2025

AP® Research Academic Paper

Sample Student Responses and Scoring Commentary

Inside:

Sample C

- ☑ **Scoring Guidelines**
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Academic Paper — 5 Points

Score of 1 **Report on Existing Knowledge**	Score of 2 **Report on Existing Knowledge with Simplistic Use of a Research Method**	Score of 3 **Ineffectual Argument for a New Understanding**	Score of 4 **Well-Supported, Articulate Argument Conveying a New Understanding**	Score of 5 **Rich Analysis of a New Understanding Addressing a Gap in the Research Base**
• Presents an overly broad topic of inquiry.	• Presents a topic of inquiry with narrowing scope or focus, that is NOT carried through either in the method or in the overall line of reasoning.	• Carries the focus or scope of a topic of inquiry through the method AND overall line of reasoning, even though the focus or scope might still be narrowing.	• Focuses a topic of inquiry with clear and narrow parameters, which are addressed through the method and the conclusion.	• Focuses a topic of inquiry with clear and narrow parameters, which are addressed through the method and the conclusion.
• Situates a topic of inquiry within a single perspective derived from scholarly works OR through a variety of perspectives derived from mostly non-scholarly works.	• Situates a topic of inquiry within a single perspective derived from scholarly works OR through a variety of perspectives derived from mostly non-scholarly works.	• Situates a topic of inquiry within relevant scholarly works of varying perspectives, although connections to some works may be unclear	• Explicitly connects a topic of inquiry to relevant scholarly works of varying perspectives AND logically explains how the topic of inquiry addresses a gap.	• Explicitly connects a topic of inquiry to relevant scholarly works of varying perspectives AND logically explains how the topic of inquiry addresses a gap.
• Describes a search and report process.	• Describes a nonreplicable research method OR provides an oversimplified description of a method, with questionable alignment to the purpose of the inquiry.	• Describes a reasonably replicable research method, with questionable alignment to the purpose of the inquiry.	• Logically defends the alignment of a detailed, replicable research method to the purpose of the inquiry	• Logically defends the alignment of a detailed, replicable research method to the purpose of the inquiry.
• Summarizes or reports existing knowledge in the field of understanding pertaining to the topic of inquiry.	• Summarizes or reports existing knowledge in the field of understanding pertaining to the topic of inquiry.	• Conveys a new understanding or conclusion, with an underdeveloped line of reasoning OR insufficient evidence.	• Supports a new understanding or conclusion through a logically organized line of reasoning AND sufficient evidence. The limitations and/or implications, if present, of the new understanding or conclusion are oversimplified.	• Justifies a new understanding or conclusion through a logical progression of inquiry choices, sufficient evidence, explanation of the limitations of the conclusion, and an explanation of the implications to the community of practice.
• Generally communicates the student's ideas, although errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization distract or confuse the reader.	• Generally communicates the student's ideas, although errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization distract or confuse the reader.	• Competently communicates the student's ideas, although there may be some errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization.	• Competently communicates the student's ideas, although there may be some errors in grammar, discipline-specific style, and organization.	• Enhances the communication of the student's ideas through organization, use of design elements, conventions of grammar, style, mechanics, and word precision, with few to no errors.
• Cites AND/OR attributes sources (in bibliography/ works cited and/or intext), with multiple errors and/or an inconsistent use of a discipline specific style.	• Cites AND/OR attributes sources (in bibliography/ works cited and/or intext), with multiple errors and/or an inconsistent use of a discipline specific style.	• Cites AND attributes sources, using a discipline-specific style (in both bibliography/works cited AND intext), with few errors or inconsistencies.	• Cites AND attributes sources, with a consistent use of an appropriate discipline-specific style (in both bibliography/works cited AND intext), with few to no errors.	• Cites AND attributes sources, with a consistent use of an appropriate discipline-specific style (in both bibliography/works cited AND intext), with few to no errors.

Mirror, Mirror on the Wall…Who Is the Fairest of Them All?

A Content Analysis of Disney's Animated and Live Action Villains

Word Count: 5352

Introduction

My research project aims to explore the question: “Does Disney's depiction of villains in animated fairytales, compared to their live-action remakes, impact Gen Z’s perceptions of beauty standards?” Known and loved worldwide, Disney continues to shape cultural and social norms through their fairytale creations. With unique visuals, Disney has set standards around beauty, morality, and character designs observed in classic children fables. This project dives into how these representations reinforce or reshape beauty standards (B.S.) perceived in two distinct media formats: animated and live action. In order to conduct this experiment, I will be performing a content analysis. Several evaluations will take place in this investigation, primarily focusing on specific visual and character design elements (V.C.D.E.s) such as color schemes, facial features, and body images. The V.C.D.E.s will be analyzed alongside measures of perceived attractiveness to understand how adaptations of Disney’s fairytales influence viewers’ reactions. Here, the target audience is Generation Z, as many grew up with Disney’s animated films and now have been recaptured with the live-action versions. However, the viewers do not necessarily have to be enthusiasts; they can simply be individuals who are decently acquainted with Disney, which I define to be true if they previously watched more than two fairytale animations and/or know of at least half of the villain characters that will appear in this study.

With this being said, my project will concentrate on only well-known Disney narratives that have been adapted into live action films, since these are the most visually impactful. I hypothesize that the animated villains will be more exaggerated and reflect negative V.C.D.E.s to a greater extent, while the live action variants will attempt to humanize characters, allowing for a nuanced portrayal of B.S. in media. Furthermore, due to these alterations, I believe Gen Z will find the live action versions more attractive.

Significance

Live-action remakes are on the rise, transforming how classic stories are experienced by modern viewers. When audiences are deeply attached with the original animated versions, the stakes to meet, or even exceed those demands are high. In fact, a journal on the analysis of adaptations published by English Professor Rebecca Rowe dives into how viewers "desire adaptations to remain true in different ways" and matching those expectations can be complicated (Rowe, 2018). For this reason, understanding how these adaptations influence perceptions, particularly in terms of B.S. and morality, is critical.

My research can offer valuable insights for not only media analysts but for content creators hoping to construct remakes that resonate with Gen Z. One of the many aspects that are difficult to replicate are visuals, especially when they are at the forefront of films. No matter how subtle the visual alterations are, they can potentially shift how a character is perceived or remembered. These details may play a larger role in audience perception than what creators initially anticipate.

Literature Review

Disney and Media's influence on Beauty Standards

Dating back to 1923, Walt and Roy Disney founded the renowned Walt Disney Company which quickly reconstructed the animation industry with the debut of Mickey Mouse (1928) and their first feature-length movie, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) (Gabler, 2006). Over the decades, Disney has crafted numerous blockbuster films and is slowly, but surely, segueing its way into live action. As these adaptations become increasingly prevalent, so does Disney's reach and power to shape beauty standards (B.S.). B.S are defined as socially composed ideals that determine what is accepted as desirable or attractive in appearance, commonly associated

with femininity (French, 2024). However, for the objective of this research, B.S will be used as a gender-neutral term, recognizing that these perceptions affect all individuals. Scholars debate that the artistic portrayal of heroes and villains remarkably correlate with B.S, connecting physical appearance to moral alignment. Meagher and Neal at the Department of Psychology, Hanover College, emphasize that children develop associations between specific facial characteristics and personalities. Their research discovered that animated heroes were signified with softer, rounder, and lighter features while the villains demonstrated more exaggerated and angular features (Meagher and Neal). In contrast, a study posted in The Journal of Social and Media—a peer-reviewed platform dedicated to commentary and analysis on media's impact—highlighted how Disney's visual storytelling follows traditional B.S. In other words, Disney lacks a wide range of "race, skin tone, and hair length." Nevertheless, the experts conclude that there is no significant difference in B.S and body images between the villains and heroes (Silalahi et al., 2023). On a similar note, expert in psychology, Micheal B. Lewis discusses broader implications of the link between race and attractiveness. He addresses how media often marginalizes diverse appearances, conditioning the audience to find Eurocentric B.S more appealing (Lewis, 2011). The uncertainty surrounding whether or not B.S. are disobeyed for villains is a crucial foundation that needs to be understood before analyzing the effects on audiences. Hence, I will be conducting a series of tests incorporating the experts' methods, as well as my own, to set the groundwork for Disney's bias with B.S. towards villains.

