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Stories They Tell: Examples of Conceptualizing Gender in Children's

Interaction with Animated Films

Diplomová práce

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Zadávající katedra:	**Katedra sociální a kulturní antropologie**

Zásady pro vypracování

Filmový průmysl, a zvláště animovaná produkce amerických filmových studii začal v posledních letech usilovat o přiblíženi se některým feministickým ideálům. Cílem tohoto výzkumu je zhodnotit, zda je tato skutečnost vnímána samotnými dětmi, a to skrze srovnáni filmu na základě jejich sledováni a následných reflexivních aktivit. Jádrem výzkumu je otázka, jak diváci nizšiho a vyššiho školniho věku reaguji na předobrazy silných, nezávislých hrdinek a další rozvolňováni genderových roli ve filmu Výzkum je ukotven ve feministické teorii konstrukce genderu. Výzkum je dále podpořen teorii filmové interpretace, doplněnou perspektivou sémiotické analýzy, kterou zastupují např. Kress a Leeuwen. Úmyslem autora je zhodnotit schopnost dětí reflektovat nad definicemi sociálních a genderových rolí a zhodnotit jejich návaznost na obraz těla. Výzkumnou skupinou budou děti nizšiho školního věku od 8 do 12 let. Při výzkumu budou využity kreativní aktivity jako kreslení a hra, tyto aktivity budou doplňovat a rozšiřovat tradiční rozhovor. Aktivity mají za úkol identifikovat aspekty filmu, které jsou pro účastniky výzkumu zásadní a nabídnout možnost kreativního vyjádřeni k tématu výzkumu. Výstupem je obrazová dokumentace, která bude doplňovat závěry z rozhovorů.

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V Pardubicích dne 30. listopadu 2020

Prohlašuji:

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V Hradci Králové dne 29. 11. 2022

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And to my parents who listened to my stories when I was a child.

ANNOTATION

The aim of this research is to map some of the ways in which children respond and reflect on gender stereotypes in animated films. The research is based on the theoretical foundation of cultural anthropology and semiotics. It represents children's views in the form of interviews and drawings made by children during research sessions.

KEYWORDS

Animated film, gender, gender stereotypes, anthropology of children, childhood studies, semiotics of film and media, Disney

NÁZEV

Příběhy jejich očima: Příklady chápání genderu v dětské interakci s animovanými filmy.

ANOTACE

Cílem tohoto výzkumu je zmapovat některé ze způsobů jakým způsobem děti reagují a reflektují nad genderovými stereotypy v animovaných filmech. Práce staví na teoretickém základu z oblasti antropologie a sémiotiky. Dětská perspektiva je zprostředkována pomocí přepisu rozhovorů a kreseb, které děti vytvořily během výzkumných setkání.

KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA

Animovaný film, gender, generové stereotypy, antropologie dětství, sémiotika filmu a médií, Disney

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INTRODUCTION

Modern research in the fields of gender and media studies suggest that the ideas of feminism are finding their way into the mainstream film production for children. Animated films by studios such as Disney or Pixar have been introducing a number of female lead roles and adjusting the character design according to the modern perception of gender roles. This is important, as according to various cultivation theories such as the Social Cognitive Theory (Bussey 1999), or the Identity Theory (Hogg 1995: 256-259), the models encountered within one's environment help shape children's ideas about gender. If we aim to eliminate gender inequality, we need to remain critical towards the way that gender is constructed in the media representations including animated films. However, in majority of cases, where gender in film is discussed or theorized, it is done so from the adult perspective. Little attention is given to the actual responses of the children as the target audience of these films.

This is where anthropology can contribute to this topic by looking at how children respond to cultural images, how they understand them and use them in their own creative expression. The present work aims to explore the issues of gender as perceived and understood by children audience, on the example of animated feature films. I employ an approach and method which position the work within the domain of visual anthropology. In the next section, I briefly elaborate as to why I believe the present work fits this category. The research attempts to mediate the perspective of children and therefore it presents specific methodological challenges. I bring in several theoretical perspectives on this problem in the second section. The work is centered about the concept of gender. I am interested in a pragmatic use of this concept, however, as I show, this does not reduce its complexity. In section three, I argue for three different aspects of gender which relate to the methodology of this research. Section four briefly introduces the defining characteristics of animation relevant for researching gender. In section five, I provide a comprehensive introduction into the academic writings on animated films for children. In the next section, I discuss the problem of understanding, I argue that there is a creative aspect in the process of making meaning. Therefore, I do not suggest that cultural resources such as films impart a particular view of gender to their audiences. Instead, the view of this work is that children make use of these resources, sometimes creatively, other times re-creatively. The following sections deal with specific issues relating to the methodology and the field research.

The study provides a range of examples in which children creatively construct meanings in the context of drawing, talking, or play. The study maps different situations, focusing on the motivating interest behind their creative decisions, rules of play they create, and features of the visual representations they provide. It is driven by the following research question:

RQ: In what ways do children read, adopt, and emulate representations of gender in animated film?

The observations are presented as examples which may help inform the understanding of the children's reception of films and other media. On the following pages, I provide an overview of the theory relating to gender in animated film, and explore theoretical grounding for researching meaning making, and representing children's voices.

1 ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE VISUAL

Although this research does not engage with visual ethnography and provides only a limited amount of visual material, I hold that it makes a contribution to visual anthropology. In one of his essays, David MacDougall makes a distinction between visual anthropology and the anthropology of the visual. He suggests that the anthropology of the visual is done by focusing one's attention to the visual elements of our culture (for instance, films). The true visual anthropology approaches its topic with attention to the visuality of its medium (MacDougall 1998: 178-196). The difference is marked by focusing on the integrity of the visual material attained or produced in the research, as opposed to, as Taylor puts it in his introduction to MacDougall, "reducing images to their paralinguistic or propositional properties" (Taylor 1998: 15). While MacDougall's distinction is evident and justifiable, I believe that it does not need to remain restricted to the case of the film medium.

Children's drawings constituted one of the key materials for this work's analysis. The drawings display Taylor's paralinguistic and propositional properties. However, they also constitute visual documents in their own right. They are the direct outcome of the informant's visual thinking. Indeed, when described as the anthropology of visual thinking, this research seems to position itself somewhere in between MacDougall's categories. I believe that by comparing the visual expression with the verbal reflection, one can better appreciate the characteristics of different modes of thinking. This seems very relevant in the case of gender which, as I show below, extends over a multiple domain, including the visual.

2 CHILDREN'S VIEW MEDIATED

By its choice of informants, this research situates itself in the domain of anthropology of children. This, however, does not mean that the findings of the research are relevant only within this field or, say, for the field of childhood studies. In fact, one of the aims of this work is to suggest that the analysis and critique of films for young audiences, should take in consideration the different levels of understanding and sensibility of those who view these films.

As for the difference in children's understanding of films, I do not suggest that it is necessarily limited in comparison to that of the adults. I draw on Kress and Leeuwen, who suggest that what sets children's understanding apart, is that it is affected by social conventions of meaning making.

> "We have used children's drawings as our example because we believe that the production of signs by children provides the best model for thinking about sign-making. It applies also to fully socialized and acculturated humans, with the exception of the effects of 'convention'. As mature members of a culture we have available the culturally produced semiotic resources of our societies, and are aware of the conventions and constraints which are socially imposed on our making of signs. However, as we have suggested, in our approach adult sign-makers, too, are guided by interest, by that complex condensation of cultural and social histories and of awareness of present contingencies." (Kress 2021: 12)

This view holds that the meaning making practices of adults and children are essentially identical. The difference is caused mainly by the number of semiotic resources – in other words the knowledge of things in the world – and the influence of meaning-making conventions which we learn through life. This suggests that by examining the differences within these categories we can find out more about their impact on our thinking about culture, both visual and non-visual.

3   GENDER IN PRACTICE

In this section, I discuss gender as the key topic of my work. The term as used here borrows from several theoretical approaches. In each part, I attempt to highlight one of the relevant aspects of gender which is later used to construct the methodology of research. These aspects are 1) conceptual gender categories providing way of classifying things in the world, 2) definition of one's gender role actualized in social interactions, 3) embodiment of gender in people's bodies including visual and aural representations.

3.1   Gender categories

On the most general level, gender has been used to create large general categories of male and female in order to group a majority of cultural items in them. This structuralist view that culture can be classified in binary categories such as male and female has been picked up by many theorists. Sherry Ortner addresses this problem with her essay *Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?* suggesting that males' higher status across the majority of cultures can be caused partly by their occupation being associated with creating culture, while females' role has been, traditionally, the reproduction of life (Ortner 1972: 76-80). The habit of categorizing things as male and female does seem to be very much alive in our visual thinking. A common view is, for instance, that rounded and horizontal shapes are feminine while angular and vertical shapes are masculine. "Soft" lighting in film and photography is reserved for women, while "hard" light is only seen as suitable for men. The examples are many.

When studying how gender is approached by young people, the assumption is that they find themselves in the process of learning gender. The process of gender enculturation was explored by Sandra Bem in her articles on Gender Shema Theory (Bem 1983). Bem holds, that the formation of child's gender identity is based on the system of dualistic schema of male and female categories. Bem claims that almost anything that we think of can be gender-coded and we learn to categorize things in this way as we grow older. Each child develops a readiness "to encode and to organize information – including information about the self – according to the culture's definitions of maleness and femaleness" (Bem 1983: 603). Bem puts forward an important idea that during our childhood we develop the tendency to gender-code the resources

we have available in our culture. In practice this can amount to, for instance, dividing films to "boy films" and "girl films".

This research addresses this aspect of gender by giving children the option to classify selected films according to gender categories or opt out of this classification. The reasons for this choice are then discussed. This approach aims to provide clues on how children think about gender in conceptual and categorical terms.

3.2   Gender roles

Simone de Beauvoir famously suggested that gender is a particular kind of situation (Beauvoir 1967). This situation is understood in terms of the effects and repercussions of one's actions. Beauvoir's view allows for individualistic approach to gender despite recognizing the limiting factors that are maintained in the society through culture. Beauvoir's view suggests that one can live their gender in the way one decides, although not all those ways are equally accessible.

Beauvoir's view signals the idea that there are expectations in the society as to one's role and actions according to gender. This notion expands into narratives, including fictional narratives such as literature and film. Granted, the particularities of the story plots can variate or subvert these gender expectations, however, those processes only confirm the existence of the stereotypes as the origin point of the efforts.

The present research attempts to address this aspect of gender by letting children play out imaginary scenarios between selected characters. The interaction between the characters can give us clues as to what kind of relationship children expect based on the character's appearance or gender.

3.3   Gender and body

Many gender stereotypes tie particular social roles and psychological dispositions to the image of the body. One of the main functions of the term gender is to detach the principles discussed above from the category of biological sex. Nevertheless, gender categories are still very effective for coding appearance. Arguments by Judith Butler suggest that our appearance and bodies are being continuously shaped and defined, often according to the abstract images shared in culture. It is reasonable to assume that films help shape this abstract image of gender properties due to their mass distribution and emotive effect.

The issue of representation is explored by Judith Butler in her theory of body image construction. Butler holds that, similarly to our gender, our bodies too are a result of the process of social construction (Butler 1988: 519). She suggests that different features of the body are subject to gender-based conventions. Furthermore, people consciously act in choosing and developing a particular body image. This can be done simply by altering one's clothing, hairstyle, or makeup, but also by means of exercise or diet, which targets the shape of the body, or by adopting or practicing a particular body language and gestures. Butler highlights the responsibility of each individual for participating in the creation of the gendered body image by performing their own gender in public.

