

Essay

Frozen in Time: How Disney Gender-Stereotypes Its Most Powerful Princess

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Abstract: Disney's animated feature *Frozen* (2013) received acclaim for presenting a powerful heroine, Elsa, who is independent of men. Elsa's avoidance of male suitors, however, could be a result of her protective father's admonition not to "let them in" in order for her to be a "good girl." In addition, Elsa's power threatens emasculation of any potential suitor suggesting that power and romance are mutually exclusive. While some might consider a princess's focus on power to be refreshing, it is significant that the audience does not see a woman attaining a balance between exercising authority and a relationship. Instead, power is a substitute for romance. Furthermore, despite Elsa's seemingly triumphant liberation celebrated in *Let It Go*, selfless love rather than independence is the key to others' approval of her as queen. Regardless of the need for novel female characters, Elsa is just a variation on the archetypal power-hungry female villain whose lust for power replaces lust for any person, and who threatens the patriarchal status quo. The only twist is that she finds redemption through gender-stereotypical compassion.

Keywords: power; gender as social structure; Disney; Frozen; castration; emasculation; romance; masculinity; princess; Elsa; Anna

1. Introduction

In Disney's animated feature *Frozen* (Walt Disney Animation Studios 2013), sibling conflict and resolution take center stage, a novel strategy credited with the film's phenomenal success (Fritz 2015; Stewart 2014). The movie won acclaim for its absence of a male savior and its promotion of sisterly love rather than nuptial bliss. At first glance, the familial theme seems to be an antidote to the commonplace female preoccupation with marriage and other gender stereotyping found in Disney movies (Coyne et al. 2016; England et al. 2011; Henke et al. 1996; Do Rozario 2004). *Frozen* ostensibly departs from gender-circumscribed plots. A closer look at *Frozen*, however, reveals questions about whether its princesses do indeed provide an improved model for young girls coming of age. This essay departs in design from standard research studies and instead employs critical content analysis. It draws on the literature exploring gender stereotypes and patterns in Disney films to build on prior work challenging claims that Disney has created groundbreaking princesses (see authors' most recent work) (Dundes and Streiff 2016). In *Frozen*, Disney's first movie to feature two princesses, we analyze whether it matters that one sister, Anna, finds love while the other, Elsa, possesses power. Is it important to promote both?

There is undoubtedly merit in having an attractive, strong female character who is happy without a romantic relationship. After all, it is difficult to "have it all." However, Elsa's power appears to both substitute for romance and deter male suitors who risk emasculation in having a love interest who is powerful. Although the *femme castratrice* character has been applauded as a product of feminist politics

that subverts hegemonic masculinity (Kelly 2016; Creed 2003), a princess whose power emasculates and repels men also limits women's prospects by suggesting that power and heterosexual romance are mutually exclusive.

It is noteworthy that Elsa, despite her beauty, lacks any sexual tension with any male character. Her interactions with men are devoid of interest from either party. Regardless of speculation about her sexuality (Nikolas 2014), it is significant that a female character with power has a life without romance; in fact, the frost she exudes is consistent with this interpretation. While some might protest that the movie celebrates sisterly bonds, Elsa and Anna barely speak to each other as adults in the movie (only in a few conversations) and their relationship is dysfunctional. Furthermore, although *Frozen* culminates with sisterly love, it is not surprising that these two sisters would be able to reconcile as their goals are different and non-competing: power versus romance.

2. Basic Plot

The story, adapted from Hans Christian Andersen's *Snow Queen*, revolves around two sibling princesses and how they resolve misunderstandings and acrimony surrounding the magical powers of the eldest, Elsa, who proves ill equipped to handle her potentially lethal powers to freeze anything and anyone in the world around her. Unknown to her younger sister, Anna, the parents isolate a young Elsa to protect Anna and everyone else from Elsa's unwitting misuse of her powers. When the parents later die at sea and Elsa is crowned, she unintentionally drives the kingdom into perennial winter because she is incapable of managing her power. After Elsa flees in shame and fear, Anna then searches for Elsa, hoping to somehow figure out a way to both halt the never-ending winters and to reconcile with Elsa who has chastised Anna for her rash decision to become engaged to a suitor the same day they met. By the end, Elsa can control her power, Anna gains insight into true love, and the sisters make up.