The Role of Live Action Remakes

Live action adaptations have long opened the world of Disney to new dynamics. The media portrayal of live action drastically differs from animated art styles, presenting opportunities to challenge or preserve established standards. Often, audiences form attachments

and admirations for specific actors and actresses. Furthermore, a psychology professor and researcher duo declare that once these feelings develop, it can influence their perceptions of reality, which affects how individuals react to solely the characters (Gardner and Knowles, 2008). The study explores how characters are seen as more authentic and relatable when they see a real, human face, rather than the animated stories which has unlimited creativity. Due to these aspects, many critics state that "the remakes do not have the same impact or magical elements that were previously captured in the animated features" (Hassan, 2020). This emotional interference challenges traditional B.S. by providing a complex portrayal of characters beyond just visuals. Likewise, scholars in media and social science elaborate how differentiating the character from the actor is difficult. More often than not, "an actor who is perceived to play a positive character" will be associated with positive personality traits, whereas "playing a negative character more likely leads to a misattribution of negative personality traits" (Koban et al., 2021). The relationship between the actor and the character is highly linked, and even one change influences how the other is viewed. Many researchers have analyzed how audiences' opinions of characters personalities change depending on the actor playing them and vice versa. However, there is not much research on how the actors may challenge the B.S. originally placed. With this being said, I aim to answer *how* in the context of Disney's villains to examine if live actions will continue the trend of altering audience reactions, when B.S. representations are being tested.

Generation Z and Media Influence

Pew Research Center defines Generation Z as "anyone born from 1997 onward" (Dimock, 2019). Over the years, Gen Z has become highly infatuated with digital media. Like anyone, they too are tied with nostalgic content from childhood, including Disney classics. Sage

Journals, an internationally peer-reviewed database, published a study asserting that the Gen Z demographic is highly susceptible to being influenced by social networks and digital media, especially with the platforms shaping their perceptions of beauty and desirability (Chang and Chang, 2023). More specifically, early exposure to digital media allows Gen Z to view, process, and resonate with newly discovered topic at a young age. This includes viewing characters that embody specific aesthetic traits, and those who don't, who are often seen in nostalgic media like Disney which can affect what Gen Z believes is desirable or attractive. In fact, Cascio and his two co-writers—one with a PhD in Mass Communication, and the other two with an MD in Pediatrics, respectively—support this by explaining how "media offers the opportunity for identity exploration and development" for adolescents (Cascio et al., 2023). Media serves as an influential tool for Gen Z, and since it shows a diverse representation worldwide, many young individuals are able to be more open minded. Moreover, they are comfortable to bend traditional societal rules and discover what they believe to resonate with their beliefs, in comparison to past generations. This is an important aspect in my research as I want to see if B.S. represented by live action, which are catered to the younger audiences, will be perceived differently when the target viewers aren't as conventional.

Visual and Character Design Elements (V.C.D.E.s)

V.C.D.E.s in Disney's animated and live action films are a critical aspect of this research topic as it drives the characterization of heroes and villains. In her study, Silalahi focuses on how exaggerated features in villainous character designs create and intensify negative B.S. stereotypes. Commonly, villains "were portrayed as ugly or unattractive" which aligns with the general trend where people correlate the two with each other (Silalahi et al., 2023). These traits typically include sharp, distorted, and/or asymmetrical features to indicate their immorality. In a

larger context, these B.S. mirror cultural biases about attractiveness. On the other hand, Buchegger, under the supervision of Assistant Professor of Philosophy Stefan Brandt, analyzed how Disney's heroes are often animated with soft, symmetrical features that align with their morality (Buchegger, 2020). Here, she focused on the simplification of good and evil, where heroes are represented with features aligning with B.S. and villains showcase the opposite. Despite these findings, Wellman, an expert on communication findings, takes a different, more global perspective and explores how different cultures may use character designs. Her research dived into the color aspect of V.C.D.E.s and how one color "may be viewed positively in Eastern cultures, Western cultures could see it negatively" (Wellman, 2020). Her approach emphasizes that varying cultures offer different cues to convey what fits B.S. These studies closely resemble my research method and tackle how V.C.D.E.s serve as significant element that needs to be researched to recognize the impact it has on the perception of a character.

Call To Research

Thus, this research project will investigate how Disney's animated and live action depictions of villains affect Gen Z's perceptions of B.S. and morality. Though several studies have concentrated on the animated villains, there is limited information about how Disney's representations in newer formats impact B.S. By analyzing these portrayals, my study assists in examining whether or not the pattern observed in animated formats continue in live action films. Understanding this shift is essential in comprehending how visual cues influence evolving beauty ideals, especially when Gen Z engages with both media formats.

Methodology

Overview

My method consists of 4 main steps: 1) analyze visual and character design elements, V.C.D.E.s, for eight Disney villains in both animated and live action media formats, 2) compare and contrast both media format results, 3) survey and record audience perceptions of B.S in both media formats, and lastly 4) examine the correlation between differences in V.C.D.E.s in (2) and Gen Z's reactions.

Sampling

In this study I analyzed eight Disney villain characters: Captain Hook, Maleficent, Jafar, Ursula, Gaston, Cinderella's stepsisters—named Anastasia and Drizella, which I counted as one villain since they often are seen on-screen together, but later collected data separately—, Shan Yu, and Cruella. These characters were chosen not only because they are known worldwide, but more specifically due to the fact that there are only a handful of live action remakes. Up until 2024, Disney has created as many as 21 live action remakes of their classics ("All 21," n.d). Of these 21 films, only 14 movies consist of villains that are categorized as human, not including sequels or animations that repeat villains. The list of 21 was narrowed since I steered away from antagonists who were categorized as animals, inanimate objects, or anything else not classified as a human. This choice was made in caution to potential disagreements about B.S that could arise when considering non-human features, as well as to avoid controversiality of individuals who would agree to find characters not-of-human nature, attractive. Though it may seem contradicting, I did keep Ursula in the list of villains analyzed as she is half human and is seen to turn full human for part of the film, *The Little Mermaid*, to satisfy her evil intentions. Next, from the reduced list of 14, the most popular fairytale adaptations were picked, leaving eight Disney fairytale remakes to be analyzed with their animated counterparts to make up my qualitative data.

Once the list of films was decided, I established criteria to ensure consistency and validity in the images I analyzed for each antagonist. First and foremost, each image chosen had to, at the very least, clearly show the characters torso and up. This was crucial as body features were significantly relevant to the study when I evaluated the villain's attractiveness. Moreover, the selection had to incorporate the character, free of distracting objects or backgrounds that stand out more than the individual themselves. Additionally, the image could not include any other character—with the exception of animals or pets that are essential to the villain's description—as they could influence the viewer's opinion. Furthermore, to avoid unnecessary bias, images where the antagonists' expression was distorted or exaggerated were excluded. I did not regard smiling or smirking as an example of "distorted" or "exaggerated." If twisted expressions were included, viewers' impressions could have been based off the images present, misrepresenting the characters' allure. With that in mind, the face also had to be at least three-quarters visible, guaranteeing a comprehensive view of their features, maintaining accuracy and impartiality in this study.

Analyzing V.C.D.E.s

After I established the images that can be used for each of the eight villains, I analyzed all individually with 4 structured trials, each focusing on a specific characteristic: 1) hairstyle, 2) body shape, 3) facial symmetry, and 4) actor popularity.

First, for hairstyles, I conducted a direct visual comparison between the animated and live action format of each antagonist. This comparison involved qualities such as hair style and length, in order to understand how certain changes—if any—influence audience perception of appearance as whole.

