



Animated Classic vs. Live-Action Adaptation: A Comparison of Romantic Relationships in Disney Movies

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the improvements made to romantic relationships in Disney princess movies' live-actions remakes. Prior research shows how Disney has improved the portrayal of gender roles in their live-action remakes, and how Disney has improved romantic relationships across their animated films. However, there is no study that focuses on the improvements in live-action remakes in regards to romantic relationships. Data was collected through comparative content analysis, in which all existing princess movies with a live-action counterpart (14 in total) were watched and documented, and these notes were then highlighted with my coding dictionary and compared. Even though this study did not include human subjects, part of this research aims to deduce which version of the Disney movie is better for younger audiences. Initial results showed that the animated originals had very high levels of unhealthy characteristics and low levels of healthy characteristics, while the live-actions displayed the opposite. This means that the live-actions are greatly improving on the aspects reflected in the coding dictionary. Therefore, the conclusion can be made that live-actions are improving the portrayal of romantic relationships in terms of time spent together, consent, positive interactions, physical violence, male emotions, and more. However, this is limited to only current adaptations and only Disney princess movies. Future research should expand to other live-actions in Disney's domain, as well as other companies' adaptations.

1. Introduction

Disney films are a staple in many generations' childhoods: telling stories of heroes, love, family, and other important life lessons. Disney actively improves on their storytelling each year and adapts to each time period. Disney is noteworthy for their fairy tale adaptations, with the main heroines embodying the collective term "Disney princess." The impact of these movies and characters continues through generations because of Disney's newer adaptations in live-action form. The purpose of these live-action adaptations is to profit off famous stories, while also fixing the original mistakes, portraying them in new light. Many of the original animated princess movies contain plot holes, dated jokes, and harmful stereotypes, with a major problem being the romantic relationships the princesses pursue.

The way love portrays itself on screen highly influences children, who are keen to believe most of what they see. Correcting their perception of romance requires attention as it directly affects how they will enter relationships of their own in the future. Much existing research surrounding the live-actions' improvement centers around analyses of gender role development, and any research regarding romantic improvement focuses on only the animated films. So far, there has not been any research directly linking Disney princesses' romantic relationships and improvements made in the live-actions. This research aims to rectify this problem by answering

the question, “How does Disney use live-action remakes of their princess movies to improve the dated portrayal of romantic relationships in the animated films?” Accomplishing this will include watching and analyzing existing Disney princess movies with live-action counterparts, and from there, noting the improvements made to their relationships in terms of healthy and unhealthy characteristics.

2. Literature Review

Though much research has been conducted, none has directly connected these aspects together. Significant research on the improvements made in live-action adaptations exists, but none directly connect romance. Linda Houwers, of Radboud University, highlights the similarities and differences between the live-action and animated versions in terms of gender roles, mainly focusing on Disney’s *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*. She deduces that Cinderella’s character is more “feminist-friendly” in the 2017 adaptation, compared to her original character in 1950, who acts more like a “damsel in distress” (Houwers, 2017). Houwers briefly touches on Cinderella’s ending with her prince, and how an immediate marriage minimizes the feminist changes made to her character (Houwers, 2017). As for Belle, Houwers concludes the live-action only makes minor changes to her character; since Belle’s character was already quite progressive in the 1991 version. Houwers’s overall conclusions convey that the live-action adaptations have more complex characters that break stereotypical gender roles for both femininity and masculinity (Houwers, 2017). However, they fail to go much further than the analysis of gender roles. Houwer’s paper exposes the lack of research specifically surrounding romantic relationships in comparison to the live-action remakes.

Gender roles are intertwined with the concept of romantic relationships, as seen in Houwers’s (2017) commentary on the ending in *Cinderella (2015)*, but they are still lacking explicit connections to the substance of relationships. Kaitlyn Brown, of Salve Regina University, compares live-actions and animated Disney princesses films finding in both portrayals that princesses exude characteristics involving them being weak, submissive, belittled, etc. Brown touches on how most princesses have to be saved by men in their story or fall victim to “true love” (Brown, 2020). Despite this, Brown agrees with Houwers (2017): the live-action versions are more progressive and beneficial to young audiences, allowing for more detailed and complex characters and modern, feminist female leads (Brown, 2020). Noting how the female lead acts will directly impact how she behaves in a relationship and how the male lead will treat her, but the focus on gender roles in this comparison still leads to a significant gap.

Disney’s portrayal of romantic love is vital because ultimately Disney markets towards children, and they need to see a well-rounded depiction of romance or else they will think unhealthy relationships are normal. Veronica Hefner, a quantitative media scholar with a PhD in communication, and colleagues do a content analysis of “romantic ideals” in Disney princesses movies, again excluding live-actions (Hefner et al., 2017). Hefner and colleagues find the media children consume will have a direct impact on what they may see as normal or acceptable, including relationships (Hefner et al., 2017), noting how the romance Disney portrays specifically is idealized and unrealistic, which will negatively influence the viewer (Hefner et al., 2017). Additional research including the modern adaptations would strengthen Hefner’s argument of how Disney is seeking to improve their representation of romance. Children are more likely to watch newer films, compared to the older versions; so it is vital to compare and determine which portrayal is healthier and a better influence.

