordan

While Hades is persuading Megara to help him find Hercules’ weakness, Hercules himself is recalling his heroic efforts to his father at the temple of Zeus. Zeus is impressed with all the things that Hercules has accomplished and verbally tells him that he is a proud father. This makes Hercules assume that the day has finally come when he can rejoin the gods on Mount Olympus. Zeus tells Hercules that this is not yet possible since he has not really proven to be a true hero. Hercules protests by saying: “But father, I’ve beaten every single monster I’ve come up against. I’m the most famous person in all of Greece. I’m an action figure!” (Image 26.) This comment about being an action figure can once again be linked to He-Man, the very famous action figure introduced by Mattel in 1980 and the object of admiration and embodiment of masculinity for masses of little boys.
Zeus instructs Hercules that being famous is not the same thing as being a true hero. This is a moment in the film when some of the hype of hegemonic masculinity is taken to the background and softer values take the forefront. McCallum (2002: 117) argues that these notions in Hercules “sustain and elaborate the late twentieth century image of the ‘new man’ […]” Zeus tells Hercules that he has to find out by himself what it means to be a true hero and there is a strong emotional charge when Zeus says: “Look inside your heart” before turning into a massive statue. After this moment Hercules falls to the ground, in a state of hopelessness. This scene communicates that there is more to being a hero – and a man – then having a great physique, being adored and winning battles. Every man has a vast range of emotions and characteristics inside them and many of these characteristics, like sensitivity and caring or loving emotions, are not regarded as the traits that belong to the realm of hegemonic masculinity. Hercules has so far focused on external things and appearance but Zeus wants him to connect with his feelings and let them lead him to becoming a real hero.

The next scene is at Hercules’ villa where he is having his portrait painted on a vase and Philoctetes is reciting Hercules his agenda. For his picture Hercules is posing in a very masculine fashion, muscles flexed, a club in his hand facing to the sky and wearing a lion’s head (image 27). This is an allusion to the hunting culture that is
part of hegemonic masculinity. Hunting and displaying the prey is very much present in the character of Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast*. Hercules is frustrated with his situation and asks what is the point of everything when he just wants to become a true hero, and what he has been doing recently is not getting him closer to Mount Olympus. Philoctetes reassures Hercules that he is headed in the right direction and that there is nothing he cannot do.

Image 27: Hercules posing for a picture

A pack of teenage girls storms in the villa and Philoctetes and Hercules have to orchestrate a disappearing act for Hercules. Megara sneaks in after the teenagers have gone and catches Hercules by surprise. Hercules turns into a lovesick and slack boy when Megara is around and immediately admits that he has missed her. He loses the steepest edge of his masculinity with Megara and gives up the control of the situation. Megara persuades Hercules to play hooky that day and spend time with her. Hercules is powerless to resist.

When Hercules and Megara return from their escapades, they spend a romantic moment in a garden. Megara is torn between carrying out the task Hades has ordered her to do and her infatuation with Hercules. She inquires if Hercules has any weaknesses and physically gets very close to him. One might use the term ‘seduce’. Hercules is very nervous and his expressions and actions give off that he is not very
experienced when it comes to women. This is also one of the moments when hegemonic masculinity is not manifested in Hercules’ behavior. He is shown as a shy and inexperienced man who does not quite know what to do with Megara’s passes. He tries to be smooth but somehow does not seem to get the hang of it. The mood relaxes when the pair sees a shooting star and Hercules recalls that when he was younger he just wanted to be like everyone else. Hegemonic masculinity is also blending in, not being different, at least not on a lower status of masculinity. Megara makes a comment that communicates her general distrust in people and this evokes a response in Hercules. He confidently draws nearer to her and swears he would never hurt her. This is once again a trait that is very masculine by the hegemonic definition. By saying that he would never hurt Megara Hercules takes a protective role over her. The couple is very close to a kiss when Philoctetes and Pegasus burst in on them scolding Hercules for skipping everything Philoctetes had planned for the day. Hercules’ punishment is a workout at the stadium. Before he leaves he gives Megara a flower and kisses her on the cheek.