In relation to body language and gestures, it is worth mentioning the work of Iris Marion Young. Young claims that female presence in space differs from the male (Young 1980: 142-144). Men are more likely to take up a large amount of space with their postures and gestures, for example, with the way they sit or stand. I argue that some children in this research seemed to be recreating this difference in their drawings or heroes and princesses.

One can add to Butler's view the fact that we encounter a large number of gender performances in media. Film has been the most long-standing example of this trend. Movie stars represent images of gender rigorously selected and crafted often with the sole intention of becoming popular and imitated. Since film is an outcome of a creative process, its authors control the way it represents its fictional reality. Therefore, the implied meaning of that representation becomes the responsibility of those who participate in the cycle of production. Additionally, the production process is regulated by the demand of the audience (Petráň 2011: 196-209) and to some degree also by the critical reception. This research is partly motivated by inquiry about what kind of gender images are offered in culture and how they are received.

In the present research, I explore this issue by focusing on visual recreation of certain character-body types. Children were asked to draw images of princesses and heroes to assess what kind of visual clues they respond to in character design and how that relates to the idea of gender roles.

3.4 Gender identity

Aside from the concepts sketched above, gender remains to a large degree a matter of personal identity. This is a dimension which I do not wish to cover extensively in this research, although it is inevitably touched upon during the interviews. I do not make claims about how children developed their views or why they hold them, and I do not attempt to analyze their personalities beyond direct observations. The relation of this research to identity is that it looks at cultural material which contributes to the formation of that identity. It does so by using a selected sample of culture which is animated film for young audiences. In the next section I explain the motivations behind this decision.

4   ANIMATION AN GENDER

As I shown in the previous section, the issue of representation of gender is closely tied with the image of the body. A significant feature of animation is that it offers nearly unlimited freedom to manipulate the appearance of the characters. Furthermore, we often see conventional ways of visual stylization being tied to specific roles and personalities in the film. This provides fertile grounds for researching yet another aspect of gender construction which is the relationship between appearance and personality.

4.1   Characteristics of the medium

In animation, the possibilities of representing characters are almost without limits. It regularly features characters of alien forms, as well as objects brought to life. This has important implications for the medium. For instance, Ursula Heise suggests that the bodies of animated animal characters represented in various degrees of plasticity can be efficient vehicles for carrying environmentalist views (Heise 2014: 316). In human characters, one can often see radical modifications of real-world anatomy. These modifications are often guided by gender-based conventions. A historical tendency is to present unnaturally slender female bodies and overly muscular male bodies[1]. Klein and Shiffman provide quantitative research of animated cartoons up to mid 1990's showing that "[o]verweight characters were nearly three times as likely as others to be shown as unattractive whereas thin/underweight characters were nearly twice as likely as others to be depicted as above-average in attractiveness" (Klein, Shiffman 2006: 361). Moreover, the authors show an association between beautiful characters and prosocial, desired behavior. The association of appearance and personality is another key feature of animation which makes it a great tool to research gender stereotypes.

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[1] This view is further discussed by Rebecca Rowe in her essay *Shaping Girls: Analyzing Animated Female Body Shapes.* She concludes that there is in fact a wide variety of basic shapes used to represent female figures. These shapes depend on the age of the represented character and the frequency of using particular shapes changes over time. She gives an example of young girls who usually display a Rectangle body shape, instead of the traditional Hourglass body shape used for Young-Adult characters (Rowe 2019).

4.2 Body and soul

Animators use stylization, simplification, and exaggeration to convey character's personality through their appearance (Feng, O'Halloran 2012). The association of personalities with body types is often based on a visual grammar which, as was discussed earlier, is often gender coded. For instance, round 'feminine' shapes are softer, happier, and friendlier than angular 'masculine' shapes. A great example can be drawn from the character design in the film *Inside Out*, where each character represents a specific emotion (Figure 1). Common types emerge on basis of these conventions. For instance, there are many examples of a muscular male character with a "V" shaped torso and low voice (Buzz Lightyear from *Toy Story*, Weaver from *Antz*, Maui from *Moana*). These features imply physical strength and sometimes a lower degree of intelligence. The psychological effect of visual and aural elements of the character design is used as a tool to create expectations about their psychology.

Figure 1: Characters from the film Inside Out
Source: Pinterest

Clearly, the close connection between appearance and personality can produce unwanted stereotypes. For example, princesses tend to embody a "thin-ideal" having unrealistically slender body and limbs (Coyne 2016: 1911). More importantly, this feature is recognized by children as socially desirable, rewarding and even virtuous. Lori Baker-Sperry shows that girls at age 6 not only identify beauty as one of Cinderella's key characteristics, but also express jealousy and a desire to achieve a similar type of beauty (Baker-Sperry 2007: 722). Doris Bazzini presented quantitative research in support of the fact that beauty is generally associated with kindness and moral virtue (Bazzini 2010: 2697). Other studies suggest that obesity is often associated with antisocial or evil characters (Towbin 2004: 30). Finally, Li-Volmer and La Pointe show that Disney's villains are often characterized by gender transgression in their bodily features. Males are characterized by slender figure, eye shadows resembling make-up, and subtle restricted and

fluid movement. Female villains of this kind are best represented by Ursula from *The Little Mermaid* with her corpulent figure and double chin, resembling a popular transgender actor Divine (Li-Vollmer 2003: 97-106). As the research shows, the body-personality typification can lead to stereotyping despite it originating from the freedom of visual artistic expression.

Animation makes for an interesting material for the study of gender. The present research focuses on the relationship between typified body image, the personality of the character, and the roles that characters play within the film's narrative. It aims to provide some insight into how this relationship is understood by the child viewers.

5 ACADEMIC LITERATURE AND DISNEY

Although most academic research on animated films does not engage with children's perspective, it can still provide valuable context for grounding the present work. In this section I summarize several studies both qualitative and quantitative, to identify trends in contemporary animated film and media production. The research mainly focuses on U.S. based production and often that of large animation studios Disney and Pixar.

5.1 Quantitative representation

Several studies suggest that animated films have historically presented stereotypical and imbalanced portrayals of men and women. Some researchers conduct quantitative analysis of films and TV programs to address the ratio between male and female characters. For instance, Shumaila Ahmed and Juliana Abdul Wahab evaluated a sample of TV cartoons broadcast on Cartoon Network, concluding that there are about twice as many male characters than the female (Ahmed, Wahab 2014: 47-52). Keisha Hoerrner conducted similar type of research for Disney feature films starting with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarve*s (1937) and finishing with *Lion King* (1994). She arrives at similar gender ratio to Ahmed and Wahab, saying that "14 out of the 22 characters identified as either the central hero or villain were male" (Hoerrner 2015: 221). She also suggests that "Disney movies depict women as less physically aggressive and more prosocial than males" (Hoerrner 2015: 220). Female characters are often portrayed as passive and kind and often take the role of housewives, mothers, or cooks.

5.2 Balancing personalities

Another type of research deals with the characters' traits and properties. Dawn England conducted a thorough study of Disney films in order to assess the behavior displayed by Disney princes and princesses. She compares the films in three chronologically ordered groups starting with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* and finishing with *The Princess and the Frog*. In order to code the character's behavior, she uses categories of masculine and feminine characteristics, which should represent models commonly accepted within the culture. England suggests the following schema:

Masculine characteristics – curious about princess, wants to explore, physically strong, assertive, unemotional, independent, athletic, engaging in intellectual activity, inspires fear, brave, described as physically attractive (masculine), gives advice, leader.

Feminine characteristics – tends to physical appearance, physically weak, submissive, shows emotion, affectionate, nurturing, sensitive, tentative, helpful, troublesome, fearful, ashamed, collapses crying, described as physically attractive (feminine), asks for or accepts advice or help, victim (England, Descartes, Collier-Meek 2011: 558-560).

This categorization recalls Bem's and Ortner's binary categories of culture. It is by no means an exhaustive list of the psychological properties displayed by characters. The categories are not intended as guiding or prescriptive principles, and they are certainly not constructed from an essentialist point of view. They are based on generalization, approximation and stereotypes. Nevertheless, they model the commonly shared expectations – However, it is one that provides reasonable grounds for building a methodology.

England concludes that modern Disney films present characters with more equally distributed gender traits, although the trends is not entirely linear (England 2011: 555). She also highlights the importance of certain narrative points. In the examined films, princesses never performed the climactic rescue without the help of a prince. Furthermore, all films include heterosexual romance which often serves as the conclusion of the film (England 2011: 565). The narrative convention of rescue was incorporated into the present research as one of the themes for the stories created by children.

5.3   Androgynous princess

Benjamin Hine adopted England's coding method and conducted a similar study for later 2000s to 2010s films. The results are compared with films studied by England. Hine concludes that regarding character trait balance, "prince characters have once again become more feminine in their behavior" while "princesses have become progressively more androgynous over time" (Hine 2018: 9). Princes and princesses in these films also perform equal number of rescues including the climactic scenes. For instance, in *Frozen*, the climactic rescue features two sisters saving each other in turn. The princesses were also less likely to marry by the end of the film. Only 2 out of 5

films ended in marriage and the story of *Moana* did not include any romance at all (Hine 2018: 2). This suggests a significant change not only in the film characters and their behavior, but also in the narrative structure of the films.

A similar view is supported by qualitative research done by Ken Gillam (Gillam 2008: 2-8). He focuses specifically on Pixar films, which largely avoid using the prince and princess characters. The only exception is *Brave* which explicitly deals with the problematic of arranged marriages and works mainly as a critique of the traditional marriage-oriented narratives. Pixar heroes are more often male, and Gillam argues that they also undergo an important change towards more balanced representation of gender characteristics. He shows that male Pixar heroes represent a crisis of the "alpha" masculinity, which they embody at the beginning of the film. Characters such as Buzz Lightyear in *Toy Story*, Lightning McQueen in *Cars* or Mr. Incredible in *The Incredibles* at first show notable alpha-male characteristics. However, their initial confidence and strength is radically destabilized as the story progresses. Eventually, the male heroes learn to replace the original "alpha" identity with a more caring, nurturing and community-aware model of masculinity (Gillam, Wooden 2008: 6). Thus, several strands of research converge upon the view that both male and female heroes are gradually developing towards a more egalitarian and diversified representation of gender in these latest Disney films.

5.4 Superficial equality

The optimistic view sketched above too has its opponents. Madeline Streiff and Lauren Dundes published separate analyses of two recent films by Disney, *Frozen* (2013) and *Moana* (2016), suggesting that the element of empowerment, for which the films were acclaimed, is far from unambiguous. In the case of Frozen, Streiff and Dundes suggest that the independence of the lead heroine Elsa makes power and romance appear as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, Elsa's role of a queen is approved by society not on the basis of her leadership or independence, but of her displaying selfless love. The authors conclude that "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" (Streiff 2017: 9). Though some of the arguments the author's use to support their claims are speculative, they present a notable counterpoint to the broadly adopted positive reception of the film.

Streiff's and Dundes' discussion of Moana is just as sobering as their treatment of Frozen. They analyze the plot of the film which revolves around the goddess of the Mother Island Te Fiti, and her Heart – a gem that is stolen from a hidden cave by a demigod Maui. The authors hold that the act of his venturing into the secret cave and prying the gem from the rock with the use of his large hook weapon is a metaphorical representation of rape, which goes essentially unpunished. After Maui's venture, Te Fiti is rid of her fertility and becomes a raging lava monster until Moana manages to appease her. Streiff and Dundes point out that the narrative links the woman's worth and well-being with her procreative function (Streiff, Dundes 2017: 1). Again, the authors show that in spite of representing an independent lead female heroine, the film can be successfully interpreted as perpetuating gender stereotypes.