3. Elsa as the Unanticipated Star

Much of the airtime is devoted to Anna's search for Elsa and Anna's romantic entanglements. Even though Anna was Disney's intended protagonist, Elsa's struggles clearly resonate, as her popularity exceeds that of her sister Anna (Byron and Ziobro 2014). Elsa has notable appeal partly because of her relative complexity (a change filmmakers added to her original status as a two-dimensional villain). She has been welcomed as a new brand of heroine, flawed but admirable. In the now-iconic song, *Let It Go*, Elsa seems to encourage self-acceptance, despite what others think. Her message is no doubt enhanced by her glitzy dress (more glamorous than anything Anna wears). In addition, her appeal also could relate to her magical powers, especially attractive to children who may feel oppressed by adult moral authority at school and at home (Wolfenstein 1978).

4. Postfeminist Struggles with Power and Romance

Both Anna and Elsa reflect a postfeminist, contradictory combination of attributes that both reinforce and challenge gender stereotypes. Although Elsa's struggles as an outsider make her appealing, her inability to control her emotions (especially fear and anger) reflects the risks of mixing power with female volatility. This flaw conforms to stereotypes of women as temperamental (Feder 2014; Plant et al. 2000; Schneider and Bos 2014) and even brings to mind the rage of Stephen King's *Carrie* who is set off by overpowering surges of emotion (Foundas 2013), characteristics incompatible with ruling. While Elsa struggles with her cryokinetic competence, Anna must learn how to navigate relationships with men, and which men she can trust.

According to an analysis by Rudloff, although Anna deviates from passive traits in her assertiveness and bravery, Disney does not ultimately abandon the hackneyed damsel in distress and male savior tropes (Rudloff 2016). This pattern is found in Anna's gender-conforming role in saving the day in a feat of sacrifice and love as well as the dramatic efforts of her suitor Kristoff to rescue her,

in which he gallops through a treacherous blizzard in accordance with an archetypal male hero role (Rudloff 2016).

Rudloff draws on postfeminism to bolster her claim that Disney fails to break new ground for princesses when Anna indulges in thoughts of how she will appear to a potential suitor at Elsa's coronation ball, as she sings about her hopes that a tall, attractive stranger will notice her, "gown and all" (Rudloff 2016). Rudloff argues that Anna's initial quirkiness abates over the course of the movie as she seeks male validation of her attractiveness (Rudloff 2016). The illusion of the power of being looked at, a tenet of postfeminism, echoes Cooley's looking glass self (Cooley 1902), the notion that we see ourselves as we think others see us, which would arguably detract from an individual's agency.

Rudloff also offers a caveat about what is probably the most compelling reason for *Frozen's* acclaim: altruistic sisterly love. Despite that the inclusion of this element is admittedly refreshing and meritorious, Rudloff suggests that the narrative is actually propelled by Anna's conventional heterosexual love interests (Rudloff 2016).

Regardless of what drives the story ahead, which in part depends on the orientation of the particular viewer, the narrative bifurcates with two parallel plots that emerge and then intersect only at the end. While one narrative is about agency and the other is about love, neither sister experiences *both* power and romance. Although the plot need not endow both sisters with magical powers, the sisters' limited level of complexity helps perpetuate gender stereotypes.

In the case of Elsa's lack of romance, it could be argued that it is a dispensable part of the story for her, regardless of her being older than her sister (and traditionally first to attend to romantic pursuits). But because Elsa is the Disney princess with the most notable power yet portrayed, the omission of romance begs the question of whether a formidable woman can be a desirable mate for a man. This topic is addressed in the film's opening scene.

5. Beware the Frozen Heart

5.1. Opening Scene

We are warned as the movie begins that a woman with power can be dangerous. As the film opens, the viewer has the perspective of someone underwater as a saw blade breaches the ice, headed right at the viewer. This is followed by the appearance of other ice harvesters' blades cutting through the ice. Viewers then see six macho men who rhythmically penetrate the ice with long saws and then extract the ice using pitchforks, also male symbols (see (Dundes and Dundes 2000) for symbolism of Triton's trident in Disney's *The Little Mermaid*).

