

“Look Out New World, Here We Come”?

Race, Racialization, and Sexuality in Four Children’s Animated Films by Disney, Pixar, and DreamWorks

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In this essay, the authors argue that, as suggested by Giroux, animated films offer children intricate teachings about race and sexuality, guiding children through the complexities of highly racialized and sexualized scenarios. Moreover, the authors explain how animated films for children teach children how to maneuver within the general terrain of “race” and “sexuality,” and they highlight quite specific differences. Thus, in their role as agents of socialization and “portable professors,” these films provide children with the necessary tools to reinforce expectations about normalized racial and sexual dynamics.

Keywords: Racialized anthropomorphism; heterosexism; animated films; socialization

Children’s Films as Agents of Socialization

The last decade or so has witnessed a proliferation of successful animated films, the majority of which have been made by Disney, Disney and Pixar, and DreamWorks.¹ Full of fantastic computer-generated images and special effects, the characters in these films depart from the simpler, two-dimensional designs in earlier (mostly Disney) films and provide viewers with more sophisticated, three-dimensional, emotion-displaying characters. Technological advances notwithstanding, these films, on a social level, offer viewers all-too-familiar and ordinary lessons wrapped in extraordinary and sometimes-magical plots. In a basic sense, the narratives embedded within these recent stories provide children (their primary target audience), and even adults, with audio-visual reinforcement of ideologies concerning gender roles, the importance of conquering one’s fears, the

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rewards of hard work, or the benefits of team effort, making these stories powerful agents of socialization. Elizabeth Freeman (2005) actually describes these films as "portable professors" of a sort, offering diagnoses of culture for adults even as they enculturate children" (p. 85).

These successful animated films also offer lessons about accepting ourselves for who we are, the wonders of pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps, and the idea that love conquers all—even seemingly insurmountable class differences, ill-intentioned acts, and evil characters. Similarly, the narratives teach very specific messages regarding clear-cut dichotomies such as good and evil; namely, that good and evil are mutually exclusive, self-contained monoliths and that the good will always be good whereas the evil will always be evil. Henry Giroux (1999) explains this best when he claims that with these films, the corporations involved (e.g., Disney, Pixar, and DreamWorks) are "regulating culture," and thus, profoundly influencing "children's culture and their everyday lives" (p. 2). The messages embedded within these films resonate with children and are reiterated through other sources, while they also resound with parents who have received the same lessons since childhood. As Helaine Silverman (2002) conveys, "As a quintessential form of American public culture, animated movies may be examined as a site where collective social understandings are created and in which the politics of signification are engaged" (p. 299). According to Giroux (1999), these films are part of a popular culture that "is the primary way in which youth learn about themselves, their relationship to others, and the larger world" (p. 2). He goes on to argue that

media culture has become a substantial, if not the primary educational force in regulating the meanings, values, and tastes that set the norms, that offer up and legitimate particular subject positions—what it means to claim an identity as male, female, white, black, citizen, noncitizen. (pp. 2-3)

Giroux (1999) insists that "entertainment is always an educational force" (p. 28). Within this "edutainment," "animated films operate . . . as the new teaching machines" and "they possess at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching roles, values, and ideals as more traditional sites of learning" (p. 84).

In this article, we argue that, as suggested by Giroux, animated films offer children intricate teachings about race and sexuality. Thus, as socializing agents or "teaching machines," these films guide U.S. children through the complexities of highly racialized and sexualized scenarios, normalizing certain dynamics and rendering others invisible in the process. We fundamentally disagree with Bell, Haas, and Sells (1995) who argue that "Disney's trademarked innocence operates on a systematic sanitation of violence, sexuality, and political struggle concomitant with an erasure or repression of difference" (p. 7). To the contrary, these films precisely teach children how to maneuver within the general terrain of "race" and "sexuality," and they highlight quite specific differences. It is our contention that films, in their role as agents of socialization and "portable professors," provide

children with the necessary tools to reinforce expectations about normalized racial and sexual dynamics. To illustrate our points, we will focus on four specific films: *The Road to El Dorado* (2000), *Shark Tale* (2004), *Dinosaur* (1993), and *Toy Story* (1995). We could discuss race and sexuality as intersecting markers within the context of each film, but in the interest of clarity, we will discuss each category separately here.