Ultimately, the gap highlights there is no paper discussing the improvements of romantic relationships in Disney princess movies' live-action remakes. There is research showing relationships improve over time in Disney films, but they fail to include the newest renditions of these films, as seen in Johnson's (2015) research. There are papers comparing the live-actions to the animated classics, but they are limited to gender roles. My research aims to explore how the live-action remakes improve the healthiness of these relationships, including the live-action films that have yet to be included in modern research.

3. Methods

Disney films have been “one of the most influential aspects in children’s media” since 1937 (Johnson 2015). Disney has also found a lot of success with their live-action remakes, leading to an influx of adaptations that have yet to be analyzed together. The films I selected for my research are fourteen in total: *Mulan* (1998), *Mulan* (2020), *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937), *Snow White* (2025), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *The Little Mermaid* (2023), *Cinderella* (1950), *Cinderella* (2015), *Aladdin* (1992), *Aladdin* (2019), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), and *Maleficent* (2014). These were chosen as they are the only Disney princesses with live-action counterparts and previous researchers selected their films by using all of the pairs at the time. For example, Houwers (2017) only discusses *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast* because her paper was published in 2017, thus they were the only live-action Disney princess movies at the time.

Specifically for *Sleeping Beauty*, I chose *Maleficent* (2014) as its live-action counterpart even though there are stark differences because it is highly unlikely for Disney to produce a different live-action version when *Maleficent* (2014) was successful. I did not include any sequels, even though many sequels develop the couple’s relationship further, because there is no live-action counterpart to make an informative comparison. I used Disney’s official website to define what a “Disney princess” is and is not. I also wanted to focus on human/humanoid couples, so I excluded movies like *The Lion King*, which has royalty and romance, but is about lions. This choice was made because it is easier to see one’s self in a human character, compared to an animal.

I have selected comparative content analysis for this research. Chava Frankfort-Nachmias at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and colleagues define comparison as an operation to demonstrate when two variables are correlated (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2022) and content analysis as obtaining copies of the communication produced (when available) and asking questions about these records (Frankfort-Nachmias et al., 2022). This worked best because it allows for systematic comparison across multiple films, which cannot be produced through an experiment of audience opinions alone. Additionally, my research is ethical because all of the movies I analyzed already exist on streaming platforms, and anyone can access them with a subscription. Even though I discuss the impact romantic portrayals have on children, I will not actually conduct studies on children subjects, due to IRB limitations.

For the analysis, I watched the films back to back in pairs on different days so I could give them individual attention (e.g. both *Cinderella* movies on Monday, both *Aladdin* movies on Tuesday, and so on). While I watched, I took notes on all of the scenes involving both characters and time stamps of when they met. These notes consisted of simply what I was seeing, and were informal and not incredibly detailed. From these notes, I picked out specific scenes that

develop the relationship the most. These scenes were then split into two categories: Improved Scenes and Additional Scenes, and two scenes were selected for each.

3a. Improved Scenes

An Improved Scene is a scene occurring in both movies, but is greatly improved in the live-action. They were chosen completely dependent on the animated originals. For earlier movies (*Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*), the couples only had about two scenes together (their first meeting and kiss scene), so those were the ones selected. If the couples had more scenes, I picked harmful ones in order to see any improvements made in the live-action. I isolated these scenes by finding the clips for both movies on YouTube and adding the links accordingly. By rewatching the isolated scenes, I took more detailed notes on the meaning behind these interactions for the overall relationship.

3b. Additional Scenes

An Additional Scene is a new scene in the live-action and not in the original. In all of the live-actions (except for *Maleficent*), the couples have more interactions to get to know each other. These scenes improve problems that occurred originally or simply add more development and connection between the couples. The scenes I picked are the ones that improved the quality of their relationship the most. This includes sharing similar interests, new songs, supporting one another, or general flirting. Once I selected the scene, I repeated the process of isolating it and taking detailed notes. These detailed notes were then categorized based on my Coding Dictionary and highlighted with the corresponding colors.

3c. Coding Dictionary

My Coding Dictionary is adapted from Meagan Shipley and colleagues' article titled "Piecing Together Behaviors of Healthy Relationships." They analyzed healthy and unhealthy aspects in adolescents' romantic relationships to educate youth and crafted a chart which I used to develop my own Coding Dictionary, a side-by-side of our charts is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Coding Dictionary Comparison

