

## Child Rearing and Gender Socialisation: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of

### Kids' Popular Fictional Movies

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#### Abstract

*For the last two decades, a considerable effort has been made to understand the process and sources of gender socialisation in society. It is critical to know where this socialisation starts and why it is encouraged, supported, and consolidated. The current research aims to examine the role played by children's fictional films in socialising gender. Children's fictional films, among other sources, are potential sources for building cultural-based and modelling gender structures for children. The study highlights the vital role of such films in creating gender ideologies concerning men and women. The two most famous films, Tarzan and Cinderella, are selected: the first is popular among children and the second is one of the girls' favourite films. The Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis model from Lazar (2007) has analysed the language used in both films. The findings show that language plays a significant role in building and socialising gender roles in society. How men and women are characterised, and the stereotypical roles in such fictional films socialise children. Whether men or women, children instil such a powerful gender ideology that they are constantly striving to meet the standards and standards that society has set for them.*

**Keywords:** Gender Ideologies, Gender Socialisation, Ideologies, Disney, Animated Movies

#### Introduction

Language is a simple, primary and significant tool of human communication. Still, it is also responsible for shaping and changing people's views and how they think, react, and convey ideas or thoughts towards anything or feelings towards a person or object. Wood (2011) states that language is an instrument to organise human experiences and perceptions; expresses cultural views. Since the dawn of civilisations, there have been stories and folktales narrated to children and young people. These stories generally formed the basis of the cartoon characters. These stories were a way of consoling and cheering a child and giving lessons to the child about the societal norms of their nation.

#### Construction of Ideologies through language

Movies play a significant role in the constructions and determining of ideologies through particular reference to gender. The Walt Disney Corporation has been working in films, especially animated movies for young children, so it has played a dominant role in constructing ideologies in young children for the last eighty years. Walt Disney's major work is animated movies, through which it creates clear cut gender segregation between the two distinct genders, i.e. masculinity and femininity. In these movies, especially young children are inspired to think as men or women. Animated movies released by Walt Disney Corporation play a vital part in constructing gender ideologies in children at the primary level. They, children, take much influence from such types of movies. Remafedi (1990) claims that language used in animated movies is very important; the language is responsible for constructing gender ideologies and identities in young children.

#### Research Questions

This research addresses the following questions;

1. What is the role of kid's fictional movies in the gender socialisation of kids?
2. What ideologies and identities are represented and constructed through the kids' fictional movies, particularly regarding masculinity and femininity?

3. What kinds of roles are assigned to men and women by representing male and female characters in kids' fictional movies?

**Theoretical Framework and Related Researches**

The content presented on television in different programs and movies is brimmed with ideological perspectives that help construct, shape, or change people's ideas towards society and the incidents happening roundabout. All media devices, especially television, are a major source of propagating a particular ideology in the people, whether right or wrong, with the help of different programs, including talk shows, dramas, movies, etc. The research conducted by Remafedi (1990) provides the theoretical framework for the current study.

**Origin and Background of Fictional Movies**

Media plays a significant role in children's socialisation process. As children grow up as adults, they indulge in cartoon or animated movies, which is universal. Gender objectification and portrayal in these cartoon and animated movies construct the ideas in young children. By watching these movies, children start behaving like the characters of the movies, being men and women. Martin, Ruble & Szkrybalo (2002) deliberate that from learning social theory, the postulate is formulated that focus on beliefs, social behaviours and general ideas of children at their early phase of life can easily be constructed, shaped, moulded or changed through the gender roles assigned to different characters in cartoon and animated movies. This theory has further discovered that children start learning continuously, smoothly and speedily from the programs, especially cartoon and animated movies, as they like to watch them of their own free will. In this way, from the very early stage of life, they start learning the roles and behaviours assigned to them, especially regarding their gender being men or women.

Kail (2004) believes that children learn all this from different cartoons and animated movies played for them on various TV channels because they watch such types of movies regularly. Consequently, they start behaving like men and women according to their social context set patterns, which is socially acceptable in their society. This social learning theory has also declared TV to be central and, in the modern age, the unavoidable active agent responsible for shaping human behaviours, particularly the behaviours of young children.

