

Hedda Rekdalsbakken Aleksandersen

**“But the greatest change I ever saw was that of my brother, a boy who desperately wanted to be a man”:  
Maturation, Masculinity and the Expression of Grief in Brother Bear and Big Hero 6**

Master's thesis in Primary and Lower Secondary Teacher Education for Years 1-7

Supervisor: Alyssa Lowery

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## Abstract

In the world of Disney, death is not an uncommon trope. From villain deaths to losing a family member, these are storylines that Disney keeps presenting to the audience. But why is that? In this paper I am conduct a critical content analysis to find how the main characters of *Brother Bear* (2003) and *Big Hero 6* (2014) responds to death. I investigate how maturation and hegemonic masculinity are represented in the narrative, especially in relation to the character's experiences of grief. First, I explore how maturation and hegemonic masculinity are represented in the films, then I discuss how these factors are focalized through the experience of grief. I argue that both *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* use trauma narratives to challenge hegemonic masculinity and catalyse maturation.

Key terms: Masculinity; Grief; Disney; Maturation

## Sammendrag

Død er ikke et uvanlig tema i Disneys verden. Fra skurker som dør til døde familiemedlemmer, dette er fortellinger som konstant blir fortalt av Disney, men hvorfor det? I denne oppgaven utfører jeg en kritisk innholdsanalyse for å finne ut hvordan hovedkarakterene i *Min Bror Bjørnen* (2003) og *Big Hero 6* (2014) reagerer på sorg. Jeg utforsker hvordan modning og hegemonisk maskulinitet er representert i fortellingene, spesielt i forbindelse med karakterenes opplevelse av sorg. Først vil jeg utforske hvordan modning og hegemonisk maskulinitet er representert i filmene. Deretter vil jeg diskutere hvordan disse faktorene kommer til syne gjennom karakterenes sorg. Jeg argumenterer for at både *Min Bror Bjørnen* og *Big Hero 6* bruker traumefortellinger for å utfordre hegemonisk maskulinitet og katalysere modning.

Nøkkelord: Maskulinitet; Sorg; Disney; Modning

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## 1.0 Introduction

In the Disney realm it is not uncommon for the characters to experience a tragic loss. It is also not uncommon for this to happen when the characters are on the start line of adulthood. But why is that? Why is this narrative so frequently adapted in media for children, young adults, and families? These narratives align with the beliefs that children need to experience trauma and loss to become mature. This has been a common trope in children's and YA literature for some time.

Throughout human history, stories, both written and oral, have been a huge part of our society to spread knowledge, wisdom, and cultural or societal expectations. In modern times, visual media has taken on this role as well. Disney Studio's long history of adapting fairytales and introducing widely consumed original media for children and adults has brought it to the forefront of this initiative in modernity. Visual media such as that produced by Disney is also a reflection of our society and how our society expect us to look and behave based on gender, age, and culture. It portrays how we live, how we act, what we believe, and how we react to events. It also shows the socially accepted ways of reacting and behaving. However, the films can lack representation or ignore issues that are prevalent in human experience. One of these issues is hegemonic masculinity. How does Disney represent socially acceptable and socially unacceptable masculinity? How does Disney represent men's reaction to traumatic events?

I have researched how masculinity is presented through the grief narrative in Disney's *Brother Bear* (2003) and *Big Hero 6* (2014). The research questions that guided my process included:

- How is hegemonic masculinity portrayed through the experience of grief?
- How is masculinity represented before and after maturation?
- How is trauma used to create character development?

To find the answer to my research questions I have conducted a critical content analysis of the two films. I analysed the films with a grief and maturation lens, and a masculinity lens. I then analysed my notes to find evidence on how these themes have been presented in the films and how they were done similarly or differently. In my title I included a quote from *Brother Bear* that says, "But the greatest change I ever saw was that of my brother, a boy who desperately wanted to be a man." I included this quote as I feel like it encapsulates two of the major themes in *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6*, which is maturation and masculinity. It talks about how there is a desire to be a man, and that there needs to be a change for that to be accomplished. Based on my findings I found that both *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* use trauma narratives to challenge hegemonic masculinity and catalyse maturation.

## 2.0 Background

### 2.1 Motivation and Positionality

Like most people in my generation, Disney films have been a huge part of my upbringing. As an adult I still love watching Disney and I am fascinated by how they took over the role of fairytale storytelling. Disney has a huge influence all over the world and they portray problems or familiar events to show an example of how to react. I remember as a child I watched *Wall-E* and I was shaken by the potential future they showed. This started a big movement in my peers and me about living greener. I still remember this feeling now as an adult. I am curious about how films start movements



and reflections like these, and how these films can be used. I am also fascinated by how there is almost always a death included in Disney's narratives. This is what inspired this paper. I wanted to investigate the meaning behind these death and grief narratives in Disney. In the process of this I also became fascinated by how the male characters behaved after losing a family member. This discovery motivated me to explore how masculinity and grief work together in Disney and why Disney portrays its main characters in that way.

As a future English teacher, it is natural for me to reflect about how this investigation can be useful in the EFL classroom. I believe that studies about family film and their themes are vital for how and why to use film in the classroom. After my own experience, family films tend to be used only for entertainment in the classroom, especially animation such as Disney. I believe these films should be used more for discussion or reflection in the classroom. Many of these films follow the fairytale trope by bringing a lesson for the viewer to learn. These films also bring many themes that can leave the viewer with many questions and reflections. If you have a small discussion section after the film or plan a lesson around the film, these films can create great discussions.

In the new Norwegian curriculum, an interdisciplinary topic called health and life skills was added. This topic is supposed to be used in all topics throughout all 13 years of school. The subject is described like this in the core curriculum:

The school's interdisciplinary topic health and life skills shall give the pupils competence which promotes sound physical and mental health, and which provides opportunities for making responsible life choices... Life skills refers to the ability to understand and influence factors that are important for mastering one's own life. This topic shall help the pupils learn to deal with success and failure, and personal and practical challenges in the best possible way (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

In the English curriculum the topic is described as such:

In the English subject, the interdisciplinary topic of health and life skills refers to developing the ability of the pupils to express themselves in writing and orally in English. This forms the basis for being able to express their feelings, thoughts, experiences and opinions and can provide new perspectives on different ways of thinking and communication patterns, as well as on the pupils' own way of life and that of others (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

Many family films bring up themes and topics that are relevant to health and life skills. Using these films can also open an opportunity to talk about certain topics that do not naturally come up in the classroom. It can be a gentle way to introduce tough topics such as death and grief. It has often been looked as a taboo to talk about death around children. Many parents struggle to talk about death with their children and end up using confusing language when explaining the topic to the child (Graham, Yuhas, and Roman, 2018). School should therefore be a place where children can learn and discuss these topics in a manner that is true but not scary. Literature and texts can be a safe way to introduce these topics and help give the youth an emotional vocabulary to use. However, there is a lack of literature and materials for educators, parents, or healthcare workers to work with within the topic (Day, 2012; Magnet & Tremblay-Dion, 2018). I would argue that there is not a lack of literature and texts on death and grief. There is a lot of death

and grief in texts such as fairytales and films. This inspired me to focus my paper on popular film. Films are often forgotten or ignored as texts in the classroom, especially animated films. Films as text are great as they have both a visual and an oral narrative, which makes the narrative very clear for the viewer as every emotion, action, and environment is visible. Films can also help with realism as they mirror real life and pop culture in a different way compared to other text forms. Popular film in particular is closely linked to the demands and interests of popular culture, sparking interest for the masses. Disney films is one source of texts that can be used in the classroom, and they often include death and grief. The viewer is often presented with a death on screen or with a character that has experienced loss at one point. Cox, Garret, and Graham express in their *Death in Disney Films: Implications for Children's Understanding of Death* paper that films with death can give children something to relate to when they experience loss. Films can help them understand death in a less traumatic and threatening way, and they get an opportunity to gain experience on how to deal with death in terms of grieving (Cox, Garret, and Graham, 2005). However, even though there is literature on death and grief, there is very little material on how to use these texts. It is therefore up to the teacher to find a suitable way to use these texts in the classroom. Other topics films can bring up for discussion can be family relations, climate, or gender roles. Children can live through those experiences or recognise themselves in the characters and can reflect about how it feels. It can feel real without being too pedagogical since films are a reflection on our society and will therefore be a mix of authentic texts and fiction.

In this paper I will not look specifically at how films should be used in the classroom, but I believe that analysing and reflecting on the films and what they are trying to teach are important skills teachers should have. Films are more accessible now than ever, and children are introduced to these films every day. It is time that films are looked at as an equally resourceful text to other text forms in the classroom. I hope this study will inspire teachers to use film more and see the value they can bring to the classroom.

## **2.2 Visual Media and Disney**

Luisi (2021) writes in his paper *But, He's So Serious: Framing of Masculinity Among Western Hemisphere Indigenous Peoples in Disney Animated Films* that visual media such as film and television have powerful potential to influence how the viewer understands the world and the people in it (Luisi, 2021, p.2). As such, it provides a powerful avenue for children to learn ideals regarding gender stereotypes. Television, movies, and movie posters constantly show that children's media reinforces gender stereotypes, such as behaviour and looks (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021, p. 677). Media has a big part in establishing and maintaining masculine hegemony because most definitions of masculinity are not only experienced, but also include observed opinions, actions, and outlooks performed by a role model such as a mediated character (Luisi, 2021, p.3).