Coding Dictionary Comparison

Shipley's Chart

Healthy Characteristics	Unhealthy Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mutual respect. Respect means that each person values who the other is and understands the other person's boundaries. Trust. Partners should place trust in each other and give each other the benefit of the doubt. Honesty. Being truthful, even when it might be uncomfortable, which builds trust and strengthens the relationship. Compromise. Each partner does not always get his or her way. Each should acknowledge different points of view and be willing to give and take. Individuality. Neither person should have to compromise who he/she is, and his/her identity should not be based on a partner's. Each should continue seeing his or her friends and doing the things he/she loves. Each should be supportive of his/her partner wanting to pursue new hobbies or make new friends. Good communication. Each partner should speak honestly and openly to avoid miscommunication. If one person needs to vent out his or her feelings first, the other partner should respect those wishes and wait until he or she is ready to talk. Anger control. Controlling emotions that may be perceived as hostile. Anger can be handled in healthy ways such as taking a deep breath, counting to ten, or talking it out. Fighting fair. Those who are fight fair, stick to the subject and avoid insults. Problem solving. Partners can learn to solve problems and identify new solutions by breaking a problem into small parts or by talking through the situation. Understanding. Each partner should take time to understand what the other might be feeling. Self-confidence. Being comfortable enough to allow others to express their opinions without forcing their own opinions on them. Being a role model. Inspiring others, friends, and family to also behave in a respectful way. Healthy sexual relationship. Dating partners engage in a sexual relationship that both are comfortable with, and neither partner feels pressured or forced to engage in sexual activity that is outside his or her comfort zone or without consent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Control. One partner makes all the decisions and tells the other what to do, what to wear, or who to spend time with. He or she is unreasonably jealous and/or tries to isolate the other partner from his or her friends and family. Jealousy. One partner picks a fight with or antagonizes the other partner. This may lead to one partner changing his or her behavior in order to avoid upsetting the other. Disloyalty. One partner steals or lies to or keeps information from the other. Disrespect. One partner makes fun of the opinions and interests of the other partner or destroys something that belongs to the partner. Dependence. One partner feels he or she "cannot live without" the other. He or she may threaten to do something drastic if the relationship ends. Isolationism. One partner tries to control aspects of the other's life by making the other partner fearful or timid. One partner may attempt to keep his or her partner from friends and family or threaten violence or a break-up. Physical violence. One partner uses force to get his or her way (e.g., hitting, slapping, grabbing, or shoving). Sexual violence. One partner pressures or forces the other into sexual activity against his or her will or without consent.

My Chart

Healthy Characteristics	Unhealthy Characteristics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anger control. Controlling emotions that may be perceived as hostile. Anger can be handled in healthy ways such as taking a deep breath, counting to ten, or talking it out. Understanding. Each partner should take time to understand what the other might be feeling. Compromise. Each partner does not always get his or her way. Each should acknowledge different points of view and be willing to give and take. Partners can learn to solve problems and identify new solutions by breaking a problem into small parts or by talking through the situation. Individuality. Neither person should have to compromise who he/she is, and his/her identity should not be based on a partner's. Each should continue seeing his or her friends and doing the things he/she loves. Each should be supportive of his/her partner wanting to pursue new hobbies or make new friends. Mutual respect. Respect means that each person values who the other is and understands the other person's boundaries. Trust. Partners should place trust in each other and give each other the benefit of the doubt. Good communication. Each partner should speak honestly and openly to avoid miscommunication. If one person needs to vent out his or her feelings first, the other partner should respect those wishes and wait until he or she is ready to talk. Positive Interactions. Affection during early stages of the relationship. Some examples include being nice to each other, encouraging comments, compliments, gift-giving, humor/joking, play, support, lingering looks, lingering touches. These scenes also play a part in getting to know someone better, improving the "love at first sight" narrative (Cavaletto). Consent. Dating partners engage in a relationship that both are comfortable with, and neither partner feels pressured or forced to engage in romantic activity that is outside his or her comfort zone or without permission (Shipley). Yearning. a strong feeling of wishing for something, especially something that you cannot have or get easily (Cambridge Dictionary). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Physical violence. One partner uses force to get his or her way (e.g., hitting, slapping, grabbing, or shoving). Isolationism. One partner tries to control aspects of the other's life by making the other partner fearful or timid. One partner may attempt to keep his or her partner from friends and family or threaten violence or a break-up. Control. One partner makes all the decisions and tells the other what to do, what to wear, or who to spend time with. He or she is unreasonably jealous and/or tries to isolate the other partner from his or her friends and family. Disrespect. One partner makes fun of the opinions and interests of the other partner or destroys something that belongs to the partner. This can also include ruining this partner's mood or using insults towards them. Love at first sight. A situation in which you start to love someone or strongly like something immediately, the first time you see them or it (Cambridge Dictionary). Withholding Consent. One partner pressures or forces the other into romantic activity against his or her will or without consent (Shipley). Anger expression. The opposite of anger control: being unable to keep your emotions in check and taking them out on your partner or those around you (Shipley).

Note: Shipley, M., Holden, C., McNeill, E. B., Fehr, S., & Wilson, K. (2018). Piecing Together Behaviors of Healthy Relationships. *Health Educator*, 50(1), 24–29. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1196102>

There were some characteristics Shipley included that I did not find relevant to my research, so I eliminated them. I also added some aspects I thought were lacking; anything in bold text are my own characteristics. I got these definitions from Cambridge Dictionary or April Cavaletto, at the University of Maryland, and colleagues' paper about aspects of healthy relationships. My definitions regarding consent are adapted from Shipley's definitions regarding sexual activity. My definition for *Anger expression* is put into my own words, but acts as the opposite of *Anger control*, which is defined by Shipley.

3d. Subjectivity

The selected scenes certainly impacted the relationship greatly, but placing them into categories proved to be challenging. I wanted to eliminate as much personal bias as possible, so for difficult scenes, I would consult a peer. After watching the scene, I would show her my Coding Dictionary and ask her which of the categories she would place it in, without influencing her. I already had a characteristic in mind of what I wanted to classify it as, and we agreed every time. This addition of inter-rater reliability strengthens my research.