The next scene is another musical number where Megara tries to deny her feelings for Hercules singing: “It’s too cliché. I won’t say I’m in love.” By the end of the song it is clear that Megara actually is in love with Hercules. This accentuates the role of hegemonic masculinity in Hercules since the female protagonist is in love with the male protagonist, hence acting out the heterosexual norm. This can be seen as continuum to the previously seen adoring females.

Hades makes an appearance and wants to know what Megara has found out about Hercules’ weaknesses. Megara is now very reluctant to help Hades but is between a rock and a hard place since Hades owns her soul. Philoctetes overhears them and thinks hearing the truth about Megara is going to break Hercules’ heart. Hades realizes that Hercules has feelings for Megara and plots to use this against him.

At the stadium Hercules is working out with amazing stamina and energy. Philoctetes comes to the venue with bad news. Hercules is over the moon and exclaims he loves Megara but Philoctetes blurts out that she is a fraud. Hercules does
not want to believe this and Philoctetes is hurt that Hercules chooses not to believe him. When Philoctetes says that he is leaving, Hercules takes a coping mechanism approach, yells “Fine! Go! I don’t need you” and starts lifting weights (image 28). This is once again a moment where masculinity is manifested through physical efforts.

Image 28: Hercules copes with the situation by lifting weights

Philoctetes has just left when Hades pays a visit and tries to get Hercules to give up his strength for the next 24 hours so he could release the Titans and take over Mount Olympus. Hercules is reluctant until Hades lets him in on Megara’s part in the equation. Hades promises to set her free if Hercules says yes to his request. Hercules agrees and his strength pours out of him. Hades says mockingly that now Hercules knows how it is to be just like everybody else.

With Hercules out of the picture Hades carries out with his plan and releases the Titans. They move towards Mount Olympus and destroy everything in their way. Hades has told one of the Titans to destroy Hercules. This monster arrives at Thebes where the people are terrified but have every faith that Hercules will save them. He and Megara observe the situation and Hercules makes the decision to fight the monster even without his strength. Megara is terrified but Hercules is adamant. He feels betrayed by Megara and like he has nothing to lose. He cannot stand a chance
with the Titan at first but when Megara gets Philoctetes to return and restore Hercules’ faith in himself he is able to win using his head, this time figuratively speaking. However, Megara is hurt in the action and subsequently Hades’ deal falls through and Hercules gets his strength back. Megara is weak but alive and Hercules rushes to Mount Olympus to save the gods from the Titans. Now that Hercules has his superior strength back he has no trouble fighting the Titans. Hades wants some vengeance and takes Megara’s life. Hercules is devastated but when Philoctetes states that some things cannot be changed, the fiery determination in Hercules’ eyes returns (image 29).

Image 29: Hercules is determined to change the course of events

Hercules goes to the underworld to meet with Hades and make a deal with him. He wants Hades to take him into the underworld in Megara’s place. Hades consents and Hercules jumps into the river of dead souls to retrieve Megara. He finds her and brings her up. This selfless and audacious act makes Hercules a true hero and when he emerges he has turned into a god (image 30). He is depicted as a divine being beaming with light and gold, almost in a religious manner. The deal with Hades has broken when Hercules has become a god again and Hercules and Megara both leave the underworld.
Hercules is welcomed back to Mount Olympus and he is overjoyed to be reunited with his real parents. Megara is watching Hercules’ happiness from the sidelines and is ready to give him up. However, Hercules tells her he loves her and makes an announcement to his parents and the other gods that he wishes to live as a mortal on earth with Megara.