In the history of media, gender is being portrayed stereotypically for a long time. Many studies on genders have declared that the movies, particularly animated and cartoon movies that children love to watch at their early phase of life, affect their social behaviour as men or women. So when these children enter their adult age, they start behaving as they have watched in movies. So these movies are the primary source of creating gender ideology in children (Signorielli, 1990). Grusec and Hasting (2007) state that media and television are explicitly responsible for creating socially acceptable and assigned ideas and behaviours. They further proclaim that the gender roles being men and women are the only creation of social groups and the environment in which an individual lives, such as family (parents), school (teachers and peer group) and the community around them, and they learn behaving like accepted gender roles from the society at the conscious or unconscious level.

Silverstein et al. (1986) conduct a study in which they analyse that the reason behind the actions and behaviours of men and women is mainly due to the representation of such characters in media. Children only copy these standards and then start behaving according to these socially implied and acceptable roles.

According to Thompson and Zerbinos (1995), the animation is the graphical representation of drawn pictures, but they look moving. In such movies, many pictures are associated one after the other with the help of the camera. Animated movies started in 1900, and at that time, it was costly and laborious to draw a large number of pictures and then link and join them to make a moveable movie. Hundreds of pictures were needed to make a motion picture of one minute. In 1937 Walt Disney Corporation released a full-length animated cartoon movie that was an innovation in animated movies. Toy Story, released in 1995, was the first animated cartoon film that was animated on Computer.

England et al. (2001) observe Disney princess movies and analyse that gender representation in cartoon movies is the same as many years ago. The image presented in these movies is as traditional as before, and there is no change. In cartoon movies, male characters are portrayed as

dominant and powerful as they usually rescue female cartoons, while on the other hand, female cartoons are smart, slim, beautiful and sexy.

Several studies highlight the implications of televised media concerning gender. Higher levels of exposure to television have been correlated with more traditional ideas of gender roles (Frueh and McGee 1975; Williams 1981). Television has been identified as a dominant source of social influence on children's gender concepts (Leaper 2000). Calvert and Huston (1987) state that television viewing has been connected with pro-social and aggressive behaviours.

### **Research Methodology**

The current study is qualitative as it aims to explore ideologies, values, beliefs and social practices regarding gender socialisation through kids' fictional movies. This study is delimited to two fictional movies, i.e. *Cinderella* and *Tarzan*. *Cinderella* is popular among girl kids, and *Tarzan*'s male solid leading character is popular among boys.

### **Data Analysis**

For data analysis, Lazar's FCDA model (2007) has been employed. The language of the selected movies has been analysed by keeping in view the feminist perspective, particularly regarding gender constructions and socialisation. The data has been analysed by making following categories:

1. Power Structure and Ideology Constructions
2. Sexism in Movies
3. Dressing and Language
4. Characterisation and personality
5. Gender Roles

### **Power Structures and Ideology Constructions**

Power structures refer to the distribution of power among social groups. Language is a vital tool for constructing power relations in society. Specifically addressing gender, children's fictional movies help socialise them to be like men or women. These patterns and behaviours are so deeply ingrained in children's minds that they are taken as common sense and reality. So it is with the films chosen for this study.

As in *Tarzan*, a hero can climb tall trees and high hills without a ladder and jump from tree to tree without any safety measures. Men are assumed to be more automated, self-confident, intelligent, healthy, lively, skilled, practical, buoyant, and stronger than female protagonists in most films. Saving one's life requires power, and only those with power can do so. *Tarzan* is a powerful man who saves Jane's life and the lives of animals. He scales high hills and tall trees without fear. He wears leather briefs.



Like *Tarzan*, modern-day boys want to impress other boys with their strength. They knew the power was a manly quality. They do not cry or weep as girls and women do since it is cowardly. To impress the young girls, most boys like to be superior to their sisters.

When *Cinderella*'s stepmother refused to take her to the ball, she went out and wept under a tree, calling on the angel for help. Suddenly, Mother God appeared and helped her. Because of this, the king became enraged and tried to kill Kent, but Kent managed to escape. When Kent and the attendant tried on the shoe, *Cinderella*'s stepmother wickedly locked her in the room, tingled the attendant, and broke the shoe. *Cinderella* did not disappoint as she knew she had the other shoe from the pair. She wore it in her foot. Seeing this made Kent so happy that he went out and found the real girl for the Prince. This film also depicts male and female love.