Con Men and Fish: Racialized Representations and Animated Films

In her book, *Understanding Disney*, Janet Wasko (2003) lists the various elements found in any “classic” Disney narrative: style, story, characters, and themes/values, along with the formulaic components of each. We would like to focus on her description of characters, for it is through the characters that “we” piece together the story, learn the themes/values, and get a feel for the film’s style. According to Wasko, Disney anthropomorphizes animal characters, presents formulaic heroes, heroines, and villains, and provides stereotypical representations of gender and ethnicity. We can offer two points in relation to Wasko’s basic claims. First, Wasko’s description of Disney’s animated characters can likewise be extended to the animated characters in films made by DreamWorks and Pixar (as we will discuss in this article);² and second, her claim regarding stereotypical representations can be expanded in the following way: Even though animals (and other nonhuman characters) are anthropomorphized in children’s animated films, these films also, unfailingly, racialize nonhuman characters in the process. That is to say, these characters are not simply transformed into some generic “human” (for there are no generic humans); rather, they are inscribed, for example, as White “humans,” Black “humans,” Asian “humans,” or Latino “humans.” Thus, we maintain that animal and other nonhuman characters undergo a kind of racialized anthropomorphism within animated films. Our discussion of *Shark Tale*, below, will illustrate this point.

Similarly, although human characters in animated films still “play” formulaic and stereotypical roles and adhere to strict dichotomies, the scope of these roles and the shape of these dichotomies seem to be broadening in recent films, adapting to contemporary definitions. We will use *The Road to El Dorado* to illustrate this point. Consequently, we also argue that while many “classic” animated films (often featuring human characters) tend to adhere to strict dichotomies (e.g., good/evil, hero/villain, etc.), there are also recent notable examples (generally featuring anthropomorphized characters) that create more nuanced constructions of these binaries. That is to say, while we still see films that enact clear sets of binaries and simultaneously racialize characters in accord with these roles, we are also witnessing very recent films that complicate classic structures. The two films discussed in this section provide examples of each sort of film.

Stereotypes and Dichotomies in *The Road to El Dorado*

We begin our discussion with a film that conforms to classic structures and dichotomies: DreamWorks' *The Road to El Dorado*. Adding to Wasko's discussion of stereotypical representations of race and ethnicity in children's films, and—we add—sexuality, we argue that stereotypical representations must be placed within a broader, more complicated historical context within which gendered, racialized, and sexualized dynamics take place. In other words, stereotyped representations are only relevant because they simultaneously reinforce both contemporary and historical notions of race, gender, and sexuality.³ Let us take, for instance, representations of race in *The Road to El Dorado*. Set during "the Conquest" of the Americas, *The Road to El Dorado* begins in Spain and moves to a mysterious location in what is now known as Mexico. The film begins with Hernán Cortez delivering a speech just prior to his departure for "the New World," in which he boasts, "We sail to conquer another world, for Spain, for glory." Thus, in a superficial way, the film subtly points to the greed-induced injustices of the Spanish Conquest; however, when examined more closely, *The Road to El Dorado* tells a highly racialized and dichotomized story involving Spaniards and indigenous peoples in the Americas. This story is accomplished by romanticizing the Indigenous as child-like and innocent beings (always smiling, rarely speaking, and mostly in awe) who are positioned as being in need of rescue. This "rescue" comes in the form of Tulio and Miguel—the "good" kind of Europeans (and the contrast to Cortez, the "bad" kind).

