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Title

Queen of Equestria: A Study of the Career of Lauren Faust and Her Impact on Contemporary Animation.

Dedication

Dedicated to my family.

To Lauren Faust, ‘In many ways, the work of a critic is easy. We risk very little, yet enjoy a position over those who offer up their work and their selves to our judgment. We thrive on negative criticism, which is fun to write and to read.’ (Ratatouille 2007)

Most importantly, to Andrew.

Acknowledgments

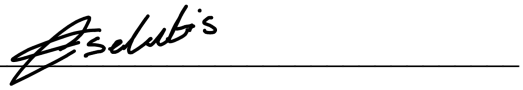
I would like to thank my supervisor, Raymond Whitcher, for his open-minded support from when I first mentioned *My Little Pony* as the topic of my research, until its final completion. Having the freedom and guidance to research what interested me is what made the process so enjoyable, and for that I am incredibly grateful.

My friend and academic, Tatenda Magaisa, for her immense help and patience on my paper. For her enthusiasm and for letting me learn from her own knowledge pertaining to the themes discussed in my paper.

To Andrew Allcock, thank you for never once protesting to hearing the *My Little Pony* opening song continuously for over two years. Your endless encouragement, from day zero, has been a pillar to this research.

Declaration

I, Kleanthi Tselentis, declare that this Thesis/Dissertation/Research Report is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master in Digital Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.



(Signature of candidate)

18 day of November 2020 in Modderfontein

Abstract

The intention of this research is to use the case study method to look at Lauren Faust's career in the Western animation industry and her impact on contemporary animation with specific look at her female characters. The aim of this research is to understand how Faust is able to create female characters that are relatable and entertaining without removing any aspect innately 'female'. The character analysis, which will follow the case study, will be isolating two characters of the show *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* that I have found to be the best candidates for an in-depth research into female identity. The character Rarity will be in reference to her self-awareness as a female character with the use of her comedy and the female gaze. The second character, Pinkie Pie, is the self-awareness of being a cartoon while still appealing to the young girl 'feminine aesthetic'. The analysis also focuses on how Faust's use of personality animation alongside the medium of cut-out animation is deemed preferrable for exploring ways to delve into the female identity outside of using a gendered body. As a way to understand the differences between tropes and stereotypes, I will also be offering a short analysis on the character Zecora and how her characterisation threatens what has made the show a success. The theoretical discourse coupled with the case study on Faust and analysis on her characters has furthered my own knowledge on developing successful female characters in animation.

Contents

Chapter 1: Motivation and Method

This research aims to analyse the female characters in the animated series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* by conducting a case study which will primarily explore the creative process of American showrunner, Lauren Faust. Particular attention will be drawn upon the female characters in the animated series that she has worked on and developed throughout her career. This will be followed by an in-depth analysis on three specifically chosen female characters in *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. The method of research and chosen literature, as knowledge to build upon, is in hopes to understand how the female identity is able to step away from harmful stereotypes without necessarily removing anything that is inherently female.

1.1 Background

Lauren Faust is a prominent figure in the Western animation[1] industry. The use of the term 'veteran' is owed to her extensive experience in some of the most respected animated films and series in contemporary animation. Her animation career includes films such as Warner Bros. Feature Animation's *Cats Don't Dance* (1997) and *The Iron Giant* (1999). However, to limit the analysis on Faust to only what is directly relevant to my research, the case study will begin in 2002 when Faust joined the Cartoon Network team on *The Powerpuff Girls* (1998) that was originally created by Craig McCracken. On this female centred animated series she took up the role of supervising director, writer, and storyboard artist until the end of the show in 2005. (IMDb) Faust continued to work alongside Craig McCracken, on Cartoon Network's *Fosters*

[1] These are industries originating from the United States, Canada, Latin America, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand.

Home for Imaginary Friends (2008) as a writer before being approached by Hasbro to take creative lead on *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (2010). After only two seasons, Lauren Faust left the series in 2011 and went on to create the DC Nation shorts *Super Best Friends Forever* (2012). Here she took on the role as director, producer, writer, and storyboard artist. The five episodic series centred around three young female superheroes and their struggles as teenagers with superpowers. Faust tried to pitch a full-length series but despite its popularity it was not accepted and ended at its fifth episode. However, many of the designs and concepts were able to be transferred onto Warner Bros. Animation's future production *DC Super Hero Girls* (2019), a reboot of the 2015 web series of the same name. Lauren Faust was brought on board as showrunner of a female led animated series once more which aired from the 8th of March 2019 and is currently, as of writing this research, still being produced.

1.2 Motivation and Aim

The reason for selecting the rebooted series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, is that I was interested in researching entertainment that is aimed and created for the targeted audience of girls between seven and twelve The fact that the show drew in a much larger than intended audience, compelled me to understand how Faust created characters that although still highly feminised still had depth that an adult person could relate to. Despite the phenomenon that is the show overall, my focus will be to analyse the characters, to understand how they were created and how they might relate to the literature and theories I have chosen. I am interested in seeing how comedy is used to match their personalities rather than falling for the comedic trap at the expense of being female. The case study and character analysis will also allow me to see how the chosen visual medium of cut-out animation has attributed to the visual language of the characters and whether its simplicity owes to their success.

The *My Little Pony* predecessors are recognisable by their highly feminised characters and superficial storylines. There was no necessity to develop in-depth characters when the main intention of the show was to advertise the toys to young girls, making the plots only as relevant as to which products were being sold. (The Toys That Made Us 2019) The franchise has often been used as satire in other animated series using the 'girly' aspect of it as the joke[2]. Often creators believe that for a female centred show to appeal to a wide audience, aspects of feminisation should be removed. However, the reboot *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* itself has not lost any of its original 'girl-centric' content and is still arguably loyal to the Pony brand. My aim is to understand how Lauren Faust created female characters that are still recognisable as 'My Little Pony' products that have personality depths without needing to remove their female identity. My aim is to understand how Faust has stayed true to the 'Pony brand', who have long been the punchline for gags at the expense of 'girlish femininity', and at the same time creating characters which are memorable and relatable.

In John W. Creswell's *Research Design* (2009) he explains how, 'Humans engage with their world and make sense of it based on their historical and social perspectives – we are all born into a world of meaning bestowed upon us by our culture' (Creswell 8). The idea that we are already marked with prerequisites of society's already integrated beliefs is not foreign, even in the entertainment we choose to consume. Arguably, it has been more noticeable in television and movies as the medium tries to simplify messages of moral coding and gender role expectations. Although gender and identity representation has changed and made efforts for inclusivity since the earlier years of animation, there are still assumptions that a show targeted to girls will not reach a male audience. In the journal *Gender Roles in Animated Cartoons: Has*

[2] *Pony Puff Princess* was a parody show in the animated series *Dexter's Laboratory* (1995) which the character Dee Dee enjoys watching and her brother Dexter enjoys insulting.

the Picture Changed in 20 Years (1995), Theresa Thompson and Eugenia Zerbinos write: 'If a show is to be successful, it must appeal to boys because boys will not watch shows that have girls as lead characters but girls will watch cartoons with male leads' (Thompson and Zerbinos 653). These social normative perspectives are based on a long-standing manufactured ideology about gender roles. However, aside from the phenomenon that is *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, the successes of shows such as Cartoon Network's *Steven Universe* (2013) and Netflix's series *Carmen Sandiego* (2019) are evidence that this belief system is changing, albeit gradual. Being involved in the industry, it is in my own best interest to understand these changes caused by catalysts such Faust and continue the progress.

1.3 Case Study Method

Although the present time of animated television is a result of positive and negative critique throughout the eras of the medium, in this research I will be choosing to focus solely on Faust's career in order to limit the scope and allow for more in depth analysis into her characters in *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. This research is to understand Faust's process, and whether the chosen characters were influenced by her own positive or negative critique in previous shows. Isolating her career into the case study will be in hopes that I can separate the aspects that have worked to benefit her female characters, and those that have failed to do so. This will be done by following the patterns of the shows she has worked on alongside the theoretical work I will be discussing on page 16 of this paper. I would like to see how Lauren Faust's contributions in the 'Millennium Age[i]' fit into this present era and how this could perhaps predict the trajectory of her future projects.

The method for the case study and analysis is mapped out according to the qualitative research approach and I will be drawing upon John W. Creswell's theories on the social constructivist world view. According to Creswell, 'Social constructivists hold assumptions that

individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work.' (Creswell 8) This, in relation to what the research questions in this paper seek to answer, allows for a better understanding of the process in the industry which I work in.

Due to the research being set in a context that is personal to my own life in both career and identity, I recognise that as the researcher there is a possibility to influence biases. To avoid this, it is as important to recognise the shortcomings of Lauren Faust's creative process, as it is to recognise the successful aspects. With this in mind, I chose to further understand the case study method and its theories. As Adrijana Starman writes in the article: *The case study as a type of qualitative research* (2013), case studies are an 'interpretative paradigm' and it is important as the researcher to keep a subjective viewpoint which also characterises qualitative research (Starman 30). They discuss different ways to remain subjective and one of which is to decide on the time period of the case study. Having understood each type of constraint, the *snapshot* study is more suited to my research methodology. A *snapshot* case is where a subject 'is being examined in one particular period of time […] the analysis is aided by the temporal juxtaposition of events.' (Starman 33). In context to this paper, I will need to focus on Lauren Faust's career as a writer, designer, and showrunner in animated television series[3] which is from 2002 until 2019.

In *Case Study Methods,* Starman suggests that the study can attain its own form of accuracy or 'disciplined subjectivity' (Starman 40). The main approach to verifiability is to describe the process of the research; specifically, in the analysis section when concepts, patterns and experience are formed. Sturman suggests a few strategies which are:

[3] I have chosen to omit *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends* (2004) from the case study. Faust was a lead writer on the show, but due to it centring around two male leads I found it best to revisit it for a separate research.

- Procedures for data collection should be explained.
- Data collected should be displayed and ready for reanalysis.
- Negative instances should be reported.
- Biases should be acknowledged.
- The relationship between assertion and evidence should be clarified.
- Methods should be devised to check quality of data. (Starman 41)

The above points should be used as reminders and guidelines for the researcher in the case study. As previously mentioned, I will pay close attention to the subject of biases by recording negative instances and making sure any defence by the researcher is explained.

Starman also mentions Mesec's theory, in that a case study along with its findings and results should be the start of a research paper. In order to validify the research, they also recommend that, 'case studies should then be followed by other subsequent case studies in order to reinforce the accuracy of the first study's findings.' (Starman 41) To address this, I have chosen to first review the chosen literature to provide a foundation and build onto the existing knowledge. This system of case study is referencing Alexander George and Andrew Bennett's theory in *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Science* (2005). The *disciplined configurative* case study uses existing theories to analyse the material found in the case study. The second point that Starman mentions is using multiple case studies to confirm the results of the research, although I will not be conducting multiple case studies, I will be using the analysis of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* characters directly after which will aid in confirming the results.

Returning to the especially important issue of avoiding biases, I refer to Maureen Furniss in her book *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (1998). She addresses how the

researcher should take steps to assure that they are constantly aware of the content they are analysing. Furniss explains that ‘all values are subjective; naturally, the researcher’s task is to recognise his or her own point of view and understand how it affects his or her perceptions of a given situation’ (Furniss 231). When conducting research on representation it is not only important to understand my own social position in the subject, but also to be reminded about the cultural, political, and representational context of what is being researched in the animated work. This is especially true if the identity politics that I identify to overlaps with a cultural identity that I am not part of. Furniss provides a few questions to aid in context of the analysis:

- Who made the product?
- For whom was the product made, in what year and historical context?
- What mediating forces came between the creator and the audience?
- What is the nature of spectatorship, in general? That is, how do people derive pleasure from what they watch and to what extent does viewing affect behaviours?
- How is the researcher qualified to speak for the group whose representation he or she examines, and how can he or she make assumptions about that group’s interests, abilities, and needs?
- Whose standards are being employed in the analysis. (Furniss 231)

As the researcher, it is important to keep the above questions as guidelines in order to uphold a subjective viewpoint, this will aid in achieving the best results in the case study and in turn benefit the character analysis.

The above mentioned method is to best serve the aim of this research that I have chosen. By analysing Faust’s thought process in the creation of her female characters through a case

study, I will be able to then use the information into an in-depth analysis where I will be isolating two characters from *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. This will be to understand how the female identity in an animated series is able to exist in a multi-faceted way without necessarily removing 'femininity' from the overall branding of the show. This will be done by first focusing on Faust's career as a *snapshot case study* and using the notion of a *disciplined configurative case study*. With continued reference to Furniss' questions for the researcher, I will be reminded to actively keep an awareness of my own assumptions when engaging with the findings and analysis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The specific aim for this research requires to look at the separate facets that make an 'animated cartoon' which not only consists of the technical aspect but also what characteristics entertain the audience. Hence, the literature review has been separated into the isolated areas that make up a female animated character. To understand each aspect separately before coming together to form the existing knowledge that the case study and analysis will be built upon.

The first section will be looking at animation, how it contributes to representational politics and how it reveals society's problems. I will also be looking into the comedic style, where some have stood the test of time in animation, whilst others lend themselves to problems in gender performance; and what that means for female characters. This section will also be looking at animation as a visual language in how the chosen designs and animated mannerisms become an extension of the character's personality.

Finally, I will be looking at three feminist theorists and their discussion on gender roles, the idea of identity and the female gaze. The selected literature review will then be applied, and cross referenced in the character analysis on chapter 4 respectfully. These complex investigations in female identity and gender roles alongside a female showrunner will not only be beneficial in looking at how Faust creates characters using her own identity, but also how she approaches diversity that spills into the term 'female'.

2.1 Animation and the Visual Language

In order to analyse a showrunner's contribution to the animation industry, it is necessary to understand animation not just as a tool but also its place in history. Both technical and

theoretical knowledge in this field has been developed since its first appearance as a moving image, evolving through the consequences of innovation and integrating societal dynamics. Creative fields are often susceptible to the constant changes in society due to the proximity they need to have with audiences in order to entertain and stay relevant. There has always been a requirement for studios to keep innovating, be a reliable source of entertainment and to maintain a recognisable brand. This can be seen in the level of quality in both story and visual aesthetic often expected for Pixar Studios. By providing a literature basis on animation, in both technical and theoretical aspects, it will aid in understanding the methodologies that result in how Lauren Faust has kept a personal brand in the female characters that she has developed in contemporary animation.

Animation as a topic within theoretical discourse is limited[ii], however the works that will be discussed in this section are highly revered in this field. Maureen Furniss and Paul Wells both discuss animation within an in-depth analysis on a range of subjects from different studios within the medium. To look at a specific studio's process in character development, I have chosen *The Illusion of Life* (1981) by Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston which discusses the techniques used at the Walt Disney Studios during the Golden Age of animation. Many of these techniques in character development are often still used today. These selected works will set a basis for my case study and will be used in parallel to the analysis.

2.1.1 Maureen Furniss: Art in Motion

To begin this chapter, I will be looking at Maureen Furness' *Art in Motion: Animation Aesthetics* (1998). The first animation technique that will be discussed is perhaps the most important animation concept to this research and that is 'personality animation'. The term itself is used in three of the literature works discussed in this chapter and it is used to initiate an

emotional response in the audience. The success of personality animation is the key to viewers feeling invested in the character and story, and so promises continued viewership.

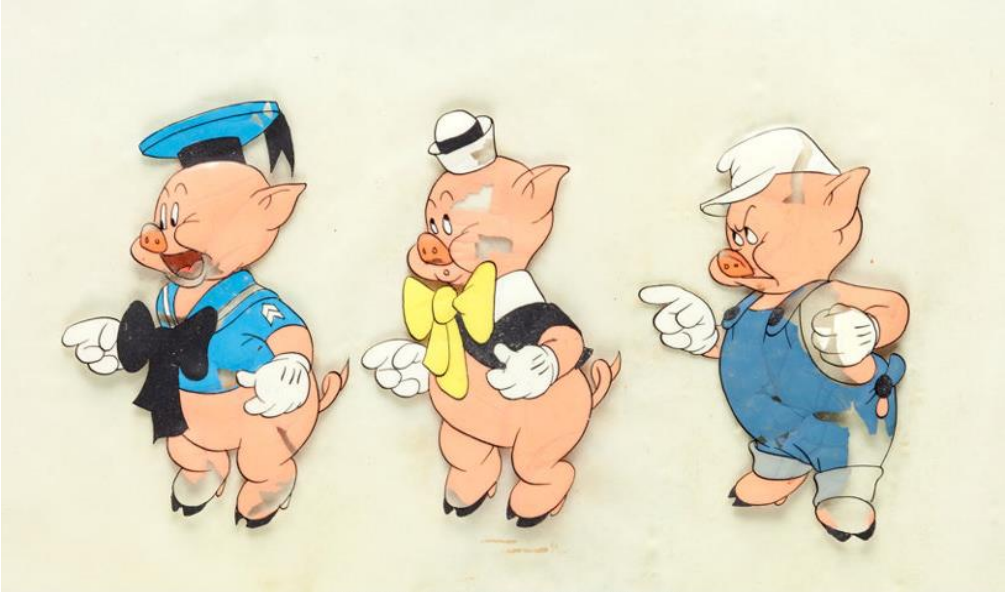


Figure 1 Three Little Pigs Colour Model Cel from Walt Disney's The Practical Pig (1939)

Furniss writes that personality animation is '… a term used to describe work that is concerned with delineating individual character through the development of movement and voice' (Furniss 68). The 'individual characterisation' that Furniss mentions can be seen clearly in Walt Disney's short film *The Practical Pig* (1939) as well as in their full feature film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937). In the short film, each pig is founded on a basic identical design, it is through looking at their clothing (Figure 1) and along with their differentiating mannerisms and voices, we are able to set them apart and draw certain cues about their personalities. Ultimately, the utility in simplifying designs for animation especially in television, speeds up the animation process and cuts costs in production. Commercial animation relies on tight schedules to meet the deadlines and overlap of episodic releases. This is why cut-out and 3D animation are so often used. There are many benefits to using the same base model for the majority of the characters: animators are able to keep a constant flow and

not have to constantly refamiliarize with a character's anatomy; and designers are able to introduce new characters faster when there is an existing character base. But along with the simplification of designs, more emphasis on personality must be added. Identification increases a viewer's comfort level and loyalty and makes him or her more likely to return for additional episodes and to purchase the related merchandise (Furniss 68). In *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, the majority of the characters share the same basic 'pony' body. In the analysis I will be looking at how Faust uses personality animation on them to create individuality.

Furniss has dedicated the chapter: *Issues of Representation* (Furniss 229) to analysing the previous depictions (or lack thereof) on representation in the animation industry and their productions by delving into the issues that female creators have experienced in the industry. Furniss sees the industry and its productions as a mirror reflecting society and its views. She writes the following: 'What is missing from films and television shows often can say as much about social attitudes and business practices as what is actually being depicted' (Furniss 229). As do most creative industries, the 'what' and 'who' that is being depicted in animation is not a coincidence but rather a reflection of the decisions made by showrunners and their teams. When a specific identity of people is constantly being represented on screen, it becomes clearer the choices made of who and what they are omitting. In the present entertainment industry and the influx of more accessible content, the call for representation has been at a demand and answered by most studios, this has caused the shift in problems from 'who is invisible' to 'how is this character representing a marginalised group'. What is being shown and what is being excluded from that specific character's narrative, is equally a conscious decision from creators as is choosing to omit them fully. In *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* the majority of the characters are represented as female, and so our attention is drawn to how is each character being represented within this group, how do they form an identity outside of the umbrella term 'female' that is often grouped as one? This will be discussed further in the analysis section of

this paper, where I will also be looking at how inserting characters, such as Zecora, that end up representing a 'real world' identity through stereotypes in a fantasy setting, and how this poses problems in the inclusivity of the show.

The main focus of this research is to look at how female characters are being characterized against their male counterparts and grouped into an 'umbrella definition' of the female gender. Through Furniss' study on this topic, I will be isolating the issues previously noticed in early television animation that serve as example of how female characters were often limited to the use of their bodies, and just as a distinction of being the 'other gender'. This will also serve as a comparative point when approaching the case study on Lauren Faust and finally in the analysis of her characters. This will be in hopes to see how even anthropomorphic characters can be represented as female without relying on the semiotics of gendered, and often sexualised, bodies. Finally, it is also to understand if the female character in question can exist as a solo narrative or is her existence to solely exist in representing the 'marked' gender in animation.

Stereotypes have been and are still a topic of debate in terms of whether they are appropriate to use as a 'shorthand' in animated television. Using them as a device for either language or image styles, stereotypes use concept simplification of particular groups or identities of people which are often created by society. Stereotypes operate as a universal and familiar language that reinforces to the audience who is being represented here, therefore saving time on explaining to the audience who the character is. Nonetheless, the repetition of wrongful stereotypes is harmful to the specific identities they are said to represent[iii] and is rightfully scrutinised. The danger of using such systems is especially apparent when paired with the perceived 'innocence' of comedy in the cartoon. Using humour as a way to act out stereotypes diminishes the weight behind harmful tropes and audiences deem it acceptable to assume those stereotypes in society, which is a cycle of reinforcing in what we see and how we

act. One example of this is using women's bodies to signify gender performance. This is frequently used on anthropomorphised characters who need to be marked as 'female' in a series where the assumed gender is male. In an animated series such as *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, where the assumed gender is female, it will be worth analysing what happens to the stereotypes associated with being 'female' in both body and personality.

Figure 2 Still from Episode Carnival Knowledge/Sand in Your Navel Season (1993)

In an extreme instance, the animated series *Rocko's Modern Life* (1993) received some criticism for depicting adult humour on a Sunday morning cartoon, the show would often contain female stereotypes to define the character. Linda Simensky[4] recalls asking the show's creators whether the designs of the female characters could be less 'top-heavy' which they responded that it was easier to draw them the 'traditional way' (Furniss 238) implying that depicting them any other way would be out of the 'norm'. An example of this can be seen in Figure 2 when the protagonist, Rocko, spends a day at the beach. When applying some sunscreen to the heavy chested character, Lady Hippo, Rocko slips and falls in between her

[4] Linda Simensky is a production manager who has worked for Nickelodeon as well as Cartoon Network.

chest. The major problem with stereotypes falls under the following question: when drawing a female character 'traditionally', does it represent all women? And are there traditional ways to represent a male character if a character is not by default male? In *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic,* there is an opportunity to analyse these questions as the default gender in this specific series is female. In the instance of *Rocko's Modern Life*, stereotypes are used to define the female characters in order to point out what is the 'other', to separate them from the assumed gender.

To get a reaction out of the audience there needs to be an extreme and Simensky explains the uneasiness she felt with this process: 'I feel as though I'm constantly faced with the issue of 'is it funny' versus the 'is it politically conscious' (meaning gender stuff) while working on 'Rocko'… We push them to be funny, but a lot of their women are stereotypical' (Furniss 238). This quote lends to the notion that there was only one way to make a female character funny, which was to use her body as the punchline. Ultimately, in order to use her body, it had to be gendered and it had to be sexualised. Due to the repetitive nature of this harmful 'traditional' way of representing women, the gendered female body became sexualised instinctively. So, to use a female body was to use it as a prop to distract the male protagonist and be the 'other' gender. Due to the industry having been male dominated, these stereotypes and using the female body as a gag is intended to seem as 'locker room' conversation and or a playful remark. With the cartoon *Rocko's Modern Life* being described by the webpage *Common Sense Media* as '… it's got a fair amount of hidden raciness that makes it iffy for tweens' (Common Sense Media). One parent reviewed that: 'This show is hilarious. All of the dirty references they got past the radar were impressive' (Common Sense Media). Implying that the fact that they are able to pass through as a children's cartoon with subliminal adult jokes is an accomplishment in itself. Paul Wells describes in *Understanding Animation* (1998): 'The cartoon here connotes escapism and unambiguous visual pleasure, albeit unthreatening

and comforting' (Wells 5). The words 'unthreatening and comforting' is perhaps the issue with stereotypes in animation, but using the seemingly innocence of cartoons has helped in Faust redefining those stereotypes to a much larger audience.

Whether it is an issue of underrepresentation or misrepresentation in question it is more than likely a direct reflection of what is lacking inside the industry's studios. Furniss writes:

> Whether one is discussing racist imagery, sexism, or any other form of seemingly derogatory representations, the origins of stereotypes and the reasons for their perpetuation are many. In terms of film and television, one finds that certain depictions are deeply ingrained in traditions of popular humour. (Furniss 229)

Female creators have been appearing inside the industry, albeit slow and perhaps still with their voices being buried under the still male dominated animation world. This makes it difficult to pitch certain content with 'non-traditional' leading roles. At a panel called *My Little Pony Creators Panel* (2015), Lauren Faust was asked whether she had experienced sexism when creating content for a young female viewership, to which Faust replied:

> … constantly, I still do… It's tough. I had thought after working on *Powerpuff Girls*… that was proof that content for girls could be successful, could be profitable and that you could step away from the stereotypes. And we were shocked that just a year after *My Little Pony* was finished with its first season there was a mandate from people up above "no girls show." (EQLA 2015)

Similarly, Furniss references Linda Simensky's experiences in the Nickelodeon studio during the early 90s, who found it difficult to produce animated series with female leads. Her observation was that men pitched concepts with male leads more frequently, and if a female character did make an appearance it was as a secondary role and often stripped down to the object of a basic love interest. When Simensky proposed focusing on a female lead she was

responded with the idea that female characters cannot be funny. A notion that, to Furniss, is deeply rooted in the sexism of society. She quotes June Sochen on this view who says, '…showing personal weakness, an essential trait of humour, was considered funny when big, burly men did it, but women? After all, members of the 'fairer sex' were known to be physically weak[iv]; that was their nature. What was funny about that?' (Furniss 238). This reiterates the perception that women in general only had one identity, which was being a woman, so a female character could not carry the weight of comedy outside of what that identity allowed. If she were to be funny, it would be in the confines of what makes her 'a woman'. However, despite the issues found in earlier cartoons and humour centred around female characters there have been reimagined ways to bring these two together in animation and this discussion is to be used as a point of comparison. Comedy is a useful tool that Faust herself uses throughout her stories, it is both a necessity for the target audience and to reinstate the character's personality, which will be looked at in closer observation in the analysis.