One of the publishers of popular visual media is Walt Disney Animation Studios. Luisi writes, "As a company, Disney's depiction of masculinity has not been immune to criticism and some findings have suggested that the company's films reinforced hegemonic masculine values (e.g., Dube, 2016)" (Luisi, 2021, p.3). In Luisi's paper about masculinity and Indigenous men in Disney, he discusses prominent masculinity traits found in Disney films. He writes that it has been found that "Heroic" male Disney characters often have stereotypical hegemonic masculine values. In addition to this, male

characters changed less over time compared to female characters. There are four predominant masculine archetypes found in Disney movies. These are: young boys becoming men, dashing heroes, handsome princes, and evil villains. Characters that did not fit into either of these four categories were usually unimportant characters in the film's narrative (Luisi, 2021, p.3).

Disney films can be divided into four different eras. Lowery (2020) describes these four eras in relation to Disney princesses in *Buying the Blueprints: Investing Emotionally and Materially in the Icy Ideologies of Disney's Frozen Films*. The first era is the Classic Era and it is characterised by being closely related to their fairytale source texts. Films from this era include *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). The next era is the Renaissance Era which is characterised by princess-heroine figures who looks to defy social conventions and gain more independence. However, they are still achieved within a romantic plot line. Films from this era include *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Aladdin* (1994), and *Mulan* (1998). After the Renaissance Era comes the Revival Era. The Revival Era have many similarities to the Renaissance Era, but the division of responsibility between the princess and prince character have been adjusted. Films from this era include *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) and *Tangled* (2010). The era we are currently in is the Reconstruction Era, which can also be called the Digital Era. These films are characterised by focusing on character development and healthy family relationships instead of focusing on romance. Films from this era include *Brave* (2012), *Frozen* (2013), and *Moana* (2016) (Lowery, 2020, pp. 21-22). Male characters in the classic Disney films tend to be more likely to portray less emotion, are less in control of their sexuality, and looked stronger and more heroic compared to female characters (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021, p.678). However, in recent years new Disney films have showed male characters as less congruent with hegemonic masculine values, and over time male characters have an overall wider range of character traits and emotions compared to what is typically associated as stereotypical traits (Luisi, 2021, p. 2).

As with masculinity, society's expectations about expressions of grief are also represented in visual media such as film. Moran (2016) notes, "Movies do not necessarily reflect actual experience, but they often reflect and contribute to the culture in which they are part" (Moran, 2016, p.98). However, while masculinity is something we experience on an almost everyday basis in real life, death and grief are things most people do not experience on a regular basis. Therefore, media becomes one of the most influential and common sources of people's perceptions of death and grief. By experiencing the death of others indirectly, media allows us to learn about death and grief, especially if a person has little experience with loss. Compared to reading a headline, statistic, or a news clip, film can allow the viewer to become invested in a character, therefore bringing an opportunity to ponder over the topic of death and demystify grief. However, while death is a common theme within media, grief is often overlooked or ignored. This usually happens to move the plot forward (Moran, 2016, pp.86-88).

### **2.3 The movies**

*Brother Bear* is an animated film from Walt Disney Animation Studios. It was released in 2003 as Disney's 44<sup>th</sup> animated feature film. *Brother Bear* follows the story of the Inuit teen Kenai and his journey to discover his true purpose. Originally characterized as very playful, Kenai's only goal is to become the bravest and strongest man. However, his life takes a drastic turn when his oldest brother Sitka dies while trying to save Kenai

and his other brother Denahi from a bear. In desperate need for revenge, Kenai kills the bear. As a punishment, the spirits turn Kenai into a bear to teach him a lesson. He must come to the mountain where the light dances to become human again. On his journey he meets many friends, including the bear cub Koda. Kenai becomes Koda's caregiver as they journey to find Koda's lost mother and the mountain, where Kenai can become human again. The journey with Koda opens Kenai's mind to all his ignorance. In the end Kenai realises that the bear he killed was Koda's mother and she will never come back. He realises the awful things he has done and said and apologises to Koda. When Kenai arrives at the mountain, he decides to stay as a bear to take care of Koda because Koda has no one left in his life. This is the beginning of good relations between his tribe and the bears, and Kenai finally embraces his true purpose.

In the *Paths of Discovery* (2004) series of bonus content featured alongside *Brother Bear* on the Disney+ streaming service, the directors and producers of *Brother Bear* discuss the making of the film. They explain that *Brother Bear* is an original story from Walt Disney Studios. The producers at Disney researched the Inuit culture and history and created a story based on some of the elements they found. One of the elements they used is the Inuits' great respect for the animal world and the world around them, and they wanted this to be an origin story about how the Inuit began to see animals like brothers. They also found during their research that many Inuit stories involved people being transformed into animals to learn a lesson. Often this animal was a bear, because bears' hibernation patterns symbolise natural cycles of dormancy and rebirth. When creating Kenai, the producers intentionally made Kenai unlikeable, saying "We knew that Kenai had to be flawed in a way so he could go out and kill a bear, but then you felt compassion for him some way as well." They wanted him to be narrowminded and do something unreasonable so he could receive a lesson from the spirits. This is also visualised by the cinematic scope of the film. In the beginning, a wide, black frame encompasses the picture, mirroring Kenai's narrowmindedness. However, after the transformation, as his character is starting his journey to understanding, the picture opens to fill the whole screen. The colours become richer, and the sounds become fuller. This all signals a change in Kenai and his view on the world. He sees more as his character begins to understand the world around him.

*Big Hero 6* is an animated film from Walt Disney Animation Studios. It was released in 2014 as Disney's 54<sup>th</sup> animated feature film. *Big Hero 6* features the adolescent Hiro. At the age of thirteen he finishes high school early and spends his time gambling in illegal robot fights to kill time and earn some money. In hopes of changing Hiro's attitudes in life, his brother and best friend Tadashi introduces him to his university and his scientist friends to show Hiro all the productive things he could use his talent for. This is where Baymax is presented, a healthcare robot that Tadashi created to aid people in need. Baymax is activated by the sound of distress or pain and will aid the person in need until they are satisfied with his work. The visit sparks a fire within Hiro, and he decides that he will participate in the university entrance conference to gain a spot at the university. He succeeds, earning acclaim for his incredible microbots, but before Hiro gets to enjoy his victory, he tragically loses his brother in a fire that engulfs the conference building. One day in the weeks that follow, Hiro accidentally activates Baymax who diagnoses Hiro with bereavement and begins his work to help Hiro feel better. This starts a unique friendship between Hiro and Baymax, who is now the last piece left of Tadashi. Together, Hiro and Baymax start the journey to cure Hiro's grief but end up discovering the truth of the fire that killed Tadashi. Hiro and Baymax join forces with Tadashi's friends and becomes a superhero team called Big Hero 6. When confronting the villain his identity is revealed to be Professor Callaghan, the man Tadashi tried to save. This makes

Hiro furious, and he tries to kill Callaghan. However, he fails. After the attempt, Baymax convinces Hiro that killing is wrong. Baymax also shows a video of Tadashi which reminds Hiro of Baymax's purpose and his brothers wish for the world. During this Hiro learns a lot about himself and starts his journey to become a real hero who is willing to do anything to help others.

In *The Origin Story of Big Hero 6: Hiro's Journey* (2014) the staff explain that *Big Hero 6* is an original Disney story inspired by the comic with the same name. They took the spirit of the characters and the name of the comic, then constructed an original narrative to fit the Disney brand by adding an emotional story arc. One of the producers expressed this about the story: "To think that you can create something that is so entertaining and makes you really connect with the characters, like get lost in the story, at the same time could take on these really important, really emotional ideas, in ways that remind people on these very simple truths that are important".

In both films, the theme of brotherhood are central. Both narratives feature youngest brothers who loses their older brother, and who also receive bonus "brothers" by the end of the films. The producers included a lot of realism on the topic of brotherhood to make the films relatable. The producers of *Brother Bear* added their own experiences as brothers, including scenes like the playfighting and teasing (Walt Disney Animation studios, 2004), whilst the producers of *Big Hero 6* interviewed co-workers about their experiences of brotherhood (Melvin, 2014).

### **3.0 Theory**

When conducting my analysis to answer my research questions, I will ground my thesis in multiple topics. The topics I will explore for my analysis are masculinity, grief and coping, and melancholia and maturation. These topics stood out the most in my notes and they became my critical lenses for my analysis. In both films, the characters go through a maturation experience as a result of immense grief, which results in a new understanding of what it means to be a man. To further analyse the films, I needed to ground myself in these theories first. This way I could catch notable events easier. These topics also became the base for my coding.

#### **3.1 Masculinity**

Gender and gender roles are constructs created by our society to define what is feminine and masculine. These are rigid categories used to characterize feminine and masculine, and these are clearly articulated, inflexible, and brutally enforced in their expression. These messages are conveyed to us by every socializing structure in society. Even though gender roles are socially constructed and cultural, society makes us believe that masculinity and femininity are biological and natural. Being a man or woman is inherent and not learned behaviours. Gender roles are explained as something everyone are born with and that will not change. However, if this were true, men and women all over the world would share the same roles and behave the same, and this would be true throughout history (Adams, Blumenfeld, Castañeda, Hackman, Peters & Zúniga, 2013).