4. Findings

4a. Time Stamps

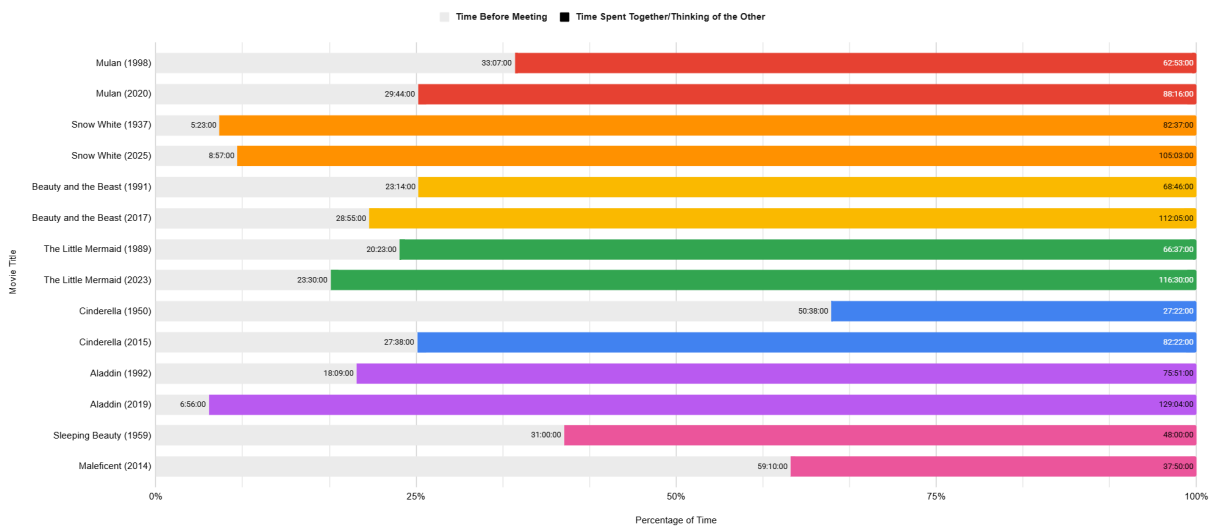
When watching the movies, I took the time stamps of when the couples met and compared it to the entire length of the individual movie. All of the movies involve some sort of engagement or marriage at the end; therefore, the time from the moment they meet to the end of the movie is the total amount the couple spent together or thought about each other while apart. The following data table and chart were created.

Table 2: Time Stamps Data Table

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1		Time Before Meeting	Time Spent Together/Thinking of the Other	Total Time	Percentage of Time Spent Apart	Percentage of Time Spent Together
2	Mulan (1998)	33:07:00	62:53:00	96:00:00	34.50%	65.50%
3	Mulan (2020)	29:44:00	88:16:00	118:00:00	25.20%	74.80%
4	Snow White (1937)	5:23:00	82:37:00	88:00:00	6.12%	93.88%
5	Snow White (2025)	8:57:00	105:03:00	114:00:00	7.85%	92.15%
6	Beauty and the Beast (1991)	23:14:00	68:46:00	92:00:00	25.25%	74.75%
7	Beauty and the Beast (2017)	28:55:00	112:05:00	141:00:00	20.51%	79.49%
8	The Little Mermaid (1989)	20:23:00	66:37:00	87:00:00	23.43%	76.57%
9	The Little Mermaid (2023)	23:30:00	116:30:00	140:00:00	16.79%	83.21%
10	Cinderella (1950)	50:38:00	27:22:00	78:00:00	64.91%	35.09%
11	Cinderella (2015)	27:38:00	82:22:00	110:00:00	25.12%	74.88%
12	Aladdin (1992)	18:09:00	75:51:00	94:00:00	19.31%	80.69%
13	Aladdin (2019)	6:56:00	129:04:00	136:00:00	5.10%	94.90%
14	Sleeping Beauty (1959)	31:00:00	48:00:00	79:00:00	39.24%	60.76%
15	Maleficent (2014)	59:10:00	37:50:00	97:00:00	61.00%	39.00%

Table 3

Meeting Time Stamps in Disney Princess Movies (Animated vs. Live-Action)