This scene establishes early on that working with ice is an occupation requiring male brute force and one that is successfully carried out prior to Elsa assuming power. Viewers also are introduced to a very young Kristoff (one of Anna's future love interests). Kristoff tries to emulate the virile men around him, but with limited success in a task that clearly requires the strength of a grown man. The scene provides a telling contrast to life after Elsa gains power when the ensuing perennial winter undercuts the demand for the men's work as ice harvesters, exacerbating Elsa's unpopularity.

5.2. The Frozen Heart Song

As the men work, they sing a song entitled *The Frozen Heart* that encapsulates many of the story's themes surrounding a powerful beauty who rejects men. It is significant that men, specifically macho ice harvesters, are the singing narrators at this point: "This icy force both foul and fair has a frozen heart worth mining." Elsa is the "icy force" who is both "foul" (wicked) and "fair" (meaning either blonde or beautiful—or both). If her heart is frozen, she is neither capable of love nor sexually accessible. Yet despite these qualities, she is nevertheless a conquest that merits "mining" (penetration).

In the next stanza, the men boast about their plan of attack: "Cut through the heart, cold and clear. Strike for love and strike for fear." If Elsa's frozen heart leaves her uninterested in suitors, then cutting through the heart could make her more accessible. Yet there is ambivalence expressed in the need

to strike both for *love* and *fear*; she is an object of desire, but one who elicits fear (of rejection and castration), perhaps not unexpected given that she is an ice princess, a term connoting such traits.

“*See the beauty sharp and sheer*” references Elsa’s castle located atop a sheer cliff, where she defends herself with sharp icicles that threaten to impale invading males. The strategy for the men’s predicament, to “*Split the ice apart! And break the frozen heart,*” would allow a suitor to break Elsa’s resistance to becoming a sexual conquest. Yet Elsa is no easy mark: “*Beautiful! Powerful! Dangerous! Cold! Ice has a magic that can’t be controlled.*” Her strength is compared to that of men: “*Stronger than one, stronger than ten, stronger than a hundred men!*” Unlike the admiration a strong man would win, for a woman, great strength is a “danger” that brings “fear:” The song repeats the central message of ambivalence towards empowered women and expresses the need for the men to reassert their masculinity: “*Strike for love and strike for fear. There’s beauty and there’s danger here. Split the ice apart! Beware the frozen heart.*” Thus, the song serves as a warning for those drawn in by an ice princess—a beauty who threatens emasculation through rejection and threatened impalement.

6. The Origin of Elsa’s Inaccessibility to Male Suitors

Elements of the story provide a basis for Elsa’s lack of romantic pursuits, similar to other Disney movies where the father discourages or forbids suitors who threaten their daughter’s virginity. For example, in *The Little Mermaid*, a human poses a threat but not a merman who lacks genitals; in *Pocahontas*, the father comes close to executing John Smith, the love interest.

When Elsa’s father, the king, takes her to see a troll who might be able to advise him about Elsa’s burgeoning power, the king promises to “protect” his daughter, even though it is ostensibly others she might injure who need protection. Although his attempt to exercise patriarchal control over Elsa’s body is not surprising within the context of his parental role (Crosby 2016), the king’s solution, to cover Elsa’s hands, may seem arbitrary and illogical. A person wielding power like Elsa’s seemingly would not be disempowered by such a tactic. Yet we can speculate about the possible meaning behind this element of the story that undoubtedly operates at an unconscious level (according to Freudian psychology, such as with Freudian slips) (Freud 1920).

We surmise that this plot element reflects a persistent societal double standard regarding women’s sexuality. Males are applauded for sexual prowess; in fact, kings are sometimes addressed as sire, a word that in its verb form means to procreate. It is not an accident that sire is a term of respect for high status males, but not females. Similarly, suitors by definition are males, since males are permitted and even encouraged to be romantically assertive. Suitors traditionally have asked a father for his daughter’s “hand” in marriage. This is a tradition practiced only by males just as only women wear engagement rings on their hands, signaling that their “hand” in marriage (that is, virginity) has already been promised to a man.