Another characteristic of socially constructed gender norms is the representation of masculinity and femininity as opposites. While men are supposed to be strong, women are weak. In addition, all human attributes that are labelled as feminine are consistently belittled in society, as well as it often used to harass and insult men. This draws a picture on how female roles are viewed in society. Violence is also a characteristic within gender roles. Violence, both physical and psychological, are used to make sure no one deviates from their expected gender roles. For cisgendered men (men who are biological male and

identify as a man) this violence can include the ever-increasingly violent performances of masculinity in media and the ruthless policing of gender that men force upon each other through physical, emotional, and verbal taunts and confrontations in everyday life (Adams, Blumenfeld, Castañeda, Hackman, Peters & Zúniga, 2013).

Masculinity is a form of gender ideology that includes expectations and beliefs for how boys and men should behave or look. This ideology is defined by expectations, beliefs, and social norms within a culture (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021, pp. 677-678). Within masculinity, we find hegemonic masculinity, which can also be referred to as traditional masculinity or toxic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity theory refers to a set of attitudes and behaviours that creates the idealized or dominant type of masculinity in our society and is socially privileged within a given historical and cultural moment (Luisi, 2021; River & Flood, 2021). Patricia Sexton, who has written works such as *The Feminized Man*, suggests that "male norms stress values such as courage, inner direction, certain forms of aggression, autonomy, mastery, technological skill, group solidarity, adventure and considerable amounts of toughness in mind and body" (Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, as cited in Donaldson, 1993, p.644). Luisi (2021) states in *"But, He's So Serious": Framing of Masculinity Among Western Hemisphere Indigenous Peoples in Disney Animated Films* that hegemonic masculinity theory proposes that there are five tenets that work together to establish hegemonic masculinity in the Western society, and that they have had influence in how children define an ideal masculinity. These tenets are occupational achievement, physical strength, heterosexuality, frontiersmanship, and familial patriarchy. In terms of frontiersmanship, hegemonic masculinity theory states that men who rise to power without the help of others would be expected to be praised because they are trailblazers and have the strength to achieve it. Luisi (2021) also states that an important aspect of the theory is how it emphasises that there is a struggle between identities. The dominant identity of hegemonic masculinity should conquer and weaken other identities, such as femininity or other masculine identities (Luisi, 2021, pp.3-8). Donaldson (1993) describes hegemony like this.

Hegemony involves persuasion of the greater part of the population, particularly through the media, and the organisation of social institutions in ways that appear "natural", "ordinary", and "normal". The state, through punishment for non-conformity, is crucially involved in this negotiation and enforcement (1993, p.645).

There are several characteristics of masculinity in the U.S., Disney's home nation, such as bravery, aggressiveness, and risk-taking (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021, p.678). From an early age people learn gendered scripts and schemas and it continues as a self-regulating process by monitoring ours and other's behaviours (Moran, 2016, p.89). Donaldson (1993) summarizes hegemonic masculinity to these traits.

Hegemonic masculinity concerns the dread of and the flight from women. A culturally idealized form, it is both a personal and a collective project, and is the common sense about breadwinning and manhood. It is exclusive, anxiety-provoking, internally and hierarchically differentiated, brutal, and violent. It is pseudo-natural, tough, contradictory, crisis-prone, rich, and socially sustained. While centrally connected with the institutions of male dominance, not all men practice it, though most benefit from it. (1993, p.645)

Toxic masculinity has become a framework for scholarly and popular understanding of the gender factor in social problems (Harrington, 2021, p. 346). The term emerged in the 1980's and was coined by Shepherd Bliss who used it to characterize his father's militarized authoritarian masculinity. Bliss explained the reason behind the word toxic in his term in an interview in 1990. He said, "I use a medical term because I believe that like every sickness, toxic masculinity has an antidote" (Gross 1990, as cited in Harrington, 2021, p.347). Many scholars, such as Frank Pittman, use the term to describe men with issues who lacked adequate fathering. These men would feel a constant need to prove their manhood and pursue unrealistic cultural images of masculinity. Psychologists claimed toxic masculinity as culturally normative but also claimed that it could be cured through engaging men with fatherhood, creating an essential image of masculine emotional development (Harrington, 2021, p. 347). Toxic masculinity is also described as a harmful form of traditional masculinity which is characterized by misogynistic and homophobic attitudes, the drive to dominate and aggressively with others, and attempts to maintain dominance over women and minority groups (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021, p.678).

Strict adherence to traditional masculine norms has been associated with damaging effects on wellbeing and over-all health for men, and negative outcomes such as poor mental health, reduced help-seeking, and suicide are associated with conformity to these norms. Toxic masculine characteristics, such as reduced emotional expression and not showing weakness or vulnerability, may also increase resistance to mental health treatment (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021, p.678). This is a problem as approximately 75% of the annual suicide deaths worldwide are men (World Health Organization, 2018, as cited in River & Flood, 2021, p.911). Researchers believe that men learn to conceal emotions such as sadness, fear, and grief to distinguish themselves as men (River & Flood, 2021, p.911). In a study conducted by River and Flood (2021), they found that most of the men in the study had been told in their childhood that particular emotions, such as sadness and fear went against the ideals of masculinity. Many of the men in the study also never or only spoke to certain people about their emotions to be perceived as masculine to the public (River & Flood, 2021 pp. 917-918). Men in emotional distress can redirect their emotions into actions that affirm masculinity, such as violence and aggression. In River and Flood's (2021) study they found that when confronted with emotions like sadness, nine men turned to emotions that increased masculinity, such as anger, whilst two men engaged in acts of vandalism (River & Flood, 2021, pp.919-920).

McCallum (2002) examines how the new masculinity of the 90's was portrayed in Disney's late 90's films *Hercules*, *Mulan*, and *Tarzan*. She argues that these films explored the notion of masculinity being a social construct with a bundle of behaviours and a way of being in the world that must be learned. She also found that the traditional, hypermasculine man was often set up against the new sensitive man of the 90's, putting the traditional masculinity in a bad light. McCallum mentions that masculinity is often used as an opposition to femininity, citing the example of *Mulan* in which Li Shang accuses his recruits of being effeminate in the song "I'll Make a Man Out of You," signalling that the recruits must complete military training to be looked at as real men (McCallum, 2002).

In a study conducted by Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan (2021) they researched masculine traits in the thirty highest grossing animated movies in the US (as of 2019) and they found that out of their seventeen masculinity themes, all the movies

had at least six of the themes and nine of the films contained at least thirteen different themes. Out of the seventeen themes, the most prominent themes were violence, inspires fear, and risk-taking (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021, p.682). They also mention that, based on earlier work on toxic masculinity, animated films contain few masculine themes. However, they argue that two of three of the most common themes found in their sample, inspires fear and violence, are consistent with the conceptualisation of toxic masculinity. In addition to this, many of the male characters displayed a combination of positive and negative masculinity traits throughout the movies, such as being a leader and assertive, while also being violent and fear-inducing to others. These mixed messages within a character, particularly a hero, may legitimize those behaviours and function as a potent socializing agent for young viewers, since exposure to these films may constitute a harmful endorsement of such attitudes. (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021, pp.683-684). Harriger, Wick, Trivedi, and Callahan (2021) also note that not all traditionally masculine traits are inherently problematic, and positive themes showed up on an average on 4 to 6 times in the movies. However, the problematic masculinity themes were more prominent in the sample compared to the positive themes (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021, pp.683-684).

Having considered various explanations about hegemonic masculinity I have decided to focus on behaviours related to hegemonic masculinity. The behaviours I have decided to focus on in my paper are dominance, emotional stoicism, anger and aggression, and risk-taking. I chose these behaviours because they were the most prominent in both *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6*, and they affected Kenai's and Hiro's decisions the most.

### **3.2 Grief and Masculinity in Media**

Disney is a media outlet that presents death to the viewer on many occasions. Cox, Garrett, and Graham (2005) executed a study on the potential influence of Disney films on children's concepts of death. Since many children are inexperienced with the concept of death, they might be unprepared to deal with death of a loved one, or even a beloved cartoon character (Cox, Garret, & Graham, 2005, p.267). Many parents try to shield their children and therefore avoid films and television with death (Graham, Yuhas, & Roman, 2018, p.3). Fairytales, which many Disney movies are inspired by, have for ages served as honest and clear-cut representations of death available to children and they have often non-threatening references to death. They also have interesting and somewhat controversial portrayals of death and grieving. In terms of children's film, death is often represented, but rarely grieved. Cox, Garret, and Graham found that in terms of protagonist's deaths, they were for the most part explicit which can be viewed as a positive point because these scenes demonstrate real, explicit deaths of characters the viewer has developed attachment to. They also note that it could be potentially traumatic for some children to witness a death. They also found that negative emotions, such as sadness and frustration, were almost always present when the protagonist dies. This can be an example for the children of how to grieve a loved one, showing acceptable and normal behaviour (Cox, Garret, & Graham, 2005, pp.270-279).