For body shape, my guideline was mainly the “golden ratio” concept. Many surgical professionals agree that for males, broad shoulders tapering into a narrow waist, creating a V-shaped torso, signifies an “attractive” body. On the other hand, the golden ratio for females entails an hourglass proportion where they have a balanced bust-to-hip ratio coupled with a defined waist (Singh et al., 2018). Considering the above, I compared each character to the golden ratio as it allowed for a quantifiable approach to body shape comparison between both media formats.

Next, facial symmetry was examined by using an online AI tool called *Face Symmetry Test.* This tool allowed for several numerical values of the symmetry of facial features, which gave a systematic comparison between animated and live action faces. Originally, I was going to use the AI tool *PinkMirror,* however, it went extremely in-depth with its numerical outputs. I believed it took away from the purpose of this research to see the overall perceived attractiveness rather than simply the facial symmetry. Therefore, I fixated on the *Face Symmetry Test* application which gave mouth, nose, eye, chin, and overall symmetry values. These digits served as quantitative data that showed which media format displayed more symmetry, where a larger number is equivalent to higher symmetry.

Lastly, I considered the popularity of the actors or actresses that were casted to play the roles of the live action portrayals. Numerous times, viewers do not separate the person from the character, essentially influencing their opinion of *solely* the character. Hence, I assessed the actor or actress’s reputation by researching their social media following, award nominations, and ratio of films they had main roles in vs supporting roles. This helped uncover the role of external factors in shaping audience perceptions of B.S and acceptance of live-action designs.

Surveying

During this period of time, to gather quantitative data on audience perceptions of animated vs live action depictions, I also designed and dispersed a Google Forms survey targeting Gen Z, specifically those born between 2000 and 2010. This demographic was favored since those born before 2000 may lean closer to millennial perspectives, and those born after 2010 may be too young to provide meaningful insights. The range of individuals between 2000 and 2010 supply relevant trends in B.S as they are familiar with both animated classics and their live action remakes, offering an ideal representation of Gen Z. Additionally, this survey was limited to Central Indiana residents. Deciding otherwise would be unrealistic due to logistical restraints and practicality of gathering samples. Based on statistics compiled from *Census Reporter*, approximately 100,000 individuals reside between the three locations in Indiana and any small towns nearby. I deduced this value by finding the total population in these whereabouts, then calculating the portion that is Gen Z in those locations and lastly adding the totals in each city to get a round figure of my target audience. I settled for the percents of the populations ranging ages 10-29, instead of 14-24, as *Census Reporter* did not differentiate ages for my designated audience range. However, this was not an issue since the larger number accounts for individuals residing in nearby towns that were not specifically calculated, therefore, leveling the sample size. (Appendix A).

$$\textit{Target audience} = \textit{Total population} \times \textit{Population by age range percent}$$

Once this value was determined, I decided—with a 5% margin error and at a 90% confidence interval—that roughly 260 responses would provide a reasonable representation of the population (*Sample Size Calculator*).

Furthermore, my survey followed a consistent format. Before anything else, the beginning of the survey provided a clear consent page outlining the purpose of the survey and

how someone's information would be used. I prioritized the respondent's anonymity and voluntary participation by taking no personal identifying info, other than gender, as well as giving the option to opt out at any given moment. Following this, I had a few preliminary questions to ensure the individuals answering my survey fit the criteria to have meaningful insights. From here, there were 16 photos of the villains—eight animated and eight live action—lined up asking the respondents if they found them attractive. I sent this survey to friends, family, posted it around the school, and posted on social media. From there, individuals sent to others they knew to spread awareness.

Examining Correlation of Different Media Formats and Gen Z's Perception of B.S

Ultimately, once both the qualitative and quantitative data were sampled, I analyzed the findings from the survey alongside the V.C.D.E.s. This process involved cross-referencing the survey feedback consisting of numerous opinions and biases with results from the visual comparisons. By doing so, I intended to identify the pattern and correlation between a specific media format and how Gen Z reacts to B.S represented in it.

Results and Data Analysis

This section examines my collected data to compare physical attributes of animated and live action Disney villains. Results are displayed in five sub-sections where the first four are reserved for each of the V.C.D.E.s, and the fifth for the survey findings. Each individual data set is directly followed by analysis and interpretation.

Hairstyle

To assess whether a specific character exhibits a modern hairstyle that Gen Z is accustomed to, I gathered samples of popular trends for both male and females in recent years (Appendix B). These were chosen as they were prevalent among social media stars, celebrities,

and other influencers known in the Gen Z community. Though there is a minor personal bias given that the images were chosen solely by me, creating a survey, or any another equivalent method, would have been inefficient considering the time constraints. Waiting for the responses when my primary survey had already begun to acquire substantial data would have set me back. Additionally, relying on participant input for baseline hair trends (BHTs) could introduce inconsistencies since personal preferences and exposure vary. Consequently, I opted for a controlled selection process for securing my images. Moreover, to reduce the level of bias, I made sure access the most recent and popular hairstyles, for both females and males, reported on the medically reviewed global study platform "Medihair" (D, E., 2024a; D, E., 2024b). By integrating both, I curated styles that reflect Gen Z trends with limited delays and partiality.

Hairstyle Results

Below (A) will represent the animated version and (L) will represent the live action version.

NAMES	FOLLOWS BHTs?
Captain Hook (A)	No
Captain Hook (L)	Yes
Maleficent (A)	No
Maleficent (L)	No
Jafar (A)	No
Jafar (L)	No
Gaston (A)	No
Gaston (L)	No
Shan Yu (A)	No
Bori Khan (Shan Yu's equivalent) (L)	Yes
Ursula (A)	No
Ursula (L)	No
Anastasia (A)	No
Anastasia (L)	No
Drizella (A)	Yes

Data revealed that 4/8 characters in the live action adaptations follow BHTs while only one does in animated versions (Appendix C). This suggested a shift towards modernization in hairstyling in live action films. On the other hand, consistencies can be observed in characters such as

Drizella (L)	Yes
Cruella (A)	No
Cruella (L)	Yes

Maleficent, Jafar, Gaston, and Ursula, which all fail to follow BHTs. This trend indicates that specific characters preserve their distinctive, signature, or culturally rooted styles regardless of media format, suggesting certain designs are too emblematic to alter.

Body Shape

To determine whether body shapes of Disney villain's lien up with golden body ratios, I measured critical body dimensions for each character (Appendix D). The golden ratio is commonly known as phi (1.618), which can be "found by dividing a line such that the ratio of the short segment to the long segment is equivalent to the ratio of the long segment to the entire line" (Singh, et al., 2018). I used the platform Sketchbook, an illustration software, to import images of designs while keeping the zoom level consistent across measurements to maintain accuracy (Appendix D). Next, I established that for female characters, the golden proportion is 1.5:1:1.5 (chest: waist: hip), mimicking an hourglass body shape. On the other hand, males exhibit the phi ratio of approximately 1.618:1 (Shoulder: hip), creating a "V" body shape silhouette.

Body Shape Results

It is uncommon to get *exactly* the same ratio, therefore, I decided to keep a ± 0.3 threshold for "close" and combined that with results that are "matches" to get an overall concept of who is generally exhibiting "attractive" silhouettes.

Table 1: Female Body Shape Ratios

Names	Ratio (Upper Body: Waist: Hip)	Matches Ideal?
Maleficent (A)	1.14: 1: 0.94	Below ideal
Maleficent (L)	1.21: 1: 1.38	Close
Maleficent (L)	1.21: 1: 1.36	Close

Maleficent (L)	0.92: 1: 1.08	Below ideal
Ursula (A)	1.14: 1: 1.27	Below ideal
Ursula (L)	0.72: 1: 1.06	Below ideal
Anastasia (A)	1.5: 1: N/A	Matches ideal
Anastasia (L)	1.38: 1: N/A	Close
Drizella (A)	1.23: 1: N/A	Close
Drizella (L)	1.37: 1: N/A	Close
Cruella (A)	1.79: 1: 2.16	Above ideal
Cruella (L)	1.09: 1: 1.31	Below ideal

Above, Maleficent was calculated three times due to her diverse outfits throughout the live action film, unlike other characters who consistently stuck to one style. Of the three, one is accurate to the animated design, which she primarily wore; however, the other two altered her silhouette.