In these films, men are always powerful, while women are meek and weak. Tarzan, despite his short dress, is always ready to help the poor. Children learn that boys or men are always powerful and that when they lose something, they fight and try to avenge themselves, as the king, Tarzan, and the hunting party did in these two movies. Jane and Cinderella did not do this. Because this is a manly task, children believe that girls or women cannot do it. Assuming domestic duties, girls try to attract others with their beauty and attire. They were to sing and pity others. Because of this, boys try to be powerful like Tarzan, and girls try to be beautiful and smart like Cinderella. Boys scream and fight for their rights while girls only pray and weep. In society, boys are strong while girls are weak, and boys love to look and shout like Tarzan while girls prefer to live beautiful and smart like Cinderella. Also, powerful men always speak loudly, whereas girls do not. Girls also learn not to talk aloud from movies like this.

#### **Sexism in Movies**

Fictional movies have categorically exposed men and women through conventional and starring roles; in stereotypical body forms. Disney movies mark the chauvinist impact on kids who are at the preliminary stage to perceive the world.

Tarzan is a powerful symbol that is always ready to help others in need in the jungle. He is a hard worker who is always kind and sympathetic to others. He is an average man with some exceptional qualities and skills that set him apart from others. A lot of young boys want to play Tarzan in this movie. There is only one female character, Jane, who does nothing but expresses her love and sentiments. She admires Tarzan's physique and power. When Tarzan was out in the jungle, he met a triad of humans. Professor Porter (Nigel Hawthorne), his daughter Jane (Minnie Driver), and their guide Clayton make up this team (Brian blessed). Nigel Hawthorne was excited when he stumbled upon a nesting site, proving his theory that gorillas are primarily social creatures who live in intimate groups. Clayton's impression of gorillas is that they are wild, fierce beasts.

The impulsive Clayton almost finds Tarzan before the trio leaves. Jane lingers behind to draw a baby mandrill baboon. The baby takes a liking to the drawing and snips it. An enormous baboon troop chases Jane after she takes the picture away from him. Tarzan, looking down from above, swings down and saves Jane from a chasm. Tagging with the baby, Tarzan uses his supernatural skills to navigate the treetops and elude the baboons.



His interactions with Jane reveal him to be a romantic, often flattering, guarding and presenting flowers while declaring the best woman. In "Silver Screen," he was forced to kiss a woman

he didn't love, a performance he described as "baffling." He can also detect deceptions, but he is vulnerable. He is also known for his intellect, believing his opponents to be more vigorous than himself, and making self-taught weapons. In "Jungle Madness," he figured out what caused the animals crazy, and in "Lost Treasure," he outwitted some treasure hunters who threatened to kill Jane if he didn't comply. Despite not allowing "wild man" identity, Jane notes he is more civilised, compassionate, and has high morals throughout the series.

Tarzan is a brave, trustworthy, and noble character. And he is willing to risk his life for his clan and friends. Injuring Kerchak and trying to kill him and abduct his entire gorilla family, Tarzan screamed, "Clayton! Clayton!" and grabbed him. This shows that, like most heroes, he can be mistaken for the antagonist. Tarzan was a young man who seemed to be lost. He had never seen a human before while waiting for Jane, her father, and Clayton. So he had never heard of it. Adulthood had transformed him into a solemn personality, yet he retained his family and friends' affection.

This film contains sexism. Jane was engaged to a man she didn't want... She was also discouraged from taking risks due to her perceived weakness. Ultimately, she takes her path and wanders in the woods. In the film, she is courageous, a positive departure from the Disney woman archetype. But, as a girl, she still needs Tarzan's help. Moreover, Tarzan's portrayal reflected an over-masculinised view of men. He has solid muscles but lacks emotional expression portraying females in pathetic, subservient roles.



All in all, Tarzan is more emotionless than Jane. She is a damsel suffering due to various issues. The reversal roles mark a transferal change, especially in Jane. She no longer disseminates the customs of femininity. She is staying powerful contrary to the Goffman's notion that female is always frail and submissive as expected by the society.

Aside from Cinderella, the movie's minor characters teach the girls about domestic duties. What is their life's purpose? The mice who embroidered Cinderella's ball gown said only women sew. So, endorsing the epitome of womanhood seems to be duty-bound to carry out all daily chores. Because the Prince's father was the sovereign, the queen was not mentioned. However, there is a reference to the king's desire to find a bride for his grandson. The monarch was not looking for a bride for his son but to continue his family line. It also warns the young girls that their life's purpose is to breed and raise children.