Hercules’ appearance is a representation of hegemonic masculinity. His appearance goes through a change as he grows – he transforms from zero to hero. Connell (2009: 5) rewords the classic phrase “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” by Simone de Beauvoir by claiming: “one is not born masculine, but has to become a man”. As a teenager Hercules is a lanky boy with superhuman strength he cannot control. He gets into trouble and is ridiculed constantly because of this. He undergoes a rigorous training, learns how to use his strength and attains the look of a bodybuilder. After this transformation he has the means to fight monsters and as a result gains people’s admiration. Hercules becomes a superhero who has his own line of merchandise – like all extremely famous athletes do. When it comes to characteristics, Hercules is emotional and sensitive and even as a hunky adult he is sometimes nervous, clumsy and inarticulate. Connell talks about the deep-rooted
assumption that men are rational and women are emotional (2005/1995: p. 164). Hercules breaks this part of patriarchal ideology to a degree.

4.4. One of the Apes

Tarzan starts dramatically as a family of three – a mother, a father and their baby boy – is escaping a burning ship. They settle in the jungle (that is known to be in Africa from Edgar Rice Burroughs’ original *Tarzan of the Apes* stories) and build their life there. A gorilla family is shown in overlapping images with the human family and their lives follow a similar pattern in living in the jungle, taking care of each other and ultimately facing danger. The danger and death comes in the form of a leopard that first kills the gorilla baby and then the parents of the human baby. The devastated gorilla mother hears the cry of the human baby and rescues him from the claws of the leopard.

The gorilla mother Kala takes the human baby to her tribe where the pair encounters first a happy welcome and then baffled reactions to the weird-looking infant. Kerchak, Kala’s husband and the leader of the gorillas, is wary about the newcomer and tells Kala that this new baby will not replace the one they lost. She agrees but tells him that this baby needs her. Eventually Kerchak lets Kala keep the baby with them, but makes it very clear that this does not make the human baby his son. Kala names the baby Tarzan.

Tarzan grows to be a little boy and learns to imitate the sounds of the animals in the jungle. He is encouraged by Kala to make up a sound of his own. His gorilla peers remind him that he is different by saying that he does not move as fast as they do in the jungle. This is an innuendo that to be equal with the gorillas he would have to have the same abilities as them. This scene is similar to Hercules’ teenage years when he was an outcast. Hegemonic masculinity requires males to be able to perform physically on the same level as their peers or even better. The motto of the Olympic games is “citius, altius, fortius” which is Latin for “faster, higher, stronger”.
type of ideology is part of hegemonic masculinity. McCallum (2002: 121) refers to a “fairly conventionalized image of a real man having speed, force and strength […]” Tarzan is hurt at first because of what his peers said but then regains determination (image 31). It is visible in his eyes that he will learn to move in the jungle as fast or even faster than the gorillas.

Image 31: Tarzan is determined to learn to maneuver in the jungle

In the next scene he has caught up with the gorilla children that are playing at a waterfall where there is a herd of elephants. The young gorillas are not happy that Tarzan has arrived and Terk gives Tarzan a seemingly impossible task of getting an elephant hair hoping this would make Tarzan give up and leave. Tarzan has made up his mind about being part of the group so, to the gorillas’ surprise, he goes to pursue this task. This scene can be interpreted as an initiation rite. These rites of passage are very important parts of becoming a real man in many cultures and also becoming a member in men’s club. This was briefly discussed in the section about Hercules. One of the methods that is used in initiation rites is to give difficult tasks for prospective members of a club or a gang. Tarzan succeeds in his task (image 32).
In his efforts to get an elephant hair Tarzan manages to stampede the elephants and as a result deepen the friction between him and Kerchak. The gorilla patriarch storms that Tarzan will never be one of them.