In *Death and Coping Mechanisms in Animated Disney Movies: A Content Analysis of Disney films (1937-2003) and Disney/Pixar Films (2003-2016)* conducted by Graham, Yuhas, and Roman in 2018 they looked at death and coping mechanisms in Disney and Pixar films from 2003-2016, continuing Cox, Garret, and Graham's study from 2005. In their sample of films there are more protagonist deaths than antagonist deaths. In



addition to this, of the seven protagonists that died in their sample, six of them were related or married to the main character. This might be intentional to make the death more relatable to the viewer. They also found that there are fewer explicit deaths in their sample compared to Cox, Garret, and Graham's sample, which shows that there has been a change from explicit to less direct and traumatic representations. Disney and Pixar have not stopped showing deaths, but they are turning away from scenes that can be especially distressing. In most cases, even though antagonists are portrayed as deserving of death, most antagonist deaths were results of accidents. This reinforces the idea that the protagonist is too good to kill others. Graham, Yuhas, and Roman also found that Disney and Pixar are moving away from purposeful deaths, where a character purposely kills another character, and towards a more "realistic" and common cause of death (Graham, Yuhas & Roman, 2018).

Incorporation of coping mechanisms in a storyline that includes death is essential because characters can be role models for children on how to cope after experiencing loss. Coping is the way a person regulates emotion and behaviour in a stressful situation. The development of healthy coping mechanisms in childhood is important for overall mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing (Graham, Yuhas & Roman, 2018). Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck (2007) discuss coping in *The Development of Coping* and identified twelve families of coping strategies: helplessness, information-seeking, problem-solving, escape, support-seeking, self-reliance, social isolation, delegation, accommodation, submission, negotiation, and opposition (Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007, as cited in Graham, Yuhas, & Roman, 2018, p.3). Many children's books attempt to model different coping mechanisms through characters. Those characters can also show healthy ways to release negative emotions. Coping mechanisms can be divided into positive and negative coping mechanisms. Positive coping can include getting support from friends and family, allowing oneself to express sadness, hugging, and trying to accomplish positive goals that the deceased would encourage. Negative coping can include seeking revenge, isolation, refusal to express sadness, and being overly cautious. Graham, Yuhas, and Roman found that characters that showed negative coping mechanisms would stop using them after realising that they did not feel better. In the end the protagonist found healthier ways to express emotions and to cope, and when the film ended they were happy and in a positive surrounding. Through this, the viewer might learn that these coping mechanisms do not help them, and that for example taking out anger on others after a death is never the answer (Graham, Yuhas & Roman, 2018).

When an adolescent experiences grief, typical reactions include sadness, shock, anger, guilt, and distress. They also can experience physical symptoms such as feeling ill, sleep disturbance, physical pain, and changes in appetite (Prigerson, Zhang, Block, & Maciejewski, 2007; Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, Draper, Dudley, & Mitchell, 2018; Pearce & Komaromy, 2020). Bereaved adolescents may resort to risky behaviour like fighting, drinking, and smoking, especially within the first year after the loss. However, they might also develop maturity, appreciation of life, empathy, and compassion for other people (Andriessen, Hadzi-Pavlovic, Draper, Dudley, & Mitchell, 2018, p.203). Characteristics of bereaved adolescents are closely aligned with the risky behaviours associated with hegemonic masculinity. This makes experiences of grief a natural theme to examine representations of hegemonic masculinity in family films.

Society may continue to view grieving men within the lens of hegemonic masculinity if dichotomous gender norms dominate film. There is little research on whether grief is experienced differently depending on gender. However, examining how

men's bereavement is represented in media will give an insight on how society expects men to cope in real life. Moran (2016) explored how grieving male widowers were presented in sixteen films. Two of the tropes she found were storylines that involved the man isolating himself from friends and family to cope with his grief, and storylines that included adventurous or heroic aspects of the bereaved spouse. Ten of sixteen films showed an adventurous storyline for the man, whilst all sixteen films showed the man isolating himself. The younger men in the sample would more often separate themselves to appear stoic. Moran also found that all sixteen films in the study demonstrate that media conveys a masculine experience of grief. She also notes that mainstream film overrepresents young men and action films, supporting that even in mourning the ideal prototype for males are being stoic, strong, and adventurous. It also suggests and supports a pattern in how films on bereavement portray men keeping with hegemonic masculine characteristics when processing their grief (Moran, 2016, pp.86-99)

### **3.3 Maturation:**

Eric Tribunella (2010) explores maturation and its role in American literature in *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children's Literature*. He argues that because childhood is perceived as a period of inexperience, apprenticeship, and education, children's literature has been used as an opportunity to impart lessons. Trauma has been used a lot in children's literature and this suggests that children are deliberately exposed to trauma as a form of discipline, and to provoke or ensure the development of children. Tribunella argues that the traumatising of children – both the readers and the protagonist- can be used as a useful map or method for representing and promoting the process of becoming a mature adult. It works as a manual for the readers on how they can and should respond in similar circumstances. Society wants children to grow up into mature adults who are prepared to deal with the brutalities of life. According to Tribunella, trauma, or wound, is an enabling injury that triggers maturation and constitutes maturation. Loss is one way to produce this wound. Loss in children's literature can be looked at as a kind of sacrifice because the willingness to sacrifice is critical for the formation of a mature and disciplined citizen. Children must learn to give up something they love to signal and achieve maturity, and it is crucial for "proper" development. Now that childhood has become safer for many children, literature with trauma becomes more significant and necessary as an artificial stressor. Rather than allowing trauma to occur on its own, it must be orchestrated and consequently it is contrived. Tribunella mentions that trauma also appears in YA fiction where the adolescent protagonist often is depicted at the brink of adulthood. Adolescence is defined by the loss of childhood and initiation into knowledge, both which can be experienced as trauma. Tribunella calls melancholic maturation as the process of loving and losing objects and incorporation of the objects qualities which catalyses the transformation of the person who experiences the loss into a melancholic adult. In addition, in contrast to mourning where you slowly let go of the memory of the melancholia preserves the object as an identification which averts the experience or need of grief (Tribunella, 2010).

Tribunella argues that there are several qualities everyone should obtain as a mature adult. Adults can be an adult without demonstrating some or any of the qualities. However, a mature adult embodies all or most of them. Some of the qualities are responsibility, knowingness, and law-abiding. Being responsible means showing good judgement, being reliable, and promote general well-being for oneself and others. Being knowing means leaving the ignorance from your childhood. Adults should be aware and knowing of things such as death, violence, and the drudgeries of daily life, and go on

with their lives despite the knowingness. To be knowing is to be experienced, to own a realist sensibility about the world and oneself, and to be dispossessed of one's illusion and idealism. Being law-abiding means to recognise the common and individual good of observing laws and customs. An adult should abandon the immature, mischievous, and irresponsible ways of childhood. It involves being ethical, being moral, and being devoted to the community (Tribunella, 2010).

The most prominent themes in *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* are masculinity, maturation, and grief. Since these themes were so prominent, I made these my critical lenses. To use these lenses, I needed to have a theoretical background in each topic. After reading the theory, I was ready to start analysing the films through the lenses. With this collection of theory, I was able to understand and decode my film notes which lead me to find solid evidence for how grief is used as a catalyst for maturation from hegemonic masculinity to emotional literacy.

#### **4.0 Methodology**

For my project I decided to use qualitative critical content analysis to answer my research questions. Qualitative research is an approach where researchers explore how individuals or groups in a society attribute to a social or human problem and try to understand its meaning. One way to do qualitative research is to go in-depth on topics in chosen texts (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Critical content analysis is a genre within content analysis. Content analysis is an umbrella term used to indicate different research methods for analysing texts and focuses on what the text is about. It also has a focus on literature being a representation of human experience (Johnson, Mathis & Short, 2017, pp. 2-4). The term "critical" in "critical content analysis" signals a political stance by the researcher, and researchers who adopt a critical stance focus on locating power in social practices by understanding, uncovering, and transforming inequality in our society (Johnson, Mathis & Short, 2017).

Writing in "Critical Content Analysis of Children's and Young Adult Literature, Johnson, Mathis, and Short (2017) write, "At the broadest level, critical content analysis involves bringing a critical lens to an analysis of a text or group of texts in an effort to explore the possible underlying messages within those texts, particularly as related to issues of power" (2017, p.6). One of the main differences between critical content analysis and content analysis is the prioritizing of critical lenses as the frame for the study. These lenses are used when the researcher develops research questions, when they select the texts, and when they analyse the texts. Paulo Freire (1970) argues in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that a critical lens involves critique, hope, and action. Critique involves questioning what is and who benefits, hope involves asking "what if?" and considering new possibilities, and action involves mobilizing for social justice. The theory selected for the study depends on the research purpose and researchers usually combine multiple theories to construct a critical lens (Johnson, Mathis & Short, 2017, pp. 5-6)

In critical content analysis there is a critical examination of issues of stereotyping and misrepresentation in literature. This is the base of one of my critical lenses for my project. In both *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* the questions of "traditional" vs. non-"traditional" masculinity is central. Other critical lenses I will explore are maturation, and grief. These critical lenses will be secondary theory that aid my collection of primary sources through my analysis. The data I collected through analyses with these lenses shows how representation of grief, masculinity, and maturation is present in the films as

well as what those themes might mean. The reason for this study is to gain a better understanding of how grief and masculinity is represented in new media, specifically in Disney, and to gain understanding of how these representations can be looked at as models for the viewer.