Cinderella's feet are frequently shown to emphasise their importance in any girl's proposal. Female body parts are frequently fetishised—that which is not the sexual organ. Cinderella's costume is brown even when she is busy. It reminds me of rags, so she may be a housewife. Cinderella always wears soft blue shades to convey her sincerity and intimacy. The bluebirds awaken Cinderella in a blue nightdress with matching ribbons in her hair, highlighting her large blue eyes. She also wears a glimmering blue dress and glass shoes. The audience imagines her charmingly slipping as she steps towards Prince. Inspiring young girls who use cosmetics to look stunning. Girls are self-conscious about their appearance and fitness because they see Cinderella as their ideal heroine. Girl's fantasies are usually golden.

This happy ending teaches the young girl to achieve a happy ending, and they must be in matrimony. Cinderella is depicted as being wretched because she was not yet married. When she married the Prince, she was merry and finally escaped from the malicious foster family. Thus, educating girls to find real contentment is by marrying a man.

There is a song which Cinderella sings herself, i.e.  
*Cinderella, you're as lovely as your name*  
*Cinderella, you're a sunset in a frame*  
*Though you're dressed in rags, you wear a queenly grace,*  
*Anyone can see a throne would be your proper place.*  
*Cinderella, if you give your heart a chance*  
*It will lead you to the kingdom of romance*  
*There you'll see your dreams unfold*  
*Cinderella, Cinderella, in the sweetest story ever told*

A sweet and good girl, Cinderella hopes for good days to come and her dreams to come true in this stanza. Depressed or disappointed children, especially young girls, imitate this act. To overcome this, they usually sit alone and sing a song they like. They also think of happy days ahead and the Prince of their dreams they will marry. The song's first stanza encourages viewers to adore Cinderella. Cinderella's looks, actions, and self-assurance exemplify royal family ideals like class, benevolence, charisma, and chastisement. The song's melody acknowledges that Cinderella is dressed in rags for two reasons. The main reason is to admire her beauty, elegance, and power despite her unattractive costume. The viewers are also surprised to see Cinderella as a servant. The social conventions of domestic workers may hinder their ability to see her as a crowned head. The first stanza's last line confirms her dreams; she is born to be an empress, not a domestic girl. The second stanza clarifies the audience's perception of Cinderella's character.

When the Prince sees Cinderella for the first time, her physical appearance astonishes him, and he falls in love. Orenstein claims that young females who embrace the most conservatively feminine dogmas to avoid clashes and contemplate being perpetually pleasant and attractive; more expected to be disheartened than others. Furthermore, young girls feel that they must give pleasure to all and sundry, very skinny and costume right to be well-liked.



Anastasia and Drizella were shown before the Prince in the above image, but their posture and demeanour were awkward. A woman walked next to another's dress, but he snatched her skirt from under her feet. While Anastasia and Drizella were surprised to see Prince approaching them, he crossed them and approached Cinderella. He took her hand and bowed, and Cinderella recognised him and bowed.

### **Dressing and Language**

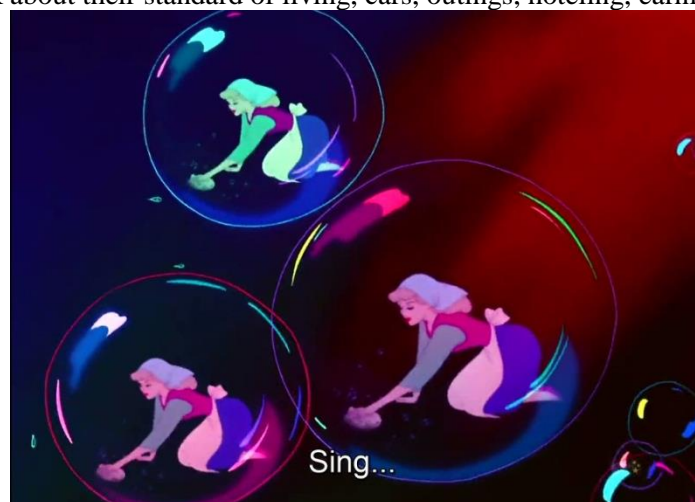
Tarzan and Jane both wear short dresses, but their dresses differ. Jane wears a short skirt and short trousers, while Tarzan only wears leather underwear around his thighs. Tarzan's attire is meant to impress others with his masculine strength and muscularity. It also shows he is fearless, even in the jungle. Jane's short dress shows her physical beauty to attract others, especially the opposite sex. In society, boys wear such clothes to impress others, especially the opposite sex.