Within this context, the king safeguards Elsa’s honor by covering her hands with gloves, urging her to, “Conceal it. Don’t feel it” (9:02–03). This conflates power with sexuality, including how women’s value traditionally depended on their virginity at marriage (bringing to mind the preoccupation with the virginity of Lady Diana Spencer prior to her 1981 marriage to Prince Charles of England) (Faulkner 1997). Elsa’s father insists that Elsa will “learn” to control her power. Yet Elsa never has the chance to learn anything about her power or sexuality. Instead, we suggest that the subtext of her father’s commands is that Elsa must not expose her sexuality to others (now *concealed* metaphorically with the gloves) and that she should repress (avoid *feeling*) any awakening sexual interests. This brings to mind some fathers’ resistance to future sexual activity of “daddy’s little girl.”

Wearing the gloves, however, is not enough. The king orders his staff to lock the gates and limit Elsa’s contact with people. It is not a coincidence that these orders are mandated by her father, and not her mother. Insulating Elsa, however, turns out to extend to any physical contact with her father, the only significant male figure in her life. When Elsa confesses her fear to her parents that her powers are getting stronger, the king tries to comfort her with a hug. She rebuffs his attempt to provide physical comfort, crying out: “No! Don’t touch me! Please, I don’t want to hurt you” (9:33–44). Her final

moments with her parents contrast with Anna who embraces both of her parents while Elsa, clearly apprehensive, formally curtsies, and urges them not to go. The parents die at sea, before the king has the chance to sanction his daughter's sexual liberation or help her resolve her Electra Complex (echoing problems stemming from parental death in *The Lion King* (Dundes and Dundes 2006)).

Elsa carries the weight of her father's protective policies. Prior to her coronation, Elsa sings: "Don't let them in. Don't let them see." Then as she looks up at a portrait of her father at his coronation, she sings, "Be the good girl you always have to be" (15:41–48). The word "girl" emphasizes a lack of maturity and sexual readiness. As she continues to meet his gaze in the portrait, she adds, "Conceal. Don't feel." (15:51–53). She later reiterates the main message: "Don't let them in" (16:19). If Elsa's being a "good girl" had to do just with controlling her power, the repeated phrase, "Don't let them in" would not make sense. But if she is trying to fulfill her father's mandate that he never had the opportunity to lift, then this phrase could indicate that she should remain a virgin and stave off suitors. When later Elsa moves forward with the coronation, she hesitates when she sings, "Tell the guards to open up [pause] the gate." This is because by opening the gates, she becomes sexually vulnerable (as doors and gates are symbols of the vagina (Blackledge 2009; Rogers 1978)). The door symbolism is more obvious in the preceding song, "Love is an Open Door" at the end of which Anna agrees to marry a suitor (Hans) the same day they meet. Throughout the movie, we see Anna opening doors and Elsa closing them (most famously, at the end of the song *Let It Go*).

7. Frost Counteracts Sexual Interests

Elsa's downfall begins during the coronation ceremony that has the feel of a church wedding, but where she is pronounced queen, linking her to her powerful position rather than a spouse. Elsa stands at an altar, nervously eyeing the royal scepter and orb on a pillow that resembles the type where rings rest during a wedding ceremony.

When Elsa doffs the gloves that her father instructed her to wear, her bare hands symbolize her vulnerability and loss of her father's protective shield. As Elsa grasps with her bare hands the phallic royal scepter and the testicle-like orb, she exudes a surge of frost (similar to what occurs earlier when she practices with similarly shaped objects, a candlestick and an ornamental box). If handling these implements is indicative of the potential for interest in men, with sexual interest being associated with heat (as in being "hot" for someone), then being cold, or rather freezing, shuts down such interest.

8. How Elsa Maintains Obedience to Her Father and Keeps Male Suitors at Bay

To deter any would-be suitors, Elsa must be able to feminize them, which entails taking on phallic, masculine characteristics revealed by aspects of her physical appearance and her creations. For example, she has a single, phallic braid. In addition, her tiara has phallic points, much more so than a standard tiara. The snowflakes that adorn her castle have a design that deviates from the standard shape in that the spokes of the snowflake are pointed, capable of impalement, or at least connoting a threat of harm.