#### **4.1 Data Collection**

When starting this project, I had already decided that I wanted to focus on death in Disney movies. Disney is one of the studios with the largest market share of family films and has been a huge part of children's lives for generations. With the addition of Disney+ the Disney universe have never been more accessible than it is today. They have become the modern fairytale tellers. They are not shy about addressing deaths in their movies either, which is something I found interesting since Disney films are targeted for children and most parents avoid showing these themes to their children (Day, 2012; Graham, Yuhua & Roman, 2018). When deciding on which Disney films I wanted to use for my project I created a list of Walt Disney Animation and Pixar films and sorted them into categories based on the type of death in the film. The categories were: death off screen, family and friend death on screen, and villain death. Films that had no death were excluded from the list. Based on these categories I decided to focus on family death on screen and then narrowed that list down into the theme "on-going grief." Within this category I chose five films that I was going to watch: *Frozen 2*, *Up*, *Brother Bear*, *The Good Dinosaur*, and *Big Hero 6*. After watching these films, I decided to focus on *Brother Bear* (2003) and *Big Hero 6* (2014) for my Master thesis as they had many similarities and touched upon the topic of young grief. In both films there are also other characters who experience grief, and the films portray how grief affects people differently. Both films also touch upon the roles of masculinity and care giving.

The first time I watched the films I watched them as a viewer and not a researcher. I wrote some notes about interesting events, but I did not analyse the texts in depth. Based on my notes I was able to find key terms that repeated themselves throughout both films. After this the search for relevant theory began. I started by reflecting over which lenses would be the most relevant to use in my project. The themes that stood out the most during the first watch were grief, trauma, masculinity, maturity, brotherhood, and heroism. I used these themes to find my critical lenses. My first critical lens is grief, the second lens is maturation, and the third is masculinity, with focus on hegemonic masculinity. Before starting my data collection, I read relevant theory related to the lenses, and when I felt I had enough relevant theory I watched the films through the different lenses. In addition to watching the films, I also watched the "Making of" videos for both films to get an insight into what the directors and producers did to create the films and their reflections around the films.

#### **4.2 Data Analysis**

I started my data analysis by digitalizing all my notes in one document. This made it more organised and made it easier for me to find notes. This also allowed me to see connections between the films and themes easier. The notes are mostly focused on interactions and dialogues between the characters, including visual dialogues directed to the viewer such as an image of untouched food as the characters have another discussion in the background. After sorting all my notes, I started to code. Since I am conducting a critical content analysis, I used my lenses as the main thematic codes. I then split those into sub-categories. I allowed myself to add codes during the process since some of the notes did not initially fit into my original codes but had relevance to my

research questions. Some notes also received multiple codes. The codes I ended up with were:

- Masculinity
  - o Hegemonic masculinity
  - o Non-hegemonic masculinity
- Grief response
- Brotherhood
- Maturation
  - o Unknowing
  - o Knowing
  - o Pre-Maturation
- Facts of importance

During my coding process, I used multiple coding methods. Saldaña (2013) states in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, "Depending on the nature and goals of your study and forms of data, you may find that one coding method alone will suffice, or that two or more are needed to capture the complex processes or phenomena in your data" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 64). In the same book he states that researchers can develop hybrid coding methods that are customized to suit the specific needs for a study (Saldaña, 2013, p. 64). Therefore, in my analysis I used a mix of provisional coding, narrative coding, and simultaneous coding.

Provisional coding involves the use of a pre-determined list of codes developed before data collection, where the codes can be developed based on anticipated categories and types of actions or responses that may arise in the data. The list is generated from preparatory investigative matters such as literature reviews related to the study, the study's framework and research questions, and researcher-formulated hypotheses. During the process, the provisional codes can be changed, revised, removed, or expanded to include new codes (Saldaña, 2013, pp. 144-145). Provisional coding goes hand in hand with critical content analysis as I have pre-determined lenses that I use to collect data and which are the main codes for my analysis. The codes that were pre-determined based on my lenses were masculinity, maturation, and grief response. Masculinity and Maturation were then split into sub-categories to make it more organized.

Narrative coding applies the conventions of literary elements and analysis to qualitative texts, often in the form of stories. Narrative analysis includes diverse methods such as thematic and dialogical methods. In addition to this, narrative analysis is especially suitable for inquiries such as psychological, social, and cultural meaning. It is also suitable for inquiries such as identity development and documentation of life (Saldaña, 2013, pp. 131-132). Narrative coding is used in my analysis as my goal is to analyse the spoken and visual narratives presented in both films, and to find specific themes within those narratives. I used narrative coding to code dialogues, visual cues, and facial expressions. By doing this I could find social and cultural inquiries in the narratives.

Simultaneous coding, also called double coding, is the application of two or more codes to a single qualitative data set or overlapping occurrences of two or more codes applied to sequential units of qualitative data. Saldaña states that it is appropriate to use simultaneous coding when data suggest multiple meanings that justify and necessitate more than one code since, as he quotes Glesne (2011), "social interaction does not occur

in neat, isolated units" (Glesne, 2011, as cited in Saldaña, 2013, p.80). Simultaneous codes showed up many places in my notes and helped me see connections between the different categories. It also helped me see the story progression and character development easier. An example of this is how actions coded as pre-maturation often also were coded with hegemonic masculinity.

After finishing coding, I sorted my codes in a separate document where every code within the same category were in one place. With this I mean that every note coded with hegemonic masculinity were together, every note coded with unknowing were in the same place, etc. This way I could see all the evidence I had in the specific categories, as well as I could see similarities and differences between the films easier. During the process I needed to revisit the theory and the films to make evidence clearer. In the end I found strong evidence for masculinity, grief, and maturation to discuss in my paper.

## 5.0 Findings and Discussion

*Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* both follow a maturation narrative in which the protagonists grow from a boy into a man. Both films have two sets of maturation storylines. There is a physical maturation, signalled by age, and the psychological, where one goes from unknowing to knowing or learn the ways of an adult. However, everyone will become an adult through the physical maturation based on age, whilst becoming mature is a mental process that must be learned and experienced. Becoming mature is not the same as becoming an adult. Both Kenai's and Hiro's maturation storylines begin with the loss of their older brothers. This incident makes them deal with many strong feelings which leads to many bad decisions. However, in the end they have learnt how to deal with these feelings and learnt how to cope with the loss.

Children learn behaviour and gender roles not only from their parents, but also from what they see in films and television. It is not new that hegemonic masculine characters are portrayed in Disney films. It is in fact the trend. It was mostly visible in early days of Disney, but these characters are still prominent in modern Disney films. In terms of Disney's four eras presented by Lowery (2020), *Brother Bear* is part of the Revival era and *Big Hero 6* is part of the Reconstruction era. However, since both films were released after Disney's redirection of masculinity, as described in McCallum (2002), I have decided to classify both *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* as modern Disney films as opposed to classics because they feature a distinctly different attitude towards masculinity from that represented in earlier Disney films. Both *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* include heteronormative masculine characteristics in the representation of Kenai and Hiro. However, both films use the characters' maturation journeys to make the characters leave their toxic behaviours behind as they begin their journeys to adulthood.

For my analysis I will first go through Kenai's story arc before I start analysing hegemonic masculine behaviours. I will then do the same with Hiro. After discussing these findings, I will discuss grief response and literary foils. There are many factors that can be classified as hegemonic masculinity, such as looks, romantic relations, and behaviour. For my analysis I have decided to focus on behaviours typically associated with hegemonic masculinity. These include risk taking, avoiding feelings, anger and aggression, and domination (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021; Luisi, 2021; Donaldson, 1993; Moran, 2016; McCallum, 2002; Harrington, 2021; River & Flood, 2021). When I talk about hegemonic masculine behaviour, I refer to behaviours typically associated with hegemonic masculinity in the west and the US as both films were created by an American company with American and Canadian directors and writers. I will also

alternate between hegemonic masculinity, traditional masculinity, heteronormative masculinity, and toxic masculinity when discussing these behaviours.

### 5.1 Brother Bear

In *Brother Bear* the narrative follows Kenai, an Inuit adolescent who is on the brink of adulthood. In the beginning of the film, Kenai is wild hearted and carefree and plays around without thinking of the consequences that may follow. The story starts right before Kenai's "coming of age" ceremony, which is the base of the story as Kenai's main goal is to complete the ceremony. The ceremony is split into two events: the totem reveal, where the adolescent receives their totem that will guide them to adulthood and throughout life, and the handprint ceremony, where the adolescent puts their handprint on the wall to mark their transition into adulthood. Kenai receives the "bear of love" totem which he does not identify with.