In the same manner as in Hercules, the change from a boy to a man happens in an instant for Tarzan. First he is a child and in a blink of an eye he turns into a grown man. McCallum (2002: 123) describes the scene as “an apparently continues shot during which he jumps into the air as a boy and comes back down as a man.” There is also a similar ‘zero to hero’ growth story as in Hercules. Tarzan is shown to learn by trial and error how to move and act in the jungle. As a child he is trying and occasionally failing but as a man he is performing everything without failure. He gets better, faster and stronger until he outruns his gorilla peers. When he is maneuvering on the trees, McCallum (2002: 128) points out that Tarzan’s way of moving is that of a surfer or a skateboarder (image 33). This ties Tarzan to the modern culture of young males and according to McCallum links nature to the representations of skateboard or surf culture and naturalizes them.
In the next scene Tarzan tries to scare Kala but she foresees him coming and they enjoy a nice moment between a mother and a son until Tarzan’s gorilla friend Terk interrupts them and wants to wrestle with Tarzan. For a while everything is fun but soon Tarzan acts restlessly and has a feeling that something bad is going to happen. He is right as Sabor, the leopard, attacks the gorilla tribe. Kerchak fights the fierce cat for a while but soon Tarzan takes charge of the fight with a spear he has built. They combat for a long time and Tarzan swings in the air, is forced inside a tree trunk and ultimately falls into a hole in the ground with Sabor. The gorillas that stand by the situation are scared that Tarzan has lost the fight. Their fear is in vain because Tarzan has defeated Sabor. This is a crucial moment in the film as Tarzan claims his status as a man and as the killer of the menace. He raises Sabor over his head and for the first time lets out his own sound, a loud scream that McCallum (2002: 124) calls ‘Tarzan yodel’. Tarzan is depicted from a low angle to accentuate the importance of the scene and his triumph over Sabor. McCallum (2002: 124) refers to this kind of presentation as strategies in visualization that make the male body a spectacle.
Once the dramatic events have subsided and peace has been restored, Tarzan’s animal friends gather around him but Kerchak seems to remain unaffected. Tarzan takes the lifeless body of Sabor to Kerchak like a sacrificial animal to the leader of the tribe. Kerchak is deep in thought and it looks as though he is relenting when gun shots break the silence. Kerchak orders the gorillas to get on the move but Tarzan is intrigued by the alien sounds and does not go with the gorillas but leaves behind to find out where the noise is coming from. He moves like an animal in the jungle and uses his sense of smell to follow the tracks of the intruders.

Tarzan witnesses a group of people making their way in the thick jungle. Clayton, who is leading them and thinning out the growth as he goes is recalling his expeditions in Africa and killing all sorts of animals. Suddenly he stops in his tracks when he senses a potential danger nearby. He tells his companions, professor Porter and his daughter not to move. Professor Porter does as he is told but his daughter Jane tells Clayton that the gunshots are scaring the very animals they came there to see and study. Clayton reminds Jane that they hired him to protect them. Professor Porter points out that they are standing on a gorilla’s nest and that they have now found what they have been looking for. Jane and her father are overjoyed and
Clayton is excited as well but for different reasons than the professor and Jane. Clayton is expecting to kill some beasts. He is a manly man and once again hegemonic masculinity is demonstrated by the use of weaponry. McCallum (2002: 128) writes that even though Clayton is depicted as the ‘civilized’ macho man as opposed to Tarzan’s ‘natural’ man, he is always shown with a gun and his goal is to either kill animals that he sees as dangerous or benefit from the jungle and its inhabitants. Tarzan is observing the situation at times from a very short distance but moves so eloquently that Clayton only has an inkling that something or someone is keeping an eye on them (image 35).

Image 35: Clayton’s shots are almost accurate but Tarzan manages to avoid them

Jane runs into a little monkey and stays behind to draw it. The monkey steals her sketchbook and in order to get back a drawing she made of the monkey she plays a trick on it. When the little monkey loses the sketch it starts crying and Jane makes a comment about what its parents would think. She soon finds out when an army of enraged baboons attacks her. Tarzan is still observing Jane’s movements in the jungle and goes to her rescue when the baboons are chasing her. The escape from the baboons is a long rollercoaster ride and eventually ends when Tarzan communicates with the parent of the little monkey and gives them back the drawing. After the mayhem Tarzan has time to take in the fact that Jane physically resembles him. Jane is taken aback by Tarzan’s uninhibited behavior but it can be seen in her own
conduct that it is more unexpected than unpleasant to be pressed against Tarzan’s chest to hear his heart beat. Tarzan introduces himself the way he knows how to and after some misunderstandings Tarzan also gets Jane’s name right. Once again the silence is broken by Clayton’s gunshots. Jane asks Tarzan to take her to her camp.