When one of the mice informed Cinderella of a new rat visitor, she opened the drawer with a tiny skirt for the new guest to find it was "he" and picked up a jacket for him. In our society, boys and girls wear different clothing, and even the colours are different. Similarly, when a girl wears a boyish colour, other girls may criticise her for it. For example, girls prefer Cinderella and baby while boys prefer Tarzan, Spiderman, and Ben ten



Names and naming practises are major social issues. Girls and boys have different names. When boys see a boy acting girlishly, they label him as a girl. Likewise, girls do the same. As shown in the image above, clothing is essential in society. Mice care about clothes and know the difference between them and her. Boys dislike girly clothes, and girls dislike boyish garments. In Tarzan, girls wear skirts while boys wear trousers and jackets. Both men and women dress similarly in both films. When most girls do their chores, they sing their favourite songs in a low but melodious voice, making their voice more melodious than boys or men. Boys who play with their pals and peers usually yell at each other. Boys talk about their standard of living, cars, outings, hoteling, earning, and even fighting.



### **Characterisation and Personality**

Cinderella is convinced that good days will come, sooner or later. She prays for good days and neither annoys nor disobeys her stepmother. She sobs alone, and when her stepmother calls her, she answers immediately. Children learn that if Cinderella can overcome such adversity, they can be patient in all situations. That they must wait and pray to Allah for goodness strengthens their faith in Allah and good days.

Girls face many issues in society, most of which stem from their gender. When a house mouse informed Cinderella that there was a new mouse in the house, she went to free it from its cage. Girls are naturally kind and compassionate, so they join in their tears when they see someone in distress or pain. However, women are more evil and jealous than men. They own their own and others' problems. They are usually good-hearted, but when they turn wicked, they cause problems for themselves and others.

Lady Tremaine and her daughters' desire for Cinderella, on the other hand, always goes unfulfilled. Cinderella is a children's morality play. From this viewpoint, viewers learn that success comes from those who are kind, soft-hearted, and honest. They know how to succeed in life and interact with others. They also learn that those with evil desires never succeed in life. Truthfulness, tolerance, and patience are great human virtues that can help you achieve success and realise your dreams.

### **Gender Roles**

When Tarzan fights an angry and enraged ape, he wins, but he lets it go because forgiving the one at your mercy is a great manly act. But women lack this trait. Cinderella wakes Lucifer up for breakfast, but seeing his facial expressions, she says, "I am sorry if your majesty objects to an early mealtime." Serving you first was not my idea. It was a rule. With their stepmothers' orders, young girls are expected to speak calmly and politely to even their pet cat, e.g. Highness. It also shows how women are less powerful than men. Boys adore toys that represent power, control, and authority, such as guns and pistols. They know that fighting is a manly trait and must be strong and skilled to overcome their opponents. Girls, like Cinderella, love to sing. They enjoy praise.

Cinderella focuses on gender roles and stereotypes, mainly focusing on how advanced any nation balances women and men's rights. For example, a woman's worth is determined by her appearance and how she dresses. Every fictional movie knows this, like when Cinderella meets her Fairy Godmother. Before this miracle, she is dressed in shabby clothes. But becoming a stunningly dressed young lady strengthens her against the beauty ideals. Cinderella's chances of making a lasting impression on the Prince are slim to none if she attends the Prince's ball in shabby attire.

In this film, a female, especially a maid, is shown cooking and cleaning the house. Cinderella does her step sisters' work as well. They give her their dirty clothes to wash, which affects young females. She is accountable for domestic duties. Watching the movie, girls try to do the same tasks at home as a female responsibility. Almost everywhere, females are solely responsible for domestic work, job or not. Even if they work, they must do their duty at home. When they see such things, some girls give up on education, believing they don't need it if they do domestic tasks.

Men always try to get power, and due to the power, whether legal or illegal, they try to control others and rule over them. The hunters also tried to kill Tarzan as to them he was dangerous for them. They shot him with guns and the helicopter, but he escaped due to his efficiency and physical fitness. He fled away from the spot while Jane was clung to him. It shows the power of man and the saviour of women. Boys, to other boys, having or showing some cowardly nature or acting/behaving like girls, hoot and criticise and vice versa.





I believe love is great for both independence and education. Women today are more focused on being self-governing, sophisticated, and self-sufficient in finding a husband. After marriage, Cinderella gains independence. The Prince will be her protector, and she can only rely on him. Education is not the main focus in the movies, implying that society did not want women to waste time learning when they had more important goals to achieve. Women strive to be doctors, lawyers, and politicians. But Cinderella, as Orenstein would say, "doesn't do anything". Cinderella accepts the proposal not out of love but to escape her stepmother and sisters' abusive household. She can't be in love with a man with whom she danced once without saying a word. Cinderella only wants to leave her abusive family and live in the Prince's castle. The Prince seems smitten by Cinderella's beauty.