In the case of *The Road to El Dorado*, the evil characters are hopelessly evil (i.e., Cortez and the High Priest) and the good characters are ultimately good (i.e., Tulio/Miguel and the Chief). While Tulio and Miguel (described by DreamWorks as "a pair of two-wit con men") may sometimes lack good judgment, they are—in the end—good, decent people (as they *must* be given their place within the binary structure). Hernán Cortez, in his evil incarnation, becomes the damnation of the natives, while Tulio and Miguel discover their role as saviors of the doomed indigenous society.

The most interesting feature of Tulio and Miguel's characters is that, mistaken as gods, they are able to become heroes and save the indigenous society from its own heartless high priest. In fact, in his role as one of the gods, and responding to the high priest's request for a human sacrifice, Miguel gives the natives their first commandment: "There will be no sacrifices, not now, not ever." In the film, El Dorado (the place) becomes a site of racial dynamics where the indigenous population not only dances, drinks, and is happily festive but also partakes in "uncivilized" practices such as human sacrifice. It is also in El Dorado that Spaniards, Tulio and Miguel (with their puzzling British accents), manage to save the place, even after Miguel informs the Chief that the Indigenous will not be able to fight off Cortez and his men who are rapidly approaching the city. Despite this claim, Tulio is able to arrive at a solution to save the city which entails blocking its only entrance, thus preventing Cortez (or anyone else) from ever finding

the city. In turn, its residents are isolated from other human contact forever, thus repositioning them as perpetually innocent and childlike peoples in need of protection. While carrying out the plan, both “con men” renounce the gold they had planned to take, signaling a change of heart concerning their own greed and revealing that in the end—and different from Cortez—they *do* possess kind hearts. Nonetheless, given that Tulio and Miguel were “con men” who arrived to and stayed in El Dorado through deceptive actions, their portrayal as ultimately kind-hearted heroes broadens any former (and pure) construction of “the hero.” Moreover, dichotomies notwithstanding in *The Road to El Dorado*, Europeans become both the damnation and the salvation of the indigenous characters.

Racialized Anthropomorphism in Shark Tale

We find an excellent example of racialized anthropomorphism in the recent DreamWorks’ film *Shark Tale*, in which Oscar, described by DreamWorks (2005) as “a little hustler fish,” speaks in a clearly “Black” American accent and lives in the ghetto part (South side) of the reef. His blackness is found not only in his accent and place of residence but also in his mannerisms, behavior, and jewelry (i.e., “bling”), which are highly racialized signifiers. For instance, in one scene, Oscar tries to “hustle his way” out of a situation with his boss Sykes, a puffer fish. Oscar tries to connect with Sykes by performing a complicated “fin shake,” but Sykes is unable to follow the steps. After a few attempts, Oscar gives up and says, “Don’t sweat it, a lot of white fish can’t do it.” For children who are learning the intricacies of race (as a social signifier) and race relations, labeling Sykes as a “White fish” (and therefore, Oscar as a “Black fish”) validates other societal messages. Children learn that our culture is strictly raced and racialized, since even fish can be Black *or* White.

In fact, Oscar and Sykes are not the only fish racialized in *Shark Tale*. We can also find Ernie and Bernie (two Rastafarian jelly fish, complete with Jamaican accents) who work for Sykes, Lino (an Italian American accented Mob shark and master of the reef), and Mrs. García (an overweight, middle-aged, single, Mexican-accented, female fish, with permanent rollers in her hair) who also lives in the ghetto. These are just a few examples. However, we can also locate nuances in the ways that these characters are racialized. For instance, not only can we see Oscar being racialized as Black but also can we see an ethnicization of race whereby Oscar is constructed as a Black *American*. This ethnicization is accomplished through his juxtaposition to Ernie and Bernie with whom he interacts. In one scene, for example, Oscar attempts to sing reggae, to which Ernie retorts, “Don’t like the way you sing that song, man.” In this way, Oscar is reinscribed as Black, but this reinscription is promoted through contrasting Oscar, as Black American, with Ernie and Bernie, as Black *Jamaican* (where to be Jamaican means to be accepted by Rastafarian jellyfish). In addition, Sykes is actually finally able to perform the fin shake, once Oscar becomes a celebrity and Sykes becomes his