Elsa's creations also signal her departure from traditional femininity. Her castle is made of ice (possibly connoting sexual frigidity, at least in terms of her interest in and to men). Like her tiara, her castle contains not just towers, but a menacing, possibly phallic projection, reminiscent of a tall church spire (see (Law 2014, p. 23) for a picture of her castle as Disney declined to permit our use of their copyrighted images). Elsa also creates snowmen who are extensions of her character and who are both male and produced without the need for a male partner.

In perhaps the most blatant manifestation of Elsa as a castrating female, when she fends off villains, she conjures phallic icicles that dramatically threaten to impale her male adversaries. The first instance occurs during her coronation and features the threat her icicles pose to her male adversaries who are clearly taken aback by the peril.

Later, her impalements become more dangerous when she is threatened. After henchmen breach her castle defenses, one of them attempts to shoot her with an arrow from his crossbow. Her magical

powers come into play when she is able to produce a large icicle that rises up from the floor and protects her from the arrow, fending off penetration. She then retaliates many times over with a dramatic multi-spiked icicle attack that threatens but does not attain impalement of one of the assailants. Her failure to penetrate her foes could be to prevent gore frowned upon in a children's film, but it also could be because women are sexually incapable of actual impalement. Elsa may be a castrating woman, but she is still a woman.

Echoing her role as a castrating female is her accomplice, Marshmallow, who has spikes and shards all over his body. Marshmallow's most intimidating trait is his cavernous mouth symbolizing a *vagina dentata* (Gohr 2013) that is similar to the lair of Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* (see (Dundes and Dundes 2000)). Just as visitors to Ursula's cave must swim through the toothed maw at its entrance, a *vagina dentata* that presents a threat of male castration, so those seeking to enter Elsa's castle must face Marshmallow. Of note, it is only when the villains attack Marshmallow with penetrating weapons like spears, swords and crossbows that Marshmallow's teeth appear.

Earlier when chasing away Anna and her crew, Marshmallow does not show his teeth. It occurs only when an all-male group of attackers try to enter the castle. Later, after all of the credits of the movie roll, Marshmallow is feminized and loses his role as a *castrating* extension of Elsa. The scene shows a teeth-baring Marshmallow donning a little crown that Elsa had cast off earlier in the movie. After placing the crown on his head, Marshmallow, now feminized, then retracts his teeth and other spikes.

Elsa's undesirability and inaccessibility to men despite her beauty and glamour is also expressed without subtlety by the villain Hans when he explains why he had pursued Anna:

"As thirteenth in line in my own kingdom, I didn't stand a chance. I knew I would have to marry into the throne somewhere . . . As heir, Elsa was preferable, of course. *But no one was getting anywhere with her*" (emphasis added) (*Frozen* 1:15:57–1:16:11).

Although Elsa is beautiful, her master status is as castrating, as Hans correctly surmises before he is dramatically emasculated at the end of the movie. While it is contact with Anna's hand that shatters Hans' sword in symbolic castration, Anna is the conduit for Elsa's powers that ultimately render Hans impotent. The scene is retribution for the very dramatic earlier attempt by Hans to feminize Elsa when he causes the snowflake chandelier in Elsa's ice castle to drop, almost impaling her. Hans' comeuppance is the failure to gain actual or symbolic penetration of either sister, culminating in the loss of his sword. The devastation of emasculation suffices for the male villain, without him suffering another type of sensational retribution.

While some might opine that Disney had no intention of portraying Elsa as a castrating female, skeptics need look no further than the well-known scene in which Olaf the snowman is impaled. When Anna, her companion (and love interest) Kristoff, and Olaf start talking about Elsa, they are walking through a sort of snow cave with menacing phallic projections (a *vagina dentata*).