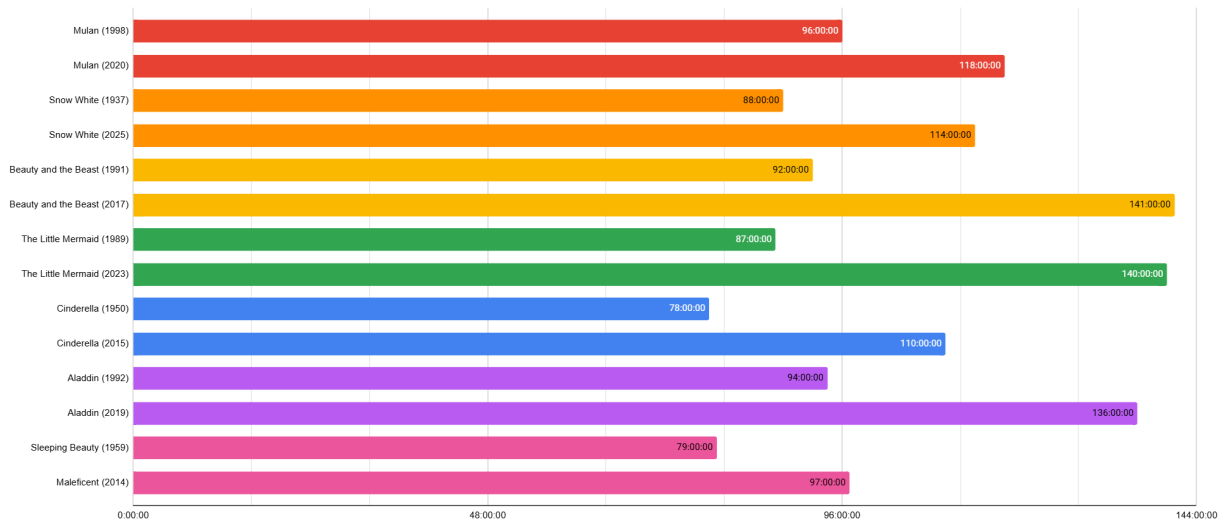


As seen in Table 3, all of the live-action couples meet sooner; however, there are few exceptions. For *Sleeping Beauty*, *Maleficent (2014)* focuses less on Aurora's relationship with Philip, and more with her relationship with Maleficent, who acts as a maternal figure. The shift of focus from romantic love to maternal love makes the underdevelopment of Philip and Aurora's

relationship more comprehensible. For *Snow White*, the difference is minimal; however, *Snow White (2025)* is significantly longer compared to the original. In total, the live-action couple spends 105 minutes together, while the animated couple spends 82 minutes together. It is also important to note that Snow White and Prince Charming only have two scenes together, and we do not see either of them truly thinking about the other while apart. Table 4 showcases the total times of all the films.

Table 4

Total Times of Animated vs. Live-action Disney Princess Movies



4b. Coding Dictionary

After going through my detailed notes and highlighting all the appropriate information based on my Coding Dictionary, I counted all the highlighted parts up and applied them to the following table.

Table 5: Isolated Scenes Highlight Count

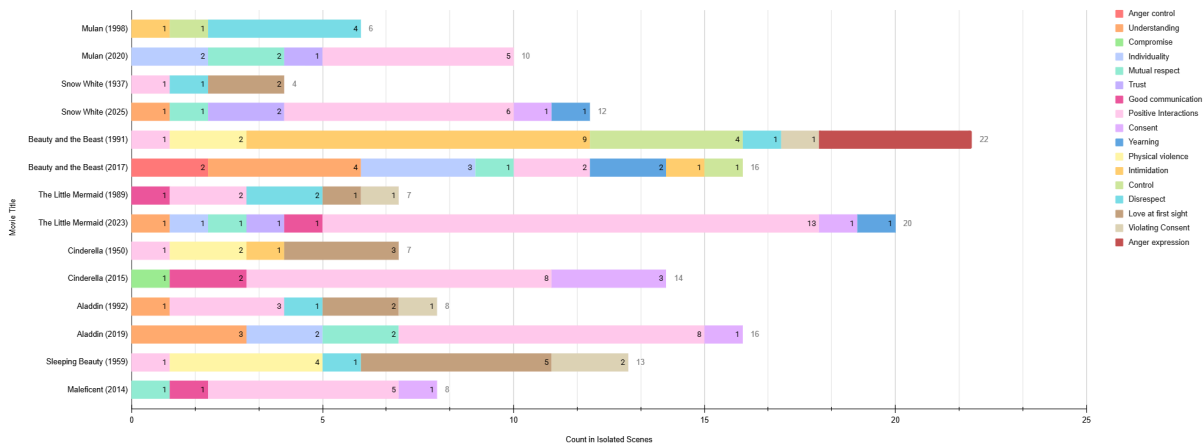
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	
1		Anger control	Understanding	Compromise	Individuality	Mutual respect	Trust	Good communication	Positive Interactions	Consent	Warning	Physical violence	Intimidation	Control	Disrespect	Love at first sight	Violating Consent	Danger expression	Totals	
2	Mulan (1998)																			6
3	Mulan (2020)					2	2	1		5					1	1				10
4	Snow White (1937)									1								1	2	4
5	Snow White (2025)			1				1	2	6	1	1								12
6	Beauty and the Beast (1991)									1										22
7	Beauty and the Beast (2017)	2	4			3	1			2			2	9	4	1		1	4	16
8	The Little Mermaid (1989)								1	2					1	1				7
9	The Little Mermaid (2023)			1		1	1	1	1	13	1	1								20
10	Cinderella (1950)									1										7
11	Cinderella (2015)				1				2	6	3									14
12	Aladdin (1992)			1						3						1	2	1		8
13	Aladdin (2019)			3		2	2			8	1									16
14	Sleeping Beauty (1959)									1						1	5	2		13
15	Maleficent (2014)								1	5	1									8
16	Totals	2	10	1	8	8	4	4	5	56	7	4	8	12	6	10	13	5	4	153

This table was then used to construct the following charts. Table 6 shows each time a characteristic occurs in each movie.

