

Film Analysis of *Frozen II*

Traditionally, Walt Disney Studios have portrayed stereotypical gender roles and norms in the company's movies. Unfortunately, Disney movies are mostly geared towards children, who mentally absorb these messages, and internalize them throughout life. This is just one example of how Sam Killerman's idea of "the cycle of oppression" continues through generations (Killerman, 2017, p. 17). In this form of internalized oppression, young girls see male figures with power, in a movie such as Cinderella, and the female figures doing chores, putting much emphasis on their appearance, and trying to earn the attention of these powerful males, such as the king and/or prince; girls internalize these "restrictive images of girlhood and womanhood" (Baker-Sperry, 2007, p. 718; Killerman, 2017, p. 17-21; Westland, 1993). However, the company is moving from those traditional stereotypes and introducing more progressive characters. One of the more recently released movies, *Frozen II*, does just that. *Frozen II* breaks typical Disney stereotypes by its challenge of traditional gender norms, depiction of governmental decisions, and the representation of townsfolk.

Frozen II is a Disney movie about two sisters, one with magical powers and one without (Buck and Lee, 2019). After becoming queen in the first film, Elsa, with ice powers, starts hearing a voice before elemental forces disturb the kingdom of Arendelle. Elsa, her sister Anna, Anna's boyfriend Kristoff, his reindeer Sven, and their snowman friend Olaf leave Arendelle to venture to an enchanted forest that the sisters' parents once told them about. Past the misty outskirts of the forest, they meet the feuding Northuldra clan and Arendellian soldiers. Long ago, the two sides started fighting, but no one knows how it began. Elsa, feeling this is what her magic was bringing her to, decides to find the truth to save Arendelle and restore their friendship

with the Northuldra clan. Along the way, she finds and calms the elemental spirits, and discovers the voice she has been hearing belongs to her late mother, who helps her realize she is the fifth elemental spirit. With the help of her sister Anna and their newfound friends, they are able to save Arendelle and preserve connections between the two kingdoms (Buck and Lee, 2019).

One of the main ways *Frozen II* challenges traditional gender norms is with Kristoff's expression of strong love for Anna (Buck and Lee, 2019). Usually, male characters are shown isolated and unwilling to communicate their feelings (Gillam and Wooden, 2008, p. 3).

Contrasting from that idea, Kristoff is very open and repeatedly shows how he loves Anna (Buck and Lee, 2019). Early on, he talks to Sven about his plan to propose to his girlfriend in the song "Some Things Never Change" and sings "some things never change, like the love that I feel for her" (Buck and Lee, 2019). After meeting and becoming friends with the Northuldra peoples, he is walking with Ryder, sharing his feelings with another male, and together they come up with a proposal, which does not go as planned. By the time Kristoff is ready to propose, Anna has already left with Elsa on the way to find the voice, and he sings his ballad "Lost in the Woods," a song about how without her, he is confused and uncertain, showing his dependence on her (Buck and Lee, 2019). Later on, after Anna being away and Kristoff being unsure of what happened, upon reuniting with her by lifting her away from an Earth Giant's foot, the first thing he says to her is "I'm here. What do you need?" (Buck and Lee, 2019). This allows her to take charge of the situation, and he listens to her needs. After breaking the dam and Arendelle is protected, Anna apologizes for leaving, and Kristoff reassures her by saying "my love is not fragile" (Buck and Lee, 2019).

These examples describe how Kristoff, a male character, is shown expressing his deep love for Anna. In the media, mostly women are the ones shown sharing how they love a person and expressing affection, but not men. It is stereotypically shown that men hide their emotions instead of embracing or expressing them (Gillam and Wooden, 2008, p. 3). When male emotions are shown, the dominant emotion displayed is anger (Gillam and Wooden, 2008, p.4). Instead of being angry that Anna is always chasing after Elsa, Kristoff understands she needs to help her sister. He does not feel the need to take control and push Anna aside in what she wants to do, but takes a step back and asks how he can help her, not fix things for her. Usually, it is shown that whenever women have problems, men come to take over or try to save them from their problems, and not simply aid her in her solving it herself, such as how Kristoff did. Therefore, he acts in ways that are different from most men in the media.