Results displayed that for females, animated designs typically diverge from the ideal BS of an hourglass figure. Instead, they used exaggerated shapes to entail the villainous nature of the character. Contrastingly, live action versions leaned towards realistic but conventionally attractive proportions. This is seen within the female data, where 3/5 live action designs reflected the ratio, while only two did for the animated designs. In fact, 2/5 characters were modified when adapted into live action movies, one of which was to conform to the ideal standards, and one that fell below. The rest were kept consistent despite the format.

Table 1: Male Body Shape Ratios

Names	Ratio (Upper Body: Waist)	Matches Ideal?
Captain Hook (A)	2.14: 1	Above ideal
Captain Hook (L)	1.5: 1	Close
Jafar (A)	2.28: 1	Above ideal
Jafar (L)	1.44: 1	Close
Gaston (A)	1.43: 1	Close
Gaston (L)	1.32: 1	Close
Shan Yu (A)	1.49: 1	Close
Bori Khan (Shan Yu's equivalent) (L)	1.26: 1	Below ideal

On the other hand, results for males demonstrated that animated designs are easier to exaggerate shoulder-to-waist proportions. I noticed that live action designs tended to prefer a realistic takes on the characters' bodies but maintained the ideal. This is seen within the male data, where 3/4 live action designs reflected the ratio, while only 2/4 did for the animated designs. 3/4 characters were modified when adapted into live action movies, two of which were to conform to the ideal standards, and one that fell below. The rest were kept consistent despite the format.

Facial Symmetry

To maintain consistency and accuracy for my facial symmetry data, I selected images where the character's face was clearly visible. I defined visible to be where at least two-thirds of the face is showing. Additionally, I preferred images where the characters do not make extreme and/or exaggerated faces that may disrupt results concocted by the AI tool, FaceSymmetryTest.com. I chose an external tool to avoid personal bias towards results (Appendix E).

Facial Symmetry Results

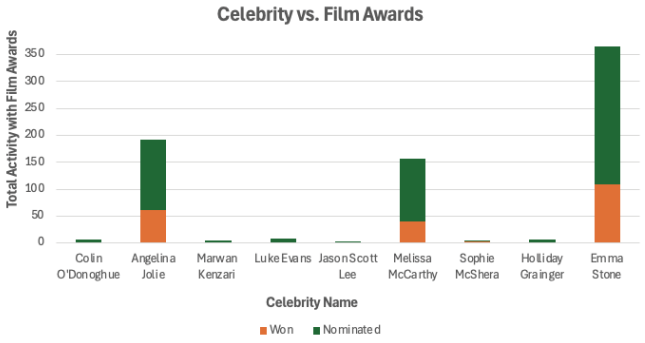
Results from overall symmetry show that 6/9 characters displayed higher balance in the live action formats as opposed to their animated counterparts. Such numbers illustrated a distinct trend where the live action adaptation converted to a more proportionate and symmetrical features; in fact, this was contrary to my theory of how the results could come out. I believed that animated characters would have higher symmetry due to the creator's ability to morph the designs however they wished. However, according to the results, it seems as though creators used that element to their advantage to produce conventionally unattractive individuals. On the

contrary, live action works modernized their versions and emphasized aesthetically pleasing standards.

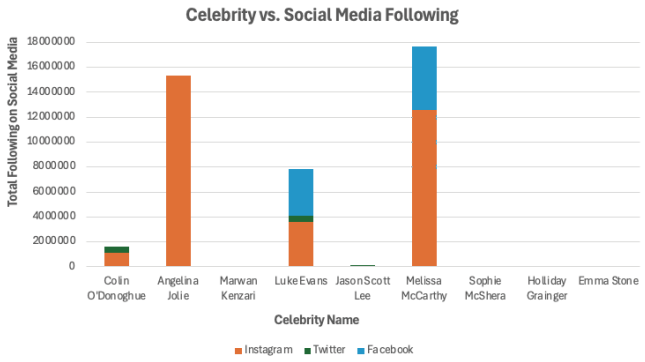
Actor/Actress Popularity

Here, I examined the popularity, if any, of celebrities in live action adaptations through three critical categories: number of awards won, social media following, and main-to-supporting role ratio (Appendix F). I determined that for a celebrity to be classified as "popular," they need to meet at least two of the three parameters above. This accounts for particular situations where, for example, a highly recognizable individual, like Brad Pitt, chooses to remain private, which skews the significance of not meeting a popularity category. Additionally, to "meet" a category, the individual has to be greater than or equal to the median of the corresponding category. I preferred the median instead of the mean since the latter is often skewed by extreme values, while the former is a more balanced representation for this particular situation.

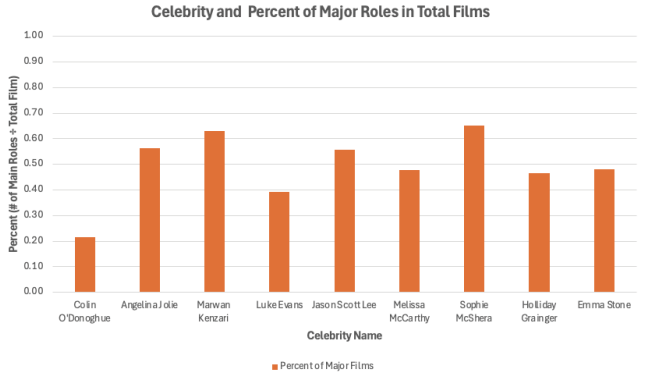
Body Shape Results

1. 

2.



3.



Findings revealed that the following 4/9 celebrities qualified as popular since they satisfied at least two categories: Angelina Jolie (Maleficent), Luke Evans (Gaston), Melissa McCarthy (Ursula), Emma Stone (Cruella). The fact that almost half of the actors passed the popularity test demonstrates that live actions films have an external influence that shapes how audiences view the characters; one that animated versions do not. In fact, several researchers have previously established that "viewers can be involved with an actor and their fictional characters simultaneously" (Koban et al., 2021). This trend aligns with Disney's adaptations, especially since they introduce pre-existing fan biases and expectations, shifting how characters are perceived.

Survey

Participants were asked for their preferences between animated and live action visuals through a Google Forms survey (Hussain, 2025). This form took on a style of a "Hot or Not" quiz, a familiar game popular among Gen Z. I chose this format to increase the likelihood of engagement since studies posted in the American Association for Public Opinion Research reveal that individuals are more likely to respond when the topics are found to be interesting (Groves, et al., 2004). Though the research is outdated, the fundamental principles of how psychology impacts human actions still pertains to modern society. Furthermore, its effects were proved when my survey exceeded my estimated value, gathering 267 responses (Appendix G).

Survey Results

Results showed that within the animated format, 7/8 characters—Captain Hook, Maleficent, Jafar, Gaston, Ursula, Anastasia & Drizella, and Cruella—received a "NO." by over 50% of individuals, showing participants' adamant rejection to find the visuals appealing. This was observed in only three of the live actions characters. On the other hand, the live action format revealed that 3/8 characters—Captain Hook, Maleficent, and Cruella—received a "YES" by over 50% of individuals, while zero reflected this pattern in the animated format. Neither format illustrated preference of the average expression, "Kind of," shown by the fact that less than 30% of individuals chose this option for a majority of characters; Instead, participants drifted towards one of the two extreme options. Due to these results, it is clear that live action characters were generally seen as more attractive. The fact that no animated characters received a majority in "YES," while a handful *did* for the live action remakes, demonstrates a change in dynamic between format perception…but why?

Correlation and Conclusion

Upon a deeper analysis, a strong positive correlation between characters rated as more attractive within the survey and those who modeled modern V.C.D.E.s in the live action format emerged. Among the V.C.D.E.s measured, facial symmetry and actor popularity presented itself to be the most impactful in determining who received a “YES” instead of a “NO.” in the survey.