manager. With Oscar's celebrity and Sykes' newfound investment, we see Sykes now able to do the finshake and to speak "Black lingo." We could argue that Sykes' "Black performance" parallels that of White rap producers and others who "learn the lingo" to have better rapport with their "investments." In *Shark Tale*, furthermore, we witness ethnicization in "White," for Lino is not only racialized as White but also ethnicized as Italian by way of very specific signifiers. For instance, Lenny (his son) tells Oscar that Lino is the Godfather, Lino speaks with an accent usually associated with New York Italians, and Frankie (Lino's other son) receives a Catholic burial, performed in Latin, after he dies. While almost silly, these stereotypes serve as important signifiers of a particular *kind* of whiteness within the United States—the whiteness of a group that, until recently, was *not* actually seen as White.

Dinosaurs and Toys: Straightness, Heterosexism, and Animated Films

A few years ago, Tinky Winky (of the children's television show, *Teletubbies*) was rendered a "homosexual" by Jerry Falwell. Falwell—a professed straight man—claimed to know the status of Tinky Winky vis-à-vis "his" sexuality. Even though Tinky Winky never said "I am gay," Falwell thought that Tinky Winky's color (purple) and his accessories (his purse) said "I am gay" very clearly; Tinky Winky need not utter the words. It is worth noting, in this case, that Falwell's assessment of Tinky Winky also followed a curious path: He first assigned Tinky Winky a sex (male), then assessed that sex (by reading the color and the accessory as "inappropriate" gender attributions for a male), and then conflated gender and sexuality (by labeling Tinky Winky a "homosexual" on the basis of these "inappropriate" gendered characteristics). In addition, it could be the case that Tinky Winky's triangle head-piece clinched the "homosexual" assessment for Falwell.

At the time of the Falwell incident, some members of the gay and lesbian community argued that cartoon characters *do not have* sexualities; hence, in musing over children's television programming, Falwell had "simply gone too far." This was a case, some gay men and lesbians argued, of homophobia run rampant. However, it seems undeniable that cartoon characters—especially in Disney, Pixar, and DreamWorks productions—certainly do have sexualities, which is to say, they have *heterosexualities*. Despite a tenuous relevance, or an outright irrelevance, to the story-lines, "heterosexuality" (in the form of heterosexual relationships or heterosexually oriented banter) pervades most films for children. Indeed, if there is a purpose to these seemingly pointless scenes, the aim could be taken to be the "indoctrination" of children into "the heterosexual lifestyle."

In the films discussed above, *The Road to El Dorado* and *Shark Tale*, we can easily find examples of heterosexual relationships and banter. In *The Road to El Dorado*, Tulio, who has warned Miguel regarding the dangers that Chel (the "native") could bring, ends up falling for her himself. The fact that it is Tulio, and not Miguel, who cannot resist the Indigenous woman only underscores her danger, for Tulio is represented as the more level-headed member of the con men

pairing. On first seeing Chel, after all, it is Miguel who states, “Maybe we should call this place ‘Chel Dorado,’” while uttering sounds of sexual excitement. The introduction of Chel into the narrative occurs after a series of scenes in which the sexuality of the two main characters could be construed as unclear; for example, after the two men have recited to each other that they have made each other’s lives more adventurous and rich (on thinking that death was immanent) and after the two men have bathed naked together (on arriving in “the New World”). Chel clarifies for the audience that these two men are, indeed, sexually “normal.” Of course, this “normalcy”—played out in the relationship between Chel and the two Spaniards—also tells the audience that the indigenous woman is available for the White man’s choosing and that, like El Dorado itself, no “normal” man could resist her temptation (leading to her/its conquest and possession).