Table 6



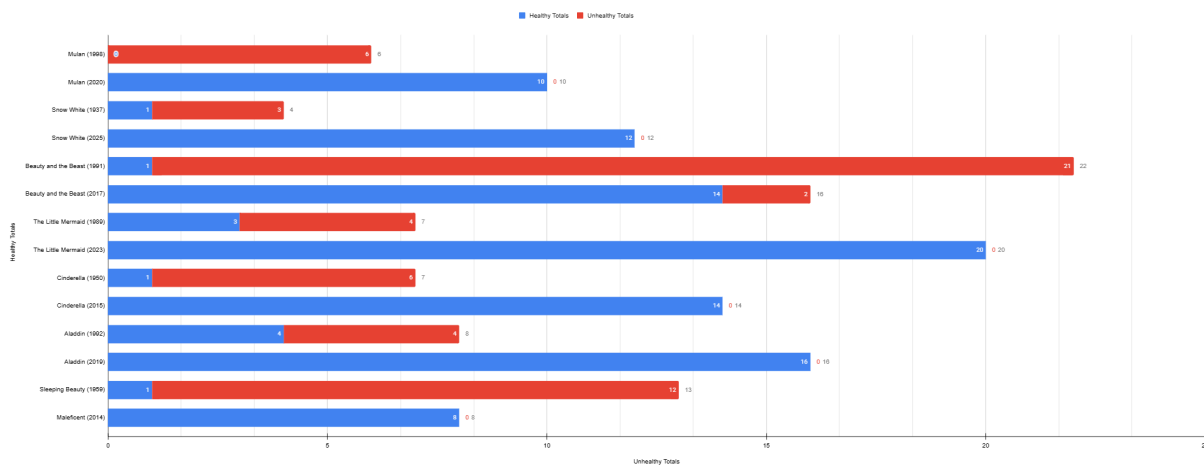
Coding Dictionary Counts in Isolated Scenes of Disney Princess Originals vs. Live-Actions



I combined all the Healthy Characteristics and Unhealthy Characteristics for Table 7, to show the totals for each movie. The animated originals have high levels of Unhealthy Characteristics and low levels of Healthy Characteristics, while the live-actions display the opposite.

Table 7

Unhealthy Totals vs. Healthy Totals in Isolated Scenes of Disney Princess Originals vs. Live-Actions



5. Analysis

5a. First Meetings

The time Disney couples spend together reflects directly on the quality of their relationship because giving them more time to sit with their emotions leads to more development in their love; a case of improvement highlighted with *Cinderella*. *Cinderella (1950)* involves Cinderella and Prince Charming meeting at the ball, where they do not speak to each other, learn names, or anything about the other’s character. After the ball, they are only seen one other time together: their wedding day. In between scenes, Cinderella looks dreamily and

hums to herself as she reminisces on her time spent with the prince, but we have no inkling of how he may be feeling. In total, they only spend 35.09% together/thinking about each other, versus the 74.88% in the live-action. In the adaptation, Ella and Kit (the prince's nickname) meet much sooner and learn more about the other's character. We also see both perspectives of how one is impacting the other as their love continues to grow.

Love is a complex emotion that takes time and understanding to truly flourish. Love also needs to be based on connection, and it is impossible to connect with someone you do not know anything about, especially such crucial details as their name. By implementing that love takes time and will lead to a healthier product, the live-actions send a better message regarding relationship quality. It also diminishes the "love at first sight" narrative, which has been established as harmful and idealized. Thus, the more time the couples spend together, the more interaction they have; which leads to an overall increase in healthy characteristics.

5b. Physical and Verbal Consent

The most impactful improvement implemented is the use of consent. In many of the animated originals, the princes violate the princesses' consent by forcing themselves onto them and ignoring their obvious displeasure. One of the prime examples is in *Sleeping Beauty (1959)*. When Aurora and Philip first meet, Philip grabs Aurora's hand multiple times as she is actively trying to get away from him. Her body language clearly states she does not appreciate his advances nor wish to introduce herself. The live-action improves this by having Philip give Aurora the space her attitude communicates. Even when she trips and he helps her up, he understands he startled her and asks for her forgiveness. A side-by-side of their first meeting is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Sleeping Beauty (1959) vs. Maleficent (2014) First Meeting Scene Comparison

Sleeping Beauty (1959)

Maleficent (2014)