Figure 3 Still from 'She-Ra - Out of the Cocoon' (2014)

Figure 4 Still from 'She-Ra and the Princess of Power' trailer (2018)

Filmation's cartoon series *She-Ra: Princess of Power* (1985) and its reboot by DreamWorks and Netflix: *She-Ra and the Princess of Power* that aired in 2018. This revamp is a visual representation of how the rules of visual femininity have altered in the current generation and what constitutes as 'feminine sensibility'. In the original version of She-Ra, the character was bought into the universe as a female counterpart to He-Man in *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe* (1983). In an interview with Lou Scheimer, who was a producer on the original series, reveals how She-Ra came to exist: 'After a year or so of He-Man, Mattel came back to me and said they would like to do something with a girl character' (Hendrickson). Looking at the two designs side by side it is clear that there are differences in the original version in Figure 3 and the reboot's design in Figure 4. Firstly, She-Ra's new costume covers her shoulders and chest which the original did not, in the original we can see her wearing a corset style top that drops to a skirt. In the reboot's design her skirt reveals that she is wearing a similar attire to bike shorts and rather than wearing heeled boots that her original version is sporting, the new She-Ra wears more practical flat soled boots. Her costume redesign is better suited for the character's role in the story which represents a more action type genre. Looking at her anatomical design, the 2018 version has younger features with more muscular proportions than the original design who tends to have a more realistic face with the added red

lipstick. The original She-Ra was born as a counterpart to He-Man to bring in a female target audience while the reboot stands as its own. Sandra Law writes an interesting perspective on 'female experience' when she examined animated studies, which all '… explore, through their use of imagery, the existence of the female form as something that is malleable and whose femaleness can be enhanced or reduced. They illustrate that femininity, as it is traditionally represented, is something that can be put on and taken off at will.' (Furniss 241)

In shows for younger viewers, it is worth looking at whether the femininity portrayed can be 'taken off' as Law writes and not be an all-encompassing identity. How do you visually animate and represent women's experience, and could it umbrella all the women in the world's experiences? Furniss answers this question by saying that it is impossible, since there are too many factors that differentiate one gender (Furniss 241). Class, race, culture, and sexuality are not included in the grouping of 'women' but rather they are excluded. Furniss discusses the idea of how gender is socialised from young, and that those gender norms are followed into the world of animation. The opportunity that an analysis of Lauren Faust's characters can reveal, is that female identity can step away from the structure that we are familiar with but does not necessarily mean to 'remove' anything that is inherently female. That the female gender can exist not as an 'other', but an individual as the male gender does. This is especially evident with the use of anthropomorphic[5] characters in animation, which has been a way for producers to avoid issues of gender and race (Furniss 239). I am interested in seeing if the use of ponies as characters has perhaps made it easier to create new ways of representing identities.

[5] Anthropomorphic characters are animals that have human characteristics.

2.1.2 Paul Wells: Understanding Animation

Paul Wells' work, *Understanding Animation* (1998) delves into animation theory and its history by looking at case studies relevant to the discussed theories. This allows for me to not only gather theories based in animation but also explore how to apply it into a case study of the relevant subjects. This is especially important because looking at a medium that is at times misjudged to only be for children, it is difficult to see how the complex theories on gender performance or female representation could be applied when the creator's intent is based for 'innocent entertainment.' But owing to this assumption, it is even more vital to study animation through a theoretical lens and acknowledge the cracks where societal hierarchies and problems might slip within such a foundational medium. Wells writes the following, 'Almost consciously, animators, in being aware that they, and their works, are marginalised and/or consigned to innocent, inappropriate or accidental audiences, use this apparently unguarded space to create films with surface pleasures and hidden depths' (Wells 6).

Although this could prove where the problems occur when allowing a creator with their own biases and assumptions navigate within such a medium, it can also prove beneficial to introduce a young audience to new ways of seeing representation. This, in particular outlines a few components that I am interested in analysing in regards to Lauren Faust. Firstly, to look at how she chooses specific projects that are aimed at a younger 'innocent' audience, and how targeting one viewership has bought in an 'accidental' audience. With the knowledge that the *My Little Pony* franchise had begun to experience a decline in sales due to their failed previous shows (The Toys That Made Us 2019), there were no expectations that *Friendship is Magic* would succeed where its predecessors could not. And so, with the animated space already left 'unguarded', as Wells puts it, and Faust being given creative control over its development, the

show is able to explore depths whilst still appealing its audience with the brand's 'surface level pleasure'.

Paul Wells looks into the connection between creator and character, and he believes that the character is and should be an extension of the creator. With most fields in entertainment, there are techniques used to bridge this gap between creator and product in order to bring believability into the work. The animation industry being no different, uses the 'self' as a model, often by using a mirror[6], the animator acts out an expression or mouth movement in their reflection and uses it as reference for the character's own performance. In a manner, the animator becomes both the puppeteer and character by projecting their own persona onto them. Wells references specific acting techniques discovered by Constantin Stanislavski's[7] to illustrate how animation resembles the acting process, 'If the basic principle of the Stanislavskian actor is to create the 'inner life' that provokes and legitimises external consequences, it is a necessary requirement of the animator to project his/her 'inner life' into the narrational consequences of character construction and development' (Wells 105). This is the essence of a character; it is participating in a shared experience not only with the creator but also with the viewer. The mentioned requirement to reproduce an 'inner life' is essentially integrated in experience, referencing their own experiences as one would with a mirror. Lauren Faust has previously mentioned that she avoids assumptions or studying other people to create a character, she rather looks at her own experiences to develop her characters and their stories. Faust says, "… I don't watch girl teenagers and try to determine what they're doing; I'm writing what I felt as a teenager or how we related to one another. It's coming from a real place of

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[6] Mirrors are still used in today's studios, but animators and designers may also access photographs or video footage of themselves as reference.

[7] Constantin Stanislavski was a Russian actor, theatre director and theatre theorist. He theorised that acting should go beyond vocal and physical training, rather the actor should embody personal experiences (method acting) that would produce subconscious emotions and not just imitation. (Dramaclasses.biz)

sincerity" (Webb 2012). The theory I would like to draw from this is Wells' 'inner life' and Faust's 'sincerity', both signifying each other as they both draw from the creator's experience. It would be necessary to pin-point these 'projections' of the 'self' in the case study and character analysis, to see how successful the technique is in female characters.

Wells also discusses personality animation through the use of comedy, which is an aspect that I would like to emphasise in the character analysis. The subject of comedy with female characters, as mentioned previously, has been particularly difficult to grind into. Largely due to women, and even more so female children, being seen as already weak and thus slapstick gags were believed to be unfit for them. And so, creators settled on using over sexualised female bodies as the coin of comedy, if and when women were to be funny. Delving into Wells' section on comedy will be in hope to see how Faust was able to produce female characters that can be comedic in conjunction to each other's interactions, suffer from 'cartoon physics' and hold up their own individual humour – all the while still being sincere to their own personality conventions.

Wells provides us with six performances that influence 'personality' animation. I will first be looking at the below techniques in his own analysis of his chosen case studies. In the analysis I will be conducting in chapter 4, I will then similarly apply these techniques to see where they fit into Faust's characters, looking at if she has successfully followed the trajectory and what this means for rethinking female representation. The six performances are as follows:

- The necessity for the illusion of eye contact between the character performing and the audience watching.
- Facial gestures which obviously signified particular thought processes, emotions, and reactions experienced by the character.

- Physical traits and behavioural mannerisms common to, and recognised by, the audience, which remain largely consistent to the character.
- The direct expression of motivation in the character and the immediate execution of the narrational action which achieves the objective signified.
- The creation of a particular physical rhythm for the character which expressed a specific attitude or purpose.
- The overall treatment of the character as if it were an actor playing a role. (Wells 129)

Paul Wells uses the notorious episode *Duck Amuck* (1953), directed by Chuck Jones, to analyse the conjunction between personality animation and comedy. The episode was revolutionary in that it broke the 'fourth wall' in animation revealing self-awareness in the characters along with their knowledge of who and what they are. The premise of the story is that Daffy Duck is plagued by a faceless animator, who even though not shown till the end we are able to put a personality to through his actions. This antagonist is constantly changing the environment around the protagonist, Daffy, changing his design and even the sounds, or lack thereof, that he makes. The episode has stood the test of time in that it is still one of the best examples of what animation is capable of and how well established the characters' personalities were prior to this episode. Revealing that Bugs Bunny was in fact the perpetrator all along only justifies the actions of the antagonist as we are well aware of the two rivalries and Bugs' especially clever abusive tactics towards Daffy. Additionally, the audience is still aware of who Daffy is despite his appearance constantly changing, his personality is never under threat. The gags are created by the believability of the character and the 'inner life' that the audience recognises, knowing that what is happening to Daffy's short temper and ego is surely making

him quite upset. The audience knows that it will not be long until he explodes with rage because we have seen it happen so often prior to this.

Animation is able to establish a recognisable context and environment which the character themselves is able to understand and adapt into different roles. It is not only the character that understands but also the audience through semiotics 'even if these become subject to quick change or redefinition' (Wells 143). The cartoon is also an 'unreliable space' in that it is not restricted by the physics that dominate our world i.e. squash-n-stretch. The physics are only dependent on the creator themselves. Due to the unreliability that animation offers, particular creators believe that there needs to be a formula that the specific cartoon needs to abide to that does not necessarily pertain to our own real-world physics. The malleability of the character's body is what I am interested in exploring. The male character can easily change and experience their own form because not matter how much is removed or added the character is still Daffy Duck. A female body in the animation medium, however, is already marked and shaped so that the viewer can understand who this represents. Ultimately, her identity exists in the cartoon world because of her body. If the female character's body is changed and adapted according to the cartoon physics, then can they still be seen as female? This is a question that will be explored further in the character analysis.

To Chuck Jones there had to be certain rules that applied to cartoons, without them there would be no notion of individuality. In order to keep the character's identity recognisable to the audience there has to be a certain amount of logic. Chuck Jones wrote, 'there are – there must be – rules. Without them, the comedy slops over at the edges. Identity is lost' (Wells 150). If we look at the *Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner* (1949) series, there are recognisable character models that Jones pertained to. The audience would not only recognise them but anticipate them. Knowing the formula did not remove the entertainment but rather increased it. Below is Chuck Jones' vital methods that the characters belonged to:

- The Road Runner cannot harm the Coyote except by going ‘Beep-Beep’
- No outside force can harm the Coyote – only his own ineptitude or the failure of the ACME products.
- Whenever possible, make gravity the Coyote’s greatest enemy.
- The Coyote is always more humiliated than harmed by his failure. (Wells 150)

These ‘rules’ that Jones implements helps to create the world that these characters live in more authentic - it solidifies personality animation and the audience become part of the running gags. Despite knowing the Coyote’s demise, the audience continues to watch because there is an expectation that will be satisfied. We understand that the character lives in a controlled environment, even if animation allows for the contrary. There is a faith and reliance on the animator to set these rules that the audience can familiarise with and, eventually, expect.

Theory	*Character type ‘A’*	*Character type ‘B’*	*Character type ‘C’*
Cartoon character (Klein)	Controller	Over-reactor	Nuisance
Comedy character (Jenkins)	The clown	Dupe/Killjoy	Counterfeit
		Comic antagonist	
Psychoanalytic characteristic (Freud)	Id	Super-ego	Ego
Example	Bugs Bunny	Elmer Fudd	Daffy Duck

Figure 5 Replication of Wells’ table representing comedic character types

Norman Klein theorises that the cartoon character in comedic series relies on a formulaic role and function system. According to Klein there are three principle roles, the Controller, the Over-reactor, and the Nuisance (Wells 152). These roles can be clearly seen in

Warner Bros' *Loony Tunes* series when Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and Elmer Fudd are present in the same episode. In Figure 5, Paul Wells presents a table to portray the concepts between three theorists, representing how the three characters fall under the specific titles and descriptions. Wells explains each category, 'The Controller' who is, more often than not, Bugs Bunny, is usually indestructible and always 'in the right place at the right time'. The 'Over-reactor' is portrayed by Elmer Fudd, the character who portrays the victim of slapstick humour. The 'Nuisance' is usually the instigator and in this scenario Daffy Duck is the appropriate character. Daffy is often provoking Elmer Fudd and edging him on to hunt for Bugs Bunny, this character '… is more like force of nature than a character that thinks at all' (Wells 152). This table, as well as the descriptions for the different character types, will be applied to the analysis that I will be conducting to see how female characters may fit into these roles. It is through this structured idea of personality animation that I will use to explore the question asked in this research paper about the malleability of the female body in relation to their identity in animation.

Paul Wells dedicated a chapter to humour in animation titled: *25 Ways to Start Laughing,* which I am particularly interested in due to comedic roles having been primarily reserved for male characters in the past. It will be interesting to look at Faust's characters through this chapter. Until recently the executions of gags, clever one-liners and slapstick comedy were a closed society for male characters. The humour was, and is too often, at the expense of the female character's appearance, intelligence, or their existence as a romantic interest. Furniss quotes June Sochen in Women's Comic Visions (1991), '… showing personal weakness, an essential trait of humour, was considered funny when big, burly men did it, but women? After all, members of the 'fairer sex' were known to be physically weak; that was their nature. What was funny about that?' (Furniss 238). Another reason that creators did not favour comedy in female characters is because there is a perception that women do not have a

sense of humour. This is largely due to the responses to the civil rights and birth of the west's feminist movements in the 60's. Feminists, regardless of other identities, were often depicted as humourless and frigid – incapable of humour[8]. There was the notion that these movements showed that women were too sensitive and emotional (Furniss 239). Above this, a gag in an animation was only well executed when its personality type contrasted it. Wells draws upon the 'Disney canon' of gags, that there are both internal and external set of characteristics in humour. The one set roots itself in character flaws and how they react to external forces, while the internal humour is about eccentricities and the exaggeration of them.

The 'Disney laws' pertain to knowing your character well enough to be able to execute the gags effectively while still staying within character (Wells 131). In Faust's series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* there are a variety of characters that use tropes as a personal identity, and female tropes especially have been used as a quick personality trait that always seems to work with an audience. However, the question I would like to answer in the analysis is, how do they use these tropes to initiate comedy and gags to both challenge them and make them more accessible as a personality? In an interview with Lauren Faust conducted by Tekaramity on the online fan site Equestria Daily dedicated to the show, Faust makes a point to say that she does not try to find an easy way out in the show. She says, '… I prefer comedy that has a sincere and emotional core… and humour that comes from characters, not one-liners.' (Tekaramity). Faust continues to explain how each character had their own specific way of being funny, Pinkie Pie was more notably the 'goofball' and most gags were given to her because of her personality trait. Whereas characters that were more serious and introverted, such as Fluttershy and Twilight, had to be more specific, 'I cleared some of the initial confusion

[8] Entertainment often inserts the 'straw feminist' stereotype to use as a comedic tool. This will be discussed further in the case study.

about how to make Fluttershy and Twilight funny, and Rarity needed special care to keep her from being the typical shallow debutante character' (Tekaramity). For the characters to stay within their personality, Faust carefully thought about how each character could be comedic while pertaining to a set of personality rules referring to each of the characters. This process and technique are comparable to how Chuck Jones worked on *Wile.E Coyote and the Road Runner*, by keeping to a specific formula the characters did not fall out of their personality or disenchant the believability of them.

The last section of *Understanding Animation* that I would like to concentrate on is the chapter titled *Issues in Representation*. In his case study about gender, Wells delves into anthropomorphic characters found in *Looney Tunes* (1930) and *Tom and Jerry* (1940) and how they impersonate gender through performance. Wells points out that there is a main difference in male verses female characters, on the one hand male characters are defined by their personality while the female characters are identified by distinguishable 'feminine traits'. For instance, the way they walk, the tone of voice, the use of words, their clothing, passivity. It could be said that a character only acts out their gender when they need to be female. As Wells explains, 'Simply, 'male' characters are defined by what they are, and how they behave, while 'female' characters are essentially understood by what they look like and a vocabulary of stereotypical mannerisms' (Wells 204). The idea of 'male until proven otherwise' is evident in classic cartoons such as *Looney Tunes* (1930) where the anthropomorphic characters such as Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck do not wear any clothing until they impersonate a female character. In Walt Disney's *Mickey Mouse* (1928) cartoons, the male characters do wear clothing, however in this instance the female character designs were essentially replicated from their male counterparts but dressed in feminine garments. So technically, both cartoon series used feminine costume to define the transition from a male character to female. Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston quote Fred Moore about Minnie's design in their book *The Illusion of Life*,

‘Drawn same as Mickey, substituting a skirt and lace pants for his pants, and high-heeled slippers in place of his shoes with addition of a small hat and eye-lids and lashes.’ (Thomas and Johnston 552); and they continue to explain that ‘In order to make Minnie as feminine as possible, we should use everything in her make-up to achieve this end’ (Thomas and Johnston 552). In this context ‘make-up’ implies her ‘DNA’, thus the perceptions of what is inherently ‘female’ should be used to set Minnie apart from Mickey, who embodies the universal gender. When the character is male their bodies are bare, devoid of any clothing or gendered bodies, when they are female, however, they are dressed and often at times depicted with female gendered bodies - they, as well as the male characters, are aware of their sexualised body.

In contrast to the above discussed gender performance, it is worth exploring how this differs in an animated series that is largely made up of female characters that also share a common design. This notifies the viewer that whoever has this body shape, can be assumed female, it is only when a male character is introduced that we see the ‘other’ thus making the male gendered body marked in this instance. This follows up with the question as to how this might change the possibilities of female gender performance, if a character is overly feminised, is she more female? In *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, the female gender no longer measured against a male character or the default gender, but is now measured against other female characters which opens a new set of physical and identity possibilities to exist. This will be further discussed in the analysis to allow for individual character studies in the series, as Wells has done in his writings.

2.1.3 Frank Thomas and Ollie Johnston: The Illusion of Life

In this work, two *Disney Golden Age* animators give a detailed autobiography of their time in the studio that, at the time, was only just becoming noteworthy. They analyse at each of the Nine Old Men's process and the techniques they used to create the fundamental principles of animation. This book provides an insight in the discoveries of character personality at a time where cartoons were generally being categorised as a tool for comedic slapstick. Disney's first feature length film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) was the first time that audiences empathized with a character emotionally; feelings such as fear or sadness were not usual for animated entertainment. This book delves into the initial innovative moments that the studio learnt in the process of developing animated feature films.

While the book provides value that will arguably stand the test of time, it also reveals the shortcomings of its time within context of female representation. One such instance was during the development of the film *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), the character, Fauna, was a topic of frustration for the all-male group of creators. After wracking their minds on how to distinguish each female fairy from each other, they discovered a muse that would inspire them: 'At last we felt we had an understanding of the elusive Fauna. She still could be vague, in that she could lose track of what she was doing, but she did have ideas of her own – most of them little, feminine ideas' (Thomas and Johnston 403). A triumphant achievement in finding the personality of the third fairy but interestingly limiting her to what they thought as the opposite to 'another dominant personality' (Thomas and Johnston 402), concluding that 'little feminine ideas' was a personality trait intended to make her more passive. It is important to look at these notions in the context of when the film was released, it is not a reflection of the animation industry in its present day. However, much can be learnt from how female characters were created in comparison to male characters. It also aids in seeing how, in today's entertainment, the wall between the two genders has become blurred, allowing for more space in the possibilities of how a character lives on screen beyond their gender.

The animators in the Disney Studio paid particular attention on understanding the character beyond what the audience can see. In the discussion of the Disney animator Bill Tytla it is mentioned that his characters had a range of personalities that made them relatable. This was due to him having a unique ability to find the character's innermost feelings and bringing them to life into the visual language of animation[v]. 'He seemed to understand the problems that his characters faced as well as their feelings about what was happening to them' (Thomas and Johnston, 133). This was possibly because of how close he was to the subject he was imitating. An example of this can be seen in the animated scene of the movie *Dumbo* (1941) where Dumbo is innocently playing in the tub of water the same way a child would, where the inspiration came from Tytla watching his own son playing in the bathtub. This is an example of 'personality animation' and how observation from reality and our day to day experiences can bring an essence of sincerity to the characters in animation even though caricatured.

Thomas and Johnston explain that '… no one will ever know what was in your mind. It is not enough to say it is there; it must be shown' (Thomas and Johnston, 401). So, careful decisions about what the creator chooses to show in the character animation is crucial. Understanding the character as a creator is only part of the process, translating it onto a screen that fits into the constraints of an episodic show or a full feature film is in itself a critical process.[vi]

'Personality animation' may also be heightened when one character is put against another with a polar personality '… there can be some advantage in working two characters together. If there can be some kind of tension between them, immediately there will be attitudes and drives and actions that reveal individual traits more clearly than would be bought out by passive agreement' (Thomas and Johnston, 401). This is especially evident when a group of characters all have a single goal to achieve and their personalities are forced to come together and take advantage of their strengths. If we look at the two characters Baloo and Bagheera in

The Jungle Book (1967) the reason why these two characters work so well together is their personalities, because their personalities are contrasted against each other; the more laid-back Baloo gets, the more entertaining Bagheera becomes (Thomas and Johnston, 409). The juxtaposition of the characters and the characters having to figure out how to work together makes it an endearing and relatable situation that audiences can relate to but also find similarities in their own relationships. In *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, characters with opposing personalities are often bought together in episodes to both provide humour and learn how to work together to overcome an obstacle. Because this is a tool often used by Faust, in Chapter 4: I will be using one of the episodes in the show to exemplify how she successfully sets two opposing female characters together to create humour and challenge one another, similar to Baloo and Bagheera.

2.1.4 Scott McCloud: Understanding Comics

Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1993) breaks down the visual world of comics and cartoons. He starts off his book by attempting to explain exactly what comics are and where they sit on the spectrum of visual entertainment. In this process, the author as the narrator, introduces the definition 'sequential visual art' (McCloud 7) when he points out that it can describe both comics and animation. So, McCloud sets a division between the two visual mediums; describing animation frames as occupying the same space whilst comic frames must occupy a different space, adding that 'space does for comics what time does for film' (McCloud 7). Although animation and comics are arguably different mediums, the visual signification and iconicity that they rely on have similarities. McCloud separates the category of icons into three divisions, the first being icons of language, science, and communication. The second is icons of the practical realm and lastly icons that we define

as pictures and are meant to resemble what we are familiar with. He goes on to explain that in non-pictorial icons their meanings are fixed no matter how they are represented because they 'represent invisible ideas' (McCloud 28). On the other hand, pictures are more easily moulded and diverse because they represent visually 'real-life'. The level of abstraction in pictures can vary depending on how close they are representing real-life or how much minimal indications they are using.

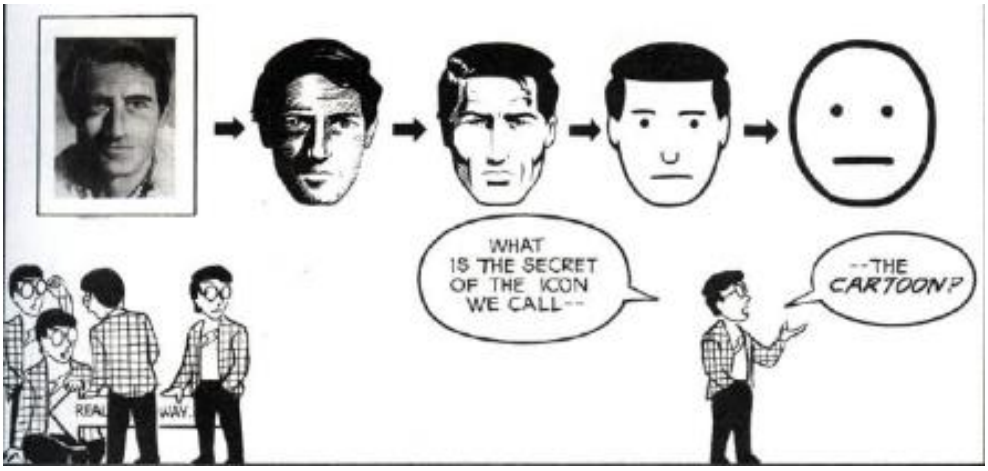

Figure 6 Scott McCloud, Image from Understanding Comics pg. 29 (1993)

McCloud uses the image in Figure 6 as an example of visual abstraction. The face on the left being a photograph, the highest representation of resemblance, and then moving towards the right the illustrations begins to subtract certain visuals from the photograph and to simplify the representation gradually into its most basic form (far right). Even though the images drive further and further away from the photograph the viewer is no doubt that the last image is still a representation of a face. McCloud asks 'Why, then, is the face above so acceptable to our eyes? Why does it seem just as real as the others?' (McCloud 29). He then examines how cartooning is a form of 'amplification through simplification'. He observes that cartooning an image is not just about removing details but rather choosing specific visuals to represent the bare essential, which is something that realistic art and photographs cannot do.

Cartoons have the ability to focus on the most central detail in a subject - the more 'cartoonified' the visual becomes the more universal the message. On the other hand, the more detailed a face is drawn the more a viewer will recognise it as 'another's face' and not their own, but the simplification of a cartoon allows the viewer to place themself in that narrative (McCloud 36).

Similarly, the Japanese character *Hello Kitty* created by the company Sanrio in 1974 was designed to not have a mouth, only two simple eyes and a nose for facial features. The reason for excluding a mouth was so that she 'speaks from the heart. She is Sanrio's ambassador to the world and is not bound to any particular language' (Walker). This makes her the perfect cross-cultural cartoon character. In relation, McCloud writes, 'The cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled. An empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm' (McCloud 36). McCloud theorises that the simpler the representation the more aware the viewer is of the message being said. The cartoon, such as the narrator in this book, is just a simplified concept of a person so we are less inclined to wonder who they are and more interested in what they have to say. McCloud then brings in the notion of 'identity' and how with the objects we interact with, whether it be a car or our clothes, they become an extension of us influencing how others see us and we see ourselves. He divides experiences into two categories: 'the realm of the concept and the realm of the senses' (McCloud 39). As he mentioned, our awareness of ourselves is simplified and that theory can be added to the objects that are extensions of us. McCloud theorises that our identities belong solely to the conceptual world because they do not use any of the human senses to exist, while 'everything else belongs to the sensual world, the world outside of us' (McCloud 40). However, the sensual realm can become part of the conceptual world once they possess identities of their own as our extensions. Through the concept of simplified form over realism, this adds cartoons

into the world of concepts as the narrator says, ‘Through traditional realism, the comics artist can portray the world without and through the cartoon, the world within’ (McCloud 41).