In *Shark Tale*, the role of “woman as temptation and trouble” is played by Lola who is positioned as a danger to Oscar’s potential wealth as he places a “sure bet” on Lucky Day to win the ensuing Seahorse race. As Oscar turns around and sees Lola seductively entering the room, a song unleashes the lyrics, “Better watch out, she’ll take your cash. She’s a gold digger.” Of course, in *The Road to El Dorado*, Chel’s initial interest in Tulio and Miguel also centers on the “escape” that they might offer, and she makes a deal with them to gain a share of their gold. However, in *Shark Tale*, the “type of woman” represented by Lola is also contrasted with two other sorts of women—the kind of woman with which a man should eventually settle down (Angie), and the kind of woman that no “normal” man could find alluring (Mrs. García). Angie, unlike Lola and unbeknownst to Oscar, loved Oscar before his newfound life of fame and fortune. Oscar initially overlooks her affection, referring to her simply as his “best friend.” But it is precisely one’s best friend (as long as that best friend is of the “opposite” sex) who offers a man long-term possibilities, unlike the seductress who will leave him on a whim. Or, perhaps worse still, it is the “Lola type of woman” who will seek revenge if he leaves her first. Lola herself states that the only thing she likes better than money is revenge.

However, it is not Oscar, the film’s main character, who is in the opening scene of *Shark Tale*. Rather, it is Lenny—the son of Lino, the “Don” of the reef. As a worm struggles on a fishing hook, eyeing Lenny swimming closer and closer (with the theme to *Jaws* playing), the audience senses the danger. But Lenny does the unexpected. Instead of gobbling down the worm, he releases it from the hook and lets it swim free. As we learn, the thought of eating any of this “meaty” sea life makes Lenny sick. Lenny eventually confides in Oscar, in a discussion that evokes a narrative of self-outing, that he is a vegetarian. However, his family has known for some time that something is “odd” with Lenny—he is not a “normal” shark. As Lino says to Lenny, “You. I’m hearing things. When you look weak, I look weak,” and “Son, you’re going to learn to be a shark whether you like it or not.” Thus, being a “normal” shark is equated with being a shark as such, and being a shark means being a vicious master of the reef (and not a compassionate consumer of kelp). Lenny’s brother, Frankie, likewise tells Lenny, “If you want to make dad happy, you’ve got to kill something. You’ve got to be a shark.”

While the issue of Lenny's sexuality is left open in *Shark Tale*, parallels between stereotypical representations of gay men and characteristics displayed by Lenny are played on throughout the film. Not only does Lenny "come out" to Oscar (as vegetarian) but also does he dress both as a cowboy and as a dolphin at one point in the film ("Sebastian, the Whale-Washing Dolphin"). This "dress up" evokes both the fondness for uniformed men within gay male culture (the most famous example being the array of figures represented by The Village People) as well as the more general relationship between gay men and drag. When Lino sees Lenny dressed in this get-up, he asks of Lenny, "What are you wearing? What *is* that? Do you have any idea how this looks?" Of course, while Oscar makes a plea for Lino's acceptance of Lenny at the end of the film, asking, "Why can't you love him as he is?" it is precisely Oscar who has subtly rejected Lenny at an earlier point in the film, stating the number one rule for friendship as "none of that snuggly buggly stuff. Whatever that was." Oscar thereby distances himself from any "abnormal" closeness between the two male characters (or two men in general) and designates such closeness as "icky." In fact, such intimacy is to be so desperately avoided that this particular rule for friendship is cited before Rule 2—the rule directly related to Oscar's self-preservation: "If you ever have a change of heart [about being a vegetarian], please don't gobble me down." With his rules for friendship, Oscar reconstitutes himself as the heterosexual man—the man who may have other men as friends (as do Tulio and Miguel), but whose sexual desires are firmly positioned where they *should* be.