As Tarzan and Jane are making their way towards the camp, Tarzan’s gorilla friends and elephant Tantor are using the objects they have found on the camp as musical instruments and coincidentally making a mess of the camp. When Tarzan and Jane arrive Tarzan is happy to see his friends and the gorillas take notice of Jane. Jane realizes that the wild man she has just met is one of them. Kerchak is anything but happy to see humans in the jungle. The gorillas flee the scene and the conflicted Tarzan eventually goes with them.

The worried professor and Clayton return to the camp and Jane, who is in a frenzy about the events, gives a full account of her adventure. When she gets to the end she dreamily exclaims: “I was saved by a flying wild man in a loincloth”. According to McCallum (2002: 129) this implies that the ‘big wild quiet silent man in a loincloth’ is even the modern woman’s fantasy deep down inside. This assumption is put into visual form in these spectacles of the male body. Jane mentions that she also saw the gorillas and Clayton is immediately interested and wants to know where she saw them. Jane’s thoughts are on Tarzan.

Kerchak advises the gorillas to avoid the strangers but Tarzan thinks differently and opposes Kerchak. Tarzan is certain that the humans do not mean any harm. He asks Kerchak why he is threatened by anyone who is different from him. Tarzan stands up to the leader and this is a trait of hegemonic masculinity (image 36). Kala tells Tarzan that he should listen to what Kerchak is saying but Tarzan replies by saying that she should have told him that there are creatures that are like him.
At the camp Jane is drawing Tarzan and describing his behavior to her father. It is evident that she is infatuated with this wild man. As Clayton is ridiculing Jane’s fantasies, Tarzan literally descends from the sky to the scene. Clayton tries to make him tell the whereabouts of the gorillas. Tarzan does not have the words to tell anything but he enthusiastically mimics Clayton’s behavior (image 37). Clayton tries to give a quick lesson in how to communicate and tell the location of the gorillas but is not very talented in teaching so Jane takes over the task.

Image 37: Tarzan mimicking Clayton
In a musical montage that follows Jane and her father, with a very unenthusiastic approach from Clayton, teach Tarzan about the world human beings live in. Tarzan learns the English language, he gets acquainted with the stars and the vast universe around us, he learns to ride a bike – in the extreme fashion that he surfs the tree branches – and his interest towards the world he learns about grows. At the same time he develops strong feelings towards Jane. He wants to behave like the man he sees on a slide show about the modern world, who takes flowers to a woman. Tarzan gathers flowers to Jane and goes to take them to her. When he arrives at the camp he finds that it is being torn down and the ship has come to take Jane, professor Porter and Clayton back to England. Jane asks Tarzan to go to England with them and respectively Tarzan asks Jane to stay with him. Jane replies that she cannot and leaves crying. Clayton comes to offer his wisdom to Tarzan that women cannot be comprehended, even if one was not a savage like Tarzan. Making a clear distinction how women and men behave is very much connected to hegemonic masculinity. Individual characteristics and behaviors are disregarded and all women are seen as a mass that behaves in a certain way that can be retraced back to their gender.