### **Findings and Conclusions**

These movies lay different impacts on the viewers but especially on young children. Ideologies are constructed at an early age and young children are straightforward prey as they can easily be motivated and change their mindset. Movies are liked by most humans, especially in their leisure time, sometimes for information but mostly for entertainment. They become easily impressed by what is presented to them in the movies. Young children mostly like to watch cartoons or animated movies as they are fundamental for them. They are funny because most of the characters look naughty and provide entertainment to them.

### **Findings**

There are two different roles for males and females, and there is a significant difference between their roles. Their roles and language, their choice of words, tone, pitch loudness, dresses, feelings and sentiments, and their behaviour towards others are also different from one another.

1. Tarzan is a symbol of power and strength, but he is also a lover of the opposite sex. He is gentle and responsible for his siblings and those in his care. Is it also there to help the poor and needy? He doesn't kill anything. Boys often say they look like Tarzan to show their strength and power, and it has become a symbol of manly power and strength. He yells, crawls, and jumps like an ape to show his male potency.
2. Men or boys are not usually tender and kind-hearted when given a task to complete. Boys don't make compromises when they're determined to do something. Other than Tarzan, the males in this film are cruel and enjoy killing. They want to harm others with guns. This is evident throughout the film. They lack a kind heart.
3. Women are mostly wicked and jealous as they cannot bear anyone to look like them. They cannot share their beauty tips and other things like this. There is a personal grudge among males because they do not want to bear others and do not want to share the treasure with other males. That is why they try to kill them with the gun and sometimes with explosive material.
4. The greedy nature of males is an opposing point of male strata in the movie as they are ready to use every fair and unfair means to get the treasure. For this, they never hesitate to abolish any obstacle in their way, even if it would be a human or male.
5. Her foster mother and sisters are envious of her beauty, which shows females' jealous nature. They do not bear anyone above them, whether in beauty, education or wealth etc. They oppressed her in every way and treated her as a maid of the house. But on the other hand, Cinderella remained patient and did not lose her trust in God and stood victorious being the princess of the state.
6. Jane and Cinderella, on the other hand, are weak and show love to other humans and non-humans. Cinderella's stepmother and sisters did not want to take her to the palace ball because they feared the Prince would choose her as his princess. Cinderella's dresses were short and tight to show off her feminine beauty, whereas Tarzan is only dressed in underwear. The king didn't dress up either. Cinderella speaks softly, but her stepmother and sisters do not. They are rude, loud, and used to sleep past dawn. When Anastasia and Drizella were practising singing, and her mother encouraged them, Lucifer, the pet cat, was also present. When the song became unbearable for him, he fled the room and saw Cinderella singing and cleaning the floor. It also shows a woman's greedy nature and her love for her real daughters, and her willingness to do anything to raise them well. She also wishes to marry into a noble and wealthy family.

### **Conclusions**

In the light of the above findings, the following conclusions have been drawn;

1. The roles, language, and attire of males and females are distinct in these films. Females are portrayed as more beautiful, delicate, and kind than males. Females take care of their appearance, but males do not, as seen in society. Females are often the symbol of beauty and love. They wear short, tight dresses to attract males. Females speak softly and musically, whereas males talk loudly. So most females do not speak aloud, whereas males do not care and avoid fighting with each other and others. Males are fearless, but females are weak and meek, and males lack vocabulary. Young children also imitate this trait. Kids started acting like the characters in these movies, which changed their lifestyles. It alters their way of thinking and perceiving things. In society, males' language, words, and dress differ from females'.
2. Language mechanics always play an essential role in conveying and understanding messages. This is particularly important in fictional films, where the characters are not real people. In Cinderella and Tarzan, specific genders are emphasised. Males work outside for the family, hunting, and other jobs, while females work inside to cook and clean. It is prevalent in society as male and female roles are distinct. Males who love a girl become tender, sweet, and kind to them, but they are hard and direct in everyday life. Males in Pakistani society behave very differently from females, believing they are superior to females and trying to suppress females at every opportunity. Males speak loudly, whereas females usually speak softly and musically. We value the female lexicon and word choice more than the male lexicon.

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