Majority of the live action characters were displayed with more symmetrical facial features in contrast to their animated counterparts. Symmetry was one parameter that changed nearly all live action individuals towards more typical B.S of balanced features; these same characters tended to score significantly higher on attractiveness. Fo instance, villains such as Cruella and Jafar had more than a 15% increase in overall symmetry. Both also showed more than a 10% increase in survey responses saying “YES,” signifying a positive direct correlation.

Additionally, body shape played a subtle but important role. Though the films attempt to accurately represent costume designs to the authentic animated designs, they still reflect fit, hourglass or V-shaped figures that are commonly idealized in modern media. Maleficent was seen to be the most drastic change due to appearances in several costumes, two of which made drastic body shape changes from the regular, classic cape that hides her silhouette. Moreover, this live action character received the second highest “YES” responses. The others were subtle shifts, almost all becoming slightly closer or above, rarely below, the ideal ratios in contrast to the original ratios observed in animated formats.

Furthermore, actor popularity served as a significant factor. Remarkably, over half the villains who switched from “NO.” to “YES” when going from animated to live action format were portrayed by widely recognized actors. This suggests an unconscious projection that

viewers cast onto a character. Here, fame itself became a design choice, increasing appeal and attractiveness despite the character being played, showing a strong correlation between the two.

Finally, hairstyles also mattered. Villains who exhibited modern hairstyles tended to score higher on the survey; a trend that was more prominent among the males. It has long been said that hair is a man's makeup. Characters like Captain Hook and Shan Yu embodied this phrase, especially since their ratings for "YES" more than doubled in their live action formats compared to animated formats.

Everything considered, the correlation implies that live action depictions not only modernize Disney's designs but intentionally shift physical traits towards B.S accepted by Gen Z audiences. The transformation represents a cultural shift towards aesthetic visuals in villains. Media today often emphasizes beauty, giving these villains more than just their evil personality, which may cause audiences to sympathize with their actions. What we see can often coincide with what we feel, and this intersection between beauty and morality moves storytelling away from the typical black-and-white plot. My findings contribute to how different visual formats can influence Gen Z's perceptions of B.S and morality. However, there are limitations to consider. First of all, though I attempted to choose a diverse sample of villains, it is a small pool of characters in terms of what Disney has to offer. Second, finding images where each character was facing forward in a clear, observable format was more difficult than pre-determined. This acted as a challenge especially during symmetry analyzation where particular images had no other choice than to be scanned with angles or imperfect quality. Additionally, when assessing actor popularity, external factors—such as a celebrity not having social media due to personal, private reasons—made it difficult to provide concrete, objective evidence to support their fame. Nevertheless, the findings still reveal meaningful patterns. As Disney and other popular studios

continue to recreate characters with attractive features, society may gradually merge what they see and feel. This has implications not just for entertainment and media, but for how young audiences internalize B.S and form emotional connections with morally flawed characters. Future research can explore a wider range of characters as animations increasingly become adapted into live action films, analyze global perspectives from a cultural point of view, and even examine different media formats—for example, TikTok trends and edits—to see who *truly* is the fairest of them all.

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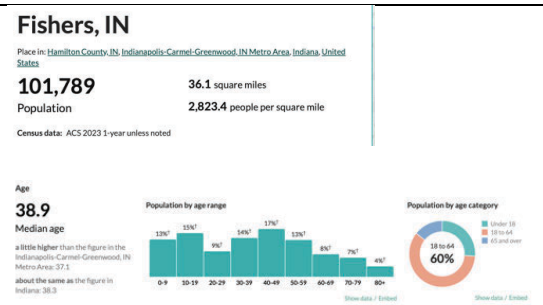
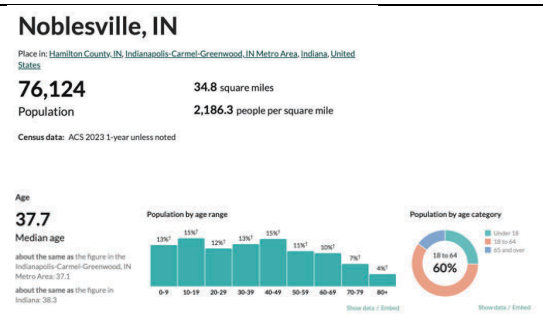
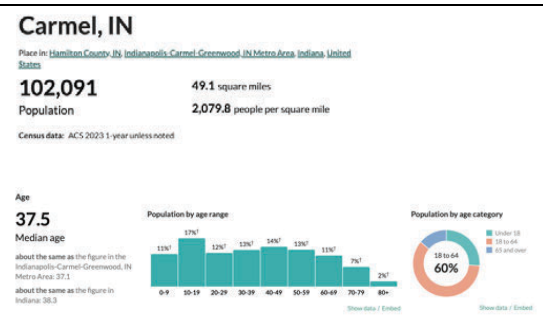
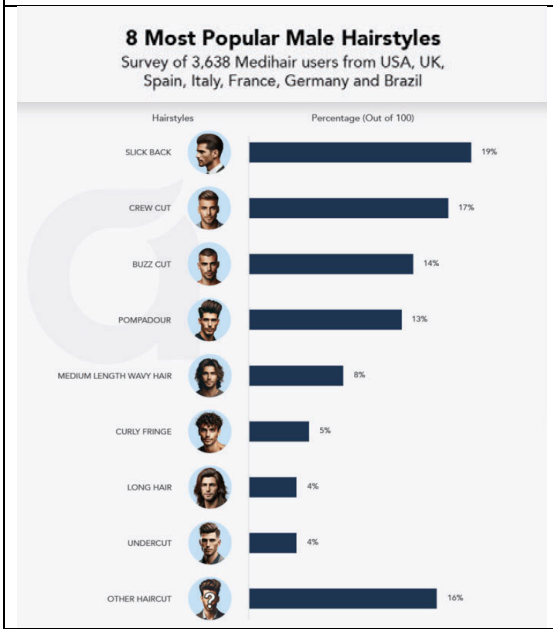
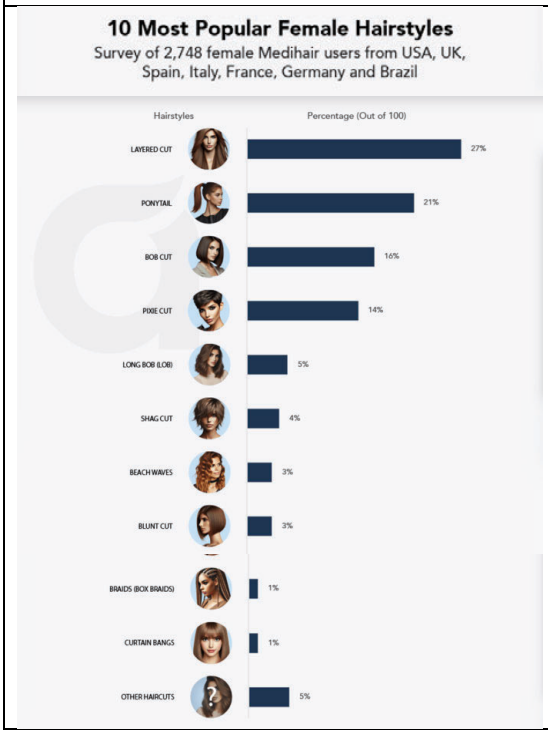
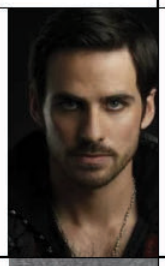
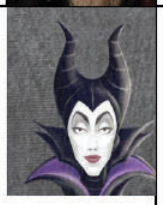
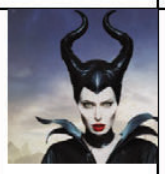
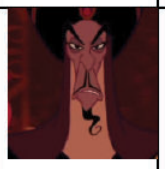
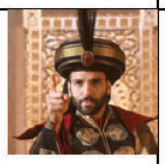
Appendix A

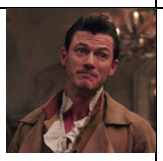
	Image	Calculation	Total
Fishers, IN		*Target audience = Total population × Population by age range percent* 101,789 × 0.24 =	24,429
Noblesville, IN		*Target audience = Total population × Population by age range percent* 76,124 × 0.24 =	18,270
Carmel, IN		*Target audience = Total population × Population by age range percent* 102,091 × 0.29 =	29,606
TOTAL		*Total target audience = Target audience 1 + Target audience 2 + Target audience 3*	= **72,305 people**… Rounded to **100,000 people** in case of variation in numbers from 2023 to 2024.