A point of connection between the overall representations of sexuality in both *The Road to El Dorado* and *Shark Tale* involves the incorporation of [hetero]sexuality into the narratives of the films when the basic messages could have been served without it. In this respect, children's films do not function very differently from adult-centered Hollywood films which find a way to work a [heterosexual] love story into almost any plot. But unlike adults, whose sexualities have already been soundly established (it would appear), children are still learning the societal lessons of [hetero]sexuality—that heterosexuality is the "normal" sexuality and the desired outcome for "any healthy child." Thus, the seemingly unnecessary incorporation of heterosexuality into the narratives of children's films can actually be seen to serve a function. That is, it reiterates lessons that children receive elsewhere—that boys like girls and girls like boys, and men like women and women like men, even when the boys/men and girls/women are, for example, fish . . . or dinosaurs or toys.

[Needless] Heterosexuality in *Dinosaur*

In the film *Dinosaur*, the main character, Aladar, becomes orphaned when a bird picks up his egg and drops it far from Aladar's home. Aladar (a dinosaur) is subsequently adopted and raised by a clan of lemurs. While this unusual situation could, and perhaps does, offer lessons about "alternative families" or "families of choice," this message is fundamentally undermined given its repositioning within

a framework of normative heterosexuality. This framework renders procreation as the only legitimate reason for sexual activity and the nuclear family as sexuality's only "natural" outcome. For instance, near the beginning of the film, a scene with questionable relevance to the plot unfolds (the plot being dinosaurs making their way to the "nesting grounds" after meteors strike and destroy much of the Earth), when pairs of male–female lemurs are shown "doing the wild thing." While an argument could be made for the relevance of this scene (i.e., it suggests the means of survival for a species, thereby foreshadowing the meteor scene which renders extinction possible), any such significance to this scene—in our view—is undermined by a blatant depiction of lemurs "doing it."

To prepare for the mating ritual, we see Zini (Aladar's "brother") practicing his pick up lines and remarking, "Girl, I'm the professor of love. And school's in session," and "Hey, sweetie. If you'll be my bride, I'll groom ya." At the same time, we hear the girl and boy lemurs being taught their separate mating lessons. The girls are told to be subtle with their intentions and to "keep the boys guessing." Of the boy who has successfully mated in the past, we hear the praise, "He put the 'prime' in primate." And, as the boys arrive to "go at it" with the girls, we are privy to their introduction, "Here's your buffet table of love." All of the lemurs then embark on heterosexual pairings, and all are successful, except for Zini, who reassures himself by saying, "Before you know it, she'll be wanting a bigger tree" (i.e., to say, "women are trouble"). Zini is appointed the only bachelor of the clan—except for Aladar, who has not yet found others "like himself" (i.e., other dinosaurs). Thus, Zini and Aladar can be seen to form a connection on the basis of their mutual bachelorhood, and while Zini is unsuccessful with the ladies himself, he does not fail to offer advice to Aladar later when he meets Neera on the way to the nesting grounds. Zini remarks, "Hey, hey, there's your girlfriend. What you need is a little help from the love monkey." Finally, Aladar is able to settle down with "the right girl," and the two dinosaurs have "a little Aladar" who "looks just like his father." In the film's final scene, we see Zini encircled by a "harem" of female lemurs, suggesting that he too might finally mate successfully. Zini asks, in a moment of sexual excitement, "Are you ladies up for a game of monkey in the middle tonight?" His inquiry is followed by a cheesy grin of sexual anticipation.