Because animation is first and foremost a visual medium that also relies on aesthetic design elements, symbols could be a subconscious input and should not always be taken literally. Instead of all artistic choices being taken as a bearer of a meaning there needs to be some effort made by the viewer (and to the researcher) to acknowledge that some symbols are not always implemented for plot narrative. However, creators have a delicate job on their hands to be conscious of the decisions they make in their productions. Wells states that ‘It is, therefore, useful to distinguish between the symbol and the sign, and to engage with the idea that the symbol can function in different ways dependent upon its context and the specific historical moment in which the symbol is defined and, subsequently, called into the image system (Wells 83). As the researcher, it is also important for me to understand the difference in order to implement my own study where it is most useful for my analysis.

Peter Munz offers his point of view on the two, suggesting that a sign mirrors exactly what it signifies while the symbol brings on the meaning of what it is symbolising. He theorises that ‘Since the symbol has a more specific meaning than the thing it symbolises, the thing benefits from a feedback and receives a new and more specific meaning from its symbol than it originally possessed.’ (Wells 83)

2.1.5 An Overview of Tropes and Stereotypes

In this section I will be giving an overview of the two concepts, namely tropes and stereotypes, and how they differ from one another.

Stereotypes, as discussed on page 21, are a method used to oversimplify a character in a familiar set of ways that the audience will recognise. Stereotypes are notoriously criticised in their appearance in forms of entertainment, be it visual or written, this is due to their signification of representing groups of people or ideas through prejudice and misrepresented depictions. Stereotypes were often used in methods of political propaganda and so their use in children's entertainment is indeed reason for critique. The large issue with stereotypes is that they manifest from society's own preconceptions and their reproduction of them using the 'innocent' tool of animation only reinstates them as a 'harmless' depiction of said group. This in turn results in audiences leaving with the perception that those stereotypes can and should be repeated in society. So, if a cartoon character aimed at children can either exploit or perform these stereotypes, then they are presumed to be harmless and even educational in some instances. This endless problematic pattern of translating, repeating, and acting out prejudice can lead to making those perceptions the norm.

A section of gender stereotypes worth observing is the *'Smurfette Principle'*. It originated from the TV show *The Smurfs* (1981) and is now being used to describe a female character whose only trait is being female amongst a group of male leads. In short, *The Smurfs* is about a group of male characters that all have a specific trait that is part of their identity, for example Papa Smurf is the leader. Smurfette's only trait is being a female and that is what sets her apart from the other Smurfs. According to an article on *The Odyssey Online*, Greg Conan writes 'The Smurfette Principle arises from a subtle form of sexism called "androcentrism" that implicitly defines the male gender as "normal" and female gender as "abnormal", such as girls only exist as they relate to males' (Conan). Another example of this principle can be seen in Walt Disney Television Animation's *Gummi Bears* (1985). A show that depicts anthropomorphic bears with individual roles similar to *The Smurfs*, while the female characters, Grammi Gummi and Sunni Gummi, are defined by their gender and their personalities are thus

regulated by that one identity. It could be said however that in *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* the reversal of this principle is happening. Every female character has a unique trait that defines them rather than only being defined by their gender.

Tropes are a tool used to depict a person or idea in a way that has been done before and perhaps multiple times. A trope is associated with entertainment in that its portrayal can be recognised through literary or film, where the audience becomes accustomed with the notion and expects it before they even know the character. A stereotype takes one identity and attaches it to a group of people that presumably share one trait.

Tropes are not recognised as a theoretical source to draw substantial analysis from, but they can be used to distinguish and understand the intention of the creators. A large resource for these conventions is the webpage TV Tropes which lists a large amount of different variations of the term that are recognised and used in entertainment. Due to these conventions not being set by theoretical analysis, I will be using them alongside the works discussed in this section to aid me in solidifying it in the analysis.

The idea of caricature is to simplify an idea with a character to its bear meaning that makes it recognisable in a 'global' visual language. Often, stereotypes are used because they are the most easily understood symbols for an audience. This can also be represented in the way the character acts as well as visual terms. However, the problem with translating things into a visual medium is that what is truly being represented is an interpretation. There needs to be attention given to 'who' is the creator to really understand what the intention is. Paul Wells looks at the creators of Betty Boop as an example and writes:

> Caricature, in their eyes, was merely a convention of cartooning, and did not carry with its overt political agendas. This is also a partial defence of the film's apparent sexism, but Betty Boop was also a product of male artists who felt they were properly reflecting

> their depiction of the child-woman… Betty is literally a male fantasy figure contextualised in a masculinised animated space which constantly demonstrates its fascination and preoccupation with her body. (Wells 74)

It is also important to understand the environments in which these characters live in. Likened to a Tex Avery world, Betty finds herself in an extremely masculine environment that repeatedly places her in situations that emphasize her sexually and is often the subject of the male gaze. She is the ideal woman in the context of (year) in which she is aware of the male gaze but does not fully reject it, rather innocently plays cat and mouse. She is 'literally a male fantasy figure contextualised in a masculine animated space' (Wells 74) and all her reactions and actions are dependent on the world she exists in and the creator's interpretation of it.

2.1.6 Animation as Children's Entertainment

Having chosen my demographic target audience of the ages between seven and twelve years old, I found it was necessary to understand the importance and sensitivity required when writing television series targeted at young children. Henry Giroux in *Animating Youth: the Disnification of Children's Culture* (1995) challenges Disney films. He explains that animation is a type of teaching medium that should not be ignored. Giroux stresses that children's culture should be open for critical analysis because children are a significant influence on social theory. He writes that 'children's culture is a sphere where entertainment, advocacy, and pleasure meet to construct conceptions of what it means to be a child occupying a combination of gender, racial, and class positions in society through which one defines oneself in relation to a myriad of others' (Giroux 1995). In the period that Giroux wrote this article he felt that the available animated films at the time all held a 'cultural homogeneity and historical purity' (Giroux 1995). Media was used as a filtering tool to ignore social struggles such as cultural or gender

differences. This filtered view in animation saturated children's culture and because marketing and merchandising was the favourable option, depicting diverse characters was not of any interest (Giroux 1995).

In Teresa L. Thompson and Eugenia Zerbinos article *Gender Roles in Animated Cartoons: Has the Picture Changed in 20 Years* (1995), animated TV shows have revolutionised through the 90s and into the 2000s. The research conducted in this paper shows that females had been under-represented on screen entertainment. The research analysis is not only based on cartoons but also television programs and commercials. But for the sake of my own research I will concentrate only on the section 'cartoon analysis'. As Thompson writes, television is a way to teach social learning and with children being more prone to imitating their own gender, therefore, analyses on gender representation in animation should be analysed. Realistic, unique portrayals of women and girls will affect the way a young audience interacts in everyday social situations. Not only can stereotypical female representations influence gender role development for the child, but it can also affect the way women are treated in society (Thompson and Zerbinos 652). Animation is a foundation for children, perhaps more so in this digital age with the easily accessible technology and streaming networks. As Thompson and Zerbinos explain, 'cartoons are of particular importance because they are the preferred program format for children starting at the age of 18 months to 2 years' (Thompson and Zerbinos 652).

Network executives had made no effort on trying to uplift the numbers of female led animated series because boys outnumbered girls when it came to viewership. None-the-less there is still an assumption that boys will not watch a female led cartoon. For instance, a show that was pitched to Nickelodeon called *The Modifyers* was cancelled after its first pilot, despite positive reviews from critics and audiences. It was rejected due to it having a female protagonist and most female led shows had not had a large enough viewership in the past (The Modifyers

Fandom). The risk of perhaps losing viewership due to it being female centred was too high for the studio.

Research conducted in 1981 found that 75.5% of the characters in children's television were male while only 21% were female (Thompson and Zerbinos 654). Apart from a higher percentage of male leading roles, male characters were also portrayed in more diverse roles and occupations. When female characters were represented, they were placed in stereotypical gender roles such as a mother, housewife, girlfriend, teacher, and secretary. This can be referred back to the discussion of Shanti in *The Jungle Book* whose only purpose, and reason for her design, was to attract the male protagonist. Levinson writes 'television's portrayal of the sexes in cartoons does not accurately mirror real world events but it does reflect real world values concerning traditional; gender-role assumptions' (Thompson and Zerbinos 654). Male characters are more inclined to use violence or deception; female characters were more inclined to use their charm or require help from another character to achieve their intended goal. Through a conducted analysis that studied gender representation through the 80s era, they concluded that there has been a substantial change particularly in female characters. Female characters showed more leadership, independence and were less helpless, challenging gender stereotyping. However, in the article *Children's TV. Where Boys Are King* (1991), Bill Carter writes 'After having tried to create female characters that boys would watch, one of the few concessions the networks are now making in response to the absence of leading female characters is to give the male characters attributes considered to be "female"' (Carter 1991). This perhaps points out that it is not inherently the *presence* of 'feminine' identities, but rather the visual idea of a 'girl/woman/female'. This observation reflects that the problem is not a series containing inherently 'feminine' identities, but rather that the mere *presence* of a female gendered body is prevailing a male audience from watching a cartoon series.

The study conducted in Mary B. Oliver and Stephen Green's *Development of Gender Differences in Children's Responses to Animated Entertainment* (2001) looked at how different genders respond to the different genres in film. This article looked at how the viewer's gender might affect the reason for enjoying the content. The study explores two questions: the first one examined gender stereotyped emotional responses and the second question is, 'how gender differences in enjoyment of media entertainment may reflect perceptions of media offerings as more or less appealing to one gender.' (Oliver & Green 71)

Social learning has indicated that children develop gender-based characteristics from the concepts 'reward and punishment' by observing characters that are either rewarded or punished for their actions (Oliver & Green 70). There is also the internal social factor that is bought on by family or friends that influence appropriate entertainment for boys or girls, re-establishing what behaviours are rewarded. Differences in enjoyment of entertainment stem in gender differences. Through the following study we can understand how these differences in emotional responses are present and how do they affect the reception of entertainment content. Women and girls are perceived as being more emotional with sadness and fear more predominant emotions associated with their characterisation. While aggression and anger are associated with male viewers (Oliver & Green 71). With these social studies in mind it would be safe to assume that given these gender stereotypes girls and boys would be drawn to entertainment that reflects these stereotypes. Oliver and Green state:

> … females should be more likely to report enjoyment of entertainment that is likely to elicit "female appropriate" emotions (e.g., sad films, romance), whereas males should be more likely than females to report enjoyment of entertainment that is likely to elicit "male appropriate" emotions (e.g., violent films, action films). (Oliver & Green 71)

In one of the studies, children were shown previews of two films which were *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (unknown date). The findings, found after the research was conducted, proved that gender and age differences in enjoyment were present, as prior research had suggested. As it was also expected, the participants would notice gender-related behaviours and would be more inclined to engage with the gender stereotyping in the films (Oliver & Green 72). As prior assumptions showed, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was enjoyed more by boys and few perceived it as enjoyment for girls. Contrary to assumptions, the majority of the children perceived *Beauty and the Beast* to be enjoyed by both genders even though they did still associate the movie with females. Oliver and Green observe that 'the idea that children would more strongly gender stereotype the "male" film than the "female" film was unexpected, and therefore deserves greater attention…' (Oliver & Green 84). This outcome is surprising especially in contrast to the belief that female led films (and shows) would not be watched by boys while shows aimed at males will be enjoyed by both genders. A way to understand this outcome is that the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* film was stereotyped a greater deal and may shed light on the media industry's strategy for targeting male viewers may result in greatly excluding female viewers, while "female orientated" entertainment is less exclusionary (Oliver & Green 84).

Oliver and Green observe that perhaps male gender roles are more rigid in comparison to female gender roles. They suggest that perhaps stereotypical "male" entertainment is more consistent and easily distinguished because "masculine" themes such as aggression and fighting are carried through different age groups of entertainment. While "female" programming is more unambiguous and might evolve through age appropriate content (Oliver & Green 85). They ask an interesting question in relation to this, 'how might the relationship between gender-stereotyping and enjoyment be interpreted?' (Oliver & Green 85). They give two possible scenarios to answer this, the first one being, that when children have a preference

in entertainment, they assume that it is liked by others of the same gender; and the second scenario is that children find out first what is the preferred entertainment for their gender is and then grow enjoyment from that knowledge (Oliver & Green 85). It is important to take note that there may have been a gap in the way in which this research was conducted. Children's preferences in what they like, and dislike are not manufactured in a confined space but stimulated by the many forms of socialization around them, this includes the influence from parents.

Arguably, *Beauty and the Beast* depicts a large amount of aggression and violence that is both represented physically, through voice styles and dialogue. Belle herself even shows anger towards Gaston and Beast and acts upon it. So, in argument to the conclusion of this study, I believe that that the appeal of films directed at a female audience is not that they are more 'unambiguous' and 'age appropriate', but that the films represent a wider range of emotions. Representing sincerity in the emotions of the characters despite their gender or appearance is what makes the film relatable to a wider audience, unlike films targeted at a male audience which often only depict aggression and physical violence.

2.2 Gender Identity

2.2.1 Judith Butler: Gender Trouble

Judith Butler's work in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) will set a basis for gender theory in this paper. The notions of identity, gender and what it means to 'be female' are important to this research in understanding where female representation in characters is succeeding and where it is falling short.

Butler's first chapter, *Subjects of Sex/Gender/Desire,* looks at the feminist discourse on the topic of 'women' and the interests and goals within the movement. She approaches the topic by looking at multiple theorists and their views or approaches in the discourse. Her chapter opens up with the heading *"Women" as the Subject of Feminism* and starts off with pointing out that feminist discourse has assumed that there is a female identity branded as 'women' that seeks out better representation. This identity label is for the sake of political visibility. But, Butler challenges the two ideas, 'representation' and 'politics', which already exist within problematic systems and questions their value in reaching feminist goals. *Representation* seeks to extend visibility and to legitimise women as *political subjects.* Butler points out that the very word 'representation' is already revealing the distortion of what the category on 'women' is supposed to be. It is validating what the word stands against, seeking political representation. This plays on the notion that within feminist goals, the underrepresented are still misrepresented. To achieve specific representation, the subject has to fit into a mould that can be performed in order to be seen, the performance must be recognised as 'women' when represented. This could already circle back into the discussions of female characters in animation and what it means to be a 'female representation' in a cartoon world. With the higher demand in representation on screen and studios obliging, is it enough to only seek the visibility aspect. Butler's question of whether feminist identity politics can exist without a feminist identity, is related to the question posed earlier in the paper: If the female character exists as the assumed gender in *Friendship is Magic*, making her body unmarked, can she still represent a female identity? These complex questions might hold their own difficult to establish answers that continue to change as the exploration continues, none the less it is worth analysing the possibilities of how female representation can be made visible in an animated series.

Butler continues this notion asking how can the subject seek legitimacy where there is little consensus on what it ought to establish in its own category? (Butler 2) Female characters are often made more powerful or stronger than the male characters to appease the false pretence that if the character adopts masculine ideals, they will be a better representation for young girls. Studios have been desperate to combat the trope of 'the princess needs saving' that they have diminished anything overtly feminine. Female characters have slowly started to adopt more male character traits in attempt to resemble some form of feminism. This does not empower but reinforce that anything overtly feminine, is weak. This relates to Foucault's belief that administrators of law and power are the ones who create these subjects that they represent. The subject of 'women' seeks political representation from a system that created the subject through 'limitation, prohibition, regulation, control and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice' (Butler 2). This continued control of the female character in desperation for studios to keep relevant to the present times can be seen in Walt Disney's release of live action versions of previous animated films. In the film *Beauty and the Beast* (2017), the character Belle is made to be an 'inventor' who, poignantly, invents the washing machine in order to have more time to read. As opposed to her original predecessor who had enough time to read, but was not an inventor. This frantic attempt to clutch at the strands of the current generations requests of more inclusivity, is a representation of the constant control and prohibition of female characters.

Seeking liberation from the juridical system will only cause 'identity politics' from ceasing to exist. They exist because of the limitation put onto them, so what is identity outside of feminist discourse? What can be certain in *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, is that the brand survives on overly feminisation and appealing to the product audience, Faust has kept design elements which we recognise as a 'girl's' show. Yet the series has attracted a much larger audience despite its original brand. It can be argued that many entertainment studios

have tried to remove what the audience recognises as ‘female identities’ while keeping the marked gendered bodies, assuming that this was the way to ‘liberate’ the female representation. *Friendship is Magic*, has stepped into the opposite side of this system in that the bodies are arguably not marked, yet keeps the identities and tropes that the audience knows as ‘female’. This will be explored further in the case study and character analysis, but as Butler writes: ‘… an uncritical appeal to such a system for the emancipation of “women” will be clearly self-defeating’ (Butler 2). The desperation to remove feminisation from a character who is gendered female in order to provide a solution to past representations of women will only continue the misrepresentation they are seeking liberation from.

Feminism seeks to ask the question of how ‘women’ can be more represented and legitimized in language and politics. But for Butler it is not enough to ask for representation but also to understand how the acceptance of the category of ‘women’ is created and oppressed in the structure that feminism seeks to use for emancipation. The term ‘women’ even as a singular or plural is a problematic word, as either of them seek to unite all those who are identified or gendered as such, it is understood as an umbrella term. Butler inquires:

> If one “is” a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pre-gendered “person” transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. (Butler 3)

Identity has many possible facets and the term ‘women’ both erases and builds categories that the bearer does not necessarily associate with. It signifies the assumption that those under this category share a common identity, a foundation that is able to travel through cultures, races, and religions. It seeks to unite under a presumed singular tyranny and offers no validation of any other external oppressions if it cannot identify it as a ‘united women’s

struggle'. This poses multiple problems especially when trying to represent an all-encompassing female identity in animation, when people themselves do not fall neatly into categorised boxes. The very aspect that makes *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* an almost perfect skeleton for analysing how the female identity may exist, is that it lives in a fantasy world which allows us to rethink the identity outside of real-world categories. It focuses on the female identity as a singular concept, exploring the tropes and ways to represent it outside of the political discourse. However, this is disrupted by the presence of the character Zecora, a character added outside of the main group only to serve as a 'mentor' and who is clearly marked by African aesthetics through a Western lens. This character will be discussed further in the analysis to see how this is an example of how feminism struggles with its existence, and how its very urge to unite, essentially divides individual experiences.

In Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), it suggests that 'one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one' (Butler 8). For Beauvoir, gender is a construction that is influenced rather than just born. Similarly, the animator Sandra Law stated that the female form is malleable and can be put on or removed in animation (Furniss 241). Butler questions whether gender is as wilful and adaptable as Beauvoir suggests and asks: can gender be a choice in 'becoming'? Butler points out the word 'construction' is in itself is problematic, because of the paradox between free will and determinism, and the belief that events and decisions are already determined. The body comes off as an unassertive structure which cultural beliefs and signifiers are inscribed onto, but this is debatable. Beauvoir also believes that only the female gender is marked; the 'universal person' and the-all transcendent being is masculine (Butler 9). For Beauvoir, women are the lack of masculine identity, the remains of the negative. For Irigaray the female sex represents a 'linguistic absence' (Butler 9). These theoretical questions aim to understand whether gender is something that can be marked, constructed, or only exists as the negative of what remains. It is worth exploring how these arguments can be represented

visually in the transformative nature of the animation medium, and whether a character in *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* is able to take a side in this debate.

Butler does not seek to explain the reasoning and meanings behind being a 'woman' or a 'man' through phenomenology. This is due to her belief that there is a presumption that being a gender is an effect. She writes that 'Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being' (Butler 33). Butler agrees with Beauvoir that the term 'women' is a process, a construction that is open to new meaning. However, the process is circular in that there is not a beginning nor end, it is a repeating process and only exists through the repetition which gives the illusion of 'concealment'.

It is this 'becoming' a woman and gender performance that drove Minnie Mouse's design to originate from Mickey Mouse, but then be embellished with feminine costume and signifiers of the female gender as a way to differentiate Mickey and his female counterpart (Thomas and Johnson 552). Because animation is such a visual medium, the design of characters is vital for getting messages across to viewers. Although some feminists believe that both male and female genders go through the same cultural performance and only 'becoming' their gender through society. Beauvoir would disagree with this concept, rather saying that women are marked by their biological sex and are therefore defined by their gender, whilst men transcend their biological sex and have a combination of both body and 'universal person' (Butler 9).

However, the animated character does not experience genesis as humans do and are thus not burdened by 'biological sex'. Although this notion would suppose that an animated character is then 'genderless' until proven otherwise, the assumed gender is often still male. In the series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* where the assumed gender is female, it will be

worth exploring how this allows female identity to exist solely to differentiate between the already female characters, rather than to be a contrast of their male counterparts. This research asks for further studying of what it means to treat identities outside of gender altogether, which is why I have chosen to look at Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985).

2.2.2 Donna Haraway: A Cyborg Manifesto

This work was written in the 1980s to respond to socialist feminism. Her writings criticize the feminist attempts to understand and readopt the origins of nature and history. Haraway found that in doing this, it would do nothing to overthrow the power of patriarchy and the original myths that bound gender and especially women. Instead, her solution is to look to a new progressive stance that finds a place in the post-modern era. Haraway wishes to write a 'political myth' that holds both feminism and materialism (Haraway 5). Her idea of adopting the cyborg persona is a way to create a kind of community without boxing into one identity and moving away from the idea of gender. Haraway believes that like the cyborg we are made of different parts and so we cannot be defined by only one identity.

The idea of a cyborg aids in reconceptualizing feminism in a postmodernist era. For Haraway, the cyborg does not rely on human reproduction to exist because it lives in a post-gender world. Haraway writes, 'it is also an effort to contribute to socialist-feminist culture and theory in a postmodernist, non-naturalist mode and in the utopian tradition of imagining a world without gender, which is perhaps a world without genesis, but maybe also a world without end' (Haraway 7). Through her writing, Haraway describes her Manifesto as an ironic political myth (Haraway 5). Not only does she realise the negativity with the cyborg because it originates from a militaristic ideal, but she also promotes it. The benefit of the cyborg is that it has no genesis and thus is not confined by social structure governed by creationism. What Haraway means is that the cyborg has no 'source' and so is not born in a structure that condemns it to a singular identity, but rather adapts to them as it grows. In terms of biology, we can define animated characters similarly to cyborgs, in that they do not have a biological genesis either. This allows us to look at animated characters and analyse them for what they are, born from a

human being who has gone through genesis and is thus merely transcribing their own belief system onto them.

Haraway sets out to reconstruct socialist-feminism and its politics through the cyborg which argues themes around a disassembled and reassembled personal self (Haraway 33). Donna Haraway rejects the idea of essentialism and rather suggests the theory of multiple identities that form one hybrid being, a cyborg. She describes her essay as a 'blasphemous' but faithful piece to accompany feminism, socialism, and materialism. The cyborg, as she describes, is a technological hybrid being of combination of both machine and organism, social reality, and fiction. What creates social reality is the political construction of social relations, 'a world-changing fiction' (Haraway 6). Haraway looks at the feminist belief of 'women's experience' as a practiced political fiction that has accepted a collective belief as the norm. The notion that Haraway does not believe in 'women's experience' brings an interesting aspect to how animators, especially men, can still define a character by incorporating the 'women's experience' if the character itself is devoid of having any 'natural genesis'. As Haraway theorises, 'Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility' (Haraway 6). It is through the understanding of these representations that true liberation can be granted – the understanding that the continuous acceptance and performance of false juridical systems have contributed to the oppression.

Haraway does not believe that identities constituted as 'female' are naturally bonded in an organic fashion bringing in an all common ground and breaking other identities dependent on race and class. She sees this as forceful and that it uses a 'consciousness of exclusion' (Haraway 16). The creations of gender, race and class stems from exclusion in historical experience from the powerful realities that patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism have created. Haraway writes that there is no 'state of being female' (Haraway 16), female is a

multifaceted category that is influenced by many other social realities, there cannot be a static identity as ‘female’. The very category of ‘women’ invalidates non-white and especially black women (Haraway 18). The very word ‘us’ is problematic in that it is a collective word that assumes a collective experience and searches for a uniting representation that ignores the excluded. The ‘female’ identity is but another form of domination within the matrix of women. There is a constant search for unity through dividing identities, but the realisation that perhaps this is not the solution is growing. Haraway rather directs us once more towards ‘affinity, not identity’ (Haraway 17). Meaning the combination of multiple identities, as a cyborg with parts, to be adopted into the self.

Haraway asks what could another side of socialist-feminism be if it rather searched for the more effective contradictions of ‘permanently unclosed constructions of personal and collective selves’ (Haraway 21) while still being an effective unity in socialist feminism? The concepts that Haraway points out sheds light on how ‘feminism’ is an ironic anti-hero in the political structures. She feels that ‘cyborg’ feminists should demand that the concept of a natural matrix of unity should be obsolete because no construction is whole and seeking for one has caused more harm than liberation. Haraway references Catharine MacKinnon theories on radical feminism on how it has appropriated Western theories of identity (Haraway 23). MacKinnon believes that feminism prioritises the structure between sex and gender within a patriarchy whilst Marxism looks at the structure within class. Her theory is that ‘women’s’ identity is the self-knowledge of the self-who-is-not, it exists as a negative (Haraway 24).

The imagery within Haraway’s cyborg discourse expresses how the concept of a universal theory is an error that will exclude in its attempt to unite. With the rapid rise in technology and science we cannot depend on the singular metaphysics but rather embrace deconstructing and reconstructing the structures of our realities in order to communicate with all the parts that influence us. ‘Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms

in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves' (Haraway 67). Haraway concludes with 'I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess' (Haraway 68), ultimately choosing her destiny as a multi-faceted personal discovery rather than a societal identity given to her through her body no matter how idealistic it may seem. The main themes of Haraway's works revolve around 'affinity and not identity' which is what I will be exploring through the character analysis by choosing characters that I feel might give us the best example of this theory.