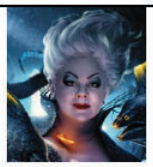
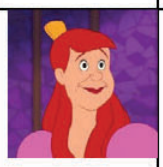
Appendix B

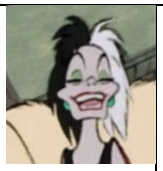
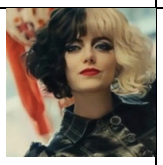
Male	Popular Hair Trends in Recent Years
	
Female	**Popular Hair Trends in Recent Years**
	

Appendix C

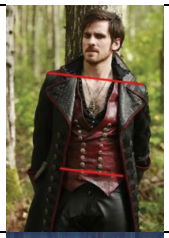
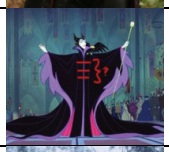
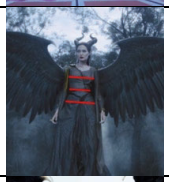
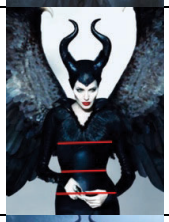
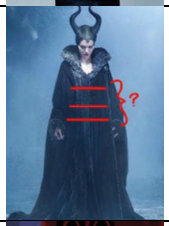
	Picture	Style	Why? – Personal notes
Captain Hook		N/A → Long, wavy, shoulder-length.	His hair is too long and exaggerated compared to modern styles. It has dramatic curls at the ends, which are more theatrical than trendy. Does not fit any of the hairstyles. This style is suitable for his villainous character, however, is inadequate to match Gen Z styles.
		Not-so-classic pompadour x Slick back.	He displays a fusion hairstyle. The hair has the volume and backward sweep of a pompadour but is less structured and more tousled, giving it a rugged, effortless look. Additionally, unlike a strict slick-back, it has texture and movement, fitting the modern, edgy take on the character.
Maleficent		N/A → Horned headdress.	No visible hair. Style less accepted in modern society as a typical hairstyle, but it might be seen in dramatic fashion. It's more theatrical than practical for everyday wear. Far from conventional hairstyles, making it complicated to compare to modern practices. Hair does not play an advantageous role for her character in ways it does for some others.
		N/A → Horned headdress + Exception.	Similar to animated, she is known for her signature headdress. However, for a few brief scenes, Maleficent is shown with a long blunt cut, that of which is observed in modern hairstyles. Though shortly, this is not present in the animated version, adding a familiar and accepted visual layer to her character.
Jafar		N/A → Long hair in topknot covered by turban always.	Actual hairstyle is never seen but pertains to his character design. He is known to have long hair that is constantly covered under a turban. This would not be as common in modern society and is rather specific to cultural context.
		N/A → Buzz cut BUT primarily covered by turban.	Similar to animated, he is known for his turban. Nevertheless, there is a notable change as Jafar is seen with a buzz cut. The buzz cut does follow modern styles, but it is rarely shown, making it a minor shift rather than a major transformation.

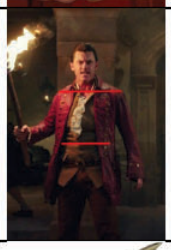
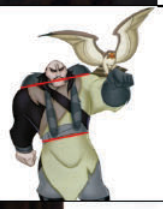
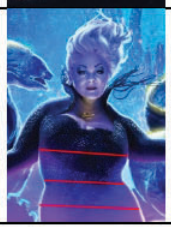
Gaston		N/A → Classic pompadour with a low ponytail	Hair has the volume and backward sweep of a pompadour in the front, but it transitions into a long, tied-back ponytail. While the pompadour aspect is trendy, the low ponytail makes it outdated by modern standards. This style wouldn't be widely accepted today, as men's ponytails are usually worn higher or looser, and the combo of pompadour + ponytail is rarely seen.
		N/A → Classic pompadour with a low ponytail	Like the animated version, live-action Gaston's hair features a pompadour in the front that flows into a low ponytail. In fact, this style is very accurate to the animated style. Similar to what has been said about the animated, while the pompadour itself is trendy, the addition of a low ponytail makes it less common in modern society.
Shan Yu		N/A → Partially shaved with long, loose hair	Shan Yu has a fully bald top with long, unbound hair flowing from the sides. The defining features are the completely bare crown and the long, loose strands, which do not align with any modern hairstyle trends. This style would not be widely accepted today as it is not only uncommon, but also shies away from beauty standards, coming off as unappealing.
		Long wavy hair styled with a half ponytail	He has naturally wavy, shoulder-length hair with the top half pulled back into a ponytail, while the rest flows freely. This style, while not as popular, still fits modern trends. However, the half-up styling leans more historical and practical for battle rather than a common everyday look. While long hair on men is more accepted today, his specific style is more rugged. He does not display the same baldness seen in the animated format, changing audiences' perceptions quite a bit.
Ursula		N/A → Short, spiky hair; styled upward.	Her hair resembles a pixie cut because of its short length, but it is styled upwards in a spiky manner, which moves away from the classic definition of a pixie cut. The spikes give her a wilder and more chaotic look rather than the softer, more feminine style typically associated with pixie cuts. Therefore, it does not match modern trends

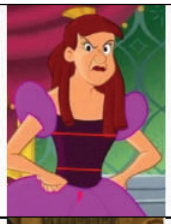
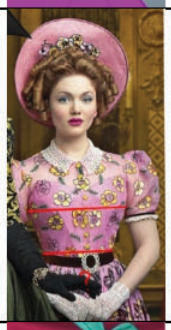
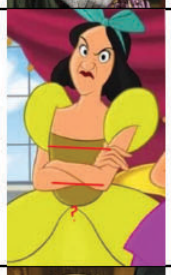
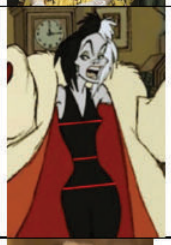
			or fit neatly into any popular hairstyle category.
		N/A → Short, wavy hair; styled upward.	Like the animated version, her hair stands up and out dramatically. While the wavy texture resembles the beach waves style, the overall styling is theatrical and exaggerated, aligning more with her villainous character. This specific look isn't common in modern society, as it leans towards accurately representing the animated version interpretation rather than a casual, everyday style.
Anastasia		N/A → Half updo with long, straight hair	She has long, straight hair styled in a half updo, which is not uncommon in society today. However, modern trends often favor volume and waves, making straight hair less popular among hairstyles. While her style may not fit into the hairstyle accumulated at the top, it is still accepted and can be considered elegant, reflecting a timeless look rather than a current trend.
		N/A → Curled updo	Her hairstyle is long hair styled into a curled updo, giving it a very traditional, Regency-era appearance. This is quite different from the animated version. In modern society, this style would likely not be accepted as it resembles a more historical look rather than a contemporary trend, which typically favors more relaxed and natural hairstyles.
Drizella		Wavy bob	She has shoulder-length black hair styled with rolled locks that create a wavy bob appearance, especially when stationary. This hairstyle aligns with the modern concept of a wavy bob due to its distinct short length and texture.
		Curly lob	She has a curly lob styled in a poofy, raised manner. This hairstyle closely resembles the curly lob as it has the same length and texture. The added volume and unique styling give it a distinctive look while still fitting within the curly lob category. It is a bit uncommon due to the way she styles it but is still accepted in modern society since it mimics a popular style.