After losing his brother Sitka in a bear fight, Kenai decides to kill the bear for revenge. Because of this, the spirits in the sky, with Sitka in the lead, turn Kenai into a bear to teach him a lesson. The lesson is to get a new perspective on the world by walking in someone else's shoes. He then meets a bear cub by the name Koda, who helps Kenai find the mountain where the lights touches. By the end of the film, Kenai has learned to take responsibility for his actions, and he has become aware of the world around him. When given the option to become a human again, Kenai decides to stay as a bear to take care of Koda, saying, "He needs me." This marks that Kenai has understood and accepted his totem, and the finish of his maturation. He is now able to put his handprint on the wall next to his ancestors. This symbolises Kenai officially becoming an adult. Kenai's story is a prime example of going from unknowing to knowing, which is one of Tribunella's maturation characteristics. He starts off being narrowminded and unknowing of the world around him, to be understanding and knowing of what is good and responsible.

One example of hegemonic masculine behaviour in Kenai is his perception of power and dominance. This is prominent in his perception of animals, especially bears. Kenai believes that humans are superior to bears, stating that "A bear doesn't love anyone. They don't think, they don't feel..." This becomes apparent in the scene after Sitka's funeral.

**Denahi:** I know what you are feeling, but killing that bear is wrong

**Kenai:** Wrong? Our brother is dead and it is because of that monster

**Denahi:** I don't blame the bear, Kenai

**Kenai:** I see...

**Denahi:** Killing the bear won't make you a man

**Kenai:** Now you are trying to be wise?

**Denahi:** I am trying to follow my totem. Why can't you do the same?

**Kenai:** You really think love has anything to do with being a man? A man wouldn't just sit here and do nothing

Denahi tries to talk Kenai out of killing the bear, saying that it is wrong, but Kenai will not listen. He claims it is a monster, signalling that he thinks it is reasonable to kill it. Kenai's mind cannot be changed. Even after he kills the bear and is confronted with it, he

still says, "I didn't do anything wrong!". Kenai does not see the value of the bear and believes he fixed the problem. In addition to this, he still has bad feelings towards bears even though he killed the one that caused his brother's death.

Kenai also shows signs of believing that feminine characteristics are weaker and less dominant. He never specifically says that it is bad being feminine or that those qualities are weaker but based on his actions it is clear that these are underlying beliefs. One example of this is when Denahi makes flower crown to Kenai and Kenai is very offended. His reaction is to throw a rock after Denahi.

However, these attitudes are challenged as Kenai learns more about the world around him. He learns that bears and animals have feelings and act on instincts just like humans. The turning point for this is when Koda says, "Those monsters are really scary, especially with those sticks." Here Kenai finally realises that the bears feel the same towards humans as he feels towards bears. It is also proven when Kenai realises that the "monster" he killed is Koda's mother. The bears are no longer hairy beings that steal, kill, and have no feelings. They are beings who also have families they love, and they act on instinct to keep them safe. Kenai gets overwhelmed with shame and guilt, which he did not feel before. He accepts that what he did was very wrong.

Another example of Kenai showing traditional masculine behaviour is through his views of manhood and what being a man means. This is especially prevalent at the totem ceremony. Before the ceremony Kenai shares his thoughts about what totem he wants. "Sabretooth tiger for bravery, or strength or greatness, you know something that fits me." To Kenai, becoming a man is not simply going from being a child to an adult, it is becoming what society looks at as manly and masculine. However, at the ceremony he receives the totem of love. The shaman Tanana gives a speech about how great the totem is. "Love is the most precious of totems. It reveals itself in unexpected ways. Let love guide your actions, then one day you'll be a man." Kenai tries to look happy in front of Tanana, but when he hugs her his facial expressions shows signs of disapproval and disappointment. Later in the film Kenai exclaims "Do you really think love has anything to do with being a man?" which signals that he never accepted his totem.

This shows that Kenai has specific thoughts about gender roles and what qualities are masculine or feminine. To him love is a feminine and weak quality. This correlate with heteronormative masculine beliefs that feminine qualities are viewed as a weakness and worse than masculine qualities. Kenai may have learned these viewpoints through his tribe and older brothers. These viewpoints are reflected in the tribal traditions in the film as during Tanana's speech in the totem ceremony she points out different gendered characteristics in the crowd. When she talks about bravery, she points out a strong, proud man, and when she talks about patience, she points out a woman who is a mother. In addition to this, Kenai's brothers react to his totem by laughing. This shows that these viewpoints are prevalent in his family. They might not have as intense thoughts as Kenai's, but they taught him those opinions. Kenai's brothers also treat him as a baby whilst Kenai identify himself as a man, which makes Kenai determined to prove himself as a man.

When Kenai receives his totem, he feels like he loses his manhood. After the disappointment of his totem not living up to his expectation, Kenai feels like he is losing sense of himself and what his future looks like. He believes that he will struggle to follow his totem, therefor never be able to put his handprint on the wall next to his ancestors. He wants to be looked at as brave and strong, not someone who, in Denahi's words



"skips around loving everybody." Kenai shows how he struggles to follow and accept his totem in the dialogue between Kenai and Denahi as Denahi says "I am trying to follow my totem. Why can't you do the same?" and Kenai responds "You really think love has anything to do with being a man? A man wouldn't just sit here and do nothing." When he later throws his totem in the ashes it symbolises that he rejects the future the spirits planned for him, burning the ties between him and the spirits. He does not want to follow his totem but wants to follow what he believes is the only right thing to do. It can also symbolise him removing a reminder about how he is doing the opposite of his life task, as killing and hating is the opposite of love. It can even mean that he simply did not want the spirits to see what he was doing as he knew that it would upset them.

However, by the end of the film he realises that love is strong and powerful. This is proven by his action of staying as a bear to take care of Koda. Through his maturation journey he has learned and experienced the different types of love: love between couples, love between friends, love between brothers, and love for the world around him. He has learned how love can be a driving force to make one strong and brave. For Kenai to stay as Koda's caregiver he shows that he is brave and strong. He gives up his future as a human and brave man in his tribe and embraces a future he believes suits him more: a future as a strong bear. He shows that he has grown up but also has become a man. By following his totem, which he earlier rejected. He shows that he always had the ability of love, it was just hidden by his toxic thoughts. He embraces love as a part of his life.

One last example of toxic masculinity in Kenai is his aggressive behaviour. We see this especially in the fish basket scene. Here Kenai gets the message that the fish basket he failed to tie up had been taken by a bear. Kenai is confronted by his brother Denahi for being incompetent whilst the tribespeople are annoyed of him. As a way to deal with the situation, Kenai decides to go after the bear to get the basket back. However, when he finds the basket, it is broken, and all the fish are gone. He spots the bear that stole the fish and throws rocks after it. This is the episode that provoke the big fight between the bear and the brothers.

In this scene, Kenai acts on his anger rather than fixing the problem in another way. The feeling of getting judged by his brother and the rest of the tribe mixed with the feeling of embarrassment and shame makes him chase the bear. His pride is hurt in the ceremony and then being publicly shamed by his brother makes him feel worse about himself, and maybe even less of a man for failing, or rather ignoring, to do a very simple task. Because of this he has a reason to prove himself as competent and as a man, and he believes going after the bear to get the basket is the way to prove it.

When Kenai meets the bear, his way to deal with the grudge and anger towards the bear is to throw rocks after it. This is a thing Kenai does earlier in the film as well. He tries to throw a rock after Denahi after he teases Kenai for his totem. It seems that Kenai's way to express his anger and annoyance towards someone is through violence. This might be because he does not have the words to express his feelings and disapproval in another way, or it might be him simply acting before thinking.

This hegemonic masculine way of behaving is challenged in the film. However, there is not a specific scene where Kenai chooses to not act on his anger. However, as Kenai becomes more mature, he shows less anger and aggression. The scene that is closest to showing that Kenai no longer acts on his anger is the scene where Kenai tells Koda that he killed Koda's mother. Instead of avoiding the conversation or trying to

make himself look better, he tells Koda directly that he killed her and that he regrets it. Whilst in the basket scenario he tries to prove himself after feeling ashamed, here he reflects on his shame and actions, and apologizes to Koda.

## 5.2 Big Hero 6

In *Big Hero 6* the narrative follows Hiro, an adolescent from the fictional conglomerate city of San Fransokyo. Hiro and his older brother Tadashi live with their aunt Cass after their parents died ten years ago. Hiro is an extremely smart boy who graduated from high school at only thirteen years old. Now he spends his time both fighting to have something to do. However, Hiro joins Tadashi's school's competition to get a spot in the school. He ends up winning a spot with his invention called micro bots. However, after the competition Tadashi dies in a fire when trying to save his professor. Sometime after Tadashi's funeral, Hiro discovers that his micro bots, which he believed were destroyed in the fire, still exist and is stored in a warehouse downtown. Together with Baymax, the robot healthcare companion Tadashi created, and Tadashi's friends, Hiro creates the superhero group called Big Hero 6 and goes on a mission to find the person responsible for the fire and stealing Hiro's micro bots. After a long chase, Big Hero 6 manages to capture the villain and the identity is revealed to be Professor Callaghan, the man Tadashi tried to save. Hiro becomes furious and he tries to kill him. After this attempt Baymax convinces Hiro that killing is wrong, and after watching a video of Tadashi, Hiro is reminded of Baymax's purpose and his brother's wish for the world. In the middle of this, an old video that shows Callaghan's daughter Abigale dying in a wormhole accident is discovered. Now they know why Callaghan stole the micro bots and want revenge. Big Hero 6 then goes on to capture Callaghan. After capturing Callaghan, Baymax receives a signal that someone is still alive in the wormhole, and it is Callaghan's daughter. Hiro and Baymax enter the wormhole to save her. However, on the way out Baymax ends up getting injured. Hiro now has to choose between letting Baymax sacrifice himself to save them, or not make it out of the wormhole before it closes. This is a tough decision because saying goodbye to Baymax is not only saying goodbye to a best friend, but it is also saying goodbye to the last piece left of Tadashi. Hiro has lost so much, exclaiming "I can't lose you too." In the end Hiro decides to let Baymax sacrifice himself. However, Baymax snuck his healthcare chip with all the data Tadashi created into his rocket arm. Hiro was then able to recreate Baymax. Now he, Baymax, and the rest of Big Hero 6 fight crime and save the people of San Fransokyo.