In relation to sexual objectification, Haraway writes that it is the result of abstracting bodies and alienating them until they are no longer a subject, but the object, 'she owes her existence as a woman to sexual appropriation' (Haraway 24) For MacKinnon 'women' do not exist outside of the product of men's desire and so accomplishes what the Western patriarchy sets out to achieve. Haraway discusses the male gaze in this instance, what I will be exploring in the character analysis is the reversal of the gaze. Although one can argue that a series aimed at young children cannot apply a sexual gaze of any nature, in the next section I will be discussing how the gaze may be subdued to appear more 'innocent' in children's animation. I will also be further exploring the gaze by using Nuria Enciso's study in conjunction to Laura Mulvey.

2.2.3 Nuria Enciso: Turning the Gaze Around

This article was written in response to Laura Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1973). Enciso believes that Mulvey's theories were accurate at the time of publication but in more recent mainstream cinema she feels there is much that challenges Mulvey's writings. Her main argument is that the female gaze is present and necessary to bring

about change in representation. She uses the Sony Pictures movie *Orlando* (1993) directed by Sally Potter as a point for her analysis. This literature review seeks to do two things for the analysis to come, the first being exploring how the gaze can be turned around, and secondly to show how the gaze may be present in children's animation.

Figure 7 Design concept for Shanti from The Jungle Book (1967) in The Illusion of Life

Mulvey believes that 'visual pleasure' or 'scopophilia' in cinema is created by male characters being the voyeurs towards female characters (Enciso). Although such themes would be perceived as inherently entertainment targeted at adults, one can argue that the male gaze is still present even in children's animation. One such instance is mentioned in *The Illusion of Life* in the chapter *Animating Expressions and Dialogue*, an image of Shanti (refer to Figure 7), the only human female character that makes an appearance in *The Jungle Book* (1967) with the following caption: 'The little girl in *The Jungle Book* has large pupils surrounded by a dark, dusky iris. We wanted to get the rich look of the East Indian eye and, hopefully, a seductive quality as well' (Thomas and Johnston 449). From what we know of the character in the movie, she is the one who stands as a deciding factor for Mowgli, when he is at a crossroads of either

staying in the jungle or entering the human village. The following is an exchange between the characters when Mowgli first sees Shanti:

MOWGLI. Look, what's that?

BALOO. Forget about those, they ain't nothing but trouble. (The Jungle Book)

This dialogue exchange is followed by Baloo realising that Mowgli could get swayed to leave the jungle by the appearance of the female character. The dialogue continues where Bagheera stops Baloo from protesting and encourages Mowgli in being the voyeur:

MOWGLI. I want a better look.

BAGHEERA. Ah Baloo let him have a better look. (The Jungle Book)

The action of Mowgli climbing the tree and viewing the female character from above on a branch reinforces this voyeuristic tendency for the audience. The description of Shanti's design choices, the camera angles, and the exchange between the male characters as they watch the young girl offers an example of 'scopophilia' in animation aimed at younger viewers. It should also be noted that the movie was released at a different time in society and I will not be using this as a comparative analysis but merely an instance in how children's animation may contain the gaze.

As the audience, we too take on this form of 'voyeur', as we are forced to take on the male gaze because of the film's strict perspective. As Enciso writes, this 'replicates the structure of unequal power relations between men and women' (Enciso), and Mulvey feels that there needs to be a disruption in order to stop the pattern. However, Enciso feels this too is problematic because of the many possibilities of 'who is looking at whom' in the female gaze itself, and that the female gaze does not promise a feminist gaze. A female gaze can still hold patriarchal tendencies and can be mistaken for liberation when, as Butler wrote, is just initiating

societal hierarchies. Enciso also points out that Mulvey's theories in reversing the gaze does not include the many other identities that might fall within the terms, 'female' or 'male'. If the gaze is presumed to be heterosexual, of one race, culture, class, and age then her solution has only ignored other social and political positions. How Mulvey seeks liberation, only re-establishes what she seeks to be liberated from. It is through 'privileging gender as the category which structure perspective' (Enciso) that causes other minority groups to be ignored or fetishized within the gaze. Feminist theory can afford to seek out independence from other power relations, but as Enciso writes, if that analysis cannot relate to the other social inequalities involved in gender and power relations then that theory is problematic.

Mulvey's argument is that film is a voyeuristic experience, that the characters portrayed on film are secluded and living in a solitary world from the audience. Enciso questions this first argument because in the film *Orlando* the main character looks directly at the camera and at the audience. Orlando not only sees the viewers, but also recognises them. This erases any boundaries that mainstream cinema has previously led the audience to believe existed. This 'breaking of the fourth wall' dispels any voyeuristic tendencies from the audiences as they realise that they are not just watching but interacting and perhaps even being the ones watched.

Mulvey believes that the very presence of women in film is an 'indispensable element of spectacle' (Enciso) and that being female disrupts the storyline as she embodies only the presence of 'erotic contemplation' (Enciso). On the other hand, the male character is never burdened with sexual objectification as the female body is. This is apparently due to the male body not being as desirable and so they remain in control of who is being desired. But Enciso dispels this theory as well, as the character Orlando moves the plot of the storyline beyond their body being objectified in both as a male and female. In both changes of sex, Orlando experiences issues regarding that gender. As a female, she encounters misogyny for the first time and is a main focal point in the story that is addressed. In terms of Mulvey's theory that

male characters cannot be objectified, the movie once more contradicts this notion by having Orlando's male love interest desired by the protagonist which is bought about through actions that are normally reserved for objectifying women. The camera lingers over Shelmerdine in a way normally reserved for women and, '… the point of view of the camera becomes an overhead, medium close-up of his face from Orlando's perspective. He is being watched and expresses himself in a way typically reserved for the objectified woman.' (Enciso)

In a defiant moment, the film offers the female gaze to the audience, allows the female character in the film to not only desire but also look back, no longer being a passive character. In animated series like *Rocko's Modern Life* female characters are often in a submissive role. But Enciso cautions that we cannot assume that a female gaze can only be achieved by women because the female gaze is not biological but an outcome of culture and society. (Enciso) This observation is important to keep in mind during the analysis of Lauren Faust's characters to avoid biased assumptions that a female showrunner will always create successful female characters. However, what needs to be challenged is Mulvey's notion that cinema (and perhaps mainstream animation) is reserved for the male gaze because the female body is already marked and thus cannot be redefined. Although a woman behind the camera does not necessarily promise a well-established female character, it is possible for there to be an alternate way of looking. Enciso stressing on the importance of female visibility behind cameras by stating:

> Women must be encouraged to use the mainstream to infiltrate these ideas of representation into society. The situation for women intellectuals and artists is already difficult enough without women discouraging their own participation in popular culture. We must not impose marginalization upon ourselves: the rest of society already does that for us. (Enciso)

Enciso points out that what she has observed is that there are usually two strategies used to challenge sexist representation: the first one is by comparison, using women to demote men and showing how similar they are. The second is to completely categorise masculine tendencies as negative and feminine ones in a positive light (Enciso). *Orlando* does not represent conventional femininity or masculinity but rather how identities can exist outside of gender and sex. The film represents how ‘we’re all born simply as human beings who are then shaped one way or the other’ (Enciso) similar to how Beauvoir theorised ‘one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one.’ (Butler 8)

Chapter 3: Sugar, Spice and Everything Nice

A case study into Lauren Faust's career in the Western animation industry

In this section I will be implementing the case study method and looking at Lauren Faust from her time on the show *The Powerpuff Girls* (1995) to her most recent involvement on *DC Super Hero Girls* (2019) as developer, writer, and character designer. My intention with this in-depth research of the showrunner is to shed light on her process and perhaps track the trajectory in what can be expected from the projects she is involved in. This section will be to both implement the theories mentioned in chapter two as well as extract the information needed for the character analysis that will follow.

To begin, I will be looking at Faust's overall influence that has shaped what she projects onto her own characters and stories. On the *Nick Animation*[9] YouTube channel, Faust was brought on as a guest where she discussed her biggest inspirations in animation which were, unsurprisingly, *Loony Tunes*, *Tom and Jerry* and *Walt Disney* movies. *Loony Tunes*, specifically, was a motivation in terms of comedy styles and how cartoons opened up a new set of rules. In discussion to what episodic television shows Faust watched as a child, her response was that she gravitated towards 'boys' shows such as *The Transformers* (1984). She explains that the characters and stories were incredibly more complex and relatable to her than shows aimed at girls. On this topic, Faust says, 'I watched the stuff they watched, and I loved the stuff they loved and that was the most interesting, compelling stories to me, but I played with girl things' (Nick Animation Podcast). This look into Faust's thought process even as a child, represents how toys that were aimed and girls even if feminised were still appealing to

[9] Also known as the Nickelodeon Animation studio.

her. What is noticeably the issue, was the superficial storylines and characters associated with girls' television shows. It could be argued that the brand, Hasbro, prioritised the monetization of the product rather than its storyline, yet shows aimed at boys[10] were able to achieve both product sales and serve complex stories to their viewers.

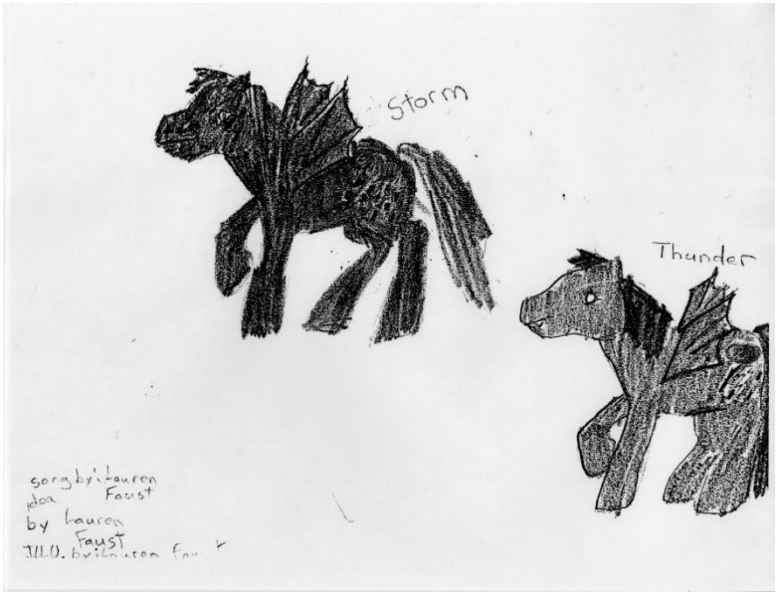

Figure 8 Image of Lauren Faust's character ideas from when she was a child (2019)

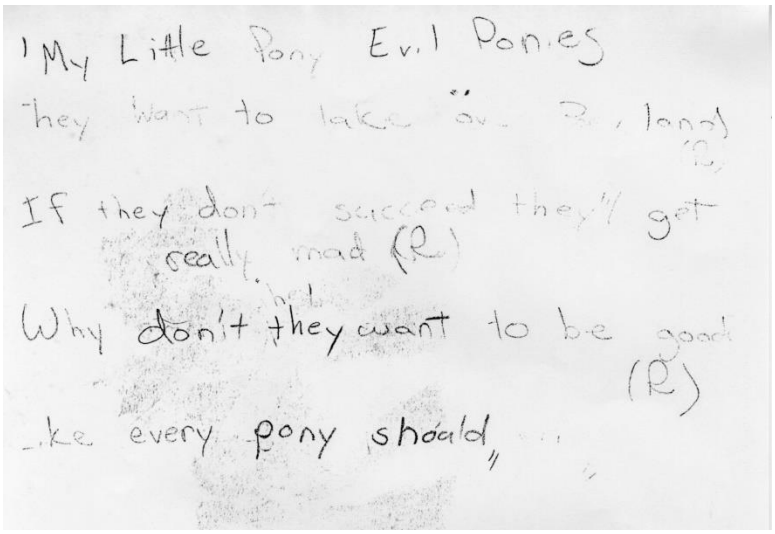

Figure 9 Image of Lauren Faust's character descriptions from when she was a child (2019)

[10] Transformers is a toy line also produced by Hasbro

Unsatisfied with what was available to her and the toys she gravitated towards she began to create her own stories, mixing both what she enjoyed on television aimed at boys and her pony collection. On the Netflix produced documentary, *The Toys That Made Us* (2018), Faust spoke about her *My Little Pony* toy collection, and how she was inspired to write her own scenarios involving the characters. On her Twitter account, Faust posted the original character designs that she had created as a child as a follow up to her interview on the documentary (refer to Figure 8) along with a themed character song she thought up of (refer to Figure 9). On writing the premise for *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* Faust says, 'I had played with the toys for most of my childhood, and I literally referenced the characterizations and stories I made up for myself when I was little… I used to say that my own inner eight-year-old was my personal focus group.' (Tekaramity)

It is clear to see that Faust had an interest in storytelling early on in her life. At her young age, she was also able to recognise the gender gap in entertainment at the time. Many of the perceptions she had as a child became a wish fulfilment in her career and was lucky enough to receive the opportunity to create the content that she would have enjoyed in her younger years. Faust states that, '… it was amazing to see all these ideas I'd had for years and years about how to make compelling stories for girls come together. So much of what is in MLP is what I've been trying to get on the air since I started TV.' (Tekaramity)

Faust began to achieve what her younger self would have enjoyed seeing on television starting from her work on Cartoon Network's *The Powerpuff Girls* (1995). The series centres around three young girls with superhuman powers, who take up the position of saving their town from countless terrors. The series was created by Craig McCracken and Genndy Tartakovsky, first airing in 1998 and ending in 2005 on its sixth season. In 2016 a reboot of the show had aired, which posed its own differing controversies, but due to the case study centring around Faust specifically I will not be using the reboot as a point of comparison, but allows for

future analysis. In relation to this series, I will be looking at Ewan Kirkland's *The Politics of Powerpuff: Putting the 'Girl' into 'Girl Power'* which provides a study of the feminist politics within the show and at its time of release. It is necessary to study the show critically in order to understand both the impact it had as a female-children centred action series and its limitations in how it negatively represented, if at all, marginalised groups.

In the journal article, Kirkland looks at the relation between the 'Girl Power' movement in young femininity that was present in the 1990s and *The Powerpuff Girls*. Girl Power was a movement that took place in the early 90s representing women's empowerment, aimed mainly at young girls. The movement witnessed the rise of female representation in pop culture, such as and perhaps most famously, the pop group *Spice Girls* who adopted the slogan into their brand. Despite what seemed like a progressive movement, criticism and controversy was received for its use of marketing commodities of the oppression-born-movement through popular culture. As the article *Interrogating Girl Power: Girlhood, Popular Media, and Postfeminism* by Michelle S. Bae states, '… Postfeminism aligned with commodity feminism is seen as weakening of conventional feminist social goals through an aesthetic depoliticization that, by focusing on individual style, fetishizes feminism.'(Bae 29) In the same light, Kirkland's article scrutinizes the restrictions of Girl Power, pointing out its limitations in vilifying other identities which are outside of the 'white middle-class heterosexual girlhood' that is depicted by the show's main characters. Although the show is representative of a positive movement that allows for heroic femininity to exist, at the same time Girl Power tries to umbrella the term 'female' and harms the identities that it does not represent. This refers to Judith Butler's concern with the movements that seek liberation or representation, by the continued 'limitation, prohibition, regulation, control' (Butler 2). It is unfortunate that such a movement that allowed growth in certain aspects by allowing 'girlish femininity', was also based on limiting other minorities.

What the series achieves is the juxtaposition of two different identities. The superhuman abilities the trio have, that would normally be seen in the darker tones associated with comic books, is lightened by the influence of Western contemporary girlhood. In the episode *Keen on Keane* (2002), the girls attempt to set a blind date between their teacher and the Professor. They assume that their single parent and single female teacher are of course in search of a heterosexual partner on this specific holiday. These tendencies are perceived to be innocent but hold assumptions of the interests of young female girls, even if they are granted superpowers. On the one hand, depicting these feminised tropes along with their crime fighting abilities, disrupts the association of femininity and children being weak. The often-violent fighting of the three girls, is masked by the stereotypes of girlhood and as Kirkland observes, 'the lack of seriousness commonly attributed to the mode suits a brand of feminism articulating challenges to patriarchal power relations while remaining playfully unthreatening' (Kirkland 11). The combination of both 'girlish femininity' and superhuman strength is something that can be seen in many of Lauren Faust's characters. Faust has had a way in using tropes as an instrument to break stereotypes; a way to represent how there can be multiple identities to a female character. Faust has expressed her thoughts on this subject saying, '… I refuse to believe that something being feminine by nature automatically means it isn't worthwhile. If I can put the tiniest dent in the perception that "girly" equals "lame"… I'll be satisfied.' (Tekaramity)

Figure 10 Image of "Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup" found on Powerpuff Girls Wiki.

Kirkland also observes the lack of academic writing on children's culture especially about gender, race, class, and sexuality. This is similar to what Henry Giroux states on page 45, that it is important to analyse what is being represented on children's television in order to understand children's culture. It is with this that we may shine a positive light onto the show. *The Powerpuff Girls* allows for conversation around 'girlish femininity' and how it does not need to be replaced with masculinity for it to appeal to larger audiences, or be a positive representation. The show itself does not only deal with gender politics but also empowers female children by giving them the control to save adults whilst still attending kindergarten. Paired with the defeat of incompetent older super villains, which is realised by bright, colourful visuals and a smiley-faced hotline – the series embraces femininity and children's culture while creating, borderline, age-appropriate content. The audience is met with a conundrum of oxymorons in the content of the show and are forced to question the stereotypes that they have come to accept as 'normal'. Perhaps this unusual amalgamation of identities that shock, offer a refreshing look at female representation and may be related to Haraway's notion of 'affinity not identity.' Creating unique female characters is not dependent on removing femininity to

allow for other identities to exist, because ultimately ‘female’ is not an all-encompassing identity but makes only one part of the cyborg.

Interestingly, Craig McCracken believed that the trio were ‘kids first, girls second’ (Nick Animation). Although this is a well-intended approach, due to female identity and children being closely related in their perceived vulnerability and naivety, there needs to be a distinction between the two for them to be ‘kids first’. In Wells’ discussion on gender performance, he uses Warner Bros.’ *Tom and Jerry* episode *Baby Puss* (1942) to correspond to the above theory. Wells states that ‘… the cartoon also uses the idea of juvenilisation as feminisation and, ironically, applies it to Tom…’ (Wells 209). After the alley cats find Tom dressed as a baby, and enjoying it, they start to mock and harass him. Wells explains that, ‘This routine relates Tom to the other cats, and is significant in the sense that Tom is coded as a feminised domestic ‘kitten’ as opposed to a streetwise, sexually knowing, alley ‘cat’’ (Wells 209). This shows us that feminization was often used to signify or refer to juvenilisation, which in turn, could cause McCracken’s statement redundant if it were not effectively applied. However, it can be argued that in terms of allowing the characters to act, learn and enjoy childhood as children before being pigeon-holed into the category ‘female’ was well executed and important to female representation.

The Powerpuff Girls is indeed a voice for gender politics and children’s culture, but despite its success, the show contains its limitations in how they choose to ‘represent the underrepresented’. As Kirkland observes, the show’s brand is limited to a ‘particular white, middle-class, heteronormative kind of girl’ (Kirkland 20), while using the category of ‘villains’ subsequently for minorities, marginalized identities, and political enemies (Kirkland 20). In where the series celebrates liberty and rebellion of gender restrictions, it also reinstates the political discourse that prohibits feminism. Although each villain in this series deserve

lengthened analysis of the problematic representations, for the purpose of my research I will be looking at a villain written by Lauren Faust in particular.

The episode *Equal Fights* which aired on 5th January 2001 was centred around feminism and how equality is its main objective, this was in relation to men and women and equal rights between the two genders (Equal Fights). The episode has been criticized for representing the movement through use of extremist stereotypes known as 'straw feminism[11]'. The trope is often used in the entertainment media to vilify the character that supports feminism by presenting them as seeking empowerment through disempowering the patriarchy and men in general. The representation of such a stereotype is problematic in many ways, which will be discussed after an overview of the episode.

We are introduced to the antagonist of the episode, 'Femme Fatale', when she is robbing a bank. During her introductory scene she makes a point of degrading the male characters by calling them 'little boy' and 'macho meat heads' (Equal Fights). These trivial insults are used to demasculinise the male citizens she comes across and place herself at a superior level as both villain and female.

[11] The 'straw feminism' trope is used for a person/character believes in an extremist feminism. Often added to provide a comedic story line or be the antagonist. According to TV Tropes this term is used for a character who possesses an 'automatic moral superiority to a man'. (TV Tropes)

Figure 11 Still from The Powerpuff Girls: Equal Fights Season 3 Episode 12 (2001)

Figure 12 Still from The Powerpuff Girls: Equal Fights Season 3 Episode 12 (2001)

The villain's design quite literally signifies the female gender in that both her mask and 70s style body suit adorns the Venus symbol, which symbolises the female sex (refer to Figure 11). In Figure 12, we even see Femme Fatale pointing a Venus symbol shaped gun at the male civilians, and soon afterwards we see her using a grappling hook that is shaped in the same way. When the Powerpuff Girls manage to capture her, she persuades the trio that men are the enemy, and they should in fact sympathise with her. Blinded by Femme Fatale's words, the trio renders their 'superhero code of conduct' obsolete by letting the villain walk free. As a

mirroring montage we get to see Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup misconstrue innocent situations involving their fellow male characters at home, in their school, and in the city. Once the Powerpuff Girls realize their mistake they capture Femme Fatale, and in a traditional *Powerpuff Girls* ending, throw her in jail. The villain is stripped of her Venus symbol attire and sports the traditional striped uniform of a prisoner.

The episode's intention was to be packed with morals that explain radical feminism and misandry. Faust has come out to say that she regrets writing the episode realising that extreme feminism was a complicated topic to use in 'a light-hearted way' (TV Tropes). Radical feminism is understandably a heavy topic to insert as a plot in amongst the action-comedy themed children's television show. This along with using male characters as the 'victimised and oppressed' group when the show often utilizes harmful stereotypes to signify minority groups as antagonists is problematic itself. For instance, the Mayor after getting scolded at by Blossom, wants to make up for all his apparent 'sexist' ways, says, 'Oh I know, I'll plant more flowers in the park, ladies love flowers. Oh, and candy that'll do the trick. The fillies love a chocolate' (Equal Fights).

The issue with the straw feminism stereotype, particularly in this television show, is that it lives in a world where all characters are already living as equals and thus feminist beliefs are deemed unnecessary. This is already implied at the start of the episode where the narrator begins with, 'The city of Townsville, where everyone gets their fair turn' (Equal Fights), thus implying that in this fictional world, marginalized groups do not exist, at least not in the way that our world can relate to. Yet, the show is an animated embodiment of the 'Girl Power' movement which even Cartoon Network used to develop a side scroller *Powerpuff Girls* videogame called 'Girl Power'. There is an expectation of the show, before even viewing it, through its branding and use of the feminist movement to promote its intention; however, this episode tells us that the world in which the trio lives is not in need of any feminist movement

as it exists in an equal society where ‘everyone gets their fair turn’. ‘Girl Power’ was a movement born out of gender inequality, so the moral of this episode renders it obsolete and unnecessary. The ‘female identity’ in this episode is but another form of domination within the matrix of women and as Butler writes, ‘… an uncritical appeal to such a system for the emancipation of “women” will be clearly self-defeating’ (Butler 2). By using white female girls to represent how ‘extreme feminists’ exist, is harmful not only to a movement but also to those that this narrative does not include. Due to society’s perception that women are a collective group despite culture, race, and class; the moral of the episode problematically addresses all women. The answer to this might be in Haraway’s theory or ‘affinity, not identity’ (Haraway 17). There is a constant search for unity through dividing identities, but the realisation that perhaps this is not the solution, rather that there is not one encompassing identity.

The visual concept of human characters already leaves the audience with a certain reference to real life, that it makes it difficult to feel that the white male character may be oppressed. If we cannot feel empathy for the victim and yet we are told the villain, the straw feminist in this instance, is who we must detest makes it difficult for the viewer to find a side when their own self-experience is not agreeing with any of the notions present in the episode. What may be asked, is how would this message differ if they were not human characters? By taking away the recognisable identification of a white male verses white female, we left with an emptier canvas where perhaps Faust could have discussed feminism as Butler and Haraway do, not by using men as victims but rather women as the victim in their own movement. This was almost achieved when the adult female characters throw and intervention to the trio to explain how they have been victim to Femme Fatal. This is an interesting theme that I feel could have been addressed further to show how feminism attempt to seek unity through controlled oppression of those it tries so desperately to liberate. What may be expected from

Faust, is her awareness of criticism and willingness to find better ways to discuss such topics. Continuing with the case study, I hope to see if she continues on this trajectory.

Once *The Powerpuff Girls* show ended, Faust worked on the show *Foster's Home for Imaginary Friends* also created by Craig McCracken for Cartoon Network. After working on this series, Faust attempted to pitch her own stories to developers and studios centring around female characters. But after facing constant rejection that girls' shows were not profitable enough, she decided to attempt developing a collection of dolls called *Milky Way and the Galaxy Girls* (Nick Animation Podcast). During her pitch to Hasbro, Faust was not able to find enough interest in her toy line concepts to receive a deal, serendipitously however she was asked whether she might be interested in taking up the reboot for *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. The series will be discussed in further detail in chapter four, to illustrate the impact before delving into the character analysis.

In 2012, the animation studio Cartoon Network, hired creatives to develop a series for DC Nation[12]. Many of the shorts provided a spotlight for characters that, as Peter Giardi[13] explains, '… we've always wanted to see animated, but that might not be able to support a whole series' (Giardi). Lauren Faust was among the creatives chosen to develop a personal short series which she pitched called *Super Best Friends Forever* (2012). The five-episode series starred three original characters from DC Comics, which are Supergirl, Batgirl and Wonder Girl. Each episode was only one minute and 15 seconds long, not allowing for any complicated plots, Faust opted for a 'slice-of-life' style of episodic series which would look at a scenario into the character's day-to-day life. The reason for choosing these specific DC

[12] This is a programming allocation on Cartoon Network to showcase heroes of the DC Comics universe that used different creatives to develop a mini-series for it.
[13] Warner Bros. vice president

characters was that Faust was interested in looking at female ‘side-kicks’ in the DC universe, particularly in their teenager years.