Clayton manipulates Tarzan to take him, Jane and professor Porter to see the gorillas. He uses Jane’s desire to study the gorillas as a decoy for Tarzan who wants Jane to stay. Tarzan gets his friends Terk and Tantor to get Kerchak out of the way so Tarzan can introduce the gorilla population. Kala is wary of the humans, even though Tarzan is giving his best effort to show there is nothing to be afraid of. Soon the other gorillas come out of hiding and Jane and her father are ecstatic. Clayton marks the spot on the map and his gaze reveals he has malignant thoughts. Tarzan teaches Jane to speak gorilla and the mood is very playful and light. The mood changes drastically, however, when Kerchak comes back. He is furious that Tarzan has brought the strangers to the gorillas and compromised their safety. Kerchak attacks Clayton and Tarzan jumps on the male gorilla who is twice his size to protect the humans. When Kerchak tries to attack Jane Tarzan’s grip around Kerchak tightens and he slams the enormous animal to the ground (image 38). This demonstration of his strength and his need to protect Jane and the other humans can be viewed as a representation of hegemonic masculinity.
When the humans have fled the scene, Tarzan lets go of Kerchak immediately and is baffled by his own reaction to go against Kerchak in favor of the humans. He apologizes and disappears into the jungle. Kala finds him deep in thought and tells him that she should have shown him something a long time ago. She leads him to the tree house Tarzan’s parents built there when they were shipwrecked. Tarzan recognizes himself as baby from a picture where he is with his parents. Kala says that his happiness is what matters and goes outside to wait for him. Tarzan exits the house standing upright in his father’s suit (image 39). Middleton (1992: 156, as cited in Havaste 1998: 62) argues that identity is expressed through clothing. Clothing indicates what the individual feels his or her role in the society is. Tarzan, in putting on his father’s suit, is conforming to the norms of the human society. Kala is sad because she knows Tarzan wants to go with Jane to the place where he is originally from.
Tarzan joins Jane and professor Porter who are headed towards the ship that will soon take direction to England. As they get on board, Jane, her father and Tarzan are taken captive and Clayton is in charge. He wants Tarzan’s gorilla friends in cages so he can ship them to England and get paid. As Clayton goes back on land to get the gorillas, Tarzan’s friends Terk and Tantor go on the ship to help Tarzan. Clayton and his crew are in full flood of capturing the gorillas when Tarzan enters the scene with his signature sound. Kerchak is surprised but happy that he has returned and Tarzan says he has come home. In the heat of the action Clayton shoots and hits Tarzan in the arm. This infuriates Kerchak who charges towards Clayton. Clayton takes a shot at Kerchak and kills him. Tarzan and Clayton go into battle on the tree branches and Tarzan has an opportunity to kill Clayton with his own gun. Clayton says to Tarzan: “Go ahead, shoot me. Be a man.” Tarzan’s reply is: “Not a man like you!” This suggests that Clayton’s type of hegemonic masculinity differs from the masculinity Tarzan represents and he makes a conscious choice of being a different kind of man. He destroys Clayton’s gun. Their combat continues and Clayton gets tangled up in lianas. Tarzan tries to warn him but Clayton ends up killing himself when he cuts all the lianas except the one that is around his neck.

After the battle Tarzan goes to Kerchak who is taking his last breaths. He apologizes to Tarzan for not understanding that he has always been a part of their gorilla family. Throughout the film Kerchak has been the conventional patriarch with authority and in the end he learns to be thoughtful and accept his son’s difference, very much the task for modern fathers (McCallum 2002: 129). Kerchak wants Tarzan to lead the tribe in his place. Tarzan accepts this responsibility with a heavy heart and claims his place in front of the tribe (image 40). Once again he is depicted from a low angle to accentuate his physical attributes of masculinity and his place in the hierarchy of hegemonic masculinity. Havaste (1998: 289) claims that in the traditional model of masculinity a man is expected to be a fighter, a protector and a ruler. All this is expected of Tarzan as the leader of the gorillas.
In the end Tarzan is saying his sad goodbyes to Jane who has reluctantly decided to go back to England. Her father encourages her to stay because she loves Tarzan and she is overjoyed when the decision to stay has been made. Professor Porter decides to stay as well.

Tarzan is a man who has grown outside the realm of modern civilization and has not been subjected to the stereotypes of masculinity. His masculinity is depicted as a natural masculinity that takes its influences from the animal world. Tarzan mirrors his behavior with that of the gorillas. It could be argued that he demonstrates the deep and true masculine that is referred to in the pop psychology interpretations of masculinity. McCallum (2002: 130) claims that “the depiction of Tarzan as ‘natural’ and ‘wild’ reinstates a (rejuvenated) version of macho-masculinity”.