5.5   Reception studies

Rare but all the more important study of animated film's reception was conducted by Katherine Barnes. She looks at gender stereotyping of two animated films, *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas*, by children aged five to six. She focuses on children's tendency to classify these films as either boy or girl films and she finds that a majority of children in the research group saw the films as suitable for both girls and boys. As her second goal Barnes choses tracing patterns of specific gender schemes in the narrative as understood by children (Barnes 2012).

Barnes asked children questions on the related to the two films that they saw beforehand. She focused on key moments such as the rescue of Jasmine by Aladdin, the swordfight between Aladdin and Jafar and the rescue of John Smith by Pocahontas (by giving him medicine). Barnes asked children question such as: "Aladdin returned to the palace to save Jasmine. Do you think a girl could have done that?" or: "did Aladdin fight the snake with a sword because he was a boy?" or: "did Pocahontas give John Smith medicine after he was shot because she was a girl?" (Barnes 2012: 35) She also asked about the motivation behind the children's answers.

Barnes states that the majority of children did not think that a girl could save a girl in the same way Aladdin did. Children also widely supported the fact that Aladdin fought with a sword because he was a boy. They were largely unclear on whether Pocahontas gave John Smith medicine because she was a girl. However, they supported the view that a boy could save John Smith just as well as a girl could. Barnes concludes that although girls and boys treat and enjoy

both films equally, they do expect different behavior from male and female characters (Barnes 2012: 37-47).

Barnes' research is in many ways instrumental to the present work. It stresses the importance of studying the reception of the films. It identifies some of the key gender schemata and presents a unified methodology to examine how they are used by children. I would argue, however, that the questions used in the research are not ideal. In my opinion, question such as: "did Pocahontas give John Smith medicine after he was shot because she was a girl?" is more likely to incite a positive answer, since both the predicates the question expresses are true. It asks the respondent to evaluate the degree of causality between the two statements, which may not be easy. Barnes indicates that children often did not know why they answered yes or no. This may be the result of the question's design.

An interesting study of reception of gender narratives was done by Lori Baker-Sperry. The research explored how children react to reading a *Cinderella* book. Most importantly, she looks at the reactions within the context of a classroom reading group. She suggests that boys distanced themselves from the reading activity, while girls "often found a social power of acceptance in the retelling of the tale" (Baker-Sperry 2007: 721). Association and dissociation with male of female themes was very apparent in this research especially in boys' drawing of princesses. There seemed to be a strong peer pressure not to engage with the drawing of females in a serious way. The second type of influence usually came as inspiration by older sibling. There were two pairs of siblings in the study, and both younger siblings showed signs of being influenced by the older one.

The overview of the research aimed at animated feature films suggests that modern films try to balance the way in which males and females are represented. Research of the reception of these films suggests that children tend to think of the narratives in terms of gender schemas. To complete the theoretical picture of understanding films, I use the next section to diverge briefly into the area of semiotics, which offers an interesting theoretical view of meaning making.

6 UNDERSTANDING MEDIA

As the present research is concerned with assessing how children understand films, I find it helpful to bring in a theoretical framework for constructing meaning. Gunter Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen develop a theory which I find helpful and suitable for use in anthropological study. In their book *Reading Images,* Kress and Leeuwen employ a semiotic perspective in discussing how people (including children) understand and communicate visual messages (Kress 2021: 9). They mainly emphasize the individuality creativity of meaning making processes.

Kress and Leeuwen suggest that the relationship between what is expressed (signifier) and what is meant (signified) is a result of an active mental engagement of the communicating agent (Kress 2021: 9). In other words, the meanings are *made*, not merely used or adopted. As we will see, for instance, the meaning of the word "princess" can be recalled and actualized differently, depending on whether it is used during drawing, or during play featuring other characters. The specific situation in which the meaning is created influences, to some degree, what is being forwarded by children when a princess is discussed. Kress' and Leeuwen's approach to meaning making as activity stresses the fluidity of the resulting mental structure, and the proprietary and temporary character of the expression. In my view this is chiefly pertinent to the evaluation of qualitative research data.

Although Kress and Leeuwen see meaning as being created, it does not mean that it is arbitrary. They emphasize that meanings are always motivated. According to their theory, speakers "choose the nearest, most plausible form they know for the expression of what they have in mind" (Kress 2021: 13). This means that the expression is dependent on the knowledge, schemata and systems of categories available to the speaker (semiotic resources). However, the choice of the appropriate means of expression is a creative act. When one of the interviewees, Kuba, says that his princess has "baguette feet", it is most likely not because he has this expression readily available in memory, but because he creates this meaning on the basis of visual likeness (princess' feet seemed a little too large and prolonged).

Despite the acknowledgement of the creative factor in meaning making, the previous knowledge (semiotic resources) still play an important role when making signs. Children frequently represent other films and media in their works. Jakob draws James Bond as his hero

character, David does the same with Batman, and Melia uses characters from YouTube videos for all her stories. Since the frequency of these decisions proved to be quite high in the research, I also briefly discuss other types of media besides the film which seem to influence children's understanding of gender and the world in general.

7 RESEARCH SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This research limits itself to studying children's understanding of animated films. These films, however, represent only a small fraction of the volume of audiovisual media that the children are exposed to. The children watch live action fairy tales from local and foreign production, live action Netflix series, and YouTube videos. They also engage in playing games, most notably Minecraft and Roblox, which are often featured in YouTube videos they watch. Jan mentions other games such as PUBG. The amount of time the children spend engaging with other types of media is hard to determine, and further research in this area would be desirable.

I chose to base the method of research on films by Disney and Pixar as they are well known among the Czech children. Despite being only a small fraction of audiovisual culture, animated feature films are complex and rich in terms of narrative storytelling and visual detail. Therefore, they make for a great research material in the area of gender. Furthermore, the production of Disney studios has been subjected to a considerable amount of criticism concerning the ways of representation. The production of this studio seems to have responded to this criticism, in ways that we addressed in the review of current research. As a result, it provides a suitable sample of well-known characters both male and female. Furthermore, it allows to contrast substantial academic research with the data obtained from qualitative research on the films' reception.

It should be said that the results of the research do not pertain only to Disney films. Disney characters were used to provide a common ground and a starting point from which discussions about gender could originate. The discussion of gender related issues with individual children extended beyond the case of a film or films referenced in the questions and tasks.

8   ANTHROPOLOGY OF CHILDREN

Doing anthropology of children presents its own challenges related to the methodology and ethics of research. I draw on several writers who address the common issues in data gathering and analysis when working with young informants. I then discuss several problems which I faced in designing the research and provide arguments in support of the methodological decisions.

The ethics of research with children has been discussed recently by Alison James. In her essay *Giving Voice to Children's Voices*, James identifies key pitfalls of the research with children, and practices that should be avoided (James 2007: 261-269). The core idea is to provide a responsible and accurate representation of each child as well as the category of childhood itself.

James stresses the importance of challenging "ethnographic ventriloquism". This term was coined by Clifford Geertz and describes the tendency to assume that children's mental processes are easily interpretable and follow similar logic to those of the ethnographer (James 2007: 263). The assumption results in the illusion that one can "see in the children's heads" and make conclusions about their choices with certainty as if these were their own. Thus, for instance, Jakob's story of stealing an item from a museum protected by a high-tech laser security system, can be interpreted as a result of his fascination with James Bond films. However, it is important not to present these conclusions as obvious and necessary truths, especially if they are not backed up by any additional proof. This work tries to only focus the analysis on connections made by children and to present its interpretations within context, and with a degree of uncertainty.

Ethnographic ventriloquism is closely related to the issue of false authenticity. The voice of a child is often associated with a sense of authenticity and truthfulness. James warns that one can start falsely assuming that "research done with or by children—research including 'what children say'—is an authentic (and hence unproblematic) representation of children's voices" (James 2007: 263). Both the process of eliciting the child's response and presenting it within the context of the final work should be accounted for. The present research to do so by clarifying its methodology and contextualizing its findings.

Finally, James criticizes the tendency to treat children as a homogenous group or groups (James 2007: 262). This practice was attributed for instance to the work of Piaget (Hardman 2001: 511). James suggests promoting multivocality and contextualization of children's voices to

avoid creating the notion of homogenous group in which universal rules apply. The present study attempts to represent children's voices as integral units by discussing the interviews individually and attending to each of its parts. Data is interpreted as relevant to a particular child and associated with theory only in terms of parallel, not a clear-cut example of a proof.

8.1   Play as a tool for expressing ideas

In order to facilitate the discussion of gender roles within a story, I used play and creative activities such as drawing. Both these processes have been associated with meaning making and making sense of the world (Arizpe 2016). In play, children exercise a set of rules, which are constructed through a creative process based on their understanding of the social world. As Vygotsky puts it, "[w]hat passes unnoticed by the child in real life, becomes a rule of behavior in play" (Vygotsky 1966: 10). Importantly, play can reveal how children make sense of particular social situations. By staging a scene of a wedding or a rescue, they employ their understanding of such events and recreate relationships between characters and the environment as they see fit.

The activity of drawing, used in this work has also been explored in theory and practice. Susan Wright holds that "drawing provides us with a visible projection of children's thoughts and feelings" (Wright 2019: 2). This is a key feature when discussing the visual aspect of gender. Furthermore, Wright asserts that that the children display empathetic intention, thinking about the mental states of others that they draw. I observed similar tendencies, for instance, when David remarks, during the drawing of a princess: "she is dancing because he [the hero] saved her". In this way, information can be gathered as to what children imagine about the psychology of their characters.

An important tool for children in the creative process is a toy. Charlotte Hardman quotes Tylor in her explanation of the concept. "The toy for Tylor is mainly an assistance to the child in enabling it to arrange and develop its ideas by working the objects and actions it is acquainted with into a series of dramatic pictures" (Tylor 1870: 108 in Hardman 2001: 506). According to this view a wide variety of object that can be used as toys. Furthermore, it highlights the role of a toy as a facilitation tool in representing relationships based on everyday experience. Cristina Sylla, for instance, argues for deploying interactive digital interfaces which help children engage in a storytelling process (Sylla 2014). The present research follows a similar approach. The key idea is that a toy provides children with a resource on which they base their creative decision.

Additionally, curating a selection of objects to interact with helped in focusing the discussion on the topic of gender.

8.2   Researching gender with children

As the present research aims to explore the ideas of gender displayed by children between 8 and 12 years, it encounters specific methodological problems. The most obvious issue is that children may not be familiar with the term gender. Most children use the binary categories of gender. Therefore, in order that they understand the research tasks, it is necessary to also use the gendered pronouns and the binary categories of "girl" and "boy". This needs to be addressed in the process of mediation of their responses.

It could even be argued that by using the binary gender this research perpetuates an outdated gender classification within the young generation. Although I consider these concerns to be valid, I believe we should reframe this problem within the anthropological notion of etic and emic perspective. Anthropology often deals with phenomena as situated within a different context than that of the researcher. The emic perspective of the "natives" needs to be mediated and juxtaposed with the etic perspective of the researcher or the reader in order to shed some light on the common as well as diverging concepts. I believe that such process allows the children's perspective to inform the academic debate on this topic in meaningful ways.