Cruella		N/A → short, spiky, uneven/layered bob	Her short and uneven/layered hairstyle is half black, half white. While it resembles a bob in length, the spiky texture and overall rugged appearance does not fit the typical wavy bob or any other popular hairstyles from the list. This hairstyle is unique and bold, making it less common in modern society.
		Blowout bob with bangs	Her hairstyle is half black and half white hair styled in a bob, similar to the animated version. However, the live action version is softer and fits the wavy/curly bob concept as it has a similar length. Her specific color choice is bold like the animated representation. In fact, unnatural hair colors are accepted among gen z so it does not contribute negative views.

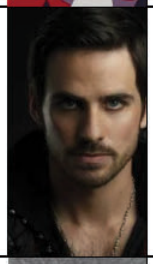
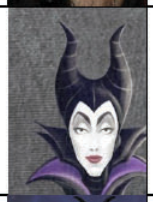
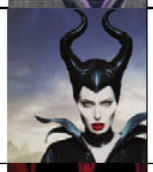
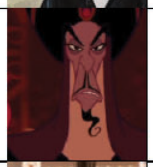
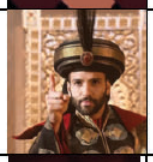
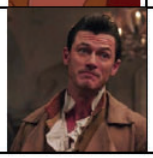
Appendix D

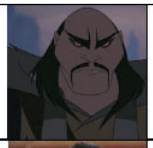
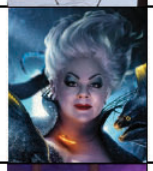
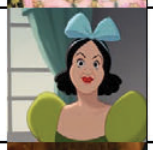
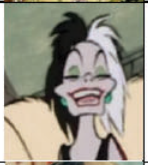
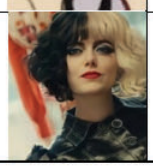
	Picture	Zoom	Upper Body (cm)	Waist (cm)	Hip (cm)
Captain Hook		700%	7.5	3.5	
		500%	10.5	7	
Maleficent		1000%	4	3.5	3.3
#1 young/fitted		900%	7	5.8	8
#2 older/fitted		600%	8	6.6	9
#3 older/coat		900%	6.8	7.4	8
Jafar		300%	7.9	3.2	

		400%	10.5	7.3	
Gaston		400%	10	7	
		600%	10.3	7.8	
Shan Yu		600%	11.6	7.8	
		400%	11.7	9.3	
Ursula		400%	8.2	11.4	12.1
		400%	9.7	8.5	10.8

Anastasia		500%	9	6	N/A
		300%	6.6	4.8	N/A
Drizella		500%	7.4	6	N/A
		400%	7.8	5.7	N/A
Cruella		500%	6.8	3.8	8.2
		400%	8.7	8	10.5

Appendix E

	Picture	Mouth Symmetry	Chin Symmetry	Eye Symmetry	Nose Symmetry	Overall Symmetry
Captain Hook		74%	89%	92%	86%	85%
		65%	95%	96%	98%	88%
Maleficent		79%	95%	98%	99%	92%
		94%	98%	98%	99%	97%
Jafar		71%	59%	90%	62%	70%
		91%	96%	97%	99%	95%
Gaston		78%	79%	88%	80%	81%
		93%	96%	97%	99%	96%

Shan Yu		94%	87%	96%	98%	94%
		91%	93%	98%	99%	95%
Ursula		92%	90%	94%	94%	93%
		80%	92%	95%	98%	91%
Anastasia		82%	60%	71%	91%	76%
		66%	78%	86%	92%	80%
Drizella		88%	96%	98%	99%	95%
		83%	94%	95%	100%	93%
Cruella		36%	63%	84%	98%	70%
		65%	95%	98%	99%	89%

Appendix F

Social Media Following

Name (in order of movies listed in notes)	Instagram	Twitter	Facebook	# of followers (total)
Colin O'Donoghue	1100000	510100	0	1610100
Angelina Jolie	15300000	0	0	15300000
Marwan Kenzari	78400	0	0	78400
Luke Evans	3600000	461900	3800000	7861900
Jason Scott Lee	32100	4400	0	36500
Melissa McCarthy	12600000	0	5100000	17700000
Sophie McShera	0	0	0	0
Holliday Grainger	0	0	0	0
Emma Stone	0	0	0	0
			Median:	78400

Awards

Name (in order of movies listed in notes)	Won	Nominated	# of awards (total)
Colin O'Donoghue	2	4	6
Angelina Jolie	62	130	192
Marwan Kenzari	2	3	5
Luke Evans	1	7	8
Jason Scott Lee	0	3	3
Melissa McCarthy	41	116	157
Sophie McShera	3	2	5
Holliday Grainger	0	7	7
Emma Stone	109	257	366
		Median:	7

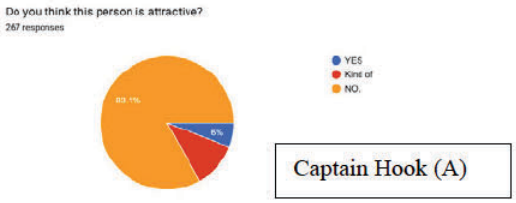
Main to Supporting Role Ratio

Name (in order of movies listed in notes)	Main Role	Supporting Role (including cameos or uncredited)	Total	Ratio
Colin O'Donoghue	6	22	28	0.21
Angelina Jolie	36	28	64	0.56
Marwan Kenzari	22	13	35	0.63
Luke Evans	20	31	51	0.39
Jason Scott Lee	24	19	43	0.56
Melissa McCarthy	31	34	65	0.48
Sophie McShera	15	8	23	0.65
Holliday Grainger	28	32	60	0.47
Emma Stone	26	28	54	0.48
			Median:	0.48

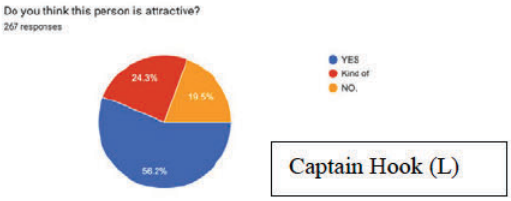
Condensed Version (Ratio)

Name (in order of movies listed in notes)	Ratio
Colin O'Donoghue	0.21
Angelina Jolie	0.56
Marwan Kenzari	0.63
Luke Evans	0.39
Jason Scott Lee	0.56
Melissa McCarthy	0.48
Sophie McShera	0.65
Holliday Grainger	0.47
Emma Stone	0.48
Median:	0.48

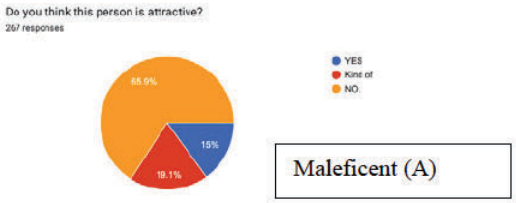
Appendix G



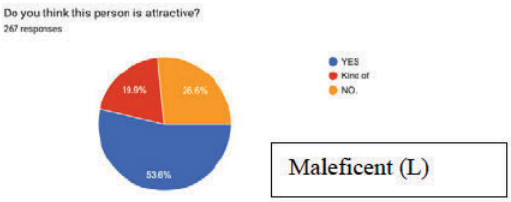
Captain Hook (A)



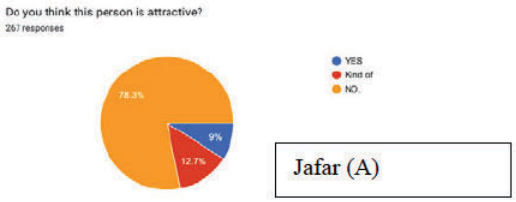
Captain Hook (L)



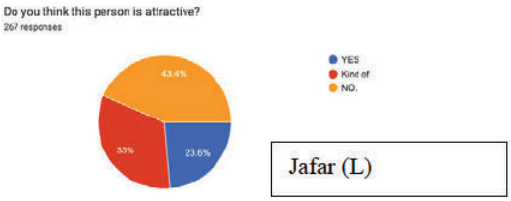
Maleficent (A)