4.5. Other Male Characters and Their Roles

The Beast in Beauty and the Beast represents hegemonic masculinity in a subdued way. Because he is a prince who has been turned into a monstrous, animalistic being, he hides in his castle and avoids contact with the outside world. He does, however, demonstrate power when he goes to save Belle from the attack of a pack of wolves.
He is protective of Belle and this is a trait of hegemonic masculinity. The Beast gets hurt in this fight and is angry and agitated towards Belle afterwards. In many scenes the Beast’s frustration turns into sheer rage and his body convulses and he roars. These actions could be seen as violent outbursts associated with masculinity. McCallum (2002: 117) argues that the Beast is characterized as “strong, protective, imposing, domineering, and overpowering, on the one hand, but on the other as childish, petulant, basically solipsistic, and needing to learn, via a female teacher, to be other-regarding – that is, sensitive.” Later in the film the Beast goes through a learning process (much like Hercules and Tarzan) and becomes a ‘new man’ demonstrating this aforementioned sensitivity.

Image 41: The Beast comes to Belle’s rescue against a pack of wolves

In *Pocahontas* there are two opposing male characters; John Smith and Kocoum. Kocoum represents the wild nature and John Smith the civilized western world. Both of these men are respected by their peers and could be called alpha males. Pocahontas’ father describes Kocoum’s performance in a battle: “Kocoum attacked with the fierce strength of a bear.” Again here, a man’s physical abilities are paramount. Chief continues his praise: “Kocoum is loyal and strong and will build you a good house with sturdy walls. You will be safe from harm.” (Image 42.) Building a house is also a physical effort and the promise of keeping Pocahontas safe from harm refers to the protective side of hegemonic masculinity where the strong male protects the weak female.
There is a character in Pocahontas that represents an opposite to John Smith’s and Kocoum’s hegemonic masculinities and that character is Thomas. Thomas falls off the ship and the ‘real man’ (John Smith) has to save him. He also has difficulties in handling a gun and after one failed effort to take a shot Governor Ratcliffe says to Thomas: “A man’s not a man unless he knows how to shoot.” (Image 43.) Shooting and the art of hunting are also very well represented in Beauty and the Beast where Gaston shows off his wall of antlers, as well as in the character of Clayton in Tarzan, who will be in focus in the next paragraph. Thomas in Pocahontas is depicted as a weak male character and therefore is in the subordinate category of men.
Clayton, in *Tarzan*, is first introduced fiercely making his way through the jungle. He has a machete that he uses to cut the growth that is in his way (image 44). He is animatedly and at a high volume recalling his hunting adventures: “I was reminded of safari I led up the Zambezi. Ooh, marvelous. Lots of hunting, yes. Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. Wildebeest everywhere.” The manner in which he talks could be described as cocky. Clayton’s masculinity is underlined by his use of weaponry and truly, he never seems to part with his gun. In fact, he is very protective of it, hanging on to it for dear life and quickly moving it out of reach when someone is close to touching it (images 45, 46 & 47). It is pointed out that Clayton was hired to protect Professor Porter and Jane. Protecting the weak is a trait of hegemonic masculinity. McCallum (2002: 128) argues that Clayton’s supermasculinity is contrasted with Tarzan’s ‘natural’ masculinity. However, McCallum (2002: 129) also claims that this contrast is really only a matter of degree and that both characters are versions of ‘muscular, hard-bodied’ masculinity.

Image 44: Clayton clearing the way in the jungle

![Clayton clearing the way in the jungle](image44.png)

Image 45: Clayton with his gun I

![Clayton with his gun I](image45.png)
These four male characters show a spectrum of masculinities that can be found in Disney movies. There are representations of hegemonic masculinity – one might even say that there is an example of a hypermasculine gun-crazed macho man – and representations of borderline subordinated masculinity – Thomas is said to be failing the part of being a man. However, true ethnic and sexual diversity still remains non-existent in the realm of Disney films.
5. CONCLUSION

Manhood is neither static, nor timeless; it is historical. Manhood is not the manifestation of an inner essence; it is socially constructed. Manhood does not bubble up to consciousness from our biological makeup; it is created in culture. Manhood means different things at different times to different people. We come to know what it means to be a man in our culture by setting our definitions in opposition to a set of “others” – racial minorities, sexual minorities and, above all, women.