9 RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted by interviewing eight children aged between 6 and 12 years. The interviews were conducted in the form of two workshops. These were advertised to parents and children as workshops of creative storytelling conducted for the purpose of anthropological research.

To create the sample, I have contacted parents whose children previously attended stop-motion animation workshops that I helped organize in Hradec Kralove. Therefore, most children are, to some degree, interested in animation. Parents were encouraged to invite friends and siblings of the children and anyone else interested. All children come from Hradec Kralove or the neighboring towns. They attend different schools and one of them was partly home-schooled. All interviews except for one were conducted in Czech. The interview with Melia was conducted in English. Children and parents gave consent to the data being used for research purposes.

All children were interviewed in Drak Theatre in Hradec Kralove. Drak is a puppet theatre which often stages plays for children and young audiences. The management of the theatre kindly allowed me to use their facility as a reciprocal act in return for collaborating on one of their exhibitions. Children were able to use a large working table and different art supplies, mainly colored pencils and felt pens. Interviews took place in January 2022.

Each child spent one to two hours at the workshop. Most of them were interviewed individually or in pairs. There were two pairs of siblings in the sample, and these were interviewed in pairs. Some of the sessions overlapped, so that there were up to three children at the workshop at any given time. I was assisted by Aneta Kohoutová in running and managing the workshop. In a few points, she helped with conducting the interviews. I had previously discussed the research goals and questions with her to inform her participation.

The interviews were recorded in its entirety except for brief moments of moving between desks and administering the workshop. The recordings were then transcribed and coded based on common themes identified in the theory section.

9.1 Research design

Based on the different aspects of gender outlined in the theoretical section, I designed several activities which were intended to facilitate a discussion about gender related topics.

First task involved filling out a questionnaire with basic information about themselves, which included age, name, hobbies, and a favorite film. Second half of the questionnaire consisted of eight film posters for recent Disney animation films (Figure 2). Children were asked to mark films they have seen. They were then given the option to classify the films as either a girl films, boy films, or undifferentiated. Children were encouraged to talk about the reasons for their choices. This task invited children to reflect on the conceptual categories, and the defining features of these categories.

The films were selected on the basis of several criteria. First, they were released in recent years and distributed in Czechia so that the children had a chance to see them. Second, they featured predominantly characters with human appearance which helps to evaluate the understanding of the visual representations of human body. Third, they feature characters of different age and personality. I selected the following films:

- *Up* (2009)
- *Tangled* (2010)
- *Wreck-it Ralph* (2012)
- *Frozen* (2013)
- *Moana* (2016)
- *Raya and the Last Dragon* (2021)
- *Luca* (2021)

These films constitute the core sample for the materials used during research. In the following tasks, I used them to create cards that served as toys for children to construct their stories with.

Figure 2 - Form template
Author: Šimon Macek

In the second part of the interview, children were asked to tell a short story using a set of cards representing characters and objects from the eight Disney films. Each child received an identical set of cards. They were then asked to tell a short story using the cards as toys or puppets. The methodology is based mainly on the concept of tangible interfaces developed by Cristina Sylla[2]. In her doctoral thesis, Sylla argues for the use of narrative storytelling in the educational environment. In order to stimulate the storytelling activity, Sylla and her team devised a visual tool in the form of image cards and a board where children can place the cards to tell their story (Sylla 2014). Cards ground the story within a given theme, while giving children space to express themselves creatively. The board adds a spatial dimension to the narrative (Sylla 2011). I adopt

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[2] My method was originally inspired by research of mental mapping. This method consists of conducting interviews, where interviewees are asked to draw a map of a particular space which relates to their narrative. Gieseking provides a comprehensive overview of the advantages of this method (Gieseking 2013: 714-721).

this idea of basic building blocks to tie the children's understanding of narratives with specific characters from animated films.

I selected two broad themes for the stories based on common fairy-tale scenarios. The first scenario was a "rescue". The theme was inspired by Hine's research which involved data about the percentage of male and female rescuers (Hine 2018: 2). Second scenario was a "competition" loosely based on Barnes' research of gender schemes (Barnes 2012: 37-47). Both scenarios were chosen to allow for discussions on the topic of gender. Children were free to choose how to approach these themes. They were encouraged to use the cards as the main means of storytelling, however, they were also free to draw their own cards, if they wanted. Many children chose to do so and some of the stories therefore diverge from the way the narratives were designed. I do not see this as a problem, however, as the main purpose of the cards was to motivate children to discuss gender related issues.

When telling the story, the children were asked to place their cards on a "playing board" - a 4x5 grid which enabled them to organize their stories spatially. They were asked to narrate the story while they were illustrating it with the cards. Each child completed both designed scenes. Some children did not complete this task due to time constraints; some chose to draw instead. After they had narrated a story, I asked questions about characters' motivation, the logic of the fictional world, and children's personal experience with the topics involved. Most questions were unstructured, motivated by the stories children told. They usually took form of "tell me questions". Arizpe et. al. promotes this approach to questioning as more engaging than yes or no questions (Arizpe 2016). Letting the children come up with their own stories was a way to explore what roles children ascribe to various characters, and what kind of relationships they imagine between them.

Third task the children were asked to complete was to draw a princess and a hero. There were no other specifications and children were free to approach this topic the way they wanted. Children could use blank papers, colorful pencils and felt pens. During the work I asked questions about the character's occupation, skills, personality, and appearance. I also asked questions about the relevance of the categories for everyday life. This exercise was motivated by considering the visual aspect of gender. It focuses on whether gender schemas appear in children's creative visual expression.

9.2 Card design

The cards used during the second part of the research were intended to provide children with building blocks to their stories. While it can be challenging for children to conceive of stories on their own, they seem to be much more comfortable with creating relationships between already existing materials. In this case, the content of the cards was selected so that it has higher change of facilitating discussions on the topic of gender.

There are two categories of cards, characters, and objects. The first set shows an array of animated characters. These characters were selected based on the following criteria. First, they must be human (or at least have a human form and appearance). Additionally, the characters must represent different body-types which indirectly suggests different personalities and different gender identities. This links the discussion of gender with the visual representation of human body. Finally, there must be an equal number of male and female characters in the selection. Second, the characters must play one of the leading roles in the films. This makes it possible to compare children's idea of the character's role and personality, and the adult interpretation of the original film, if needed. For instance, in Kuba's story the character of Giulia displayed behavior in line with the film's fictional reality, while in Eliska's story featuring Elsa there was no sign of such relation. Third, each character must come from a different film to avoid the possibility that children will reproduce the film's narrative using the well-known characters.

Figure 3 - Character cards
Author: Šimon Macek
Source: Pinterest

Figure 2 shows characters on a card sheet. Following is a brief introduction of each character using England's categories of masculine and feminine characteristics:

1. Namaari (*Raya and the Last Dragon*) – a warrior princess, physically strong, independent, athletic, brave, leader, tends to hide or suppress emotions. Overall, she displays a large number of masculine characteristics.

2. Giulia (*Luca*) – an outsider child, brave, persistent, gives advice and help, shows emotion, independent.

3. Vanellope (*Wreck-it Ralph*) – an adventurous child, brave, stubborn, independent, physically weak, shows emotion, troublesome, accepts help.

4. Elsa (*Frozen*) – a magician princess, unemotional, independent, tends to physical appearance, sensitive, fearful, described as physically attractive.

5. Maui (*Moana*) – a fighter demigod, physically strong, assertive, independent, athletic, brave, inspires fear, leader, troublesome, ashamed, accepts advice.

6. Flynn (*Tangled*) – a confident thief, curious about princess, brave, described as physically attractive (masculine), tentative, fearful.

7. Hiro (*Big Hero 6*) – a boy genius, wants to explore, athletic, engaging in intellectual activity, leader, shows emotion, tentative, helpful, victim.

8. Russel (*Up*) – an eager scout, wants to explore, gives advice, physically weak, shows emotion, affectionate, nurturing, tentative, helpful, fearful.

The layout of Figure 2 also suggests an interpretation of the selection. Characters on the left display primarily features we tend to label as masculine. Characters on the right display features we tend to label as feminine. The pose and facial expression of the characters contributes to portraying their character. These features were easily understood and developed by children as I show later.

The second category of cards shows a set of objects, taken from the same selected Disney films. I selected objects that play an important role within the film's story. The choice of objects was less rigorous than that of characters, as their main purpose was to offer ways in which the characters can interact.

Figure 4 - Object cards

Figure 3 shows a set of objects on a card sheet. Following is a list of the objects with some suggested ways of usage:

1. Vespa (*Luca*) – vehicle, toy, expensive

2. Robot helmet (*Big Hero 6*) – armor, mask, protective, militant

3. Balloons (*Up*) – vehicle, decoration, present

4. Cookie car (*Wreck-it Ralph*) – vehicle, cake, edible

5. Gem – Te Fiti's Heart (*Moana*) – beautiful, present, precious, magical

6. Sword (*Raya and the Last Dragon*) – weapon, militant

7. Frying pan (*Tangled*)[3] – kitchen appliance, weapon

Same as with the characters, children were encouraged to draw their own cards with objects if they wanted to.

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[3] I did omit an object from the film *Frozen*. This is simply an error that I did not catch soon enough.

10 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In order to better represent the integrity of each child's work, I analyze each interview group independently and link individual observations with the previously discussed theory.

10.1 Eliska and David

Eliska and David are siblings. Eliska is eleven years old, enjoys looking after her pets and chose *Sing 2* as her favorite film. She is outgoing and talkative. Two years ago, when she attended stop-motion workshops, she spent most of the time drawing detailed scenes and characters. This time, she was a lot more reserved towards drawing and expressed strong criticism of her work[4]. Throughout the interview, Eliska was open and very communicative.

David is eight years old. He enjoys playing ice hockey and football and looking after his hamster. During the interview, he supported and followed some of the ideas of his older sister. In alignment with observations made by Baker-Sperry, some children seemed to be influenced by their peers, especially by their older siblings.

10.1.1 Classifying films

Eliska categorized most of the offered films as boy or girl films, although she marked some of them as suitable for both groups. Her decisions were motivated by different factors. One of the important parameters seemed to be the degree of equality in gender representation. She labeled *Tangled* as a film for both boys and girls, because "there are two [male and female] roles from the beginning to the end. The same roles appear all the way through". The characters of Flynn and Rapunzel appear "all the way through" the film, meaning that they take up roughly the same amount of screen time. According to Eliska, this makes the film approachable to all viewers regardless of gender. On the other hand, she marks *Luca* as a film for boys. "I don't think the role

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[4] This observation supports the theory of U-shape development in children's drawing discussed by Rosenblatt and Winner. The researchers suggest that children of young age draw freely and are not concerned the realism of their drawings. On the other hand, children between 10 and 13 years of age tend to strive to master perspective and represent the objects of their drawings in a realistic way. This often leads to frustration and lessened interest in drawing (Rosenblatt, Winner 1988: 8-9). My experience with Eliska's drawing from our first encounter when she was around 7 or 8 years of age contrasted with her current approach supports this theory.

of a girl even appears there," explains Eliska. In this case, she mistakes the character of Giulia that appears on the poster for a boy and sees the cast of the film as all males.

Other films Eliska categorized based on how her peers interact with the merchandise. Eliska decides that Frozen is a girl film saying that, "when you see the snack boxes that the first graders in our class have, with Elsa and Anna on them, the boys don't have them at all".