Faust was granted full creative freedom, which included the episode stories and character designs. This served as an opportunity for Faust to design the characters in the exact way that she intended, without the interference of higher-ups, which is a unique chance for a showrunner. Faust has stated on her Twitter account before about the implications of working according to a studio’s requests, ‘Redesigning my characters to be quote-unquote “prettier” is hurting my soul’ (@Fyre_flye). Due to this series not being a fully developed show and only experimental, I feel that *Super Best Friends Forever* is the closest example available to us of Faust’s pure design and story process. When Faust was asked about how she came up with the trio’s designs she stated, ‘From real teenage girls! Each of these characters’ physiques came from girls I knew when I was young’ (Beedle). This serves as an opportunity to apply Paul Wells’ theories on both personality animation and comedy styles matching the character. To understand if Faust is able to grasp the concept on a self-run show such as this. Additionally, the show was not going to be used to market toys or vice versa, although figurines were released once the show ended as a DC Collectible, it did not coincide with the production of the series. Therefore, the expectations from Cartoon Network was not based off of any of their own briefs that Faust had to then adapt into the story.

The conclusion that the analysis on this show will bring is that we are able to make better assumptions on what was Faust’s personal influence on *Friendship is Magic* and what was perhaps the influence of the creative team, as often collaborations do, by following a trajectory of similarities between the shows. This way in working backwards and leaving the show that is the core of this research for last, will be in hopes be able to extract Faust’s patterns, and pay attention to those particular similarities in *Friendship is Magic*.

Figure 13 Super Best Friends Forever trio by Lauren Faust (2012)

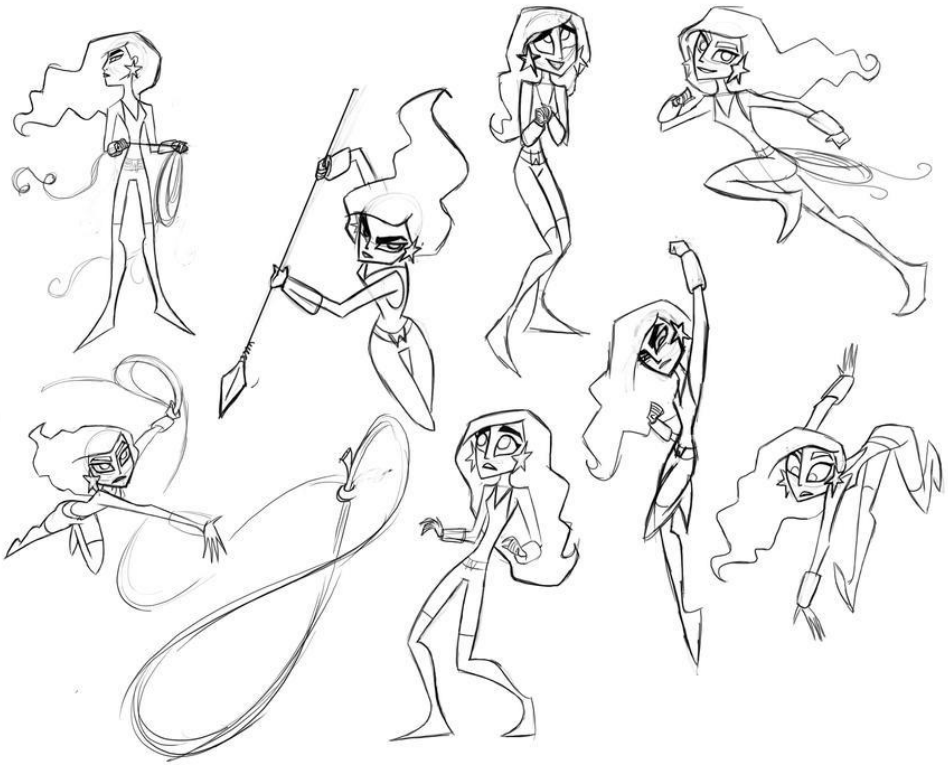

Figure 14 Super Best Friends Forever: Wonder Girl sketches by Lauren Faust (2012)

The first character I will be analysing is Wonder Girl, some early character exploration made by Faust can be seen in Figure 14. At first glance, the character is tall and thin with a larger head, her legs are longer than her torso giving the impression that the character still has to 'grow into them'- matching the awkward growth teenagers at times go through. Faust has said that she modelled Wonder Girl after herself who was also a rather tall teenager, 'I was a lanky, stick-figure beanpole' (Beedle). Despite the growth spurt that Wonder Girl is going through, Faust has signified in her poses that she is still confident and regal matching her character story being a princess of Themyscira. The angular lines of her arms and legs signify the athleticism of the character, while the angular lines on her face reveal that Wonder Girl is the stricter and more sensible of the trio. Her pose in Figure 13 reinstates her elegance in her fighting stance, a pose that seems more taught than natural, her arms systematically shield her face signifying the extensive training she has as a superhero.

From this character, we can already recognise the 'self-experience' projection that Paul Wells discusses on page 28. Faust drawing upon the awkwardness she felt and implementing it into a visual design could only be through the sincerity of expressing an 'inner life'. But Faust did not only draw upon her own experience, she also successfully coupled the feeling with a character that would have to fight against the awkwardness being that she is a warrior princess, which gives Wonder Girl another layer of identity.

Figure 15 Super Best Friends Forever: Batgirl sketches by Lauren Faust (2012)

Batgirl, in this series, is an energetic, easily excitable, and slightly more unhinged character. She is the only character in this show to not have an innate superpower. Similar to Batman, she relies on her innovation and intelligence to create the superpowers she needs in order to fight crime. Instead of Batgirl already being Batman's sidekick, in this scenario she is still in training and is a big fan of the Dark Knight. Looking at her design, she is the smallest of the three and most fluid in shape. Due to her not having the power of flight or natural brute strength, Batgirl is softer in shapes and appears more elastic, rather lacking the lean muscular figures of the other characters. Due to her reliance on gadgets such as a grappling hook, it is understandable that her body needs to be petite and easily portable - imitating the swiftness of a bat. Her personality is also the quirkier of the three, verging on whacky, her large eyes give the impression of innocence as well as a more vacant expression seen in off-beat characters.

Figure 16 Screenshot of episode 'Yankee Doodle Daffy' (1943)

Batgirl's unhinged personality matches her body's curved pear shape making her appear light on her feet. A similar shape can be seen in a comparable character Daffy Duck in Figure 16, which is a screenshot of the energetic character bouncing around the frame. Like Daffy, Batgirl's round eyes, long neck and petit body add to her personality. The tear drop shape of both characters lends itself to their flexibility and capability of interacting in a zany cartoon manner. Judging by the design itself, we can deduce that Batgirl is the more comedic of the trio which gives an opportunity to look at the character in terms of comedic personality styles. Because the series was limited in both time and episodes, much of the personality had to be represented in the design elements, so it would not be a surprise to draw upon such classic shapes such as Daffy Duck to add to the elements of personality animation.

The zaniness of this character is a recurring theme in Faust's shows. It would seem that this sort of combination of malleable and unreliability in a cartoon is a particular favourite for Faust to experiment with, especially in a female character. Often a personality type reserved

for male characters, perhaps judging by how male creators felt about women and comedy, female characters as unhinged cartoons would be too ‘unfeminine’. However, with this pattern becoming visible, it would be a particularly important aspect to isolate as it is safe to say that characters that serve these ‘loony’ comedic roles are a ‘Faust intent’.

Figure 17 Super Best Friends Forever: Supergirl sketches by Lauren Faust (2012)

The brute strength that the character Supergirl possesses is not only represented through her actions but also through her physique. As in Superman’s body, Supergirl is muscular but in her instance, it is merged with the curves of a feminine figure. As can be seen in the sketches in Figure 17 and Figure 13, Supergirl’s defined abdominals can be seen in a similar fashion to how Superman is often depicted. Faust explains her inspiration for this character by saying, ‘When I was designing Supergirl, I was thinking of the girls in my high school who played field hockey. Their uniforms incorporated these short skirts, but their legs were all muscle!’ (Faust) Supergirl’s physique is offering the ability to both appear feminine and represent the physical affects that being a superhero has on the visual body.

The three female characters above represent different personalities, and the designs represent how the female body is able to transform in different ways to represent the multiple aspects of that character. They do not exist to be othered because they do not partake in a male centred show, thus even a feminised body is only a part of the many layers that make them and not an all-encompassing identity. As Haraway suggests, there is no 'state of being female' (Haraway 16), female is as multifaceted as the male gender. To recognise that the issue with female characters is not feminisation but the continued omitting of other identities, and controlling how 'female' is represented, the more opportunity creatives can give female identity.

Although Faust was not able to see her project *Super Best Friends Forever* become a fully developed show, the studio Warner Bros. Animation offered her an opportunity to use the concepts in a reboot of their web series that launched in 2015 called *DC Super Hero Girls*. Faust's reboot, of the same name, was aired in 2019 and was developed as an animated television series that launched onto the streaming service Netflix. Faust was given the occasion to redesign and develop the characters in the series as well as the central narrative plot. This gives the opportunity to look at the two shows in a comparative study as both use the cut-out animation technique but were developed for different streaming medias.

This, along with *Friendship is Magic*, is the second series that Faust has rebooted. In the article written by Kiel Phegley, Faust discusses her process, *How Lauren Faust & DC Super Hero Girls Mix Real Angst with Super Adventure* (2019), she states that the writing and storyboard process for this show had come very naturally due to the story crew being primarily women who were able to relate to the characters and draw from their own experience (Phegley). The change in plot line was important to Faust in that she wanted to emphasise the teenage aspect of these heroes. In the reboot, the characters go to a normal high school and with regular students around their age, in this the characters are required to hide their identity when they are

not being heroes. This provides a complex storyline where the characters have to follow the secret identity regulations while still enduring the complicated world of being a teenager, which the audience will be able to relate to. Whereas the original web series took place in a 'superhero' school, similar to the X-Men series, where every student and teacher all have a specific ability. This change in narrative required Faust to reimagine each character's development (Phegley).

Faust's decision was to use the female teenager experience as a central role in the series. This could be compared to Craig McCracken's *The Powerpuff Girls* in that he wanted them to be 'kids first', Faust was interested in having these characters as teenagers first. In the article *Teen Girls to the Rescue: Lauren Faust Powers Up 'DC Super Hero Girls'*, Faust states that her intention derived from, 'Most superhero shows about teenagers usually focus on the superhero stuff… and then they add a teenager spin on it. We'll start with the teenage story and add the superhero spin on it' (McClean). Faust's priority was to elevate empathy towards her character and provide a recognisable aspect for viewers to be able to project their own experiences onto them.

Figure 18 Still from DC Super Hero Girl Episode 1-4 Season 1 Sweet Justice (2019)

The integration of humour and comedy matching the character's personality has been an integral part in Lauren Faust's characters. The visual jokes and character-based comedy can be seen in all of her productions including *DC Super Hero Girls*. Batgirl in both this reboot and *Super Best Friends Forever* plays on the quirky energetic character. However, in comparison to the DC Shorts, Batgirl is much more subdued in this version, sharing a large portion of wackiness with another character. Harley Quinn, who is both the nemeses and best friend of Batgirl in this series, Faust writes the following, '… when Harley Quinn comes around, we almost treat her like being a cartoon character is her superpower' (McLean). This personality trait is perhaps most reminiscent of the Loony Tunes characters, where the more aware they are of the cartoon they live in, the more ridiculous they may get.

Barbara Gordon and Harleen Quinzel, otherwise known as Harley Quinn, are unsuspecting friends in this version of the universe, not knowing each other's secret identity. Although Batgirl compared to her super friends is the wackiest, when paired with wacky Harley Quinn, their personalities are still distinctive from each other. This shows us that despite having two highly comedic and madcap characters, that when coupled together in an episode we are able to differentiate between the characters by the use of personality animation.

In the episode *#Frenemies* (2019) after getting upset at her friends, Batgirl tries to storm off by climbing up a slide but keeps slipping back down. Batgirl's comedy skits are more reactive to her environments. In the episode short *#Batchatcher* (2019) Batgirl sees a bat-signal in her room, thinking that Batman is calling to her to be a sidekick instead of Robin, she excitedly says, 'I'll prove to him that I'm a better side-kick than Robin. I'm awesome, like a bat, instead of some lame bird. I'm not afraid of anything' (#Batchatcher 2019). This line is directly followed to Batgirl having to eat her words when she realises that it is not a bat signal after all, but an actual bat on her window casting a shadow. After she panics, this prompts a series of slapstick gags where she tries to chase the bat out her window.

In the episode *#GothamCon* (2019), Gordon and Quinzel being long-time friends, organise to go to the 'Annual Convention of Gotham City Enthusiasts' together where Barbara Gordon gets mercilessly ridiculed by Batman's sidekick, Robin. This angers Harleen and excuses herself to Barbara, she marches out of the hall shoving a couple of people out the way (one cosplaying as Batman), as the now fallen people help each other back up, the doors slam back open smashing the two people completely out the frame this time and revealing Harley Quinn with her oversized mallet. Her first appearance as part of the Metropolis villain group in the episode *#Frenemies Part 2* (2019) she hits herself over the head purposefully creating the traditional cartoon circling birds over her head. Her gags and comedic scenes are a great deal more chaotic than Batgirl's, being more of a catalyst and entropy to the environment.

By looking at Paul Wells' six performances of successful personality animation, we are able to cross-reference the following three points in relation to these two characters:

- Physical traits and behavioural mannerisms common to, and recognised by, the audience, which remain largely consistent to the character. (Wells 129)
- The creation of a particular physical rhythm for the character which expressed a specific attitude or purpose.
- The direct expression of motivation in the character and the immediate execution of the narrational action which achieves the objective signified.

Although both characters are the most 'cartoonified' of the series, the way they exist in their world and interact with it are on two separate sides of the spectrum. Batgirl who is more 'chaotic good' in her mannerisms and the decisions she makes to achieve her goals through good intentions that seem to go wrong. Batgirl plays on naivety and a lack of self-awareness that often drives the clumsiness of her failed attempts which can be seen in many of her episodes. Harley Quinn on the other hand, plays on the theme chaotic evil, while still

maintaining an endearing and relatable loyalty to her best friend. Her good intentions are not sabotaged by clumsiness, as is in Batgirl's case, but rather her villainous personality. Her motivations are driven by loyalty, which is a common theme in her character within this series, in achieving this she chooses chaos and destruction.

By setting formulaic principles that the two characters abide to, Faust plays on the cartoonish physics of the characters but still stays in the perimeters of their own capabilities. Thus, their comedy types do not blend into one another but rather we see the comedic duos played against each other's personalities. The audience stays interested to see how such cartoonish female characters interact with one another, this coupled with the audience knowing that their secret identities are in fact enemies, creates a complex layering of identities that offers countless comedic sprints. As mentioned previously, these styles of chaotic comedic characters are a recurring theme in Faust's shows that I will be continuing in exploring in the following character analysis.

Chapter 4: My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic

An overview of the show followed by in-depth character analysis

Lauren Faust began development of the show in 2008 with the pilot episode only airing in October 2010. Faust was offered the position by Lisa Licht during a pitch for one of her own personal projects, a micro-series pop opera called *Milky Way and the Galaxy Girls*. This was an attempt to move away from animation and attempt at creating a toy line. This was due to having spent years trying to develop television shows aimed at girls and not being able to lift any of her projects off paper, Faust explained, 'I even left animation for a while and tried to work in toys because no one's going to tell me girls don't like dolls' (Nick Animation Podcast). Although Faust's personal project was not accepted, she was offered to revive and develop a *My Little Pony* animated series reboot. Lisa Licht was currently searching for a creative to take on the project and lend their own interpretation to the show, the creative freedom that was being offered is what interested Faust most (Tekaramity). Ultimately, she believed that Hasbro would not go through with development of the show, with what she had previously experienced in her career with projects centred around female characters. During the concept development for the show Lauren Faust personally produced the 'pitch bible'[14] and character designs (Tekaramity). When Hasbro and the producers accepted the show to go into production, Faust was able to handpick the writers that she would be working alongside with.

A series of this scale required a full team of creatives that constantly lend their own ideas and voices. This, unlike the DC Nations shorts that Faust produced, especially needed a team of writers It is necessary to recognise this, as the case study focuses on Lauren Faust and

[14] A pitch bible is a collection of character concepts, story premises and environments. This gives producers the opportunity to get an overall feel on how the television show will eventually look once in production.

her process, the aim is not to analyse the series as a whole but pin point her influence on characters in it. Following Faust's trajectory in the previous series she has worked on and developed, we are able to make certain assumptions into what may be claimed as a 'Faust intent'. But to approach the character analysis, I will first be looking into how Faust collaborated with her team.

When pre-production was underway, Faust had already finalised the concepts for the show, this included the characters' personalities, and designs. This along with the main locations, several episode premises and three scripts, were ready to go into production (Tekaramity). This already permits us to treat any of the character's actions and mannerisms that pertain to their personality as a point for analysis.

Lauren Faust and Rob Renzetti[15] wrote the story premises of each episode, once the basic script had gone through the approval stage, they were then assigned to a specific writer that best suited the theme of the episode. Faust, Renzetti and the specific writer would then spend a day looking over the episode and finalising the script (Tekaramity). On an Equestria Panel in Los Angeles, Faust was interviewed by a fellow writer on the show, M.A. Larson. In one of the questions, Larson asks Faust about her strategy as a showrunner and how she treated the writing process with the other creatives:

> … I had to give structure and I had to give direction. At the same time, I believe that artists need space, they need space to breathe and they need space to think… So, I like to give direction like, I want you to make the character talk to each other here. So that at the end of the scene the audience knows this bit of information. How you give that

[15] Rob Renzetti was the story editor during seasons one and two on *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*

> bit of information is up to you [be]cause you're a creative person and you're an artist and I trust you and I want you to do this work. (Equestria LA 2015)

This process allowed the writers to add onto the characters' personalities over and above what Lauren Faust had already developed. This gives the characters themselves room to breathe and not be restricted by only one writer's restricted perception of identity. This especially important when faced with challenges in the constrictions implemented by the broadcasting industry. A challenge herself and the writing team encountered was to meet the needs of their perceived target audience, and to keep an exciting adventure style plot without it being too frightening for young children. Faust explains:

> We had EI (Educational and Informational) standards to adhere to, and character behavior [*sic*] that was considered OK in shows I'd worked on previously was suddenly considered "inappropriate for children" in My Little Pony… It was tough to find humor [*sic*] and create character conflict within these very constricting boundaries. (Tekaramity)

Faust intended in keeping to the theme of friendships and loyalty that the original *My Little Pony* shows focused on, while adding in the adventure stories and character depth that she remembered enjoying in boy's television shows. She explains, '… it was always my intention to have the show partially "adventure stories" and partially "relationship stories", as I called them in my initial pitch bible' (Tekaramity). She was interested in looking at the relationship dynamics between characters and could become lessons on morals in the episode. In her opinion the way that characters did not get along when put into certain situations, made for a compelling and character driven story (Equestria LA 2015). In order to achieve these relationship dynamics Faust had to utterly understand her characters. Their behavioural mannerisms and the way they went out to reach a specific goal had to live within the perimeters

of their personality, in order for the audience to both empathise with them and expect certain outcomes from them.

Lauren Faust left the show at the end of the second season. On season one, Faust was involved in every aspect of each episode. Her role as showrunner spread into decisions on musical scores, storyboarding, story conception and design. However, by the second season her involvement had been changed to 'consulting producer'. In the first half of the season she saw through scripts for the episode, and by the second half her involvement was reduced to aiding in concepts and attending story meetings. Her part on the show had ended in April 2011 and she is no longer involved in any sections in the series (Faust).

I will be using this as a limitation for the analysis by primarily referencing season one of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic.* This is due to the reduced responsibility that Lauren Faust had on the series after the first season and the risk of analysing episodes that had little involvement from her. Faust states the following on her blog post, 'When Season 2 begins, you will see my credit changed from Executive Producer to Consulting Producer. My involvement in Season 2 ultimately does not reach far beyond story conception and scripts' (Faust). In the first season, there is more certainty of her influence due to the sheer amount of development she took lead on before the show was greenlit, this and her role as a showrunner during the production involved all aspects of developing an episode. This includes story and script conception, character designs, giving direction on voice actors, songs, and animation. All the listed roles provide a vast amount of material in which to drive the character analysis that we can be sure involved Faust. There are no clear sources indicating which episodes in Season 2 had Faust's entire participation. Therefore, it is in the interest of keeping the analysis exempt from assumptions and focused on Faust's particular contribution that has led me to limit the analysis to season one. Any reference to episodes beyond season one is purely for a comparative study and not as an analysis of Faust's role on the series.

Before beginning the individual character analysis, I will be giving an overview of the animation process, character designs and a look into each character's role in the series. In a review Mike Pinsky writes, 'These characters all have enough personality to sustain solo outings throughout the run of the show' (Pinsky). A similar sentiment was said by DMX producers on *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, 'Truthfully, each character has enough potential for their own series' (Begin 47).

In an interview with Jim Miller[16] in the book *My Little Pony: The Art of Equestria* (2015), he explains how they used each character's innate personality traits to guide animation styles and expressions. Because each Pony had an identical base shape, their personality uniqueness was required to come out not only in colours, props, and 'cutie marks' but also in physical actions and mannerisms. He explains that:

> There are certainly characters that would make different expressions, like you might do something with Pinkie Pie that you would never do with Applejack or Twilight or Rarity. So, we don't have something that's specific for just one character, but we will avoid certain expressions if it goes outside their personality. (Begin 47)

[16] Co-director and storyboard artist for *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*

Figure 19 Screenshot from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 1 Season 1 (2011)

Referring to Figure 19, it illustrates how each pony is based off of an identical body shape design, this is a common feature in what's known as 'cut-out' animation or in this case, Adobe Flash animation. This technique is similar to the technique of 'paper dolls', where each movable object/limb sits on a pivot point. The animator then moves the desired objects to create the notion of animated movement. This, rather than drawing each frame separately, is a time-saving technique used in animation especially in television shows. Lauren Faust was at first interested in giving each character a more unique design to match their personalities but then made the decision to keep the same silhouette as it would be a challenge for the production team to keep to a tight schedule (Tekaramity). She rather opted in using their manes, cutie marks and colours to visually depict their unique identities.

During the process of pitching the characters to Hasbro, Lauren Faust created test animations of each character doing a run cycle. Due to each character having the same body she wanted to make sure that their personalities came out in other ways. For this test run cycle, Faust explained that, 'They are all doing the same thing, but they are doing it in a way that expresses their personality and shows you who they are' (PonyCon). By understanding how a

certain personality will behave in a simple activity, she was able to reiterate who that character is by using personality animation.

Faust believes that design choices need to be intentional, in that the visual appearance of the character has to give visual clues to who they are. On this subject, she says the following: '… I want to be able to look at that design and be able to take a pretty good guess as to who that is and what their personality is. I want to see who they are in the design just as much as I want it to be a great design to look at… I want information' (PonyCon 2016). This includes colour variants, manes, eye shapes and, perhaps the most recognizable aspects of the *My Little Pony* franchise, their cutie marks. These symbols that can be found on their flanks, were first developed by Hasbro to heighten the collectability of the toy by providing the similarly designed ponies with a unique feature that represented their identities (The Toys That Made Us).

There are two important aspects in the *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* series that sets itself apart from its original predecessor show. As previously discussed, the series uses the digital cut-out animation technique whilst the original show was still using the traditional process of hand-drawn cel animation. Secondly, *Friendship is Magic* exclusively anthropomorphic characters, be it mythological creatures or real world animals. This is unlike the original series which did in fact contain human characters who, despite Hasbro's 'golden rules'[17], could also ride the ponies. The creators at the time believed that adding human characters would bring in a narrative to the show and heighten empathy in the viewer (The Toys That Made Us).

[17] The toy franchise creators had created a set of 'golden rules' which they would keep to when designing the playsets and characters. One of these was to never treat a pony like a horse followed with never letting a person ride a pony. They believed that the pony is like a little girl, it is the character (The Toys That Made Us).

Figure 20 Altered image revealing bases of the Mane Six Ponies

However, this is not necessarily correct, Furniss writes that using anthropomorphic characters has been a preference in animated productions because it provides a neutral identity and avoids any gender or race challenges (Furniss 238). This 'neutral identity' is reinstated by the use of cut-out animation where each of the main characters are 'stencilled' as one design. By using a singular shape and limiting the variation in the characters, results in a generality of the design. This can be clearly seen in the Figure 20, where the manes and tails have been removed revealing the base shapes of each pony. Apart from the 'race' variations (i.e. earth, unicorn, and Pegasus ponies), eye variations and colour, the ponies could all be the same character. For this I refer to Scott McCloud's theory of 'amplification through simplification' (McCloud 30) where stripping a character to its bare meaning magnifies the meaning evading any unnecessary information. Unlike *The Powerpuff Girls*, *DC Super Hero Girls* and *Superhero Best Friends Forever* which visually embodies specific identities, *Friendship is Magic* on the other hand, uses the simplification of the ponies so that they become a universal vessel for the viewer to embody. McCloud writes, 'The cartoon is a vacuum into which our

identity and awareness are pulled… An empty shell that we inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm. We don't just observe the cartoon, we become it!' (McCloud 36). Humans have the innate ability to recognise specific significations on characters and attach their own assumptions to them. So, the more detail is added to an image the more the viewer sees someone else and not themselves. However, this is in no way to say there is a disadvantage to a series that chooses to represent specific identities, especially of under-represented groups. But in the instance of my research, I am interested in seeing how the limitation of recognisable identities in *Friendship is Magic* might have resulted in its success to reaching such a wide audience.