The Love of Toys in *Toy Story*

Another example of heterosexual incorporation into a children's film can be seen in the popular *Toy Story* movies, in which the voice of Tom Hanks animates the character of Woody. In the opening scene of *Toy Story*, Woody's "boy" (Andy) acts out a playtime scene in which Woody saves the life of Little Bo Peep's flock. When Andy leaves his bedroom, all the toys come to life. Little Bo Peep gently whispers to Woody, kisses him, and thanks him for saving her sheep. She follows this gesture with the line, "What if I get someone to watch the sheep tonight? Can you come over?" Woody blushes, revealing his sexual anticipation through the

cheesiness of his smile (much like Zini). At the end of the film, Little Bo Peep tells Woody, "Merry Christmas, Sheriff," as she pulls him toward her with her shepherd's hook. To her holiday greeting, Woody replies, "Hey, isn't that mistle-toe up there?" The two toys then disappear, out of the frame, as the film closes.

This final scene arrives after Woody, throughout the film, has found himself having to compete not only for the affections of Andy but also for those of Little Bo Peep. While Woody was previously the mainstay of both Andy and Little Bo Peep, their loyalties are tested as Andy's new toy, Buzz Lightyear—the new and flashy sort of toy (guy)—enters the scene. Given that Andy's family will be moving to a new home in just a week, Woody has instructed the toys to locate partners for the move. Woody wants no toy to be lost or left behind. With the arrival of Buzz Lightyear, on the occasion of Andy's birthday, Little Bo Peep thinks that she has found her solution. As she remarks on first noticing Buzz, "I've found my moving buddy." Little Bo Peep thereby displaces Woody from the role that he would have likely assumed. In the end, however, Little Bo Peep returns to Woody, much as Oscar returns to Angie (in *Shark Tale*). The message, here, is that the steady guy—rather than the flashy one—is a girl's best option. While flashiness might offer temporary excitement, steadiness provides long-term stability. The "tried-and-true" is ultimately better than the "toy-of-the-day." It is worth noting that in a sustained *Toy Story* subplot, Mr. Potato Head spends the entire film awaiting the arrival of Mrs. Potato Head. She finally appears at the end of the film, on the occasion of Andy's sister's birthday. The arrival of Mrs. Potato Head is then followed by the regular appearance of the united and happy couple throughout the film's sequel, *Toy Story II*.

Conclusion

Given such depictions of race and sexuality enmeshed within the storylines of films primarily intended for children, it seems reasonable to maintain that racialization—including racialized anthropomorphism—takes place on various levels within these animated films. On a basic level, such films provide children with important signifiers that chart racialized, and *racist*, dynamics. On a more profound level, these films serve as tools that help to teach children to maintain the racial (and racist) ideologies that maintain the status quo. For instance, even though Oscar is no generic fish, we are taught that he should nonetheless be happy to be a fish (a Black fish), to live in the ghetto, and to enjoy the lot assigned to him in life. As Oscar, at the end of *Shark Tale*, settles into his newfound life as co-owner of the Whale Wash (with Sykes), we note that while he has indeed moved from his father's lot as long-time tongue scrubber, he has not risen so far as to make a White audience uncomfortable with the success of a Black man/fish. After all, Oscar shares his bourgeois success with a White man, Sykes. Similarly, in *The Road to El Dorado*, we learn that the conquest of the Americas is over, and there is the possibility that multitudes of Indigenous folks did not die after all. Rather, their civilizations may actually be hidden behind large rock formations

impossible for us to find—thus, we need not feel guilty about the extermination of entire cultures. We need not worry about rape either, for we are told that Indigenous women were actually more than willing to leave their families to live adventurous lives with European men (as demonstrated by the relationship between Chel and Tulio). And slavery, we are instructed, was an institution for evil people who fundamentally deserved it (as depicted by the enslavement of the High Priest by Cortez).