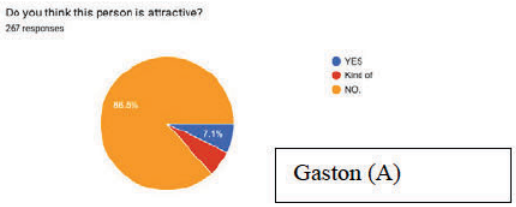
Maleficent (L)



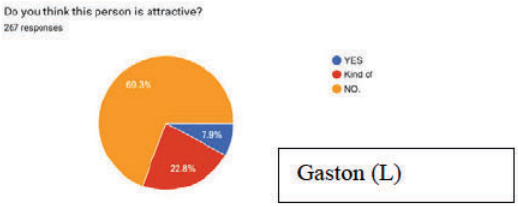
Jafar (A)



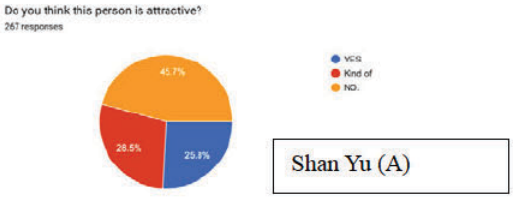
Jafar (L)



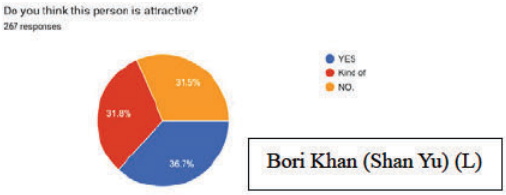
Gaston (A)



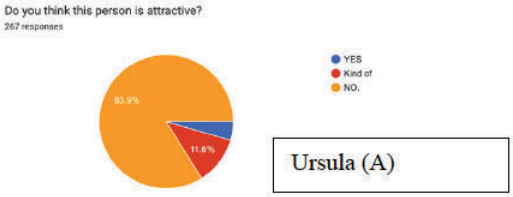
Gaston (L)



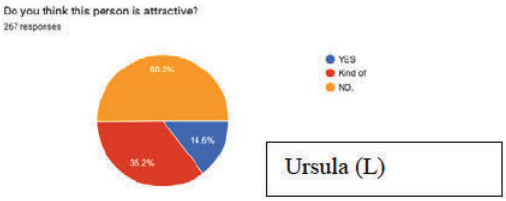
Shan Yu (A)



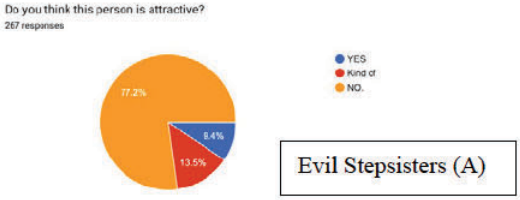
Bori Khan (Shan Yu) (L)



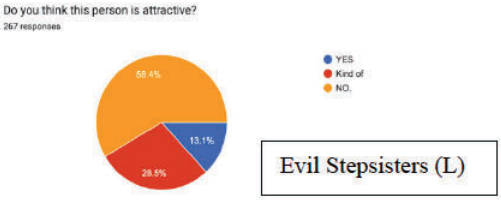
Ursula (A)



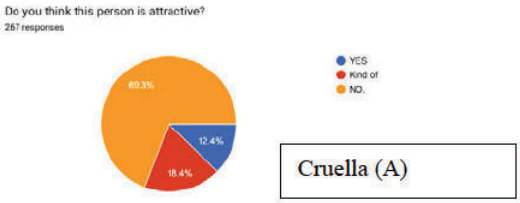
Ursula (L)



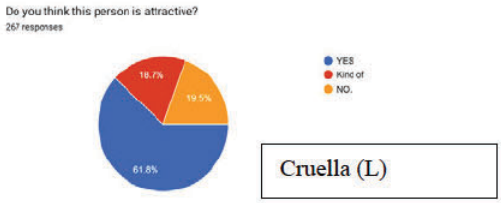
Evil Stepsisters (A)



Evil Stepsisters (L)



Cruella (A)



Cruella (L)

Academic Paper

Note: Student samples are quoted verbatim and may contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Overview

NEW for 2025: The question overviews can be found in the *Chief Reader Report on Student Responses* on AP Central.

Sample: C
Score: 4

This paper earns a score of 4. The research question is presented on p. 2: "Does Disney's depiction of villains in animated fairytales, compared to their live-action remakes, impact Gen Z's perceptions of beauty standards?" The topic of inquiry is focused, clearly communicated, and carried throughout the method and conclusion. The topic is situated with a variety of relevant scholarly and authoritative works about Disney, Gen-Z, and beauty standards/attractiveness on pp. 3-7. Connections between the sources and their relevance to the research question are made throughout the literature review to defend a gap, on p. 7: "Though several studies have concentrated on the animated villains, there is limited information about how Disney's representations in newer formats impact [beauty standards]. By analyzing these portrayals, my study assists in examining whether or not the pattern observed in animated formats continue in live action films."

The choices within the method are logically defended on pp. 8-11. For example, p. 8 presents a defense of the villains sample: "These characters were chosen not only because they are known worldwide, but more specifically due to the fact that there are only a handful of live action remakes. Up until 2024, Disney has created as many as 21 live action remakes of their classics ("All 21," n.d). Of these 21 films, only 14 movies consist of villains that are categorized as human, not including sequels or animations that repeat villains." The images used are defended on p.9, "First and foremost, each image chosen had to, at the very least, clearly show the characters torso and up. This was crucial as body features were significantly relevant to the study when I evaluated the villain's attractiveness." There are also several other instances of the method being defended, including the actresses in the study and the survey population.

The student's new understanding is found on p. 20: "Upon a deeper analysis, a strong positive correlation between characters rated as more attractive within the survey and those who modeled modern V.C.D.E.s in the live action format emerged. Among the V.C.D.E.s measured, facial symmetry and actor popularity presented itself to be the most impactful in determining who received a "YES" instead of a "NO." in the survey.… Furthermore, actor popularity served as a significant factor. Remarkably, over half the villains who switched from "NO." to "YES" when going from animated to live action format were portrayed by widely recognized actors." This new understanding is the result of a logically organized line of reasoning on pp. 12-19. For example, regarding facial symmetry on p. 16, "Results from overall symmetry show that 6/9 characters displayed higher balance in the live action formats as opposed to their animated counterparts. Such numbers illustrated a distinct trend where the live action adaptation converted to a more proportionate and symmetrical features; in fact, this was contrary to my theory of how the results could come out."

Academic Paper (continued)

The student acknowledges ethical considerations on p. 12, "The beginning of the survey provided a clear consent p. outlining the purpose of the survey and how someone's information would be used. I prioritized the respondent's anonymity and voluntary participation by taking no personal identifying info, other than gender, as well as giving the option to opt out at any given moment."

This paper does not earn a score of 3 because the topic of inquiry is focused and narrow on "how Disney's animated and live action depictions of villains affect Gen Z's perceptions of [beauty standards] and morality" (p. 7). The research methods are replicable and aligned to the topic of inquiry, as evidenced on pp. 8-12. The methods are thoroughly explained, detailed, and justified.

This paper does not earn a score of 5 because the implications to the field of knowledge on pp. 21-22 are underdeveloped: "Nevertheless, the findings still reveal meaningful patterns. As Disney and other popular studios continue to recreate characters with attractive features, society may gradually merge what they see and feel. This has implications not just for entertainment and media, but for how young audiences internalize [beauty standards] and form emotional connections with morally flawed characters." In addition, a lack of enhanced communication prevents this paper from earning a score of 5. Although some of the tables and graphs are labeled, they are not referenced in text. Thus, although the communication is competent, the communication is not enhanced by the student's design choices.