Chuck Jones believed that it was easier to humanize animals than it was to humanize people. He felt that we are both subconsciously and consciously judgmental of other people on how they differ or relate to ourselves (Jones 124). Jones points out that stereotypes were a difficult concept to let go of, not from the animator's point of view but rather from the audience. Similar to Furniss' writings, Jones chose anthropomorphism to avoid issues that came with animating people, he wrote, 'It is in order to avoid these stereotypes that animators… and countless other writers turn to animals. People look at rabbits or ducks or bears as a class rather than individuals' (Jones 125). If Jones is correct in saying this, depicting human character limits the amount of abstraction the creator can use. And, as McCloud states in his theory, revealing too much in the visual design of the character results in the viewer becoming too aware of *who* the messenger is to receive the message (McCloud 37).

With the above discussion in mind, we can deduce that the intention of the simplification of the ponies as well as exclusively using anthropomorphic characters has benefited the series from creating a separation between the characters and the viewer. Undeniably, the characters do have variations in appearance, and these details are extensions of the character and are visual cues to their identities. Despite this, the simplification of the

characters does not allow us to deduce the character completely, and so Lauren Faust has had to use all the tools available to her in order to flesh out their personalities. Hence, the extent of the analyses will be looking at how personality animation has been used to set the characters apart from one another and not specifically their visual appearance.

In the character analysis I have chosen to analyse two characters who are part of the 'Mane Six[vii]', as the group is named. The reason for doing this is that these two characters contain character elements that I was, personally, interested in analysing in conjunction to the literative and theoretical work I have chosen. These two characters also depict two overtly 'feminised' character tropes, the one embodying a more 'mature' femininity whilst the other is identified by a younger girl adapted feminization. The reason for not selecting the main character, Twilight Sparkle, for the analysis is that *Friendship is Magic* uses secondary characters as a way to isolate specific themes that pertain to their personality and then use 'slice-of-life' character episodes to bring in morals specifically directed to certain tropes. While the main character stands as more of a window to the daily life in Equestria, which the viewer is able to experience the world through. In an article by Geoffrey Harris titled *The Importance of Character in TV Writing* (2010) he writes the following, 'In TV, characters – not just the main character – are vitally important… The core characters of a TV show attract viewers' (Harris 2010). It is worth looking beyond the main character to isolate certain themes that are introduced to us through secondary characters.

4.1 Rarity – My Fair Lady

Rarity is a unicorn pony, one of the main six ponies in the show. As an overview of the character, Rarity's element of harmony is *generosity* given to her in the first episode of season one. In Lauren Faust's original pitch bible, she had planned for Rarity's element to be *inspiration;* but it was felt that the concept would be too complicated for children to understand (Bronycon 2012). The idea of giving Rarity the element of 'generosity' is to supposedly play against the perceived stereotype of the 'selfish-debutante' character. Rather than Rarity falling into the pigeonhole normally associated with her character, she is created to challenge them, as can be seen in episode one when she cuts off her tail to help a sea serpent. In *Friendship is Magic,* Rarity owns her own shop called *Carousel Boutique* where she works as both the fashion designer and seamstress.

Lauren Faust was involved in selecting the voice actors for each of the main characters. In this analysis, I will be discussing how the voice actors lend their voices in unique ways that add to the ponies' personalities. Rarity has a particular dialect, often mistaken for a British accent of high-society but is in fact a transatlantic accent[18]. When Faust was asked who her vision was for Rarity, she responded in saying that Audrey Hepburn was the biggest inspiration for her (Tekaramity). Audrey Hepburn was a widely popular actress still recognised today as an icon of classic Hollywood cinema. Often portrayed as the 'ideal woman' for society to strive to either emulate or possess. In the following analysis I hope to understand how Rarity does emulate the concept of old Hollywood elegance and in what ways she might challenge the trope.

[18] The transatlantic accent was primarily used in old Hollywood cinema and theatre. It combines together 'upper class' American and British English. (The Atlantic)

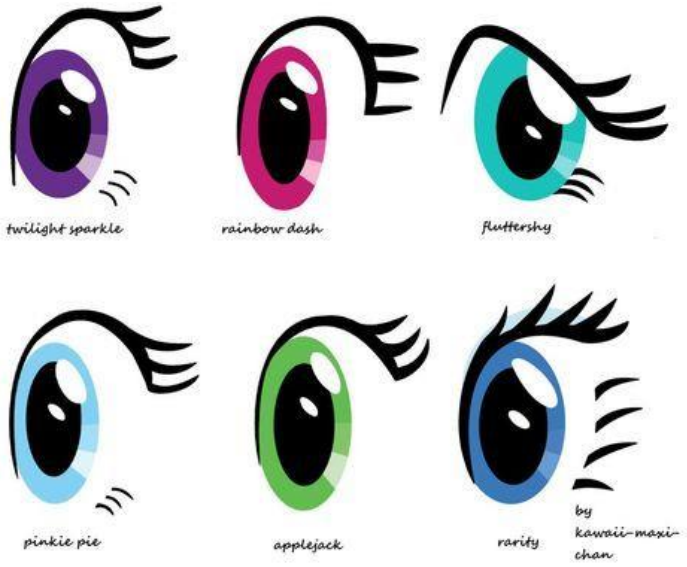

Figure 21 Mane Six Pony eye shapes

Figure 22 Tex Avery Screwball Classics Vol.1: Red Hot Riding Hood (1943)

Holding the most complicated of the mane and tail designs, Rarity's is in a corkscrew shape. The inspiration of the design was taken from the character Margaret Wade in the comic strip *Dennis the Menace* (1951), who would always wear her hair in ringlets as an extension of her identity (PonyCon 2016). The intricate twirl is also a nod to Regency era hairstyles that would need daily (and evening) care to maintain. With just the act of looking at her mane and tail the viewer is shown that Rarity takes time on her appearance. Another aspect of the pony designs that differ are their eye shapes, Figure 21 depicts the isolated eye designs for each character. Faust has spoken about how she used each eye shape to represent the ponies'

personalities. For instance, Rainbow Dash's eyes are rounded like Pinkie Pie's, but her eyelashes are straight symbolising her love for speed (PonyCon 2016). Rarity's eye shape is unique to her design where the upper lid curves at an upward angle[19], while the shy pony Fluttershy's upper lid curves downward. The light blue strip above Rarity's upper lid represents facial make-up which is also unique to her character and gives the impression of a heavy-lidded eye. This illusion is a design reminiscent of Tex Avery's character 'Red' (Figure 22) and also the character Jessica Rabbit in Touchstone Picture's film *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988). This design component is commonly depicted to signify an attractive female character who is frequently used as a distraction or instigator to the protagonist's self-inflicted slapstick gags.

Figure 23 Screenshot from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 1 Season 1 (2011)

Despite these unique visual traits, Rarity still resembles her fellow ponies due to replicated base shape as can be seen in Figure 20. Faust wanted to still signify to the audience that she was in fact exceptionally beautiful, even if the audience could not visually decipher this. In attempt to send out this message to the viewer, Faust used Rarity's opening scene to already define the fact that she stood out in her own world. In *Friendship is Magic Part 1*, Twilight Sparkle's assistant, Spike, dreamily remarks her beauty to an unbeknownst Rarity

[19] Tv Tropes lists this type of eye as *Tsurime Eyes* often seen in anime female characters who are strong-willed female characters. *Tareme Eyes* are the opposite, where the eyes droop on the outer edges. (Tv Tropes)

(refer to Figure 23). Faust uses the male gaze as an opening introduction to Rarity to signify to us that she is unique amongst the other Mane Six ponies, despite our own eyes telling us otherwise. The gaze is a common theme with this particular character, which will be addressed in more detail further along. Interestingly, Faust did not intend for Spike's crush to become an actual plot device in the rest of the series, she explains, 'I was never, ever, ever intending on Spike having a crush on Rarity. But when I was writing the pilot, I got to the introduction scene of Rarity and I knew it was important that the audience understood that Rarity was beautiful' (PonyCon 2016). As the infatuation continues, there is another nod to Tex Avery's signature comedy flair. In the episode *Green Isn't Your Color* (2011), Rarity is jumping up and down in excitement, unbeknownst to her with each hop she makes she steps on Spike's tail. Spike, who is well under Rarity's charm, does not notice the pain and stares at her dreamily. In conclusion, pain, under the spell of cartoonified-love, is anesthetized.

Faust has previously mentioned that, 'I'm actually very proud of Rarity because I know girls like that and they're nice and they deserve to be treated like nice people and not just stereotypically assumed to be snobs' (Tekaramity). With this introductory scene of Rarity, it is easy to assume that the character is treading dangerously close to niches that allude to this stereotypically feminised character type who often takes on the role of a villain or bully. Faust has also come out to say how she does not believe tropes too be bad, she feels that they are a familiarity and a language that audiences enjoy watching. What she would rather attempt, is to find ways to tell a different story with those tropes (PonyCon 2016). With analysing further episodes that involve Rarity, I hope to see whether she does transcend these stereotypes rather than emulating them. If it is possible to have these characteristics as an identity and not as a misrepresentation of an entire gender.

It is worth looking at how Rarity can emulate feminized tropes similar to Minnie Mouse and Jessica Rabbit, and still not be seen as that is all she is. Or that every female character

should emulate the same essence to be recognised as female. Especially in a series that does not require to set a female character apart when that gender is the default gender. In this instance male characters are the ones who need to be 'othered', then why is it necessary to have a character such as Rarity who is so highly feminised, in an almost stereotypical way? In the analysis I will be exploring the necessity of having an 'ideal female character' that is innately feminine in both literal and figurative notions.

In reference to Furniss' previously mentioned method for analysing representation on page 19, it is essential to look at how and why this character was created. What were the intentions of the creator, Furniss asks, 'For whom was the product made, in what year and historical context?' (Furniss 231). Hasbro were the original producers of the toy line *My Little Pony* and their intention with the 2011 reboot was to produce a show alongside the toys they wanted to release. So, it is important to note that although Faust was given creative freedom for creating the concept bible and the series, often she had to find ways to implement restrictions and additions from the executives. As Faust has explained, 'These decisions were not entirely up to me. It has been a challenge to balance my personal ideals with my bosses' needs for toy sales and good ratings… so when we were asked to portray a certain toy or playset, my team and I work to put it in a place that makes sense with the story' (Faust).

There was a danger of toy specifications influencing the character itself, especially Rarity who is the most feminised character. Faust was aware that this character would need special care in order for her to not just be a 'typical shallow debutante' stereotype (Faust). If a particular playset was requested to be added, Faust worked with her team to find a way to incorporate it as a way to add to the story. When there was a specification for fashion in the toy designs, Faust incorporated it into Rarity's character, 'There is also a need to incorporate fashion play into the show, but only one character is interested in it and she is not a trend follower but a designer who sells her own creations from her own store. We portray her not as a shopaholic

but as an artist' (Faust). This is already an instance where having an innately female character is important to the series, it allowed Rarity to be used as a spokesperson to represent that anything innately feminine is not problematic. Although executives requested a component to be added in, Faust inserted the request as an intentional feature to the character and not just as a toy line playset. This also pragmatizes 'feminine' interests, essentially giving them value in the world rather than being *little, feminine ideas*. Rarity is part of a working-class community that both adds value to the town and as a character for the audience to root for.

An aspect that I am particularly interested in is how female characters are treated in a comedic scene, especially such a feminised character. From what we have understood through Furniss' book is that previously female characters were not preferred for humour, especially physical. This was due to women, already being perceived as the 'fairer sex', could not then reveal personal weakness because that was already part of their nature (Furniss 238). Walt Disney also referenced the fundamentals of comedy, he believed that 'the personality of the victim of a gag determines just how funny the whole incident will be' (Wells 130). It was a given that men with egos could be comical when their ego was challenged, or that burly men could slip on a banana peel and the audience would laugh. Daffy Duck would have his ego confronted, Wile.E Coyote would have his obsessive determination implode. But women only had one identity and that is that they were the 'fairer sex', anything that would challenge that, would just be a cruelty to an already weak character. There was nothing to challenge or test when the only identity trait was 'female', neither being negative nor positive. However, these are past ideals of the animation industry and female characters have indeed stepped into the comedic limelight. In an analysis of specific episodes that showcase Rarity's comedic side, I hope to better understand how and why a character like Rarity, that emulates the 'fairer sex' through the use of classic Hollywood and overtly conventional feminine principles, may be funny.

4.1.1 Comedy as the 'Fairer Sex'

In a panel Faust discusses how, by allowing writers to find areas of the characters that she herself had not discovered yet, Rarity was able to flourish as a cartoon character. Faust says, 'I never thought Rarity was going to be all that funny, but Tabitha[20] brought a humour to that character that inspired all of our writing… and she ended up being one of our funniest characters' (PonyCon 2016). Naturally, Faust directed her team when something fell outside of the character's personality, but she openly supported collaboration which allowed for the characters to be fleshed out. To be able to do this, Faust needed to understand her characters in every aspect. In her own words she says, 'When I create characters, they exist for me, they are real people… I knew who she was and creating her was more about making sure everything reflected what I, not even what I had in my head, but what I felt in my gut… I knew she needed to exist in a certain way' (Earthstar 2015). For a character like Rarity to be funny intentionally, needs to fit within her personality type. For this, I will also be looking at Paul Wells' suggested six performances for personality animation on page 29, in conjunction to Rarity's scenes. This will be to analyse whether her character stays to a formula pertaining to her personality, so the choices made always feel intentional and not out of character. I will be specifically looking at these three formulaic points:

- Physical traits and behavioural mannerisms common to, and recognised by, the audience, which remain largely consistent to the character.
- Facial gestures which obviously signified particular thought processes, emotions, and reactions experienced by the character.

[20] Tabitha St. Germain is the voice actress for Rarity.

- The overall treatment of the character as if it were an actor playing a role. (Wells 129)

In the episode, *Suited for Success* (2011), Rarity decides to make dresses for her friends for the upcoming gala. To appease her friends' own ideas and preferences, Rarity ignores her own better judgement and skill to create a collection of dresses that are obviously rejected by a top fashion designer, calling them 'amateur'. This drives Rarity into a self-deprecating and dramatic burnout, believing that her career is ruined. What I would like to analyse in this episode, is specifically her reaction when she feels all is lost. In this scenario, Rarity does not only have personal weakness that is revealed but is also closely related to her own personality trait 'generosity'. This challenge initiates a dramatization reminiscent of the over-the-top Hollywood films, in where the main lead is faced with self-initiated doom.

After embarrassing herself, Rarity locks herself in her room crying noticeably loud, as can be heard through the door. No longer the well-kept pony, her mane is dishevelled, wearing a pink robe with fur collar and slippers. Despite her attempt at looking pitiful, the whole scene seems rehearsed and still glamorous. A nod at old Hollywood films where actresses would dramatically act out tearful scenes whilst still looking well put together. Rarity says the line 'I want to be alone' both in *Suited For Success* and *Green Isn't Your Color* when she is met with disappointment over her career. The line is not random but adopted from the Hollywood actress Greta Garbo who popularised the line in the movie *Grande Hotel* (1932). Rarity even adopts the actress' Swedish accent when she says it, reiterating her flair for a dramatic break down that is on the cusp of theatrical. For this, I refer to Wells' points on personality animation, 'Physical traits and behavioural mannerisms common to, and recognised by, the audience, which remain largely consistent to the character (Wells 129). This humorous over-dramatization is channelling old Hollywood's damsels in distress, even Rarity's collapse on her bed is reminiscent of Hepburn's performance in the film *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961). What is vital in Rarity's comedy is persistence and intention. The more consecutive these

mannerisms are, the more they are integrated in her personality and ultimately recognised in the character by the audience. In the episode *Lesson Zero* (2011), Rarity believes she has lost her 'diamond encrusted purple ribbon' which she then magically summons a couch for herself so that she may collapse on, repeating the action once more later on in the episode. It is as simple as the audience knowing that Chuck Jones' character Sylvester the Cat will always be in pursuit of Tweety Bird. In any given instance for Rarity to emulate classic cinema, she will indeed take the opportunity.

What validities Rarity's personality is that there is an awareness for her eccentricities in the show. Her identity is not seen as a 'norm' as it would in a male-led series, but rather as one layer of the many identities presented. Her personality is often paired up as a contrast to the other characters or to provide conflict between opposing characters[21]. The series is not attempting to imagine a reality where the identities we are familiar with do not exist, but rather they exist in a different narrative forcing us to look at them from a different perspective. As Lauren Faust has said, she does not disagree with tropes, because they offer a familiarity to the audience. The characters even register tropes themselves, after hearing an overly melodramatic sob through the door, the ponies have the following dialogue:

APPLEJACK.	Well we can't just leave Rarity like this.
PINKIE PIE.	She'll become a crazy cat lady.
TWILIGHT SPARKLES.	She only has one cat.
PINKIE PIE.	Give her time… (Suited for Success 2011)

[21] Rarity and Applejack have been added together to provide conflict in the plot due to their very opposite personalities which is often resolved as a moral of the story.

The trope ‘crazy cat lady’ does not escape this fantasy world, and clearly is a great concern to Pinkie Pie as she forewarns. Back inside the room, Rarity is reciting a monologue to her reflection in the mirror: ‘*Exile*… I guess technically I’ll have to move away, to live in exile. Where would I go? And what would I pack? Oh, it’s going to take me forever to do all that packing’ (Suited for Success 2011). It is in this self-awareness and recognition from the other characters that transcends the stereotypes that might threaten Rarity. The recognition of tropes from Rarity’s friends, her own dialogue and the contrast of different identities does not deny her femininity but validates it. The Mane Six’s reactions are that of concern and not mockery. Faust has been able to turn an intentionally feminised character as a specific identity that can exist as an individual and not umbrella a gender.

Stereotypes for women have often stemmed from male-led shows where the assumed gender was male. In order to ‘point out’ the only female character, they were often given stereotypical feminine personalities or visual signifiers to ‘other’ them from their male counterparts. In Rarity’s case, these tropes are not being represented for the sake of making her an ‘other’ amongst male-assumed characters. For this instance, I refer to the ‘Smurfette Principle’, referencing the discussed theory on page 43, a trope that originated from the television show *The Smurfs* (1981). This looks at how the character Smurfette was only used as an embodiment of the female gender amongst characters which had the assumed gender being male. In the show every character has a specific trait unique to them that also defines their role in this community, similar to the idea behind cutie-marks, i.e. Papa Smurf, Brainy Smurf etc. Smurfette’s only trait was that she was female, making it her only role in the community. This concept is also known as ‘androcentrism’ where the male gender is presumed while the female gender has to be shown (Conan). In *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* we have the opposite happening, the presumed gender is female while the male characters are the

ones with differing character designs in order to set them apart. The animation studio, DMX, wrote the following about the treatment of designs between male and female characters:

> We use pretty much the same body shape for all the ponies. The males were designed for Season 1, and they obviously have a little more of a rounded nose, [whereas] the females have more of a scooped, styled face with a button nose. Males tend to have shorter hair. The female shapes tend to have more roundness, and the males have beards sometimes. (Begin 37)

Similarly, all the Smurfs are given the same body shape and only Smurfette is given a slimmer body, blonde hair, eyelashes, and feminine clothing to signify a 'feminized Smurf'. To this we can refer to Beauvoir's notion that only the female gender is marked; the 'universal person' and all transcendent being is masculine (Butler 9). Certainly, in the instance of *The Smurfs*, we can say that the male characters are the 'all transcendent being' while the female character has to be marked in order for her to exist in this world. If not, then she is assumed male. However, in *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, the tables are turned in that all transcendent being is female. By the use of the 'same' body and only differing the male characters' visual appearance in order to 'other' them ultimately makes them the marked gender. If we look back at Rarity's personality, it can be said that what makes her personality type stereotypical is when it is used to 'other' the female gender amongst men. When her personality is contrasted, not against other female personalities, but against male identities that belittle the feminised tropes.

The importance of the representation of Rarity's personality type is to redefine the tropes that have been attached to stereotypical characters before her. The accidental popularity of the series has allowed for the previously criticised trope to be revisited in an all-female show. Wells writes: 'Almost consciously, animators, in being aware that they, and their works, are

marginalised and/or consigned to innocent, inappropriate or accidental audiences, use this apparently unguarded space to create films with surface pleasures and hidden depths' (Wells 6). Faust has used the medium to challenge stereotypes by letting them exist not in the presence of masculinity, but in the presence of femininity. Apart from the depths that Rarity's character is allowed to have during the season, she is also offered a centre stage as a comedic female character that does not use a sexualised body but her own personal weaknesses as humour.

4.1.2 Reversing the Gaze

In this section of Rarity's analysis, I will be looking at Nuria Enciso's *Turning the Gaze Around* discussed on page 60. To reiterate, Mulvey theorises that the mere presence of a female character in entertainment is an 'indispensable element of spectacle' (Enciso), that her presence on screen disrupts the narrative due to 'erotic contemplation' (Enciso). Our first introduction of Rarity may arguably be seen as an 'element of spectacle', especially due to the fact that Faust used the male gaze to direct us to her and define her attractiveness. On the other hand, Mulvey believes that the male character is never burdened with sexual objectification as the female body is. According to her, this is due to the male body not being as desirable leaving the male gender always in control (Enciso). Similarly, to how Enciso used the movie *Orlando* to illustrate how a female character may reverse the gaze, I hope to use the following episodes to demonstrate the same for Rarity.

We are first introduced to Rarity's dream of finding love in the episode *The Ticket Master* (2011). We discover that she has her sights on meeting the most eligible stallion in all of Canterlot and Princess Celestia's nephew, Prince Blueblood. Rarity goes into detail about how they will meet and eventually get married, despite his obliviousness to her existence. In

the season finale episode, *The Best Night Ever* (2011), the main six ponies are set to attend the 'The Grande Galloping Gala' where she will finally meet the prince. The episode begins by Twilight Sparkles being concerned at how they will travel to the gala. Rarity being the most aware of female bodies, refuses for Spike to enter the room they are changing in saying that they are all getting dressed. But Applejack points out that they do not normally wear clothes making her concern redundant. Rarity responds by saying, 'I'm sorry Spike, some of us do have standards' (The Best Night Ever 2011). Rarity is aware of the male gaze perhaps due to her also being the most beautiful of the ponies and is often accustomed the feeling a heterosexual gaze by the opposite gender.

Figure 24 Still from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 26 Season 1 The Best Night Ever (2011)

Figure 25 Still from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 26 Season 1 The Best Night Ever (2011)

Finally arriving at the Gala, Rarity spots the Prince as he is walking outside the hall. Mirroring Spike's initial reaction to first meeting Rarity, Rarity is now taken by Prince Blueblood and our first introduction to him is in fact, through Rarity's reaction. She stops dead in her tracks, jumping into the air with her hooves shaking slightly (refer to Figure 24 and Figure 25). A once self-controlled and 'ladylike' pony, Rarity is now the one acting as the Wolf in a Tex Avery gag. Fighting between her own morals and her desire for the stallion, Rarity tries to not to make her pursuit too obvious. After her inner turmoil, a very uncomposed Rarity sees him in the garden and says, 'I can't lose him, I can't. He's everything I ever imagined' (The Best Night Ever 2011).

Figure 26 Screenshot from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 1 Season 1 (2011)

Figure 27 Still from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 26 Season 1 The Best Night Ever (2011)

In the following sequence, Prince Blueblood has his back turned to the camera as we zoom into him (Figure 27). The voyeurism is reminiscent of Rarity's introductory scene in the first episode (Figure 26). Instead of Spike being the voyeur, in this scene we have Rarity's point of view. Enciso writes the following on a scene in *Orlando,* '… the point of view of the camera becomes an overhead, medium close-up of his face from Orlando's perspective. He is being watched and expresses himself in a way typically reserved for the objectified woman (Enciso). In the same instance, both shots in the above images illustrate an openness, from their closed eyes to their backs turned, both scenes of the characters are vulnerable to the objectification of the viewer.

Figure 28 Still from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 26 Season 1 The Best Night Ever (2011)

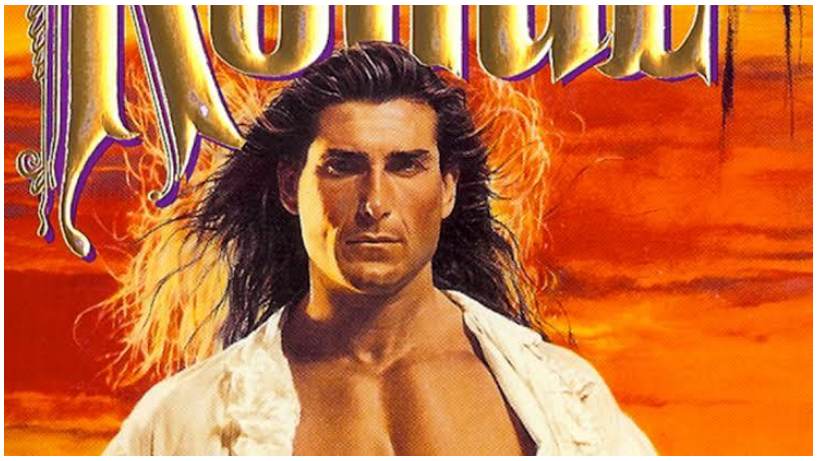

Figure 29 Article 'Let's Leave Fabio Out of It'. Image is cover of romance novel 'Rogue' (1994).

Our view is directed to a medium close up of Prince Blueblood as a dreamscape tune plays in the background. The Prince is framed by a hazy star filled vignette; he finally turns towards us now with a rose in his mouth with the now apparent wind blowing through his mane. His eyes are heavily lidded, and he raises his eyebrow provocatively at the camera. As the viewer, we are not too certain if this is indeed happening or if we are in Rarity's fantasy. The theatrical wind and set up of Prince Blueblood seem as if it is set up for a romance novel that Rarity finds herself in. The image in Figure 28 is evocative of a fictional character known as Fabio that became popularised as the cover model for mass-paperback romance novels (Figure 29). From the dark eyebrows; wind-swept blonde hair; blue eyes and high cheekbones,

it is safe to assume that the Prince is meant to emulate the stereotypical rugged male character that heroine falls for.