At the moment when Kristoff asks if Anna is afraid of her sister, he narrowly escapes being impaled. Anna replies with a shrug, "Why would I be?" because she is not only Elsa's sister, but also a female who does not risk emasculation by impalement. Olaf is then impaled by an icicle, just as he is ironically speculating that Elsa is "the nicest, gentlest, warmest person ever." To clinch Elsa's ability to feminize males, he even subsequently comments, "Oh, look at that. I've been impaled" (*Frozen*, 51:11–14).

Additional reinforcement occurs when a split second later, Olaf's impalement is superimposed onto a scene with the three walking wherein the icicle that impales Olaf also threatens to impale Kristoff. Although most viewers likely overlook this quickly-passing frame of the movie, it reveals Elsa's ever-present threat of emasculation.

Olaf accepts being feminized with good humor because impalement is most threatening to masculine characters. Olaf demonstrates traits more associated with females, such as envisioning himself luxuriating on a beach with a mixed drink, using an aluminum foil reflector (see (Law 2014, p. 24) for picture). He introduces himself saying, "I'm Olaf and I like warm hugs" (*Frozen* 46:31). At

one point, his body gets separated after he, along with Kristoff and Anna, fall off a cliff into a snow bank. Olaf then taunts the traditionally masculine Kristoff and his reindeer Sven who boasts antlers complementing Kristoff's masculinity: "Hey, do me a favor and grab my butt." Olaf goads him further, saying to Sven, "Who's my cute little reindeer?," prompting Kristoff's rebuke, "Don't talk to him like that."

When Anna worries that Kristoff has hurt his head in the fall, he reassures her saying, "I've got a thick skull." Olaf then interjects, "I don't have a skull...or bones" (*Frozen*, 1:01:08–19). This interjection reinforces his status as a feminized male who lacks a "bone" or the ability "to bone." Olaf's carrot nose serves as a substitute phallus as its length is a source of concern that would not likely resonate for a female snowman. His effeminate qualities underscore Kristoff's masculinity and suitability as an appropriately masculine love interest for Anna.

9. *Let It Go*: Power Versus Romance

In the popular song *Let It Go*, Elsa changes magically into a more sexual outfit and sings, "That perfect girl is gone" and "No rules for me" now that she's "free." Her transformation into a *risqué* dress exemplifies a glamorous makeover (Macaluso 2016) that reflects how postfeminism gives women the prerogative to aspire to anachronistic beauty standards (McRobbie 2004; Tasker and Negra 2007) conflating feminism with femininity and sex appeal (Munford and Waters 2014). Although the song appears to be a call to ignore others' expectations, judgments and rules (including how to dress), this purported lesson occurs in the middle of the movie and fails to carry over to the conclusion when Elsa resumes her role as queen, accountable to others.

Most readings of this scene, however, overlook the moment when Elsa angrily flings her glove into the wind (32:01–04), rejecting her father's admonition to "Be the good girl you always have to be." In a metaphorical sense, "the gloves are now off;" there is no holding back on either her sexuality or power (although at this point in the movie, it is not yet clear that she cannot have both power and a love interest). As she takes ownership of her power, a male-associated trait, she shoots out sperm-like flurries from her gloveless finger, as her single phallic braid sways in the background (see (Law 2014), picture on cover page). Instead of entertaining thoughts of matrimony, she embraces her power, traditionally the domain of men. In other words, Elsa experiences sexual liberation but with (somewhat phallicentric) power as a surrogate for male companionship. Despite her glamorous and sexually provocative postfeminist display, Elsa's fulfillment at this point seems to be in wielding power, sharing the company only of her castrating snowman guard Marshmallow.

Another reason that Elsa has power but not love is that a heroine who is more powerful than her love interest emasculates him, making him seem passive and undesirable. In any case, for women, power is apparently so all-encompassing that it leaves no room for romance (which is also the conventional precursor to procreation). In the absence of seeing power as a substitute for romance, there has been speculation that Elsa might be gay.

10. External Validation as Feminine Trait

Elsa reinforces Anna's lack of power when Anna fails to respond to her questions: "What power do you have to stop this winter? To stop me?" (*Frozen*, 58:03–06). In fact, Anna shows no interest in power nor ever seems even slightly envious of her sister's powers. Shortly after this dramatic, rancorous exchange with her sister, Anna expresses concern about what others think of her looks when she asks Kristoff about her hair that is turning white as a result of Elsa's spell. Despite the spell's potentially lethal outcome, she asks Kristoff, "Does [my hair] look bad?" an expression of the need for others' validation of her looks (*Frozen* 1:02:06). Elsa, however, shares this traditionally feminine need for external validation, despite proclaiming otherwise in the song *Let It Go*.