Another important way that *Frozen II* separates itself from other Disney movies is its depiction of governmental decisions. In the beginning of the movie, Elsa is the queen of Arendelle, and Anna is the princess (Buck and Lee, 2019). Neither one of the women in power are villains, which is a typical role for a queen or older woman, such as the Evil Queen (Westland, 1993). Apart from that stereotype, these sisters each make life-altering governmental decisions for Arendelle and Northuldra (Buck and Lee, 2019). Elsa awakens the magical spirits of the Enchanted Forest; she listens to the voice calling her, and decides to find the truth of Arendelle and Northuldra's past, exposing King Runeard to Anna in the process. Anna receives this message, shares the information with Lieutenant Mattias, and gathers the attention of the Earth Giants, leading them to break down the dam in order to lift the mist of the Enchanted Forest (Buck and Lee, 2019).

Two leading female characters take charge and make large governmental decisions. The people of Arendelle and Northuldra are wary of these choices, and are not sure what will happen (Buck and Lee, 2019). Both sides are very concerned for their people, but Elsa and Anna make the decisions of what they think is best, even if not everyone is thrilled about it. They assert their capability even when the roads ahead of them are hard. Doing so, they both are able to save Arendelle and Northuldra by trusting themselves and trusting each other. The people are hesitant at first, but eventually trust what the women decide and help them with what they are trying to do (Buck and Lee, 2019). When it comes to positions of higher power, most times it is a man who holds the position (Baker-Sperry, 2007, p. 718). Here, not just one, but two women become queens (Buck and Lee, 2019). They make important and correct decisions about what to do for their respective kingdoms, thinking of everyone involved. Many women are taught to be submissive and to only follow orders, but in *Frozen II*, these women are making their own orders, and when others are unsure of their decisions, they do them anyway. They also take on dangerous journeys in fulfilling these decisions, which is also not typical for women's characters.

An interesting way the movie represents the townsfolk is how characters of Arendelle and characters of Northuldra show these changes of gender roles, norms, and representation. Within Arendelle, there were King Runeard and King Agnarr (Buck and Lee, 2019). King Runeard was aggressive and fearful. He was afraid the Northuldra would defy him because of their link to the magic of the Enchanted Forest, so he attacked the Northuldra leader. On the other hand, his son King Agnarr, was very gentle with his daughters and wife. When Elsa discovers what happened to her parents, Agnarr is shown holding their mother close, at the time

of their deaths, in an attempt to protect her rather than cause harm like his father (Buck and Lee, 2019). In this example, Agnarr is the more progressive male representation than his traditionally represented father because he shows a softer side. Another new concept for Disney is how even though King Runeard started the feud, there is no villain actively going against the two female protagonists in *Frozen II*. Continuing with Arendelle and the female leaders, there was also a shift in the kingdom's responses to the actions of Elsa and Anna. At first, everyone was apprehensive of the queen and princess, but also frightened by the magic disrupting the kingdom; they were worried about what was happening and were uncertain of what would happen (Buck and Lee, 2019). They could sense these were strong forces, and were hesitant of what the sisters were doing. Even Lieutenant Mattias was skeptical of Anna's decision to let the Earth Giants tear down the dam. However, their trust strengthened at the knowledge of what the sisters sacrificed in order to save the kingdoms. They then fully trusted what the women were doing and helped them to the best of their abilities (Buck and Lee, 2019). The growth of representation here lies within the people trusting females in charge instead of only trusting and listening to men. Within Northuldra, two female characters show very different characteristics. Honeymaren is a calm and soft-spoken woman (Buck and Lee, 2019). She is very kind towards Anna and Elsa, even sharing stories with the queen. Differently, Yelena is the head-strong leader of the Northuldra. She is very protective of her people and is cautious of newcomers. Even so, she still shows kindness such as when she offered Kristoff to come with the clan (Buck and Lee, 2019). Honeymaren is an example of a typical soft woman, but Yelana is more stern, breaking those stereotypical characteristics. Each division shows the evolution of representation Disney has produced in *Frozen II*.

Disney has reinforced typical feminine and masculine qualities into characters for years. These certain roles are taught to generations of children who these ideas stay with their entire lives. Instead of continuing to re-teach these same characteristics and qualities that lead to people believing they can only be a certain way, *Frozen II* has opened up different qualities for characters. Disney should continue to challenge traditional stereotypes. Male characters should show young boys and even older men that it is okay to show emotions and to be passionate. Female characters should be given more lead roles of action and adventure and of important decisions to show that women are more than housework or being a sidekick. Women are capable of being heard, standing up for what is right, and taking charge of difficult situations. While continuing with forward-representation, Disney should also include non-binary or genderfluid characters to bring more awareness and have more inclusivity.

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