In the movie *My Fair Lady* (1964), Audrey Hepburn's character, Eliza Doolittle, goes through a character transformation. Starting as a female character who is not particularly 'cultivated', she then becomes a version of herself that could pass off as royalty. When we are introduced to Rarity, she is already this character that could pass off as a duchess. She emulates the high-class female character that recognises that having a male character in her dressing room is inappropriate. She craves the high-society life that a female character of her calibre feels she, deserves. Like the protagonist in Orlando, Rarity chooses to act upon her desire rather than suppressing it. She not only acts upon her desire, but she uses the camera to let us objectify a male character the same way that she was objectified in her introductory scene. This simple act of letting us see her fantasy takes back the power of the gaze, ultimately reversing it. As Enciso concludes that *Orlando* offers the female gaze to the audience, the same can be said for Rarity, a character who is meant to embody society's ultimate female role model, and this turns the fair lady into a not so passive character. Not only is Mulvey's notion that female characters can only be a spectacle is contradicted, but her theory that male character cannot be objectified is also challenged in this scene.

Rarity is an important character to use to re-represent the feminine archetype. They offer a different narrative to tropes we are accustomed to, by realising that they can exist in different scenarios and do not necessarily fit into one neat identity. A female character does not need to demote any inherently feminine concepts to be comedic or assertive. She does not need to fully emulate male traits in order to even have a gaze or a comedic punchline. Femininity is not an inherited 'personal weakness' or reason for passivity. Rarity is an instance where Haraway's belief of 'affinity not identity' may be applied, the feminine concept may exist as part of a character and not as an all-encompassing identity. For this I also turn to Sandra

Law's theory that femaleness is malleable to reiterate how femininity is still a performance (Furniss 241). In the episode *Best Night Ever*, Rarity is seen applying her own eyelashes onto her eye lids where she now has none. This also reveals to the viewer that even society's perception of the 'natural woman' is still a performance. Law writes, '… femininity, as it is traditionally represented, is something that can be put on and taken off at will' (Furniss 241). Rarity's persona that she chooses to exhibit is classic Hollywood glamour that people in society feel is the ideal 'woman' as Audrey Hepburn is often portrayed. When Lauren Faust was asked what she found was the most difficult part of writing, she answered that there is a difficulty in using derivative concepts that have been used often. However, she writes that, 'I don't think tropes are a bad thing, tropes speak to people and offer a familiarity that make people feel comfortable and are inviting to people… Tropes are good, but stereotypes are bad… You try to find a trope and you try to put a new spin on it' (PonyCon 2016).

Enciso writes the following, 'Women must be encouraged to use the mainstream to infiltrate their representation into society… We must not impose marginalization upon ourselves: the rest of society already does that for us' (Enciso). With this notion in mind, we can deduce that the achievement of Rarity is not just revealing that one can be feminine and have character depth, but that a character can keep their femininity unscathed whilst still performing roles inherently created for male characters.

In relation to Haraway's theory, 'Liberation rests on the construction of the consciousness, the imaginative apprehension, of oppression, and so of possibility' (Haraway 6). She believes that by seeking liberation from oppression, there needs to be a conscious decision to educate audiences on how they contribute to the problems seen in stereotypes of female characters. By the constant acceptance of what is the norm and the constant decisions made by creators to repeat these stereotypes in their own idleness and avoidance of having to de-familiarise an audience, is where identities are trapped in a constant loop of problematic

restrictions. This loop is reinforced by the constant creation of how a specific identity is being falsely represented and in turn, viewed. This is a want and need to feed the audience what have been countlessly represented, in a fear to disappoint them. Faust's set up of Rarity being the subject of a male gaze and then by the end of the season, reversing it in an exact mirror, challenges the viewer to revaluate their preconceived notions of how a 'fair lady' should act. The questions we can ask ourselves are, is Rarity's 'femaleness' ever removed to reveal a gaze or be comedic? Through the analysis above, I believe that the answer is no. Rarity throughout the season, has constantly repeated her feminised tropes whilst challenging the viewers familiarity of the character's female identity.

4.2 Pinkie Pie – A Pinkie Manifesto

Pinkie Pie is the embodiment of one of Lauren Faust's favourite tropes, the self-aware cartoon character. Pinkie is indestructible and unaffected by the physical conditions that challenge the other ponies, and so her character arc rather pivots between the awareness of a cartoon and a highly naive character personality. Similar to Chuck Jones' character, the Roadrunner, as the audience we come to expect that Pinkie is safe from anything potentially harming her. It is only with her final 'Pinkie-centred' episode that we are revealed otherwise, in which Pinkie is unaffected by physical dangers but is quite susceptible to emotional influences.

Figure 30 Still from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 14 Season 1 Suited for Success (2011)

Figure 31 Still from Betty Boop Collection (1933-1939)

Pinkie's cutie mark is a set of three balloons: two blue ones and a yellow one in the middle. As pony lore suggests, Pinkie is meant to become an extension of her cutie mark and element of harmony which is 'laughter'. By looking at her design we do get the impression of her extroverted nature, through her gravity defying mane and tail that seem to be filled with helium – Pinkie is indeed an embodiment of her 'light' and easily lovable personality. Her colour scheme is two solid shades of pink, the only pony to be sporting the colours often associated as 'girlish aesthetic'. Her wide rounded eyes are blue, adorned with childlike eyelashes reminiscent of Fleischer Studio's animated female and children (refer to Figure 31). Pinkie's wide smile and upward curving of her bottom eyelids are another nod to her child-like naivety (refer to Figure 30), a visual depiction often seen in the classic cartoons from the Silent Era of animation.

Lauren Faust has stated that she had to discuss the capabilities of each character to her story team, that was in order to keep a certain formulaic process that fit the personalities. For Pinkie's character in particular, Faust wanted her writers and animators to use the physics of cartoons to her advantage and especially for comedic effect. Pinkie had to of course live in the same world as the other ponies, but she had a certain innate talent in bending the rules of physics. Similar to the character Harley Quinn mentioned on page 86, Pinkie's superpower is that she is a cartoon. Faust explains, '… it was thought that Pinkie Pie would be irritating or off-putting... once everyone was finally comfortable that she wasn't annoying, we got to make her as zany as I had always envisioned her as the season went on' (Tekaramity). Pinkie was the connection to the cartoon world, bringing in the gags that made *The Loony Tunes* so memorable. Characters such as Pinkie Pie who appear to be indestructible mentally and physically, may come off as 'off-putting' as Faust states, which might be heightened due to the character being female. TV Tropes list this type of character as the 'Genki Girl' meaning

'energetic' in Japanese. The webpage states the following, '… a good way of telling whether a female character is *genki* or not is to see if her family and peers are exhausted, astonished, or even creeped out by her chronic outbursts of vitality' (TV Tropes). It could be said that Pinkie's element of harmony and overall personality poses a difficulty in giving her a character arc, which would need her to face a difficulty that challenges her. If her reaction to any bad situation, that would challenge any other pony, causes her to constantly laugh at or make light of – then what kind of negative encounter could test her character? If the show were a general comedy centred animated series, it would simply mean that Pinkie could exist just as a comedic outlet. But because the series is meant to represent morals and growth to a young audience, it is necessary for the character, even one so cartoonish, to go through a character arc. So, the challenge for Faust was to have a character that is so indestructible, face a circumstance that threatens Pinkie Pie's self and ultimately forces her to see her fault in order to grow.

It is worth mentioning that the characters in a series, unlike film, do not necessarily follow a conventional character arc. Harris says that characters, 'don't go through typical character arcs. They do not change much from the first episode to the last. Instead, there is a consistency to TV character, and that's what the viewers enjoy' (Harris 2010). It is important to note that this analysis will not be looking at whether Pinkie's character arc and lessons learnt are continuously followed from there on out, but whether her character is able to develop realistically despite the cartoonish behaviour we expect of her.

In the first section of the analysis, I will be looking at what this 'cartoonish behaviour' means and how what can we expect from Pinkie Pie. I will be analysing how she develops her own set of physics and personality quirks that are following the Chuck Jones formula. Over and above looking at Pinkie as a comedic character, I also want to see how her character can be challenged to represent a moral lesson at the end of the episode. Due to her character often being present in an episode just to provide entertainment, often used against the other ponies,

it was necessary to look at an episode that isolates her as the episode protagonist. For this I will be looking at Pinkie's first 'slice of life[22]' solo episode. Harris says that the goal of television writing is to, 'Build credible characters. Make them relatable, believable, and real. That way, viewers can form an emotional attachment with them' (Harris 2010). Ultimately, with this analysis I hope to understand how a highly feminised character that is perceived to be an embodiment of 'girlish aesthetic' may also be a nod to the comedic characters in *Loony Tunes,* and still be able to derive an emotional attachment from the audience.

4.2.1 The Loony Tune Effect

This first section in the analysis will be looking at how Pinkie Pie is set up as a comedic character. To look at how Faust uses Pinkie as a 'cartoon character' to emulate classic slapstick animation that broke the boundaries of animation and showed self-awareness.

Figure 32 Still from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 04 Season 1 Applebuck Season (2010)

[22] Slice of life is a term used to describe entertainment that is looking at the everyday experience of an individual. In this instance, slice of life represents the events happening between episodes that move the plot along and involve big adventures.

Figure 33 Still from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 09 Season 1 Bridle Gossip (2010)

From the first episode, *Friendship is Magic Part 1* (2010), we are met with the madcap-personality that belongs to Pinkie Pie. In her self-awareness of being a cartoon, Pinkie is able to manipulate her surroundings and herself in a way that none of the other main ponies are capable of. In Figure 32, we can see one of Pinkie's famous feats, where she can transport herself from any side of the camera shot. As cartoon physics go, only once she is finished her dialogue does gravity take hold and falls down. Pinkie can not only manipulate time and space, but also her own body's capabilities such as bulging her eyes out comparable to the Tex Avery cartoon physics (refer to Figure 33). In the episode *Griffon the Brush Off* (2011), whilst chasing Rainbow Dash around Ponyville, Pinkie appears and transports herself to everywhere Rainbow Dash hides, a nod to the *Droopy Dog* (1943) cartoons who would do the same when chasing the villain. As Rainbow Dash, arguably the fastest character on the show, hurriedly rushes to hide away from her, in no rush herself, Pinkie is seen skipping after her. Her personalised sound effects and choice in music add to the comedic timing of this scene, an exhausted Rainbow Dash is represented by the tense rock styled tune, as soon as she disappears and we see Pinkie come into frame, a '*Pepé Le Pew'* (1945) styled tune plays to the rhythm of her skips. The two juxtaposed sounds accentuate the ridiculousness and disregard of physics in the scene.

Figure 34 Still from Walt Disney Productions' Who Framed Roger Rabbit (1988)

Figure 35 Still from My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Episode 21 Season 1 Over a Barrel (2011)

An instance where we can see Pinkie's cartoon awareness is in the episode *Over a Barrel* (2011). As the episode ends and the scene is about to cut with an iris-out[23] transition, Pinkie Pie pops her head through, blocking it from closing the frame and speaks directly to us. There is a familiarity to the famous *Loony Tunes* character *Porky Pig's* closing line: 'that's all folks.' Looking at both Figure 34 and Figure 35, the two character's body language also mirror each other. What sets Pinkie apart from Porky Pig, however, is that Pinkie in her own series is

[23] An 'iris-in' or 'iris-out' is a round transition that can either close in or stretch out to reveal or end a scene. (Brooklyn.cuny.edu)

the only pony to directly address the audience in this way. Whereas in *Loony Tunes*, multiple characters have broken the fourth wall. In *Friendship is Magic* this ability is completely unique to Pinkie Pie.

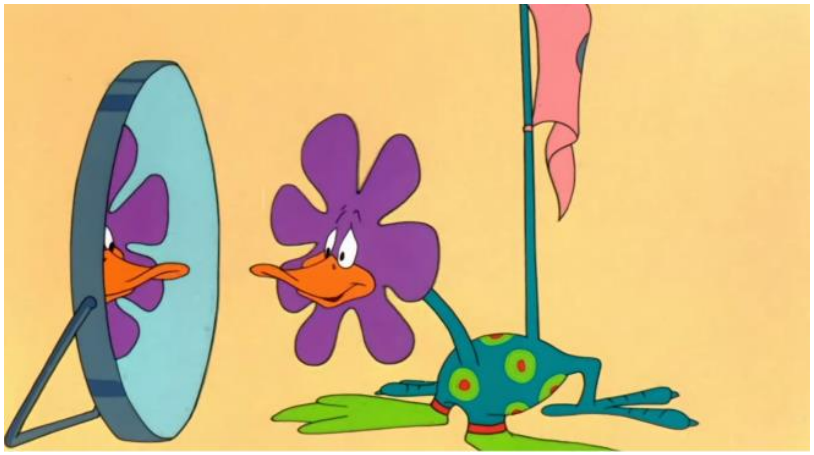

Figure 36 Still from Loony Toons Episode Duck Amuck (1953)

Figure 37 Still from Episode 07 Season 1 Dragonshy (2010)

In the following section, I will be looking at Pinkie Pie in correlation to *The Loony Tunes* episode called *Duck Amuck* (1953). Looking at the concept behind the episode according to the director Chuck Jones, his intention with this famous gag is to prove that despite changing the appearance of the character from something as recognizable as a duck to something more abstract, the audience still knows who it is because they know that the identity of the character goes beyond visual appearance. Jones believed that comedy could stem from a character's

personality if given enough restrictions (Ramsey). Looking at Figure 36 and Figure 37, we can see that Pinkie is once again paying homage to a *Loony Tunes* character. The balloons attached to her tail, the duck-like-flippers on her feet, the polka dot bow and clashing colours are all mirroring Daffy's unfortunate redesign. However, apart from paying homage to a great cartoon, I would like to understand what *Duck Amuck* means for personality animation and to see whether Faust was able to represent that in Pinkie Pie.

On the website Amino Apps, Amino Taylor Ramsey explains the episode's use of 'synecdoche' in the gag, he writes: 'Synecdoche functions on a kind of audio-visual level in depicting the iconic and enduring nature of the character. So long as any of Daffy's individual traits remain, the character as a whole, continues to exist' (Ramsey). Perhaps abstracting Daffy to only the bare essential recognition left of him, we empathise more with the character. The action of also breaking the fourth wall and speaking directly to the viewers, grows the connection we have. Making Daffy not just a character on screen, rather an overworked and mistreated actor. Paul Wells explains that, 'Self-consciousness in the cartoon represented self-awareness in its audience' (Wells 143). Similarly, Chuck Jones writes:

> That is what we were striving for. Now believability by the audience; that will follow. But belief in the life of the characters – by the writer, the artist, the director, the animator. That, after all, is the dictionary definition and meaning of the word "animation": to invoke life. (Jones 14)

Through the above analysis we can derive that Faust was indeed inspired by Loony Toons cartoons in what Pinkie Pie's capabilities in the series are.

4.2.2 The Controller

For this section, I will be looking at Pinkie Pie and Twilight Sparkles' version of the classic 'cartoon chase' scene in the episode *Feeling Pinkie Keen* (2011). This will be in parallel to Paul Wells' chapter on comedy and his analysis of Chuck Jones' comedic character types. His chapter titled *Expectation and Exploitation* sets a basis for classic cartoon physics and gags that we have come to recognise on the animated screen. Wells discusses a 'vocabulary' that is used in cartoons as a formula which I will using throughout the analysis of Faust's version of a classic 'chase' episode. The episode begins by Twilight practising spells with the help of Spike. Spike notices Pinkie Pie and breaks concentration with the spell causing it to backfire. Twilight Sparkles sees Pinkie Pie hiding for cover, transporting herself under a rock in one occurrence, whilst wearing an umbrella hat. This prompts Twilight's curiosity and let go of her usual dismissive nature of Pinkie Pie to ask her what she is doing. Pinkie explains that she has a 'twitchy tail' which is a warning that something is going to fall. Twilight then attempts to reason with Pinkie Pie that she is being ridiculous, and nothing will fall out of the sky, but this is interrupted by a frog indeed falling down straight onto her face. Twilight is still unconvinced that Pinkie is able to tell the future by her body's reactions and is content with leaving her be and carrying on with her own day. This is until Pinkie reappears with another prediction which Twilight brushes off once more while Spike, a believer this time, heeds her warning.

Chuck Jones had derived that, in a cartoon there is a specific role and function to each character, although Jones' character such as *Wile.E Coyote* and *Roadrunner* are locked into a repetitive cycle of the chaser and the chased, it will still be useful to see how Faust's characters are able to integrate this style of comedy while still respecting the characters' personalities. How she uses their personality in a situation that brings out each other's nuances that may only make sense in this particular episode.

Theory	Character type ‘A’	Character type ‘B’	Character type ‘C’
Cartoon character (Klein)	Controller	Over-reactor	Nuisance
Comedy character (Jenkins)	The clown	Dupe/Killjoy	Counterfeit
Example	Pinkie	Twilight	Spike

Table 1 Representing character types in episode Feeling Pinkie Keen

For the analyse on this episode I will be using Paul Well’s table on character types in a comedic cartoon show, the original table can be found on page 32. This will be to analyse the three-present character’s in this episode and how they fit into the roles that can be recognised in a Loony Toons cartoon. I have taken the liberty of filling out the table in the presumed roles pertaining to the three main characters in the episode. I will be discussing the decisions made alongside Wells’ decision made in his table. Paul Wells writes the following on these character type theories, ‘… these delineations provide theoretical tools for different kinds of analysis and help to clarify particular roles and functions in cartoon character formation’ (Wells 155).

According to Normal Klein’s theory there are three character types: *The Controller, the Over-reactor, and the Nuisance* (Wells 152). To iterate his theories, *the Controller* is the character who most probably does not succumb to any accidents or pain. This character type might understand the conflict around them and react to it, but they do not often receive any of the hits. Due to this, I have placed Pinkie Pie under this category. Throughout the episode she sidesteps every occurrence, granted it is due to her ‘sense’, but her evasion of every accident/gag is indicative of the character type the *Controller.* In Wells’ instance, *Bugs Bunny* is the *Controller* as he ‘largely controls the action in his cartoons…’ (Wells 152).

The next type is the *Over-reactor* which is the character who is on the receiving end of the majority of the hits. Often this character is the 'punchline' in the slapstick gags, stepping in every possible trap. Due to Twilight Sparkles' constant position of being on the receiving end of the hits in this episode, I have placed her under 'character type B'. The *over-reactor* type is often used for *Elmer Fudd* or *Porky Pig*, the characters whose attempt '… to gain control of a situation and suffers accordingly…' (Wells 152).

The last character type is the *Nuisance*, perhaps a more subdued version than Wells' choice of *Daffy Duck,* I have placed Spike under this category. The *Nuisance,* and not in fact the *Controller*, is the character who incites the *Over-reactor* and keeps the gags flowing. '… the Nuisance usually starts off the cartoon by annoying the Over-reactor, who then keeps the gags flowing' (Wells 152). Spike's fascination and faith towards Pinkie's 'sense' is what annoys Twilight.

It could be said that the role of the *Nuisance* becomes intermixed with Pinkie Pie and not just Spike. When she tells Twilight, 'You don't believe because you don't understand' (Feeling Pinkie Keen 2011). This drives Twilight to perform experimental tests on Pinkie to try and understand the scientific reasoning behind this phenomenon. Perhaps if Pinkie had not tried to reason with her and compared Twilight's magic to her sixth sense, then Twilight would have stopped the 'chase'. But by inciting Twilight's need to understand, she does not choose to 'let it go' thus continuing the cycle. However, Twilight only becomes a full *Over-reactor* character type after Pinkie has a 'twitch' and Spike opens the door on Twilight, cartoonishly flattening her. This action brings the role of the *Nuisance* back to Spike as it incites Twilight to say, '… this makes no sense. I have to figure this out' (Feeling Pinkie Keen 2011). The cycle of the chase scene officially commences.

In the first sequence, we see Twilight hiding and stalking Pinkie Pie, who is minding her own business. Twilight says to Spike, 'I'm doing scientific research, I'm observing Pinkie Pie, scientific name: Pinkius Piecus[24]' (Feeling Pinkie Keen 2011). As cartoon logic withstands, that every sixth sense that Pinkie feels, Twilight Sparkles ends up obtaining, no matter her distance from Pinkie. The gags become more ridiculous as they are carried out. In one instance, Twilight becomes frustrated at Spike's fears and steps in front of a barn door to show him that, despite Pinkie's sense, there is nothing to fear, which prompts her to fall through an open cellar rather. Ironically, Twilight tells Spike he is 'over-reacting' after Pinkie's tail twitches signifying that 'something is going to fall'. In classic cartoon logic, multiple things fall onto Twilight's head that seems arbitrary, this includes: a flowerpot, an anvil, a wagon with hay and a piano.

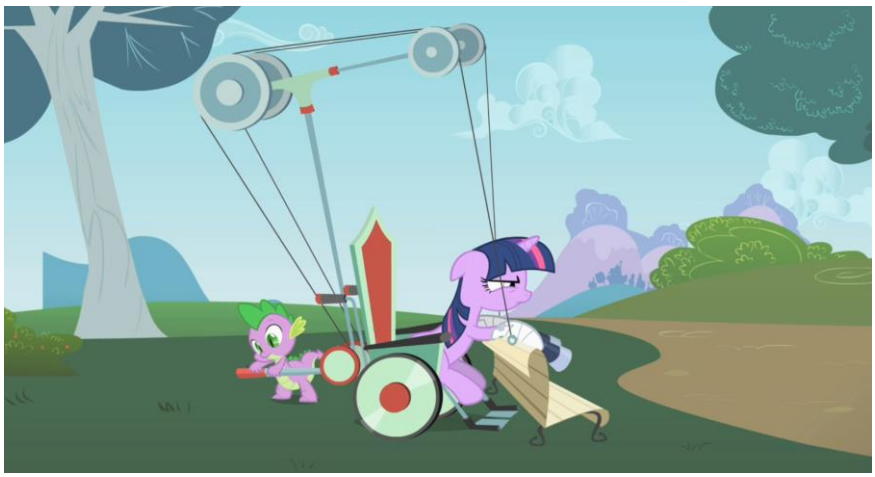

Figure 38 Still from Episode 15 Season 1 Feeling Pinkie Keen (2011)

On the webpage TV Tropes, they discuss the idea of 'Slapstick Knows No Gender. In this article they explain that women will appear stronger than men in slapstick comedy as

[24] The use of a scientific name is a long-standing gag in Chuck Jones' *Wile.E Coyote and the Road Runner*. Where a fake scientific name would be used as a caption to the character. For instance, in one episode Wile.E Coyote's scientific name was: *Eatibus Anythingus*

injuries to female characters do not last until the next scene. They write the following, ‘A woman who gets poked in the eye with a sharp stick will likely experience only a (temporary) loss of dignity; a man who gets poked in the eye with a sharp stick will have to wear an eyepatch’ (TV Tropes). Interestingly, after every gag that befalls on Twilight, she is still illustrated having the injuries in the next scene, one of which requires an entire contraption to lift up her broken limbs (Figure 38). This illustrates that Twilight is not in fact immune to long-term injuries or character humiliation.

When Applejack asks Pinkie what she is doing, Pinkie responds in a true ‘Bugs Bunny awareness’, ‘Oh, letting Twilight secretly follow me without me knowing’ (Feeling Pinkie Keen 2011). Pinkie knew all along and did not tell Twilight, humourlessly, her reasoning is due to that it would have spoilt the secret. In the following scene, Pinkie senses a ‘never-felt-before’ sense which she calls a ‘doozy’ saying it will happen where Fluttershy is heading. They all rush to make sure Fluttershy is alright whilst Twilight decides to join them just to ‘… be there to see the look on Pinkie’s face when we find out nothing’s wrong’ (Feeling Pinkie Keen 2011). Despite countless times that Pinkie’s sixth sense was proven, Twilight is not convinced and so the ‘chase’ continues. It is clear that Twilight is no longer on the ‘hunt’ to find the truth, but to rather prove Pinkie wrong. Pinkie is not at all offended, so this ‘chase’ has become an issue of Twilight’s dignity. Chuck Jones wrote the following on his character the Coyote, ‘And who is the Coyote’s enemy? Why, the Coyote. The Road Runner has never touched him…’ (Jones 120). Indicating that the cycle only continues due to Twilight’s own battle with herself.

In spite of a Hydra monster appearing, this is not the reason for Pinkie’s prediction of what the ‘doozy’ was, instead it was when Twilight finally admits to believing Pinkie that her twitching stops. The cycle of forever chasing Pinkie Pie has ended and so has the raining of gags on Twilight.

Pinkie Pie also constitutes as the *Clown* according to Jenkins, saying that: 'The Clown personifies change, encapsulating all that is rebellious and spontaneous within the individual, all that strains against the narrow codes of social life' (Wells 153). Chuck Jones has also spoken about the treatment of Bugs Bunny in how to get the audience to sympathise with him, he wrote, 'Bugs must always be provoked' (Jones 117). Twilight Sparkles, on the other hand, is the *Comic Antagonist*, which represents the social order and logic within our civilization that seeks to prevent self-expression and free-will (Wells 153). Elmer Fudd, like Twilight Sparkles in this episode, wishes to capture Bugs Bunny for the sake of hunting, but the more elusive Bugs becomes, the more Elmer Fudd's pride is at stake. Interestingly in this instance, the category of the *Comic Antagonist* delves into both *Over-reactor* and *Nuisance*. Paul Wells categorises Daffy as specifically *Counterfeit* and writes the following, 'Daffy would love to be a Clown, but despite all his efforts, he hasn't got the credentials' (Wells 154). Indeed, we can apply this to Spike as well, who both admires Pinkie Pie and her gift, but stands loyal to Twilight Sparkles by aiding her in studying Pinkie in her efforts to prove Pinkie wrong. Wells states the following on Jones' style of comedy:

> The Coyote's relentless imperative to catch the Road Runner is, however, more about pride than paranoia. His obsession is purely related to his own puzzlement concerning why he has never captured or defeated the Road Runner… as Jones suggests, he could stop at any time. Jones trusts the internal logic of characters and situations and interrogates their predictability. (Wells 151)

Instead of imitating a Chuck Jones cartoon, Faust has paid tribute, allowing her characters the chance to delve into a comedic act reserved for male characters. But allowing them their own interpretation by resolving the problem and breaking the cycle. Twilight does not catch Pinkie, but instead finds a middle ground. This is something that the Coyote could never do and thus never breaks the cycle.