When Elsa fails to fight off the villain Hans in her castle, her downfall is due to vulnerability to him saying, "Don't be the monster they fear you are." At this moment, Elsa looks distinctly troubled, revealing that she actually cares what other people think. The value of her superpowers is lost in the

face of societal rejection and the need for external validation that proves too hard for her to ignore. It is at this moment of self-doubt that Hans knocks her out with her own creation, her snowflake chandelier. This is a reminder that her most challenging struggles are self-imposed.

11. Reinforcing Gender Roles

Consistent with Elsa's emotional volatility, *Frozen* has been suggested as a means to teach children the merits of impulse control. "Elsa restraining her impulse can be an efficacious learning point for the child" (Beckmann 2014) even though her lack of impulse control is also the only way she exhibits her powers (until the movie's conclusion). In other words, Elsa's triumph as a queen is learning to control her emotions that spur her cryokinesis. This suggests that when powerful women need training, it is not to develop their abilities but rather to avoid abusing their power.

Elsa finally properly controls her power when she truly understands the importance of love and compassion as she cries over the feared loss of her sister, apparently modeling the proper (female) way to wield power. She must combine compassion with her power in order to properly rule while for males, compassion (and crying in particular) suggests weakness and is certainly not a pre-requisite for earning respect as a leader.

Beyond reinforcing the need for female compassion, *Frozen* glorifies female sacrifice. The take-home message is clearly articulated when at the end, Elsa says, "You sacrificed yourself for me?" (*Frozen* 1:27:36–37). Viewers would not expect to see this theme promoted for men because it is women who are supposed to put others' needs before their own (also a theme of Disney's *Pocahontas* (Dundes 2001)). The notion that true love is equivalent to self-sacrifice shows that this attribute is still promoted as a key virtue for women, one that promotes female subordination (Rowe 1979).

In addition, the movie veers from the message in *Let It Go*, where Elsa is empowered by freeing herself from parental and societal expectations to a message that being accepted and liked is ultimately what is fulfilling. According to one review of the film:

"It is not until her power is exposed and she runs away that she finds beauty in herself and her power. Her journey to self-acceptance, and then acceptance by her sister and her people, is a powerful and much-needed narrative for today's young people" (Luttrell 2014).

Although the above reviewer emphasizes acceptance for young people in general, acceptance by others is actually demanded only of women while male mavericks are valorized. While teaching that acceptance through altruism is positive, when it is a main message conveyed by a powerful female character, it shows the intransigence of societal expectations about women's role in society.

12. Conclusions

On the surface, *Frozen* is a feel-good movie about self-discovery, imperfection and getting along with others. Yet Elsa's seemingly triumphant liberation celebrated in *Let It Go* is only a passing moment; she does not remain in her ice castle and returns to eventually unlock the secret of controlling her power—compassion. Presumably, Elsa can now attend to ruling the kingdom.

While some might consider a princess focusing on power to be refreshing, it is significant that the audience does not see a powerful woman model a balance between exercising authority and a relationship. Instead, female power is all encompassing and a substitute for romance. While it is indeed difficult to balance power and romance (as well as family), men are allowed to have both without question. It is not a dilemma for them, but rather seen as a norm that poses challenges that are a natural and expected part of life.

There is another reason that Elsa cannot have a prince so long as she remains not just a princess or queen, but one with tremendous power: a prince that wields less power than his wife is emasculated and therefore unappealing. A prince sharing power would detract from Elsa's appeal as a powerful woman who makes her own decisions, albeit under pressure to be validated by others.

Despite the need for novel roles for female characters, Elsa is just a variation on the archetypal power-hungry female villain whose lust for power replaces lust for a mate and who threatens the patriarchal status quo. The only twist is that she finds redemption through gender-stereotypical compassion.

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