One example of hegemonic masculine behaviour in Hiro is how he avoids talking about his feelings. This is a characteristic that follows him throughout the film, but it is especially prevalent in the scene where Hiro has to explain to Baymax that Tadashi is dead. In this scene they had just come back from the factory where Hiro's micro bots had been stored after the fire, which was a shock to Hiro because he thought the micro bots were destroyed in the fire. While Hiro is busy thinking about the situation they were just in, Baymax asks for Tadashi. Hiro has to explain to Baymax that Tadashi is gone. Baymax starts to wonder why, since "Tadashi was in excellent health" and Hiro explains that he died in a fire. Hiro shows on his face that he finds it hard to talk about. He talks about his feelings to Baymax when Baymax says "Tadashi is here" and Hiro responds "No. People keep saying he is not really gone, as long as we remember him. It still hurts." He admits that it hurts, and that it is a different type of hurt, but he does not go in detail on his feelings. Even when Baymax offers to help him, he responds with, "You can't fix this one buddy." Baymax downloads a database on personal loss, listing multiple treatments for Hiro to try. However, Hiro still tries to push him away, stating that he is okay.

Hiro believes that he can manage it best himself and does not like the idea of having to talk about it to others. This aligns with hegemonic masculine studies that says that men are not supposed to show that they are affected by their feelings or talk about their feelings. Boys are taught from an early age that they are not supposed to talk about their feelings (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021; Luisi, 2021; Donaldson, 1993; Moran, 2016; McCallum, 2002; Harrington, 2021; River & Flood, 2021).

However, this ideology is challenged towards the end of the film. It all starts with Hiro's extreme reaction to finding out that Callaghan is the one responsible for Tadashi's death. After an attempt to kill Callaghan, Hiro arrives back home with a lot of anger still in him and he is determined to continue to go after Callaghan. However, Baymax refuses to let him and rather tries to talk Hiro out of it.

**Baymax:** Do you want me to terminate Professor Callaghan?

**Hiro:** Just open.

**Baymax:** Will terminating Professor Callaghan improve your emotional state?

**Hiro:** Yes! No! I don't know!

**Baymax:** Is this what Tadashi wanted?

**Hiro:** It doesn't matter.

**Baymax:** Tadashi programmed me to aid and...

**Hiro:** Tadashi is gone! Tadashi is gone!

Hiro is overwhelmed by all the emotions. He has masked his feelings to make people believe he is okay, but his body cannot take it any longer. He is still having a hard time processing and accepting that Tadashi is gone. Knowing that it was someone's fault that he died and not just a tragic accident leaves him with so many strong emotions. He is clearly in heartache. This leads to Baymax showing him the video of Tadashi making Baymax, which makes Hiro cry. Hiro is reminded about all the goodness Tadashi had and Baymax's purpose, which is to help others. Hiro does not specifically talk about his feelings here either. He says thank you and sorry for acting the way he did, but his crying shows that he is in an environment where he is no longer afraid to show his feelings. He feels safe and letting go of the feelings that have been holding him down makes him feel relief. Now he accepts that the treatments Baymax listed help him and that it does not make him weak. He might have begun to realise this when Baymax hugged him earlier. Back then he said he was okay, but the appreciation and enjoyment could be seen on his face. Now however, he accepts hugs from his friends. He has now realised that what Baymax said is helping. His treatment is working without having to kill Callaghan. He carries this ideology with him throughout the rest of the film.

Another example of toxic masculinity present in Hiro is anger and aggression. This is a behaviour that is not visible until after Hiro realises that someone is responsible for his brother's death. The scene where his anger and aggression are the most visible is the scene where the masked man's identity is revealed to be Professor Callaghan. Hiro's anger slowly grows during the hunt to find the masked man. In addition to his anger, Hiro also programs more violent features for Baymax. However, finding out that the man responsible for his brother's death was the very man his brother ran in to save and a

man he and his brother respected so much, makes him furious. Hiro can no longer control his anger. He orders Baymax to kill, and when Baymax refuses, Hiro rips out his healthcare card so Baymax cannot be stopped from killing Callaghan. The betrayal makes Hiro go from capturing the masked man to killing being the only option. He only wants Callaghan to pay for Tadashi. This aligns with hegemonic masculinity as the only emotions that is accepted and expected from a man is to express is anger.

Hiro challenges this heteronormative masculine behaviour in the film. After Hiro is reminded that Baymax's purpose is to heal the sick and injured, Hiro realises that he is going against Tadashi's wish by making Baymax kill Callaghan. This incident makes him realise the right thing to do. He goes back to capture Callaghan, but he does not kill him. He also no longer turns to violence in the fight against the villain, saying "Our programming prevents us from injuring a human being." In the end Hiro becomes more mature than the adult he is fighting. He shows that there are other ways to deal with his anger and that revenge does not mean getting rid of the person. He also proves that he is a stronger man by not resorting to violence.

One last example of hegemonic masculinity in Hiro is risk-taking. This is a very prevalent trope in the film because it is a superhero film. One scene that portrays this is the bot fighting scene. Hiro is having a bot fight with a reigning champion in the community, Yama. After destroying the robot Yama sends his boys to catch Hiro and he has to run. Luckily, Tadashi is there for Hiro's rescue, but their triumph does not last very long as they get caught by the police. In San Fransokyo betting on bot fighting is illegal and they get arrested. Their aunt bails them out, but Hiro has not learned anything. He is already planning his next bot fight. In this scene we find many examples of risk taking. These examples are betting huge sums of money, tricking a criminal, and partaking in illegal businesses. In addition to this, Hiro does not think how it affects others around them and his future. Being arrested should make him realize what he is doing is wrong and that he needs to quit, but he wants to get straight back to bot fighting. This shows that he does not care about the consequences, he only sees the money and the thrill in it. Hiro believes that nothing bad will happen and if it does, he will get out of it just fine. However, the only reason he got out of it is because his brother was there to take the fall. Hiro's risk taking is a response to him being bored from not having anything to do after he graduated high school. With bot fighting he gets to show off his skills and earn a lot of money. Hiro does not want to go to school like Tadashi because he believes it has nothing to offer, stating "Go to college like you? So people can tell me stuff I already know?"

However, this heteronormative masculine behavior is challenged in some way by the end of the film. Risk-taking is there throughout the entire film because they are superheroes. However, the reasoning behind the risk taking has changed. In the beginning Hiro did it for himself to earn money and to have some fun. Back then he did not think about how it affected others and he operated alone. Now he is taking risks to help and save others. He is not doing it for himself, but for their society. He adopts his brother's view on the world and lives his legacy. He is also no longer doing it alone, but is doing it with his team. In the beginning Hiro engaged in criminal activities and now he saves the people of San Fransokyo. After this incident he embraces his new abilities and becomes the hero of San Fransokyo. He finishes the story by saying "The good thing is that my brother wanted to help a lot of people and that is what we are going to do."

### 5.3 Grief, Coping, and Masculinity

Our society has specific expectations for how someone should grieve and how one should cope. Coping mechanisms are an important part of dealing with grief. These mechanisms can influence the user either positively or negatively. Both Kenai and Hiro use negative coping mechanisms. Negative coping mechanisms include isolation, opposition, escape, refusal to express sadness, and revenge (Cox, Garret, and Graham, 2005; Graham, Yuhas, & Roman, 2018). The focus on grief is drastically different in the two films. In *Big Hero 6* there is a lot more focus on Hiro's grief, and it is an underlying theme in the film. Baymax diagnoses Hiro with bereavement and make it his mission to cure his patient. In addition to this, Baymax checks up on him throughout the film and discusses his treatment. In *Brother Bear* Kenai rarely talks about his grief. When his grief was the freshest, his facial expressions make it visible that he struggles with his emotions, but he tries his best to be strong and manly. However, even though the focus on grief is different, both Kenai and Hiro have similar reactions to grief. Both cope badly after losing their older brothers who acted like their guides. These leads to them both using negative coping mechanisms to deal with their grief.

One of the coping mechanisms they both use is opposition. Kenai opposes his tribe by seeking revenge and killing the bear. His brother Denahi and the shaman Tanana tries to talk Kenai out of it, but despite this he still hunts down the bear. In *Big Hero 6* we have two examples of Hiro opposing. The first example is when Hiro wants to go back to bot fighting instead of going to his classes. He goes back to his familiar way of living even though his family advised him not to. It is also opposition against the law because bot fighting is illegal. The other example is when Hiro tries to kill Callaghan. His friends are against it and try to stop him, but Hiro is determined to kill Callaghan. However, in the end Hiro is talked out of it and comes to terms with his behaviour being wrong.