4.2.3 Fatal Flaw

The episode *Party of One* (2011) is Pinkie Pie's first episode where we step into her narrative and see her thought process. Whereas, in an episode such as *Griffon the Brush Off* (2010), Pinkie's intentions are left a mystery to the audience until the very end. In this episode, we see Pinkie's *Achilles' Heel* and draw comparisons as to why she is so invested in throwing parties. The episode reveals an antithetical Pinkie Pie, the evil twin born out of her fears being realised. With Rarity's breakdown in *Suited For Success* (2011), we are not faced with an exact opposite of the character, but rather something we can expect from a passionate designer. With Pinkie Pie we are used to not taking her seriously due to her friends themselves shrugging her antics off as 'she's just being Pinkie Pie.' In this episode the ponies cannot reiterate this line. In the analysis, I will be looking at how this episode show's us a different side to the character but not necessarily her being out of character.

In the episode *Party of One* (2011), Pinkie is sending out invites for the 'after party-party'. Her invites are met with rejection and suspicious excuses. This leads to Pinkie Pie eerily stalking her friends in order to find out what is going on. After chasing Rainbow Dash in a chase sequence reminiscent of Loony Toon characters like Droopy and Pepé le Pew once more. Pinkie concludes that her friends are hiding something from her. She decides to interrogate Spike, and then gets frustrated when he does not admit to what is going on, at least in her mind. Spike clearly does not understand, but to please Pinkie he ends up saying what she wants to hear.

SPIKE. Tell me what you want me to say and I'll say it.

PINKIE PIE. Tell me that all my friends are lying to me and avoiding me because they don't like my parties. They don't want to be my friends anymore!

SPIKE. Your friends are all lying to you and avoiding you because they don't like your parties. They don't want to be your friends anymore.

PINKIE PIE. Aha! I knew it… (Party of One 2011)

Figure 39 Still from Episode 25 Season 1 Party of One (2010)

After succumbing to her own paranoia, Pinkie's mane and tale literally deflate as a balloon would. In Figure 39, we can see Pinkie Pie at stage one of her antithesis transformation: her hair is flattened (reminiscent of the introverted Fluttershy's mane), her colours have dulled and her once energetic body has quite literally drooped down. What follows is stage two of her transformation where a disillusioned Pinkie Pie has thrown a party where inanimate objects are attending. In an unsettling turn of events, Pinkie throws her voice out for each object and interacts with them as if they have a life of their own. She is not just using them as stand-ins for her friends, but quite literally believes they are real.

Figure 40 Still from Episode 25 Season 1 Party of One (2010)

Pinkie transcends into insanity with every passing logic that escapes her. As can be seen Figure 40, her eyes move in opposite directions, the background is a paint splatter imitating the Rorschach test used in psychological assessments. In this instance we have stepped into Pinkie's mind, we see the objects speaking back to her, encouraging her to be angry at her friends and twisting her mind, and even then, Pinkie still defends them. Just before Rainbow Dash knocks at the door, we step out of her mind and into the real world where we see her throwing her voice for each object whilst moving them with her hooves. By now Pinkie Pie has entered the full antithesis version of herself, where Rainbow Dash has to drag her out of her home in order to come with her. She finds all her friends waiting for her at a surprise party they threw for her, Pinkie is not yet convinced and tells them, 'Why would I be excited to attend my own farewell party?' (Party of One). This is met with confusion from her friends who then tell her the reason for the party is for her birthday. Pinkie Pie, realising her misunderstanding, literally 'pops' back into herself once more.

The episode is not inline to the traditional way Pinkie Pie has been represented thus far. Instead of slapstick gags or paying homage to classic cartoons, here Pinkie has become an unhinged character. Perhaps what makes it most unsettling is that it is in conjunction to a Pinkie

Pie that was an embodiment of joy, now replaced with the seed of paranoia and even Schizophrenia. However, this look into Pinkie's fears is not out of character, but rather unexpected. In the episode *Cutie Mark Chronicles* (2011), we see Pinkie Pie before receiving her cutie mark, younger but in the same dulled colours and flattened hair. As Wells explains, 'Physical traits and behavioural mannerisms common to, and recognised by, the audience, which remain largely consistent to the character' (Wells 129). This episode was aired before *Party of One* (2011) and so established the visual signification of Pinkie Pie's physical traits and mannerisms prior to her cutie mark. Which means that although Pinkie's antithesis in *Party of One* (2011) feels unnerving, it is staying true to her personality. Looking back at the following quote which was applied to Daffy's abstract transformation in *Duck Amuck*, 'Synecdoche functions on a kind of audio-visual level in depicting the iconic and enduring nature of the character. So long as any of Daffy's individual traits remain, the character as a whole, continues to exist' (Amino). In terms of Pinkie, she is stripped away from her surface level behaviour that we have become accustomed to seeing. But through the episodes and the development of her character we still know it is her, as a synecdoche. This extreme abstracted version of her is a trait that does represent her as a whole, even if negatively. If Pinkie only had one identity, any level of abstraction would render her to be an empty shell.

The animation medium is open to many amounts of manipulation that reality would not be able to recreate. Due this vast amount of freedom, Chuck Jones felt that there needed to be a set of rules that are applied to the characters and their environment in order to keep the audience invested. Chuck Jones believes, 'there are – there must be – rules. Without them, the comedy slops over at the edges. Identity is lost' (Wells 150). In this chapter, I have come to the conclusion that Pinkie Pie has a set of 'Pinkie Rules' that pertain to her development and abilities. The following is a set of formulaic rules that may have been followed through the

season of her character appearances. These will be in reference to Paul Wells' selection of 'cartoon vocabulary':

Paul Wells states the following, 'Establishing the idea of characters in conflict which would be played out within the narrative parameters of a chase' (Wells 134). In the episode *Feeling Pinkie Keen*, Twilight Sparkles discovers that Pinkie Pie has an ability to predict future events through involuntary bodily reactions which she calls her 'Pinkie-Sense'. The idea that Twilight Sparkles, who is arguably a character who believes in proving theories before believing them, begins a conflict with Pinkie Pie who believes in the opposing effect of 'having faith'.

Wells' second point is, 'Establishing a recognizable context in which characters have specific roles or immediately identifiable traits… even if these become subject to quick change or redefinition' (Wells 134). Despite Pinkie Pie's change in appearance, personality, and colour hue in the episode *Part of One* (2011), we as the audience, know that despite these changes the character is still performing within her own cartoonish limits. This is added by referencing her mane's ability to mimic her emotions through the episode *Sonic Rainboom* (2011), this set up signifies to the audience that her mane flattening in *Part of One* (2011) is normal in this character.

Wells refers to *Duck Amuck* for this specific point, he states that 'Creating an 'unreliable space', which destabilises narrative by revealing the mechanisms of the medium' (Wells 134). In the analysis of Pinkie Pie there has been multiple references to her ability to manipulate her body and the environment to her own self-awareness of the cartoon world. The ability to break the 'fourth wall' has allowed us to see the mechanisms of the animation medium.

The last point I will be referencing is, 'Using jokes had been seen before but which had been subjected to a fresh interpretation or use' (Wells 135). For this rule I am directly referencing Pinkie Pie's adoption of *Loony Tunes* gags and comedic types, I feel that the way

she redefines them is by being female and acting the parts of roles mainly reserved for male characters. Through Pinkie Pie's embodiment of the perceived interests of little girls (i.e. the colour Pink and love for all things sweet), she however does not offer a stereotypical 'gender performance' that is often used as a comedic theme in female characters, as does *Rocko's Modern Life*. Instead Pinkie is able to embody their capabilities as a young female representation, and not a sexualised adult woman, and like Rarity, never has to remove her own 'femaleness' in order to perform gags or present self-awareness. Faust states the following, 'It is difficult to sell animation for and/or about girls, but MLP gives me something to point to as a successful example. People didn't even believe girls' shows could be legitimately funny and that boys might actually watch them' (Tekaramity).

Through the analysis of Rarity and Pinkie Pie, I believe that by using anthropomorphic characters who are only gendered through 'default', both characters have been able to disprove the statement that female characters cannot be funny without having to use gendered and sexualisation of their bodies.

4.3 Zecora – Issues in African Aesthetics

To avoid biases and respect the results of the research it is in this section where I wish to address characters who display stereotypical representations and reveal the shortcomings of representing a recognisable identity in the show. The article written by Lauren Faust titled *My Little NON-Homophobic, NON-Racist, NON-Smart-Shaming Pony: A Rebuttal* (2010), is a response to an article written against the series in accusing it of problematic depictions of minorities. In the article Faust states the following:

> Color has never, ever been depicted as a race indicator for the ponies. When your characters are purple, blue, orange, yellow, black, white, red, green and pink, who's to say which is supposed to signify a white person, a black person, an Asian person? The only races in *My Little Pony* are Earth Pony, Pegasus and Unicorn, and they are all treated equally, ruled by a leader who embodies the traits of all three… (Faust)

Figure 41 Image of "(from left to right) Twilight, Spike and Zecora" found on My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic Wiki.

The character I would like to discuss is Zecora. To illustrate who this character is, she first appears in the episode *Bridle Gossip* (2010) who is initially believed to be an 'evil enchantress' which sparks a mob mentality from the pony inhabitants. After realising that

Zecora was in fact not evil after all and wanted to help them, they befriend her, and she becomes a recurring character. As can be seen in Figure 41, Zecora is not a pony but a zebra, represented by her noticeable stripes and bristle like mane, who comes from a 'far-away land'. Nothing further is mentioned from her origins in the first season. The original intention with this character was to make her into a wise character which the ponies could turn to for advice, as specified by Faust, 'She was designed to be a second mentor to Twilight, but that didn't come to pass' (Tekaramity). It is clear that Zecora, originally intended to be called Shaman, is meant to depict a 'diversity character', whether it was intended or not by Faust it is unclear as there is not much information about this character's initial development other than she was intended to have a larger role.

Zecora is seen to having traits that are stereotypically associated with Africa. Apart from Zecora being the only Zebra and her name literally meaning 'Zebra' by the Oromo people, she also wears neck rings similar to that of the Ndebele women of South Africa (MLP Fandom). Zecora is the only recurring character who is not a pony but not a different 'creature' altogether, simply different enough to depict her as an 'other'. This is a similar concept to the *Smurfette Principle* mentioned on page 43, but instead of gender being marked, race is.

Zecora does not live where the other ponies do but in a hut in the dangerous Everfree Forest. Her hut is also decorated with tribal masks resembling that of African origins from our world. These represent human faces which is in itself problematic to Faust's decision to not include anything human to the series. Through the presence of an ethnic character we are left to assume that the 'un-marked' ponies are representative of the White race. Similar to how the male gender is the default, through the constant representation of whiteness in entertainment, we assume the race to be a default unless proven otherwise. Natchee Blu Barnd's essay, *White Man's Best Friend: Race and Privilege in Oliver and Company*, refers to George Lipsitz in stating that, '… as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness

never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organising principle in social and cultural relations' (Barnd 2013). In the same way that adding a dress to a Smurf makes them female, by doing so, we are told to assume all other characters are male. Similarly, by marking Zecora with stereotypes recognised as 'African' from our world, we are told to assume the other characters are White. The veil that the series separates between our world and the 'Pony' universe, is taken down. Through this realisation, the ponies are no longer a 'neutral' or 'unambiguous' identity.

Zecora's style of voice also adds to the problematic signifiers. Originally the intention was for her to speak in a Swahili dialect. But due to the lack of resources and knowledge of the language, they asked the voice actress, Brenda Crichlow[25], to improvise Zecora's voice. They settled on the character speaking in complete riddles, gibberish and chanting in an 'approximation of the Eastern African Swahili language' (MLP Fandom). Natchee Blu Barnd's essay, *White Man's Best Friend: Race and Privilege in Oliver and Company* explains the problematic representation of race in anthropomorphic characters in animation. Barnd writes:

> The representations of animal or object characters, however, do not simply erase racial representation. Many characters are given clear ethnic and racial "markers," while others can be inferred based on non-visual factors, like speech pattern, relationship, or action. When characters lack any explicit racial markings, they should be carefully examined for their potential to re-construct, presume, and thereby privilege dominant White identities. Instead of simply delving into how Disney creates characters explicitly marked by race (read: non-White), sex (read: female), and sexuality (read: non-

[25] This is also the only black voice actress in the show.

> heterosexual), we must also attend to the ways that the main characters and narratives privilege dominant, and therefore only implicitly marked social identities. (Barnd 2013)

In comparison to the other ponies, she also most closely resembles the masculine design. Her muzzle is square rather than upturned, she is also slightly larger than the ponies. Arguably her design could be adapted to represent how she is an 'adult' in comparison to the other characters, but by looking at Princess Celestia or her sister Princess Luna, their features still resemble that of an adult female pony.

By Faust centralising Zecora's differences from the other characters through the use of non-Western cultural stereotypes, problematises the concept of 'neutral identities' that the series, up till Zecora's introduction, managed to evoke. Unfortunately, even if the character was requested by Hasbro, the argument cannot be made that Faust's original intention with the character was any less problematic. If Zecora was written to be, as Faust says, Twilight's mentor, then the character would embody the derogatory trope 'Magical Negro'[26] (TV Tropes). The webpage states the following, 'In order to show the world that minority characters are not bad people, one will step forward to help a "normal" person, with heir pure heart and folksy wisdom' (TV Tropes).

[26] The actor, Morgan Freeman, is often inserted into these styles of narrative that use this trope, as can be seen in the following movies: *Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves* (1991), *Bruce Almighty* (2003), *Ben-Hur* (2016)

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The intent of this research paper was to look at Lauren Faust's career in the animation industry and to study the impact she has had, focusing on contemporary female characters in children's television. The aims were to understand how Faust was able to stay true to the 'Pony brand' in maintaining the 'girlish femininity' associated with it, while bringing in a new dimension in the characters. I was particularly interested in seeing how comedy could be established in a female-led show and how the show's most feminised characters might execute it. Through the analysis I was able to understand how characters, that at first look the same, become unique from each other through the use of well executed personality animation. This ultimately proved that to make characters memorable does not necessarily depend on differentiating designs, but certainly requires a careful understanding of individual personalities and how they interact within the story.

Through the use of a qualitative case study, it is clear to understand why Faust is recognised as a veteran in the Western animation industry, as she takes part in the shifting perspectives on female characters and the way audiences view them. At the start of her career taking place at the height of the 'Girl Power' movement then moving into the 'Millennium Age' of animation, Faust has represented her own views on feminism and ideas of femininity visually within the medium itself. The case study pointed out that perhaps the ways they were shown, and even the movements themselves, left just as much criticism as it did praise. However, with Faust's open condemnation of her own previous notions have indicated that she is able to recognise the faults in them and find better ways to represent female identity. With this drive to improve the animation industry's depictions of the female gender, Faust has found techniques that play on her strengths as a storyteller and fill in what has been lacking in female

representation. With this, the show *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* has proven that female led entertainment can appeal to a large audience without necessarily removing 'feminine themes'.

The case study and character analysis has proven Faust's belief that the use of tropes is not inherently flawed and can be used to present to the audience a character familiarity. Using tropes to categorise characters within female identity is not problematic, however using the female identity to categorise characters as an all-encompassing classification is. This limits identification and thus restricts viewership indirectly but controlling what 'female' is and who may identify as it.

The research has shown that Faust tends to make use of previously 'tried and tested' tropes in a setting that causes us to revaluate our own assumptions formed by prior representations of those tropes. This can be seen by the way tropes have been a recurring theme in the series Faust has worked on. For instance, one of her most common tropes found across her shows is the 'Badass Bookworm' (TV Tropes), represented in *The Powerpuff Girls, DC Super Hero Girls, Super Best Friends Forever* and *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. When these tropes are used in a setting where the assumed gender is not male, they are able to act as an individual identity that represents one singular female character.

To conclude the findings of the analysis by answering the theories discussed by Haraway and Butler. The process of this research has allowed me to realise that female characters do not necessarily need to be represented as visually recognisable in order for them to be deemed 'female'. The female gender cannot receive liberation from oppression through its constant use and dependence of the language and politics surrounding it. It is not enough to ask for representation in the medium, but there needs to be an innovative way of creating and engaging with these female characters. Most importantly, a character does need to be stripped

of anything innately ‘feminine’ in order to be progressive. A character is able to both be clad in different shades of pink and still delve into the deeper caverns of the ethos.

According to the success of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, the conclusion to the most effective ways to represent female characters are as follows:

To use McCloud’s theory in ‘amplification through simplification’ as the core intention to visual design choices. The abstraction that the medium of cut-out animation can offer is a preferable style that should be taken advantage of. *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* offers an instance where by using the same basic model and a simplified design, limits the way the viewer attaches already preconceived identities to them and gives discovery of the character solely on personality animation. The viewer is forced to wait for the story to unfold, making even an adult male audience ‘wait and see’ who the character develops into. Thus making the message more clearer than who the messenger is. This leaves more power in the creator’s hands to use the ‘innocent’ medium of animation to shift biased stereotypes. The use of abstracting a female character and removing the visual stereotypes normally associated with them, allows for personality animation to take up a form outside of ‘traditional’ gender performance and explore femininity in unlikely trope characterisations.

Along this idea of simplified designs, the character analysis concluded that, as Maureen Furniss and Chuck Jones had theorised, the use of anthropomorphic characters does indeed serve to benefit the creator in furthering the concept of identity or at least a ‘clean slate’ for the female identity to exist in. If the creator desires to explore tropes or new approaches to understand femininity outside of a gendered body, then avoiding the visual signification of a human being, will provide further removal of the viewer’s preconceived biases.

By looking at the two characters Rarity and Pinkie Pie in isolation, this research paper has provided a scope at looking at female characters in comedy. From the analysis, I have

realised that both Rarity and Pinkie Pie are able to emulate their own personal comedic style through the use of successful personality animation, and the use of tropes that they are based on while bringing in a fresh perspective. I.e. Rarity with her transatlantic accent, old Hollywood theatricals, and her use of reversing the gaze. This also applies to Pinkie Pie in the way that she innately preoccupies the 'feminised-girl appeal' of loving cupcakes and being a solid pink colour, but on closer observation, Pinkie Pie is a complex character that brings forth adult themes surrounding issues of abandonment. Simultaneously, she also follows the rules associated with male *Loony Tunes* characters famous for their comedic timing and gender performance, while never having to remove her own female identity to be able to emulate them. Comedy is an extremely wide scope in animation, an area often reserved for male characters. Faust has proven that there is room for more female representation in comedy. Comedy in animation has gone through much transformation over the generations and so is a topic that is able to branch into even more observations, which allows for further research especially in female representation.

I believe that the success of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, is due to how Faust was able to juggle three elements: comedy, personality animation and 'girlish femininity'. This amalgamation was able to be hidden under the guise of anthropomorphic characters with simplified designs set in a world where the assumed gender is female, all bought to life by the perceived innocent medium of animation specifically aimed at young girls.

Unfortunately, as most creations that are translated through human and social experiences, the series is far from perfect. The character Zecora, in this instance, has been Faust's only block that might have toppled the progressiveness of the show. Even one misrepresentation should not be overlooked from the series or categorised as an innocent and 'unintentional' mishap, which then assumes it as not deserving of proper criticism. Racial stereotypes, unlike tropes, are harmful to the character in the conditions that *My Little Pony:*

Friendship is Magic tried to emulate. By creating a neutral 'safe zone' for the female identity and then portraying race on a female character through stereotypes, only amplifies 'otherness'. Zecora's character in her introduction, intention and application to the series has posed a problem to the aspects in which made *Friendship is Magic* so successful. It is, however, an instance which much can be learnt from. The use of stereotypes is still visible on a character who is not human. Zecora's character analysis has concluded that by using anthropomorphic characters a creator does not avoid the ramifications of problematic stereotyping. Just as the *Smurfette Principle* was applied to characters who were marked by 'female', Zecora is marked by 'African aesthetic' to portray her as 'black', which ultimately causes the viewer to assume that all other characters must be 'white'. The 'magical veil' that Faust had placed to separate our world and the Pony world is lifted. This nearly makes much of the successful portrayals of femininity, redundant. This is due to the audience being taken out of a world that could rethink female representation and back to the real world with its own biases of what is female identity and who may fit in it.

What may be said, following the case study and character analysis, is that Faust has been able to address and understand the previous misgivings she has had a part in and move in a more positive direction. For instance, Faust has recognised the negativity in portraying 'straw feminism' and has rather found improved ways to represent themes surrounding feminism without needing to downgrade the movement itself. She especially uses the themes in her female led shows, rather speaking on the issues of treatment within the category of 'female' instead of using male characters as the victims. In the show *DC Super Hero Girls*, Faust's representation in black female characters[27] has been a far stretch away from the stereotypes of

[27] The show has a petit, shy black female lead called Karen Beecher also known as Bumblebee who is part of the main team. The black Amazonian female warriors are tall and muscular, representing their strength and power.

‘African aesthetic’, and although this particular show is centred around human characters, it safe to say that Faust understands that representation of race identities needs better implementation.

With the chosen theoretical research applied to the case study and analysis, this research has allowed me to shed light and gain knowledge on the process of creating female characters in animation. By looking at Lauren Faust as a creator, I was able to learn how she has shaped positive female characters, without removing anything innately female, while still exploring genres that were previously reserved for male characters. Secondly, I have also been able to understand where the misgivings lie in her process and what may be done to accomplish better results in the future. In the end, Lauren Faust is a veteran in the Western animation industry for the impact she has had on contemporary animation and female characters. Most importantly, the title is deserving because she recognises the improvements that need to be made in female representation, and moves in a trajectory that allows for this change to come to realisation.

Glossary

Fourth Wall: To break the fourth wall is a performance concept where the actor/character speaks directly to the audience thus breaching the invisible boundary between them. (Collins Dictionary)

Millennium Age: This is the age of animation between the early ‘00s until present day. (Tv Tropes)

Scopophilia: The act of gaining sexual pleasure from the action of looking. (Collins Dictionary)

Showrunner: A person who is in charge creatively as well as the management of a television show. (Lexico)

Stereotype: On the online dictionary Lexico they define this as: ‘A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing’ (Lexico)

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"Winter Wrap Up." *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, season 1 episode 11, Hasbro, 2010, *Netflix*

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Notes

[i] The Millennium Age of Animation took place after The Renaissance Age of Animation, it is recognised by its use of innovative ways to produce animation faster and cheaper. This was due to the global recession and the need to adapt to the cheaper budgets from production studios. On TV Tropes they state that this was a large problem for fans who grew up during the Renaissance Age expecting to find work in what they had grown up with (TV Tropes).

[ii] Animation theory in particular is not a common theoretical discourse readily available in South Africa. Beside the limited postgraduate programs and courses in specific tertiary educational institutions, unless it is offered in more private educational establishments within the country.

[iii] Robert Watson's article titled *A Short History of Race in Animation* (2010) during the anticipated release of Disney's *The Princess and the Frog* (2010). Watson discusses the racial stereotypes that were present during animation in the 1940s. One of which can be seen in the 1940 release of *Fantasia* which had a racially stereotyped character named Sunflower, a young black centaur represented as a '… "pickaninny" caricature… ' (Watson 2010). She was later altogether removed, instead of rewritten, for the film's re-release in 1960.

[iv] For further reference, Wells writes the following, '… Disney understood that the fundamental principle of comedy was that 'the personality of the victim of a gag determines just how funny the whole incident will be'. Crucially, 'personality' here precedes the 'gag', and, for Disney, personality is informed by status and identity; therefore, it is intrinsically funnier if a king slips

on a banana skin rather than a child. In order to properly develop and reveal ‘personality’, it was necessary to concentrate on the narrative developments out of any one situation or context (Wells 130).

[v] Points to Remember When Animating

- Make sure the emotional state of the character is clearly defined.
- The thought process reveals the feeling.
- Be alert to use of cutting and camera in helping to accentuate emotion.
- Ask yourself constantly:
- What am I trying to say here?
- What do I really want to show?
- How do I want the audience to react?
- Use the element of time wisely:
- to establish the emotion of the character,
- to convey it to the viewers,
- to let them savour the situation.
- Don’t be ponderous, but don’t take it away from them just as they start to enjoy it. (Thomas and Johnston, 507)

[vi] Fred Moore came up with fourteen points of animation to always remember while animating. This was in order to be conscious of the decisions one makes while animating and to make sure that those decisions are working for your characters and not against them. Not all

points are applicable to my study but below are the following that I am interested in looking at specifically in relation to ‘personality animation’:

- Staging
- Are you in character?
- Are you advancing the character?
- Is this the simplest statement of the main idea of the scene?
- Are you trying to do something that shouldn’t be attempted?

(Thomas and Johnston, 128)

[vii] The Mane Six

The following characters were not selected for the character analysis, but I feel it worth offering a short description for them individually for the reader’s reference.

- Twilight Sparkles is the main protagonist in the series and the viewer is mainly following her narrative in the series. We learn that she is a student of Princess Celestia, sent to Ponyville to learn about friendship and to help others. At the end of each episode, once she has learnt a moral, she sends Princess Celestia a letter explaining what she has learnt during the course of the day about friendship. Twilight is a unicorn pony and is Princess Celestia’s ‘most gifted student’, a diligent pony who enjoys researching and learning. Twilight’s element of harmony is ‘magic’.

- Applejack is a hardworking earth pony who owns a farm along with her Apple family. Applejack could be seen as the antithesis of Rarity in that she does not like anything too ‘feminine’. Applejack represents the element of ‘honesty’.
- Rainbow Dash could be seen as the pony version of Buttercup from *Powerpuff Girls*. She is a Pegasus pony that enjoys speed and anything adventurous. She is represented by the element of ‘loyalty’.
- Fluttershy is an introverted Pegasus pony who is slightly afraid of flying and rather enjoys helping animals closer to the ground. Her innate ability to help those in need even when the situation is frightening, and this gives her the element of ‘kindness’.