Finally, some choices are made based on the theme of the story. David calls Big Hero 6 a boy film because of the presence of robots. Eliska agrees with the decision, although none of them have seen the film. The importance of themes also comes through in Eliska's assessment of Raya and the Last Dragon. "This could be for both boys and girls, I think, because there is probably some magic or something, based on this animal." David and Eliska see magic as a unifying theme which interests both boys and girls, while technology and robots are mostly male interests.

10.1.2 Scenes

David presents a simple scene of imprisonment and rescue. Maui (5) holds Russel (8) captive and wants to "starve him to death". Namaari (1) saves him by fighting Maui. David chooses characters that were identified earlier as having mainly masculine characteristics to fight each other. It is also important to say that both characters are shown on the cards as wielding weapons. David explains his decisions about making Maui the villain of his story: "He has the hook and the teeth [necklace]". For David, the necklace made of teeth and bones is a signal of hostility. He reflects on this choice by saying that in the film, Maui is good. He displays awareness of the personality of characters in the original film and recognizes the fact that he does not follow the "rules" of the film.

I asked David why he made Russel the one being rescued. He answers with a smile that "he looks like the kind of clumsy guy that always loses his way and these ones [kidnappers] just lock him up". David recognizes Russel as the type of a clumsy funny character that often gets into trouble. He marks *Up* as a film that he did not see. This means that the association is based purely on Russel's visual representation. Russel is short and has a round corpulent figure. He has an enthusiastic smile. David relates these visual features with clumsiness and comic behavior.

In the competition scene, David lines up several characters for a race, giving Hiro (7) the role of a referee. He then stages a race that last several rounds. Characters go around the playing board as around a race circuit. One drives the cookie car (4), one rides a vespa (1). As a winner he selects Giulia. When I ask why she won, he replies that "he had the fastest car". David comments on his choice of Giulia (2) as a competitor in the race, saying that "he looks like he wants to race". He refers to Giulia's raised arms and an enthusiastic smile. He interprets this expression as being excited to compete with others.

Both siblings mistook Giulia for a boy. David seemed surprised when Eliska started to talk about Giulia in male form, but he accepted the view and spoke of Giulia in male form for the rest of the session. Interestingly, they marked *Luca* in the questionnaire as a film that they have seen. They might have forgotten about Giulia's role in the film or mistaken the poster for another film. It also seems that David was influenced by Eliska's opinion on this matter.

Based on David's story about characters racing, Eliska shares a memory of a race kart that their grandfather built for Eliska and David. She talks about how they used to ride it through the village. I ask whether they think that either girls or boys tend to drive faster. David says that he does not think so. Eliska voices a common stereotype about women being bad drivers.

S: "Do you think girls or boys are more likely to drive faster."
E: "Well, if there is a racer, then I think a boy is more likely to race, because if you say: 'woman behind a wheel' that does not sound right to me."

When I point out that she talked about driving the race kart, she replies that she does not enjoy it as much as David because the steering wheel is vibrating all the time. Eliska adopts the stereotype about 'women behind a wheel' and seems to adjust her view according to it.

In her first scene Eliska tells, a story of captivity and rescue. This time, Maui (5) is saving Vanellope (3) and a boy Hiro (7) is the antagonist. As a reason for choosing Maui to be the savior, Eliska names Maui's fishhook. She points out its magical powers mentioned in the film and says that this lets Maui save the victim. In referring to Maui's abilities, Eliska remains closer to the original idea of the film than David. She sees Hiro as the villain because of his connection to the robot helmet (2), which, as she says: "does not look very peaceful". She associates the image of a robot with the idea of fighting and aggression and the concept of villainy.

Paradoxically, *Big Hero 6* tries to subvert the notion of aggressive, military robots. The robot from the film is a peaceful and caring nurse robot. However, without the knowledge of the film, Eliska follows a somewhat stereotypical line of associations.

In the scene of competition, Eliska recreates a situation from her favorite computer game. She goes on to explain the game's rules. In the game, players are randomly assigned one of the three roles, Sheriff, Murderer and Innocents. Murderer tries to kill all the innocents and Sheriff protects them and tries to kill the Murderer. She chooses Elsa (4) as the murderer, because her stretched out arm is perfect for holding a sword. This is one of the several examples across the interviews where a small detail in visual representation alone motivates the character's role in the play. Eliska ignores Elsa's character known from the story, as well as her role of princess. Arguably she also defies the principle by which beauty is associated with kindness, since she makes Elsa a murderer.

In reflection on Eliska's choice I make two speculations. First is that a Murderer in a game of Roblox which Eliska references is not as closely tied to the image of a true unethical villain. Death in this kind of game is portrayed as inconsequential and serves only as a certain kind of mechanics in the game which resets the player's state. In my view, Eliska's story of Murderers and Innocents was told from in this context. Therefore, being a Murderer is not a huge ethical burden on Elsa's character.

The assignment of the role based on a particular body position of the character suggests another view. It seems to be an example of a case where characters become blank slates that can serve any purpose within the play. If one details matches the requirement of the story, character is cast for the role and their other characteristics are ignored for the time being. This suggests that one should be careful about reading too much into certain decisions within a play, unless they are supported by further explanation.

During the discussion of the game, Eliska also expresses a though suggesting the empowering potential of role-playing. When asked if a girl can save a boy, she replies that in the game she sometimes gets the role of a Sheriff. "All the boys who are playing, when I am the Sheriff, they just run to hide behind me. And I fight the Sheriff… I mean the Murderer… on my own, while they are hidden somewhere." The mechanics of the game assign the powerful roles evenly and this sometimes allows Eliska to find herself in the role of a hero.

10.1.3 Drawings

Figure 5: Jongles and a princess
Author: Eliska

Eliska draws an unnamed princess and a racoon superhero inspired by a YouTube video character Jongles. Her princess is created by following a simple pattern. She even spells it for her brother. "Just draw a woman with a crown and you're done. That's the best." Her princess has thin arms, long blonde hair, and a pink dress. In her drawing, Eliska seems to be concerned with efficiency. She recognizes, that drawing a princess only requires following a few simple steps. To complete the task, she chooses the most obvious and understandable features which characterize the "princess" category. Going back to Kress and Leeuwen's theory, the representation is motivated by the needs of communication. In Eliska's case, the clues necessary for recognizing a princess are abstracted into simple attributes as that of a crown or a dress. A visual image of a princess is highly codified and allows for a schematic treatment.

Despite being highly simplified in its canonical form, the princess category still allows for variation. When asked if princesses always wear dresses, Eliska says no and brings up the

example of Pocahontas, who did not wear dresses. "Pocahontas was different… [S]he lived in the woods. She was a forest princess." Based on the example, Eliska extends the category of princess with the "forest" qualifier so that it can then accommodate for unusual cases such as Pocahontas.

Eliska's hero is remediation of a Czech YouTuber's alter ego, a racoon called Jongles. Jongles is a camp character, who, according to Eliska's words, "acts like he's the greatest hero in the world, and he thinks he's the best", but really is not. For Eliska, the notion of a hero includes comedy characters who only claim to be heroes. The limits of the hero category seem to be more diverse among the children who took part in the study, while the idea of a princess seems more uniform.

Princess and the male character of Jongles have identical bodies, except that the skirt of the princess widens around her hips. They wear typical gender coded colors – blue for male and pink for female, although in case of Jongles this represents the clothes of the original character. The size, figure, and facial expression remain the same. For Eliska, gender does not affect the visual representation of the body. It is mainly codified in clothing.

Figure 6 - Batman and a princess
Author: David

David's drawings show a princess and Batman. Batman characterized by wearing black clothes, mask and cloak. His body has an angular shape, and his feet are large and positioned far away suggesting a wide stance. This associates a strong and confident pose of a hero.

Simon: How would you describe Batman?

David: I would describe him like this… he is strong and has good skills for example he can turn into a bat, and he can also fight criminals and he always wins.

Compared to the original character, David ascribes Batman some additional supernatural abilities. He also focuses on the moral status of a hero and his apparent invincibility as his core traits. Furthermore, he indicates a common stereotypical relationship between the Batman and the princess, when he spontaneously remarks: "she is doing a dance because he saved her". Hero saving a princess is therefore an association which appears when the categories are explicitly spelled out. We should, however, keep in mind that one of David's stories featured a boy being saved by a female hero. This is not necessarily an inconsistency. David created the most fitting scenarios out of the resources he had in disposal.

Princess is considerably smaller and thinner. She has long hair, and a star on her forehead. David may be making a reference to *The Princess with the Golden Star* a popular Czech fairy tale. During the interview, he also mentioned the *Watermill Princess*, another popular Czech film. This suggests that Czech fairy tales are an important resource for the ways in which he thinks of this category.

David and Eliska both drew their heroes as references to specific characters. On the other hand, their princesses are generic and unnamed. The category seems to have enough characteristic traits that one does not need to reference any specific character. On the other hand, this set of representational features is only tied to the visual medium. When I ask Eliska and David how would they describe a princess behavior, they answer that princesses command everybody else. When I then ask if they know anyone who behaves as a princess. They immediately answer: "Yes, mum!" Within the domain of behavior and social roles and interpersonal relationships, Eliska and David showed a very different approach to exemplifying

the category of princesses. Therefore, I believe that one should examine these categories in different contexts to gain a better sense of how children understand them.

10.2 Jakob and Jan

Jakob and Jan are siblings. Jakob is eleven years old. His hobbies are music, playing the guitar, making and editing films. As his favorite film, he chose James Bond: *Spectre*, *Ratatouille*, and films by Marvel Studios. Jakob previously attended several stop-motion workshops, and he is quite versed in storytelling.

Jan is eight years old. He enjoys drawing and his favorite films are *James Bond* and *Ratatouille*. Same as David, Jan tended to replicate or reuse ideas of his older sibling during the workshop. Sometimes he commented on this fact explicitly. Both brothers were open and friendly during the interview.

10.2.1 Classifying films

When filling his questionnaire, Jakob said he prefers not to classify films that he has not seen. He emphasizes that liking or disliking a film is a matter of individual preference. "Most movies are both for boys and girls. Everyone can watch what they want. It's just my opinion that, for example, *Frozen* did not appeal to me at all." According to him, the film audience is not determined by the film's properties. Instead, the reception and preference depend on individual factors. Jan follows his brother on most of the decisions. However, he labels *Big Hero 6* as a boy film, seemingly because of the robot theme.

10.2.2 Scenes

Jakob presents an elaborate scene of a heist that he created mostly from custom cards as a storyboard. In the story, a thief is trying to steal a guitar from a museum. The guitar is protected by a high-tech security system. The thief is unsuccessful, escapes the building and ends up in a music store where he is able to steal a less valuable guitar. Jakob's story diverges from the topic of "rescue". It seems that during the preparation stage he probably forgot about the topic altogether. When I point this out, Jakob reacts by inventing a link between the story and the theme. He says that the thief saved his own neck by not coming back into the museum and avoiding the deadly security system. His interpretation illustrates Kress and Leeuwen's theory that meanings are produced creatively (Kress 2021). In order for the scene to fit the specification,

Jakob created a meaning that was not originally intended, but serves as a link between the story and the suggested topic.