This is how Kimmel (1994: 120) describes the problems of defining manhood. It is not a conclusive or satisfying (especially from a female point of view) comment but it captures the certain incoherence that the field of masculine research battles with.

Hegemonic masculinity and how it is interlaced in the social structures of our culture is a broad subject. It could be researched from the perspective of all areas of life. The power hierarchies of the patriarchal order can still be found almost everywhere (in corporations, in the military, in media, in social relations, etc.) in contemporary society. The theoretical field concerning masculinities is vast with terminology that is interlaced with feminism, social semiotics, theories on power and pop psychology.

My goal with this research was to examine hegemonic masculinity in a very specific area of the entertainment industry, which Disney motion pictures is a part of. My corpus was a specific sample consisting of four feature-length Disney films made in the 1990s. Because millions of children watch Disney movies and absorb the influences they provide, it was my belief that this study was worthwhile.

The hypothesis of this research was that there are visible representations of hegemonic masculinity in Disney films *Beauty and the Beast*, *Pocahontas*, *Hercules* and *Tarzan*. The characters that were taken into closer examination were chosen in advance and the reasons for choosing these particular characters are specified in the first section of chapter 2.
It was determined in the analysis that aspects of hegemonic masculinity can be found in all the four characters whose every scene was analyzed. There were characters that very consistently throughout the film represented hegemonic masculinity in a very straightforward manner, such as displaying their muscular bodies, expressing physical strength, using weaponry, demonstrating power over others and showing no weakness. However, there were also characters whose hegemonic masculinity appeared here and there but in addition these characters demonstrated traits that are not considered to be in the realm of hegemonic masculinity.

Gaston behaved like the epitome of hegemonic masculinity that he is from the beginning to the end of *Beauty and the Beast*. In John Smith a less chauvinistic but all in all a clear representation of hegemonic masculinity was depicted. Hercules was the model example physically but emotionally he showed variation that does not represent the hegemonic form of masculinity. In an important part of the film Zeus advised him to listen to his heart. This is a moment where a ‘new man’ type of ideology rises in the film and hegemonic masculinity gives room for other representations. Tarzan was the most difficult to categorize since he has spent his life in the jungle with the gorillas. Therefore his masculinity has developed in a setting where the social constructions of the human world do not apply. McCallum’s (2002: 117) argument is that Tarzan’s masculinity is “a ‘hard-bodied’, ‘natural’ ideal that reinstates a version of traditional masculinity”. There are physical attributes and actions that link him to hegemonic masculinity but his ‘natural man’ identity is on the sensitive side.

The hypothesis that these Disney films represent and therefore, to a degree, produce and promote hegemonic masculinity was proven to be correct. The theorists suggest that the focus from ‘masculinity’ should be turned to ‘masculinities’ and it was gratifying to notice that the characters are multidimensional and that even one character can act on different levels of masculinities. As mentioned before, however, the diversity in ethnic backgrounds and sexual orientation is non-existent. (The first African-American characters to ever appear in a Disney feature-length film were the
Future research on a wider corpus and a more cultivated knowledge of the theoretical background could make an interesting study. As mentioned in the introduction, Disney films have an enormous following and the choices they make in gender representation is no coincidence.
LIST OF REFERENCES

PRIMARY REFERENCES

Beauty and the Beast (1991), Walt Disney Pictures

Hercules (1997), Walt Disney Pictures

Pocahontas (1995), Walt Disney Pictures

Tarzan (1999), Walt Disney Pictures

SECONDARY REFERENCES


UNPRINTED REFERENCES


APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Appendix 2


Appendix 3