Moreover, there is an ethnicization of race in more recent animated films for children, suggesting that children are being taught not only “crude” racial categories but also more intricate ways of conceiving “race” in relation to ethnic markers. While it might be argued that there are positive aspects to such portrayals (for instance, they complicate race by not homogenizing racial categories such as “Black” or “White”), we would argue that the real purpose of the ethnicization of race—in a film like *Shark Tale*—is to differentiate characters in not-so-positive ways. For example, Lino (Italian White) is contrasted with Sykes (nondescript White) in ways that promote negative stereotypes of Italians in comparison to “other” Whites. While Sykes may wish to exploit Oscar and his newfound fame, Sykes is himself victimized by Lino’s perpetual bullying, thereby rendering Sykes a “better” kind of White fish than Lino.

Heterosexism plays a similar role within these films, for a heterosexist lens implies *no* sexuality where a case can be made for glaring *heterosexuality*. Owing to the fact that heterosexuality is normative, depictions of it often go unnoticed. This claim seems a more accurate reflection of the actual status of sexuality within children’s animated films than the position that animated characters have no sexualities. All of the main characters discussed above not only have [hetero]sexualities but also convey more nuanced lessons from within the category “heterosexual.” That is to say, Oscar’s attention is depicted as properly directed at *women*, while ultimately he must end up with the right *kind* of woman; Woody must compete for the affections of Little Bo Peep, while she is distracted by the flashiness of the wrong *sort* of man. Even when a character is introduced, like Lenny, whose sexuality is unclear, this lack of certainty only affords the sort of mild put-down illustrated by Oscar’s “None of that snuggly buggly” comment. With this distancing remark, heterosexuality is recentered and given its rightful place as the only “normal” sexuality. In the case of Tulio and Miguel, any lack of clarity regarding the nature of the male–male relationship is resolved through the introduction of Chel, the irresistible woman.

Likewise, rather than construing animated characters as generally unmarked by race, it is more likely that these characters are raced as White (which is why mainstream audiences do not notice many characters’ races) as well as non-White (which is why other characters jump from their backgrounds). Concerning the second part of this point, we might consider Native Hawaiian Lilo in Disney’s *Lilo and Stitch*, or Spanish-accented Puss “n Boots in DreamWorks’ *Shrek 2*, as two additional examples. An interesting question arises here regarding how knowledge of the social location of the actors motivating the characters’ voices might inform the way we

(especially adults) perceive the characters, as well as how they are drawn and narrated. Our suggestion would be that while the participation of Tom Hanks certainly contributes to the heterosexuality and the whiteness of Woody in *Toy Story* and the voice of Will Smith contributes to the heterosexuality and the blackness of Oscar in *Shark Tale*, this is not the only relevant (or even, most significant) factor in situating the characters. Rather, it would seem more important to consider how the characters (not the actors) operate within a specific frame of reference where socialization involving race and sexuality is the key. It is also significant to note that, in the end, the importance of these films resides in the fact that they are sold as mindless state-of-the-art entertainment and not as agents of socialization. This may be the most powerful aspect of animated films for children.

Notes

1. Disney has released *Aladdin* (1992), *Atlantis* (2001), *Dinosaur* (1993), *Lilo and Stitch* (2002), and *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000). Disney and Pixar have released *A Bug's Life* (1998), *Finding Nemo* (2003), *Monsters Inc* (2001), *Toy Story* (1995), and *Toy Story 2* (1999). DreamWorks has released *Antz* (1998), *Chicken Run* (2000), *Joseph King of Dreams* (2000), *The Road to El Dorado* (2000), *Shark Tale* (2004), *Shrek* (2001), *Shrek 2* (2004), *Spirit* (2002), and *The Prince of Egypt* (1998).

2. As Alan Bryman (2004) discusses in his book, *The Disneyization of Society*, "disneyization" as a practice is so pervasive in our society that Disney's "style is frequently copied," and "as a result, audiences are sometimes unsure about what is and is not a Disney film . . ." (p. 6). For such reasons, we insist on including Pixar and DreamWorks animated films in our analysis.

3. A film such as *The Road to El Dorado* not only presents ideas that we have of race relationships in the 15th century but also reflects our own contemporary ideas of those very relationships.

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