In his rendition of a competition, Jakob offers a scene of a fight between Maui (5) and Flynn (6). He labels both characters by attaching a film name to them as well as properties expressed on a scale from 1 to 5. Maui has strength rating of 5/5 and intelligence rating of 2/5. Flynn has strength rating of 2/5 and intelligence rating of 4/5. Jakob is familiar with both films and his evaluation is therefore informed by the fictional narratives. What stands out is the idea of classifying individual character features on the numeric scale. This approach is typical for board games and computer games. It provides a schematic representation that defines character's psychology in terms of a few attributes with discrete levels of intensity. The typified representation highly simplifies the character's psychology. On the other hand, it clearly signals what kind of properties are important for Jakob in the story.

Despite the fight starts with a careful analysis of characters' skills, it ends up being decided by pure luck. Flynn wins the duel because a frying pan falls from the sky and hits Maui on the head. Jakob explains that Flynn is trying to catch the falling pan and fight with it, but since he fails, the pan does the job for him. The situation resolves contrary to the characters' intentions. The element of chance erases any narrative expectations caused by physical or mental properties of the characters.

In the reflection, I ask Jakob, if intelligence can be measured as he did with his characters. Jakob answers negatively. To my next question he replies that there is no difference in intelligence dispositions between genders. However, he adds that "girls tend to solve problems diplomatically". He supports this statement by his own experience from school. He says that boys fight each other on daily basis, while girls do not do it as much. For Jakob, gender stereotypes do not seem to be codified as general rules, but as tendencies inferred from experience.

An important connection between visual appearance and character type surfaces upon discussion of Dwayne Johnson's role in *Moana* as he dubbed the character of Maui.

Simon: Do you know Dwayne Johnson?
Jakob: Yes
Simon: Is he a bodybuilder?

Jakob: Well, he's an actor. He's an actor and he did wrestling too… but I know him more as an actor. I didn't actually see a single movie he's in except that he dubbed Moana. I just know he sang in it but otherwise I'm not an extra fan of his.

Simon: Who do you think he could play? How would you cast him?

Jakob: I would cast him based on the movie… I would cast him as some kind of boss… just the biggest guy who knows everything, just because he's like that… the guy who has no mercy.

Despite that Jakob is not familiar with Johnson's acting, he clearly characterizes the kind of roles that he would cast them for. The physical strength, in this case, seems to imply not only toughness and mercilessness, but also intelligence, or at least a kind of practical knowledge and leadership abilities. Although, in Jakob's view, the strength does not necessarily translate into intelligence, in Johnson's case, he finds it appropriate.

Jan initially planned to stage a bank robbery scene. He admits that he took the idea from his brother's story. A while later, we discuss whether there are rescue scenarios which do not involve defeating or killing someone. Jakob suggests that one can, for example, save their phone from falling into a sewer. Jan eagerly picks up this idea and turns it into his story. This illustrates the influence of older siblings in the creative processes. The second important factor that guided Jan's work was the efficiency concern. From the possible options Jan chooses the story that is the simplest to draw and tell. The principle of efficiency appeared as a factor influencing children's creative decisions across the workshop. For instance, it can be found in Eliska's method of drawing of a princess. The most straightforward way to signal a role, a trait or a relationship is often the one chosen.

As a rescue story, Jan shows a boy who dropped his phone, and then caught it again before it could fall into a sewer. In Jan's story the phone speaks and comments on the situation as a passive observer, adding an interesting perspective of an inanimate object into the story.

In his reflection, Jan suggests that boys of his age seem to be more interested in technology than girls. However, according to him, this is different for teenagers, who all seem to enjoy playing with their phones. Jan speaks of teenagers as an undifferentiated mass of people while he is able to better observe differences among his own peer group.

For the competition story, Jan shows a boy choosing a computer game to play. The narrative of his story is very minimal and does not provide many clues as to the nature of the competition. According to Jan, it seems to be motivated both by choosing between games and the games being a competition. In his choice of games, he mentions a third person shooter PlayerUnknown's Battlegrounds and Minecraft.

After discussing several types of games, he concludes that they are all made to be played by both girls and boys as he personally knows girls who play them. It seems that in Jan's view, if there is a girl who plays videogames than that videogame is for both boys and girls. This would be a different view than the one considering the tendencies of the majority. On the other hand, Jan may not have the kind of experience and knowledge to evaluate these trends. Instead, he bases most of his views on direct experience with his family and peers.

When working on the stories, Jan glues a couple of colored papers on his nails. He then engages in the debate over this act with others.

> Jan: I became a girl!
> Aneta: Do you think boys don't paint their nails?
> Jan: They don't. Only girls do… I'm a girl!
> Jonatan: Just because you have a nail polish doesn't mean you have to be a girl.
> Jakob: What have you done Janik?! What have you done!

Jan's words address the problem of defining gender categories. He suggests that by engaging in an activity that is supposedly only done by girls, he transgresses the gender categories and "becomes a girl". This notion seems to work as a kind of "scoped" concept. Jan almost certainly does not assume that his physical and psychological properties other than the nails changed when he "became a girl". His interest in phones, for instance, probably remained the same. I suggest, however, that his momentary activity as well as the topic of conversation become the prism of his thinking about gender. In this situation he seems to divide people between "polishers" and "non-polishers" while polishers signal girls and non-polishers signal boys. Gender is defined by the property which is currently in the center of Jan's attention. In such case, any gender characteristic feature or act alone seems to be sufficient for defining the category. In Jan's view, there does not seem to be an inconsistency in becoming a girl through adopting a girls' habit and remaining a boy in all other aspects of his being. Despite that this view is based on stereotyping, it reveals a

surprising fluidity between genders, especially in combination with partial, feature based definition discussed above. Furthermore, Jan's reaction to his act of gender transgression was not evaluative, although that of his brother seemed to be.

The view of gender that Jan exhibited in this example differs from the way we as adults tend to think about gender categories. The usual approach is to try and evaluate one's character features as a whole in order to reach an approximation which can be placed into one of the commonly accepted categories. Thinking about Jan's way of categorizing gender may prompt us to question the unifying holistic approach to gender. Perhaps one can ease down the requirement that the whole of one's personality must be labeled as a specific variation of gender. This could lead to an approach which is instead built around the multiplicity of personality aspects.

10.2.3 Drawings
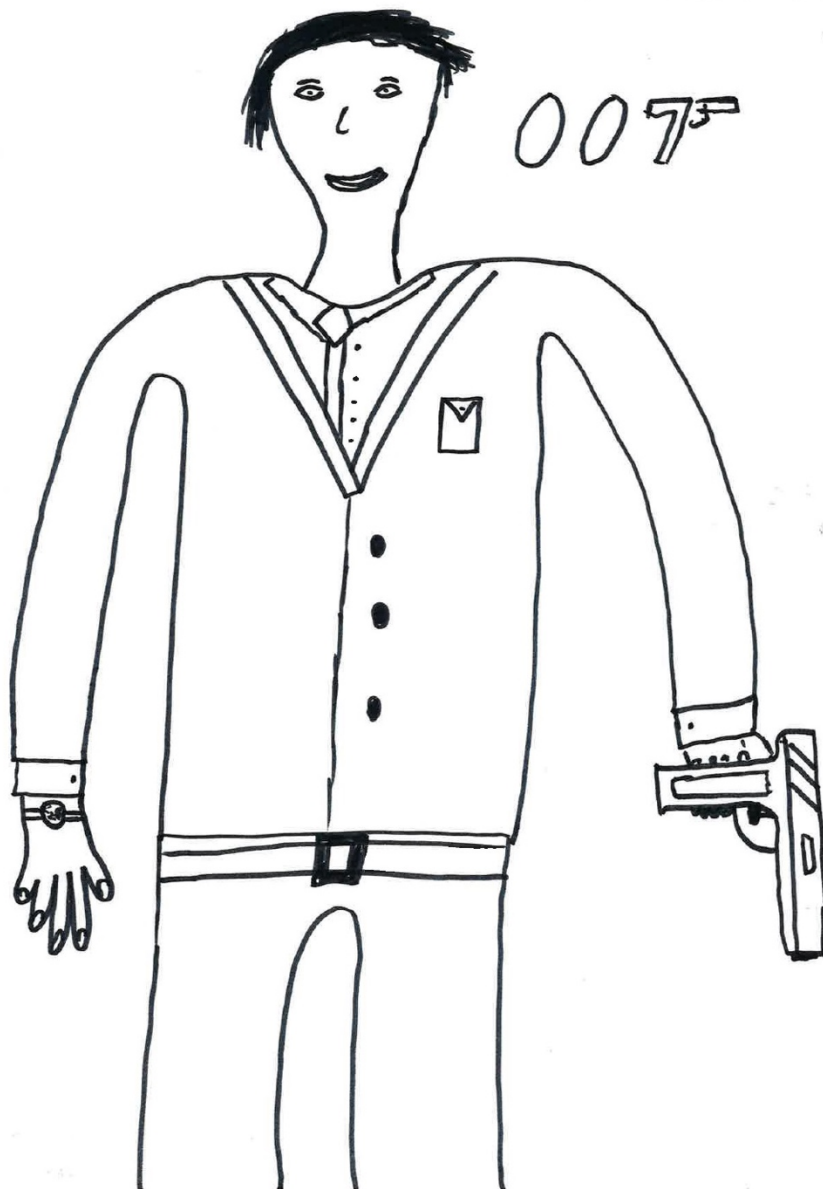
Figure 7 – James Bond
Author: Jakob

Jakob's drawing is done in black felt pen. It shows James Bond characterized by several attributes drawn in detail. Bond holds a gun in one hand and wears wristwatch on the other. He is dressed in a suit with pockets and buttons. When I asked him, what Bond is like, Jakob answers: "[he is] elegant… definitely elegant, he's in a good shape, fast… he's the right kind of guy. He doesn't always listen to his bosses though. He is being himself. And he always wins." It does

seem that for Jakob, James Bond represents a hero ideal. He interprets him as morally virtuous, although disobedient. The rebellious character is perceived as positive as Bond is just "being himself".
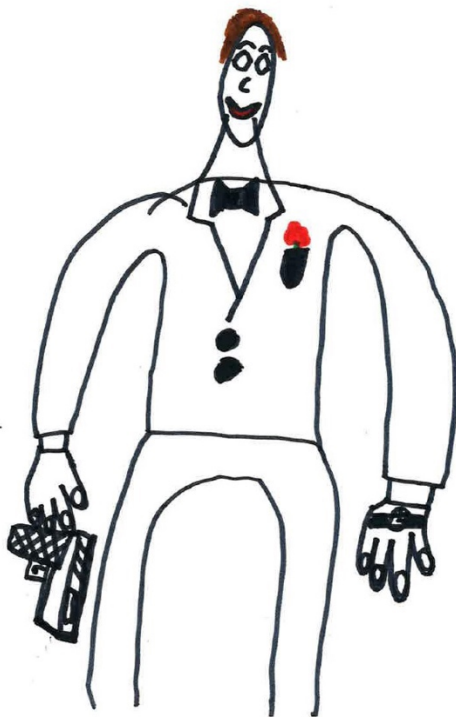
Figure 8 – Johnny English
Author: Jan

In drawing a hero, Jan again adopts his brother's idea, but instead of James Bond, he decides to portray the character of Johnny English. His rendition of the figure is very similar to Jakob's even in the visual style. However, certain elements, such as the colorful flower in the front pocket or the wide red smile, capture the difference in what kind of hero Jan's picture

represents. Johnny English is a comedy hero, while James Bond remains serious. Both brothers seem to enjoy watching both characters, but the elements of seriousness and parody make a difference when choosing the best fit for the category of a hero.