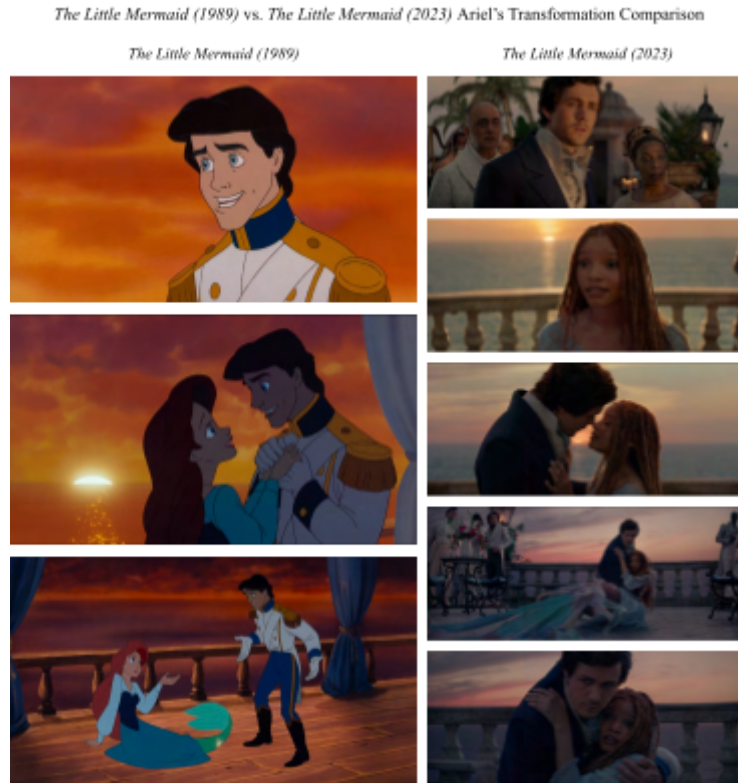
The more they talk, the more comfortable they become and introduce themselves. Aurora's body language shifts and she is clearly more happy and relaxed. Respecting boundaries and reading body language is a vital part of a healthy relationship. In the original, after Philip grabs Aurora multiple times, her body language softens and they dance together, which is the wrong message to send. This tells young audiences even though someone you are pursuing is actively running away and avoiding your advances, they secretly like it and you should continue because eventually you will win them over. The opposite is being displayed in the live-action: the more you respect someone's boundaries and ease the situation, the more likely they are to open up to you, leading to a mature introduction.

5c. Positive Interactions

The *Positive Interactions* characteristic had the most counts overall related to general improvement. Romantic chemistry is significantly improved upon in *The Little Mermaid (2023)* specifically, with a total of 13 positive interactions, the most out of any movie analyzed. This score comes from Eric's overall support for Ariel and their body language towards each other. When Ariel transforms back into the mermaid, there is a stark difference in Eric's reaction. Eric's

support for Ariel is evident in his reaction to hold Ariel close, instead of letting her flop on the floor. Ariel transforming back is a vulnerable moment for her, and when Eric supports her, it shows that he will continue to love her in any form.

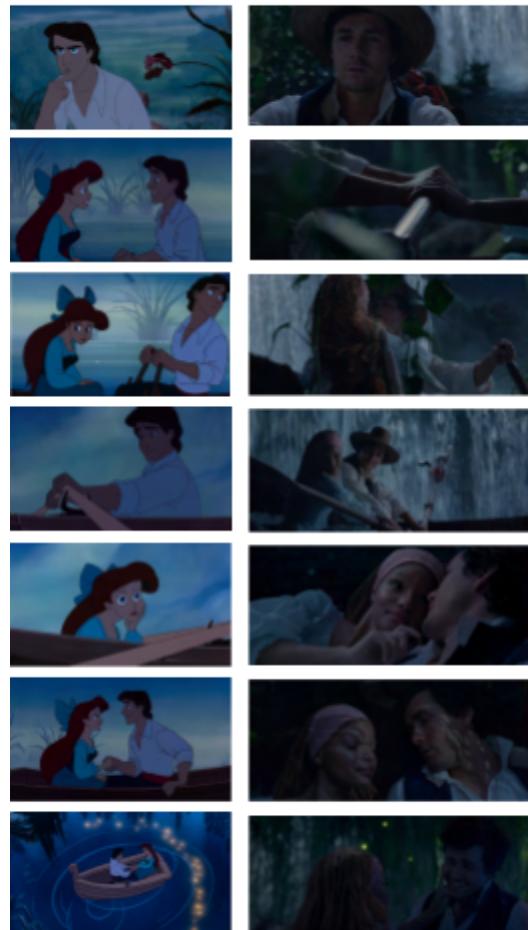
Figure 2



We see his affection being carried out during *Kiss the Girl* as well. In the original, Ariel and Eric have not spent much time together prior to their date in the lagoon, leading to little interaction and awkward moments. The affection between them feels especially forced because of Sebastian's overbearing encouragement. The live-action highlights Eric's body language as he develops feelings for Ariel, and the song helps bring those feelings to fruition. The pair has also spent time together previously, so they have an established connection. Eric's longingly looks towards Ariel throughout the entire song are evident, a stark contrast to the original.

Figure 3

*The Little Mermaid (1989) vs. The Little Mermaid
(2023) Kiss the Girl Comparison*



The improved connection between Ariel and Eric shows even small interactions make a big difference when portraying healthy relationships. By adding Eric's longing looks towards Ariel, the audience is more convinced about the status of his love and how it has taken extra time to develop, eliminating awkward aspects that make one question the vitality of his love.

5d. Physical Violence

The pattern of improvement is evident across each movie, but it excels in the development of *Beauty and the Beast*. The original film had the worst overall score regarding Belle and the Beast's relationship, with 21/22 Unhealthy Characteristics. The reason for this incredibly high score is the Beast's temper. The movie establishes early on that the Prince is selfish and unkind, resulting in anger issues directed at Belle. His attitude is vital to the story as he learns to be gentle and kind the more time spent with Belle. However, his actions toward the beginning are inexcusable and he never takes accountability. Their first meeting displays these horrid actions, seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4



Belle is talking to her father in the dungeon and the Beast grabs her by the shoulder and throws her on the ground, leading to a power imbalance as he threatens her in the dark. In the live-action, the Beast does not touch Belle and is clearly more respectful of her space. He still hides in the dark, but likely because of his insecurities regarding his looks. He does not feel the need to make Belle feel small and create a power imbalance to show her even though he is beastly, he is still better than her. The Beast's temper and arrogance is shown further Belle's first night at the castle, seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Beauty and the Beast (1991) vs. Beauty and the Beast (2017) Asking Belle to Dinner Comparison