Figure 9 – A princess
Author: Jan

Both brothers decided to portray a princess in a radically different style from the heroes. While the special agents are carefully drawn in a human-like form, the characters of princesses are schematic, composed out of geometrical shapes and made to look silly. They evoke the idea of a drawing made by a much younger child. The most detailed part of Jan's princess drawing is a large army knife. He does indicate gender of the princess by representing a bottom part of her

body with a triangle standing for skirt or a dress. He also includes a schematic crown. When I ask him about the difference, Jakob responds that he does not like princesses. Later he explains this further.

> Jakob: Well, it's like this, I like Czech princesses. Those are nice, but those Disney ones… Elsa, Anna…
> Aneta: Do they seem stupid to you?
> Jonathan: So, if Elsa wasn't a princess, you wouldn't mind her?
> Jakob: (laughs) Technically not.
> Aneta: And what do you think is stupid about them?
> Jakob: Well, they're so fussy and kind of stubborn.
> Aneta: And you don't think girls are like that?
> Jakob: No.
> Aneta: Do you think they are made based on the way girls behave?
> Jakob: No. They need to do something cute to evoke a princess. So, they add too many frills and those big eyes.

Jakob points out a difference between princesses in Czech fairy tales and in Disney films. He seems to adopt a generic view that traditional Czech princesses are more likeable than modern Disney ones. He criticizes the artistic style in which the characters are portrayed as well as their behavior which to him seems far-fetched and exaggerated. As Jakob was leaving, he asked me not to show his princess drawing. "It was just for fun… I just went a little crazy."

In general, Jakob consistently avoids essentialism when speaking about gender categories, although he recognizes different behavioral tendencies among his peers. His stories do not show any obvious gender schemas. However, he seems to strongly favor heroes over princesses. The category of princess appears to be too feminine for him to represent it seriously.

10.3 Melia

Melia is seven years old. She is growing up in Hradec Králové with English-speaking parents. She is partly home-schooled and communicates mostly in English. She is outspoken and demands a lot of attention. As her only hobby, she named watching YouTube on her iPad. Her favorite film is a YouTube video of Siren Head.

10.3.1 Classifying films

Melia only marked two out of eight films from the list as seen. She pointed out that she prefers watching horror films over kid's films. She explains her position towards gendered toys.

> "I prefer boy toys more than girl toys. I don't like Barbies. I feel like they are a bit stupid sometimes."

She then adds that "any boy film is a girl film, and any girl film is a boy film," she clarifies her logic as follows.

> "Cause I think it's not fair that people say that girls have to watch girl films and boys have to watch boy films. I just wanna do it the way I want"

Melia seems to purposefully reverse the conventional gender categories by taking up a revolting, individualist position. Her system of classification, however, is not rigorous.

> "I like everything in the world except girl stuff. […] I don't like dolls and also… let me think. There's a lot of girl stuff… but I also like some girl things too sometimes. I don't like princesses, except the old ones of course. I like queens but not princesses."

Melia creates a category of girl stuff which she has some trouble defining. However, her original message of defying authoritarian conventions reappears consistently throughout her interview.

10.3.2 Scenes

In her scenes, Melia draws heavily on the content of her favorite YouTube channel videos. The videos feature five videogame characters, one male and four females. Each character is a digital avatar representing one of the group of YouTubers. Melia uses characters from the videos and talks extensively about their appearance, preferences and character. In the rescue scene, Draco the male YouTuber character is kidnapped by Funneh who uses the balloons to get out of reach. He is then saved by Gold.

In her competition scene, Funneh and Gold verse each other in a made-up game. Both have a sword, and they are trying to pop as many balloons as they can with it. Draco acts as a judge of the competition. The winner of the competition is not rewarded, but the loser must eat the whole cookie car.

In Melia's stories, the kidnapper, the savior, and the competitors are all female. In this way, she does not follow gender schemas outlined in theory. However, when Melia started thinking about the stories, she chose Draco as her main character. She points out that he is special, because he is the only boy. As I mention earlier, research of popular films and animated TV series shows that male to female ratio is usually about 2:1 in favor of males (Ahmed 2014: 47-49). In case of Melia's YouTube channel, it is 4:1 in favor of females. Paradoxically, the only male character is thus singled out and brought forward, as his gender sets him apart from the others. In both Melia's stories he gets a prominent, although somewhat passive, role. This example suggests that within evaluating representation, it might be helpful to also think about the element of rarity, as opposed to only the issue of dominance.

There are other factors which influence the hierarchy of the characters. One of the female characters, Rainbow[5] takes, according to Melia, the role of a leader, as she is the oldest and biggest. Physical differences may matter, especially in the early years of childhood. For instance, James shows that "to be small for one's age… is to be seen as different" (James 2007: 264). Difference can be approached as negative or positive. This is an example of a case where physical properties such as size and most importantly age leads to taking a dominant role within a group. Gender seems to matter less than age.

In discussing competitions, Melia mentions that her mother does not like the concept of competitions. Melia thus learned to prefer challenges which, in her words, are "competitions against yourself". She goes on to talk about her challenge of staying in a bathtub for one hour. Through parental guidance, Melia seems to have learned to avoid direct comparison with others. She then firmly states that girls can do the same things as boys.

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[5] Upon discussing names and nicknames, Melia states that sometimes, boys have girl names. She adds that she would not mind having a boy name either, as long as it would be "Thunder" or "Lightning".

10.3.3 Drawings

Figure 10 – Bad hero
Author: Melia

Melia's drawings seem to intentionally go against the conventions in portraying princesses and heroes. Her hero is labeled a "bad hero". It is a furry creature standing on two legs with four eyes. The drawing is done in orange red and black colors. The hero has red hands and feet which may or may not signal aggressivity. Similar to other male heroes in the study, he displays a strong

wide stance. A large sign "BAD" is written across its head. It seems that she wanted to highlight primarily the subversive moral status of her anti-hero.

Her princess is a fish-like creatures with cat-like mouth. According to Melia, the creature is an axolotl. The shapes on both sides of its head, which look like ears, may represent the external gills. Melia eventually added a crown as the signature feature of princesses.
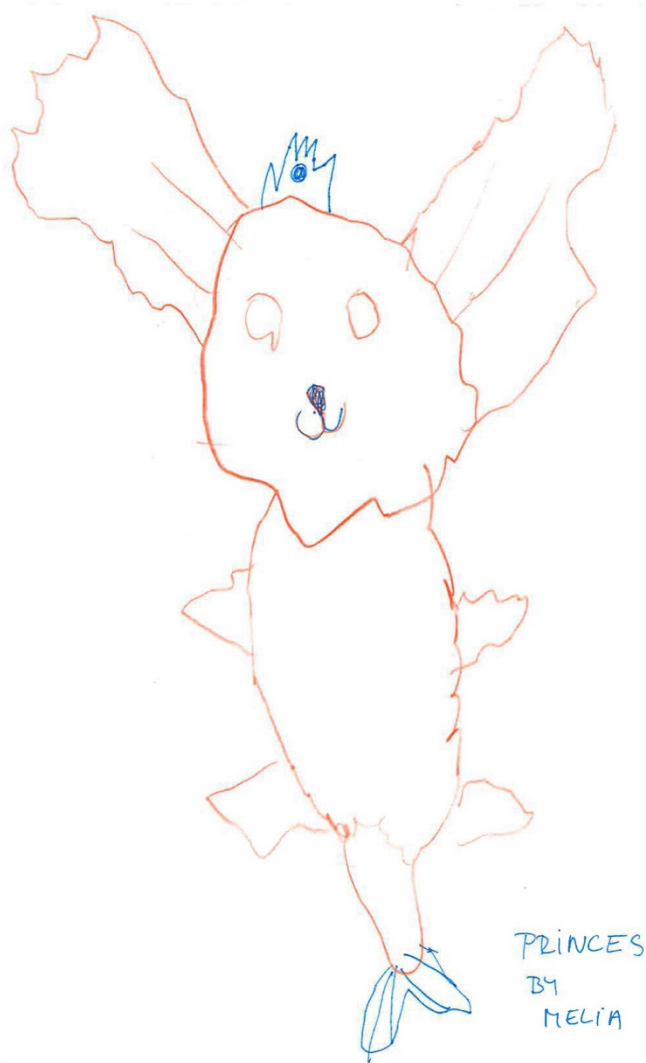
Figure 11 – Axolotl princess
Author: Melia

Melia's drawing style is expressive. The fluid shapes of indeterminate creatures resist gender-oriented interpretation. Melia was one of few children who represented gender indeterminate characters in her drawings. Interestingly, the princess still possesses certain cuteness, while the hero seems more dangerous and menacing. When interpreted based on these visual details, Melia's drawings still display some of the properties expected from the given character categories.

Melia was one of the most vigorous defenders of male-female equality. She employed a characteristic tactic of role reversal and subversion by inverting her definition of male and female categories. In her drawings she created a bad hero and a non-human princess and clearly stated that girls and boys have the same potential.

10.4 Jonatan

Jonatan is twelve years old. He enjoys reading and playing videogames. His favorite film is *Raya and the Last Dragon*. Jonatan is well acquainted with most of the films from the list. He reflects on them and evaluates them critically. During the interview he came up with various ways how to play with the themes of the workshop and some of his answers were clearly intended as jokes or irony. He rates all films uniformly as gender neutral, including the one film he has not seen.

10.4.1 Scenes

For his first scene, Jonatan presents a story with an adversary, a victim and a savior. Elsa is cast as the villain. Jonatan explains that the reason for his choice is that her arm is reaching out and hence it is well suited for holding a sword (this detail motivated Eliska to make the same creative decision). Hiro (7) is selected as the victim and Vanellope (3) as the savior. In Jonatan's story the conflict takes place between two characters which, according to the previous classification, display female characteristics.

As his competition story, Jonatan presents a cooking contest. The contest is taking place between Russel (8) and Maui (5). Jonatan suggests that Russel wants to get another badge, referring to his scout badges he is wearing on his uniform. The awareness of the badges and the meaning behind them probably comes from Jonatan's knowledge of the film. He also speaks about his experience as a scout. Maui was selected because of his fishhook, resembling a piece of cooking appliance. However, Jonatan indicates, that originally, he intended to cast Elsa into this

role but changed his mind, because "she was facing the wrong way. Again, visual details such as spatial orientation motivate creative decisions more frequently than the implied character properties.

Jonatan's decisions further support the idea that in play, many properties get stripped away from their usual roles. For instance, when I ask if Jonatan thinks that Elsa cooks, he answers that she doesn't look like it. Despite that, he seemed to be willing to cast her into the role. This simplification approach, however, is not applied consistently. When casting Russel, Jonatan seemed to base his decision on the character's personality as seen in the film.

The cooking competition provides an interesting case of gender schemas. Cooking within the context of housekeeping has traditionally been regarded as female activity. Jonatan confirms that the one who usually cooks at home is his mum. However, he portrayed both chefs as male. This is consistent with the idea that highly skilled cooking or even competitive cooking as displayed in the modern TV shows, tends to be a male domain[6].

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[6] Sherry Ortner discusses makes this observation in her comparison between definition of the male and the female within culture (Ortner 1972: 80).