Beauty and the Beast (1991)

Beauty and the Beast (2017)



When Belle refuses to go to dinner with the Beast, he runs on all fours to her room, bangs on the door, and yells at her. After Belle offers him a polite refusal, he disregards her clear boundary, continues to yell at her, and threatens her with starvation. In the live-action, the Beast asks her to dinner in a more calm manner. Straying from the original, Belle stands her ground and is appalled he would even ask her to dinner because he took away her freedom, a reasonable reaction. Unfortunately, the Beast still loses his temper and raises his voice. Still, he is not roaring and trying to dictate her.

The changes in attitude directly shows how harmful anger is and how one should keep their emotions under control so as to not harm those around them. The Beast exhibiting brute force and expecting Belle to obey him enforces unhealthy behavior, indicating this is acceptable behavior because he and Belle enter a relationship in the end. Further highlighting the importance of Belle standing up to him in the live-action, and specifically teaching young girls to not let their partners treat them poorly, especially when they have already told them no.

5e. Male Emotions

All of the previously collected information improved aspects on the female side of the relationship, which is of the utmost importance as women are constantly treated abysmally on screen and it is deemed romantic. However, I also noticed the men express more emotions in the live-actions regarding their love, specifically the Prince's reaction to Snow White's death, seen in Figure 6.

Figure 6



In *Snow White (1937)*, when Snow White is presumably dead, the Prince approaches Snow White's unconscious body without any expression and immediately goes to kiss her. He has no understanding of what happened, but clearly sees she is dead and does not provide a reaction. When she wakes up, he expresses minimal excitement, and they hug each other. The live-action love interest, Jonathan, distinctly displays his emotions. We see his uneasiness due to his ragged breath and shaking hands. He is also seen crying, a logical reaction to losing the woman you love. When the curse is broken, Jonathan is clearly confused but extremely relieved, and then they share a more passionate kiss.

This sends a positive message to young boys that expressing overwhelming emotions is not embarrassing, pathetic, or weak; especially when it comes to love. By understanding the emotions caused by love, one can act accordingly and apply that to themselves and their relationships without shame. Jonathan's case is of important note: there is nothing wrong with crying, especially when you have lost someone close to you. This healthy way of expressing emotions, unlike the Beast, leads to better communication between partners, instead of leaving feelings bottled up.

5f. Outliers

The adaptations of *Aladdin* and *Mulan* show improvements, but not as drastically as the other films, making them both outliers. The main improvements for *Aladdin* (2017) consist of an Additional Scene before Aladdin turns into a prince. This establishes his connection with Jasmine further as it showcases the real him and not his prince persona. The major improvement made to *Mulan*'s relationship is that her love interest is no longer her commanding officer and is instead a fellow soldier, eliminating unnecessary power imbalances. A comparison is shown in Figure 8 of their first meeting.

Figure 8



Despite both changes being minimal, they still improve the quality of the relationships greatly as they add more development and exclude harmful power dynamics.

6. Limitations

My conclusions would be strengthened if I had a team of people with different world views to classify each scene. Perhaps even a simple survey asking people which version they prefer. Ideally, I would play the isolated scenes for a team of children of different genders and ask which one they prefer and why, to deduce which is healthier for younger audiences.

7. Conclusion

At the time of constructing this study, the live-action versions of Disney's *Moana* and *Tangled* have only been announced and not released. In the future, I would like to apply the same time and research to these two films to observe any changes. I would also like to expand my research to other live-actions in Disney's domain (such as *The Lion King* or *Lady and the*

Tramp), as well as many other modern remakes. Many current movies are renditions of older films or sequels/prequels. It would be interesting to see if other film companies contain the same level of development Disney does. The result of my findings hints that other adaptations will also improve on their originals.

The aim of this research was to examine how the live-action versions of Disney Princess films improve their depiction of love and romance compared to the animated originals. My findings prove live-actions develop more aspects of healthy romance, and further provide support for this claim by analyzing specific characteristics. The live-action remakes incorporate more examples of consent and respect towards boundaries, as well as adding more positive interactions, contributing to the process of getting to know someone. Taking more time to learn details about each other explicitly shows how love develops. After sitting with these emotions, many male leads were able to show more emotions regarding how their partner affected them deeply. All of these aspects will contribute to a better message of what love should look like for younger audiences. By understanding healthy relationships at an early and developmental stage, children will carry these lessons into their adulthood, where they treat their partner and themselves better.

The overarching fact that the more modern retellings are greatly improved in terms of romance is not surprising, given Johnson's (2015) findings. However, the lack of details and research behind what actually makes the live-actions better was significant. These findings show exactly what was problematic and harmful in the originals and the specific scenes the live-actions used to amend these mistakes; connecting live-action development to romance and directly filling the gap. This research was constructed to aid parents that may unconsciously be teaching harmful dynamics, but it also acts as a way for movie directors to understand what goes into their films. By fully understanding how two characters interact over the course of an entire film, they will be able to display healthy interactions that do not harm audiences' perception of love and thus make better adaptations.

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