10.4.2 Drawings

Figure 12 – Ranger princess
Author: Jonatan

Jonatan creates a picture of a ranger princess and a bubble-gum hero. Neither of the characters display any characteristic gender traits. Jonatan confirms that the princess is a female. However, the hero seems to have no gender. Similar to Melia, Jonatan represented his characters as gender neutral. The princess is shown wearing a camouflaged cloak and a hood. She is armed with a bow and arrows. As Jakob points out, she is a reference to the book *Ranger's Apprentice*, which Jonatan confirms. He explains that there is a single female ranger in the books. Similar to Draco's

position in Melia's favorite YouTube streamer group, the princess is singled out by her gender and chosen by Jonatan in order to represent an unconventional instance of a princess category. Notably, Jonatan's princess is the only one which came as a direct reference to a specific character.

Figure 13 – Bubble-gum hero
Author: Jonatan

His rendition of a hero is also highly unconventional. He presents a pink and purple blob character with a friendly face. Jonatan submits that the character is not exactly a hero. However, he decided to draw a "neutral character" instead. He describes its personality as trying to boss people around, however, concludes that it is a comedy character. Contrary to Melia's hero,

Jonatan's does not create any sense of danger or strength. His pink color amoebous shape and friendly face make him quite cute. This certainly defies the common understanding of the representation of a hero.

10.5 Kuba

Kuba is ten years old. His hobbies include drawing and animation, and as his favorite film he chose *How to Train Your Dragon*. Kuba is an introverted child, and it took some time for him to adjust to the situation within the workshop. However, after this he has become comfortable and together with Jonatan, he started having fun with the tasks approaching them often in a subversive and ironic way. Kuba is very self-critical when it comes to the art style and realism of visual representation.

10.5.1 Classifying films

Kuba marked most of the films as suitable for both girls and boys. The exception was *Tangled* and *Frozen* which he labeled as girl films. In both these films, the lead hero is a princess. Kuba also marked the film *Wreck-it Ralph* as suitable for "gamers", since the film is mostly inspired by the videogame world. He was the only one who decided to involve another category aside from the dual gender categories.

10.5.2 Scenes

Kuba's rescue scene involves a straightforward story of a theft. Giulia (2) steals a gem (4) and Maui (5) fights her using the frying pan. He retrieves the gem and returns it to Flynn (6) who is its original owner. Kuba's story is the only one where a female character was defeated by male character. Similar to other children, Kuba takes death as a very common feature of his stories and indicates that Giulia was not only defeated but also killed. Death was featured in several other stories in the research and was largely portrayed as commonplace and inconsequential.

Kuba specifically comments on character motivations in his heist story. Flynn, the owner of the gem, is portrayed as a vain character, who "flexes" (boasts) with his gem in front of his companions. On the other hand, Kuba explains that Giulia would use the money that she would get for the gem to provide for her father. He is directly connecting Giulia's fictional world, including the existence of her father with his own story.

Kuba attributes prosocial selfless behavior to the female character of Giulia, and vain, selfish behavior to the male character of Flynn. This recreates a quite common gender schema. The decision may be based on the fictional character's personalities in the films. However, Flynn's vanity was not as notable in *Tangled* as it is in Kuba's story, so we may assume he added this feature on his own.

In his second story, Kuba depicts a trivia contest. He shows a large crowd trying to guess an answer to a "terribly difficult question". The speaker in the story asks the crowd: "how much is 1+1". In this story, Kuba uses custom drawn characters. The crowd is not distinguished as to their gender.

10.5.3 Drawings
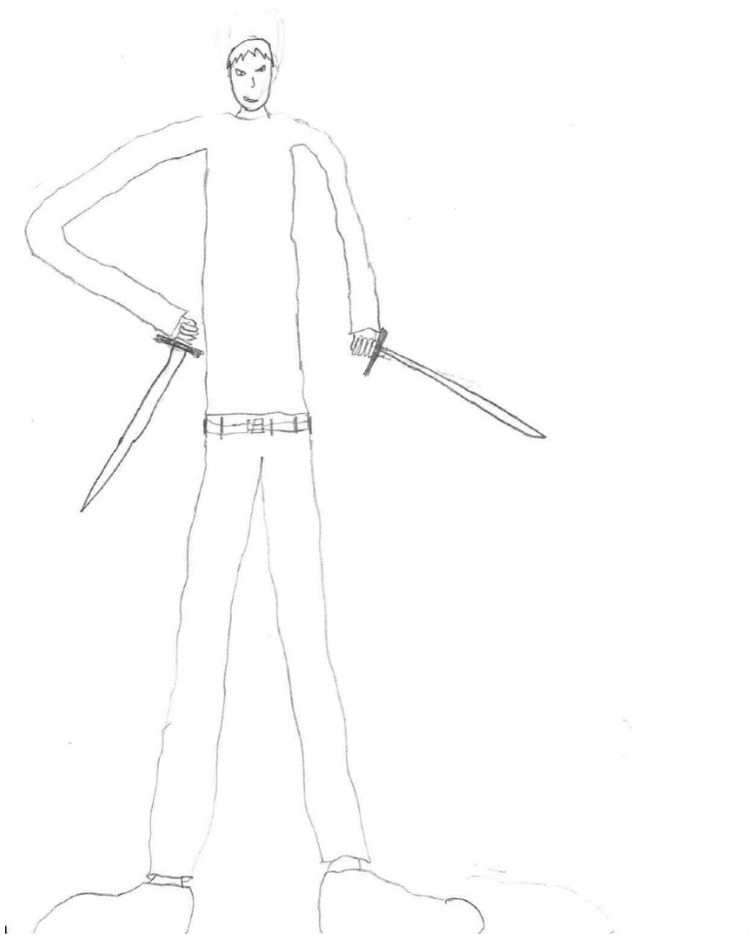
Figure 14 – A hero
Author: Kuba

Kuba produced several drawings. His hero is a male character with squinted eyes and an evil smile. As a princess Kuba first submitted a male character with a crown on his head. He took up Jonatan's suggestion to present a man as a princess and supported his decision with a backstory. A princess died and the man in the picture needs to stand in for her. At this point both Jonatan and Kuba add their ideas and they construct a satirical subversive play on the theme of princesses.

The representation of Kuba's transgender princess comes off as negative. The character looks distressed and angry. Their arms a shown only as snowman-like sticks with three fingers, one foot is much larger than the other. An angry face is drawn on the character's torso. The only conventional feature of this princess representation is the crown. Overall, the portrait is not very flattering. This example would support the view that gender transgression tends to be associated with negative emotions, evil and ugliness (Li-Vollmer 2003: 97-106).

Figure 15 – Princess #1
Author: Kuba

Figure 16 – Princess #2
Author: Kuba

After Jonatan left the session, Kuba started another drawing, where he portrays a princess as a ballet dancer. He draws a female figure with a skirt, a lacey blouse and high-heel shoes. Despite posing with a strong wide stance, this second princess displays more female characteristics than the first one. The view that "girl stuff" (including princesses) is not suitable for boys seems to be a common position expected, performed and perpetuated among boys. Once the peer pressure is gone, they seem more willing to engage with characters and narratives that are perceived as more appropriate for female audience.

10.6 Lesana

Lesana is 6 years old. During the interview she was quite shy, and I used many open questions to encourage her to talk. It seemed hard for her at times to come up with ideas, but she seemed to have fun narrating the stories. Her hobby is drawing. She did not think of a film she would like the best, however, she has seen a couple from the list. She claimed that all films are for both boys and girls.

10.6.1 Scenes

In her story a princess saves a knight who got lost in the forest. Lesana created a detailed custom character of a princess with magical powers. She described her magic as being able to conjure stars and flowers. Lesana's story does not involve any adversary character. The knight simply loses his way getting in trouble by accident. The princess uses a sword to cut her way through the forest. We also discuss the possibility of using balloons to fly over the obstacles. The idea of princess using a sword does not seem odd to Lesana, especially when motivated by the narrative. No obvious gender schema is displayed in her first story.

In her competition story, Lesana shows several characters racing. She chooses Giulia (2) as the winner based on her body posture. Again, the visual representation is more suggestive of the selected role then gender or body type. When I ask who would win if all characters raced each other, Lesana picks Elsa as the winner. Interestingly, she does not justify this decision by her magical powers. Instead, she suggests that Elsa would just "run really fast". Lesana does not rely on the logic of the fictional character. Instead, she seems to choose her favorite character and justify their win by the most readily available means. Again, no particular gender schema is apparent in her story.

10.6.2 Drawings

Figure 17 – A hero and a princess
Author: Lesana

Lesana created careful and detailed drawings of a princess and a knight. Both characters share similar body shape, they have the same eyes with long eyelashes. The princess, however, differs from the knight by a detailed rendition of the lips and a different posture, with legs close to each other. She is also wearing a crown, a pink dress and decorated high-heel shoes. The knight is drawn in a slightly more schematic way. His helmet is indicated by black lines going across his face. Armor is suggested by a zig-zag line going across his chest. Knight has his mouth open so that one can see his teeth and he is sticking out his tongue. Lesana makes use of different means to distinguish between the male and female body type, including details such as body posture.

Finally, Lesana also adopted the notion of a protective relationship between the hero and the princess on her last painting. I asked what a hero does, to which she replied: "he probably protects the princess". She recognized a common scenario within the layout of the drawing, while

by contrast, her rescue story presented the relationship in exactly the opposite direction. It seems that Lesana was able to recognize some gender conventions when presented by typical relationship of a princess and a hero. However, without having this relationship represented in this obvious way, she did not try to model it herself.

11 CONCLUSIONS

From the analytical part, we can extract several key observations.

Children classified most films as suitable and enjoyable for everyone regardless of gender. Films which were commonly labeled as girl films were usually those which featured princesses. Film that was most often labeled as a boy film was Big Hero 6 which features robots and technology. In this sense, the gender stereotype that science, math and robots are male interests seems to last.

Rules of play with the character were to a certain extent arbitrary. When children used characters in their stories, they sometimes focused on an individual visual detail and ignored other traits of the character which would otherwise make their role incoherent with their personality or commonly expected social or gender role. Play provides a large amount of freedom and children can bend the rules of their game if they want to.

The character behavior in children's narratives was to a considerable degree motivated by concrete visual representations of characters. Details such as body posture, facial expression, or a piece of clothing often initiated the decision about the character's role in the story. Therefore, in creating meanings, children preferred to make use of clues that were visually present, rather than following abstract ideas such as modelling behavior appropriate for a princess. Children's awareness of common gender roles such as "hero saves a princess" often surfaced during drawing, while during play, children were less inclined to cast the characters into stereotypical roles. Generic categories offered as themes for the drawing task may have been more successful in evoking a stereotypical response.

Some characters were described as different in a positive way thanks to being the only boy, or only girl in a larger group of people. This is not to say that differentiating through gender should be regarded as a desirable phenomenon. However, there may be merit in acknowledging this occurrence as a factor in children's evaluation and understanding of narratives.

Children often relied on personal experience when making decisions about gender classifications. Having a female friend who plays computer games meant that computer games can be played by both girls and boys. This approach conflates the idea of possibility and a general

tendency. This observation should be considered when evaluating children's classifying statements.

Children usually did not put characters into stereotypical roles in their stories. As one of the few examples, we can take Kuba, who introduced a vain and materialistic character of Flynn, and selfless and altruistic character of Giulia. He seems to have been motivated by the knowledge of the characters from the original films.

Boys expressed great deal of unwillingness in engaging with themes that involved princesses. They often drew their princesses in a mocking or schematic way and continued to approach this activity with irony, especially in the presence of their male peers. Once they were allowed to work on their own, this became much less of a problem for them.

These observations are to serve an array of examples which illustrate different ways children engage with the topic of gender. Hopefully, this material can inform and inspire further inquiries in the field of anthropology of children.

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