Both Hiro and Kenai oppose through revenge, which is also a negative coping mechanism. They are both convinced that the only solution to their problem is to kill the one who is responsible for their pain. They believe that if they get rid of the problem things will get back to normal and they will get closure. This signals that they believe that grief is a task that needs to be accomplished instead of learning to live with it. Kenai mentions this when he says "A man wouldn't just sit here and do nothing" implying that something must be done, and as a man he needs to do it. He believes that if he does not physically put an end to it himself, the problem will always be unresolved. However, when Kenai ends up killing the bear, he looks both sad and frustrated. He did not get the closure he wanted. He thought killing the bear would make him feel good, but he ends up feeling equally empty and frustrated. In addition, the way that everyone is against Kenai's and Hiro's revenge attempts signals that their societies do not believe in killing another being no matter what they have done to deserve it.

Another negative coping mechanism both Kenai and Hiro portray is social isolation. In *Brother Bear* Kenai tries to go on the journey to the mountain by himself, declining help from everyone. He also avoids disclosing the reason behind his journey. It is not until he is left without a choice that he breaks out of his isolation. In *Big Hero 6* Hiro's isolation is more noticeable. After Tadashi's funeral Hiro locks himself up in his room for days. He does not eat and he avoids talking to anyone. Hiro is actually given an opportunity to use a positive coping mechanism through having a big support system. However, he dismisses them and chooses to isolate himself and deal with his grief by himself. When Baymax confronts Hiro with his grief, Hiro tries to avoid speaking about it

and says, "You can't fix this buddy." This shows that Hiro is acknowledging that he is hurting but that he believes that it is a problem he needs to solve by himself.

One last coping mechanism that Kenai and Hiro use is refusal to express sadness. In both cases it is visible on their faces that they are sad. However, they do very rarely talk about it. For Kenai, his sadness is only visible on his facial expressions, which shows that he is struggling. In addition to this, he avoids showing his feelings when he is with others. He keeps them to himself and lets them out when he is alone. Kenai avoids talking about his feelings throughout the entire film, except one scene. He opens slightly up about Sitka to Koda when they talk about the spirits in the sky. He mentions that his brother is part of the spirits after being killed by a "monster," clearly still agitated about the situation, and mentions that if it were not for Sitka, he would not be alive. However, when Koda thanks Sitka for saving Kenai and leading Kenai to him, Kenai's facial expressions show relief and comfort for the first time. This signals that talking about his brother with someone helps Kenai with his feelings. Hiro on the other hand, does express to Baymax that he is hurting. However, he brushes over it and avoids talking about it again. The small window of vulnerability might have been caused by Baymax catching Hiro off guard. The search for the micro bots made Hiro have something else on his mind besides missing his brother, but Baymax reminds him of the reality and brought him back into his sorrow. Throughout the film Hiro assures others that he is fine, and it is not until he is overwhelmed by emotions and presented a video of Tadashi that he shows his sadness and frustration. Hiro originally believed that he needed to go through it alone, even declining Baymax's offer to cure his bereavement. To him taking help from someone else to fix his problems is a sign of weakness and failure, even when it comes from a healthcare worker. However, after feeling the effect of the treatment Hiro finally accepts help.

Even though both Hiro and Kenai avoid showing their feelings, one feeling that they are not afraid to show is anger. In many of the cases where they are overwhelmed by emotions, their feelings are transferred to anger. For Kenai, a lot of the pain he has after losing his brother is transferred to anger and resentment. He tries to act brave in front of his brother, but his inability to talk about how he feels and why he wants to kill the bear, makes him build up his anger and want revenge more. One of the reasons for Kenai's anger after losing his brother might be that he is feeling blame and guilt from his brother's death. His brothers came to help him when he went after the bear the first time. It was his fault his brother ended up in that situation. The feelings are intensified as Denahi says, "I don't blame the bear, Kenai," indicating that he blames Kenai as well. Based on Kenai's tone when he says "I see..." it is obvious that this statement really hurt him. However, Kenai still stands his ground, saying that it was the bear's fault. All this contributes to his anger taking over.

For Hiro, after realising that the fire was not an accident his sadness turns in to anger. His inability to express his feelings is also contributing to swapping out sadness with anger. However, the biggest reason for his anger is because of the betrayal he feels knowing that Callaghan was the one who caused the fire and Callaghan showing no care for Tadashi dying because of him. Hiro might have started the chase for getting back his micro bots, but the growing frustration for not being able to catch the bad guy mixed with the anger of knowing the identity of the masked man, makes Hiro let anger take control. Luckily, with Baymax and his friends help, Hiro can look past his blocks, think clearly, and talk about his feelings clearly. He is now able to act on ethics and logic, and not on his anger.

However, even though both Kenai and Hiro use negative coping mechanisms, they end up adapting positive mechanisms by the end of the film. Both learned that the negative coping mechanisms got them nowhere. In the end they started accepting help, express their feelings, and hugging. Hiro even starts to try accomplishing his brothers' goals of helping others. All these are positive coping mechanisms. In the end they both feel happier and accomplished. This is a common trope in films because most characters that display negative coping mechanisms learn that they are just making things worst instead of helping. They are there to show examples on how to deal with grief (Graham, Yuhas, & Roman, 2018).

When analysing negative coping mechanisms, it became apparent that these goes hand in hand with hegemonic masculinity. In the scenes where negative coping was presented, hegemonic masculine behaviour was also presented. Society has expectations to how people are supposed to deal with grief. This also applies to masculinity. However, hegemonic masculinity can make grief complicated for many (Moran, 2016). Both Kenai and Hiro's hegemonic masculine behaviours hinder them in dealing with their grief and make them have negative coping mechanisms. Through oppression they execute risk taking, they isolate themselves to avoid showing weakness to others, and they express only anger because that is the accepted emotion amongst men. Especially the connection between refusal to express sadness and heteronormative masculinity's beliefs that men are not supposed to show sadness is important. In both films, the inability to express sadness to maintain a strong and manly image is causing both Kenai and Hiro to lash out and find other outlets for their overwhelming emotions. In addition to this, the traditional masculinity seemed to have been triggered by experiencing loss. All of a sudden, they have these intense emotions that they have to deal with. To deal with these they try to use negative coping mechanisms. However, these are making things worse and as they learn that these mechanisms are not good, they also learn that the hegemonic masculine beliefs that triggered these mechanisms are bad as well. In the end they do not only learn to use positive coping mechanisms, but they also learn to reject hegemonic masculinity to improve their lives.

The way Disney sets up these bad qualities in Kenai and Hiro up against other characters that show positive coping and non-hegemonic behaviour, makes it seem that they are trying to take a stand against the traditional masculine way to deal with grief and emotions. As the characters learn the correct way to cope, the viewer does the same. However, there are very few studies that look at coping and grief in films. There are also very few that investigate how men cope with grief in film. It could be interesting to examine if men are portrayed the same in films with a grief narrative. This can be a potential field of interest in future studies.

#### **5.4 Literary Foils**

One thing that is interesting is how both films uses literary foils to mirror the main character. In *Brother Bear* Denahi's grief is a foil for Kenai's grief. Right after Sitka's death, Denahi does not show the same anger and complicated feelings Kenai does. He takes on the role of the responsible older brother, trying to live up to his totem of wisdom. However, when he thinks he lost Kenai to the bear as well, he loses control of his rage. Denahi is now showing the same symptoms as Kenai. He tries to stay strong for Kenai, but now that he is alone, he has no one to stay strong for. He feels a lot of blame because he was the one that triggered Kenai to go after the bear. He replays the conversation in his head, and it leads him to hunt the bear to avenge Kenai. He keeps going throughout the entire film. Even when he is freezing and hungry, he keeps going.

Similarly to Kenai, he also believes that he needs to kill the bear to get closure and that the bear needs to pay for the pain it has given him. In the end we almost get a *déjà vu* scene for the killing scene when Denahi almost kills Kenai the same way Kenai killed the bear. However, this time Sitka grabs Kenai just in time before he hits the spear. This pulls Denahi out of his trancelike state. Denahi not only realises he had succumbed to what he discouraged earlier. When he sees that his brother is the bear, he realises that a bear could be someone of importance. This is a similar situation to how Kenai felt after Koda told his story about his mother.

In *Big Hero 6*, Callaghan is a foil to Hiro. Just like Hiro, Callaghan also isolates himself and avoids talking to anyone about his daughter Abigale, who died in a work accident. None of his students knows about his daughter and his grief which shows that he brushes it off around people, pretending that he is ok. Callaghan also turns to revenge and violence to get over his feelings. When Hiro met him at the Krei tower, he recognises himself in Callaghan. Hiro tries to use Baymax's strategy on Callaghan by asking "Is this what Abigale would have wanted?" where Callaghan answers "Abigale is gone." The same Hiro answered. Hiro tries to talk him out of it by saying "This won't change anything. Trust me.," trying to show him that he learnt from his mistakes to encourage Callaghan to do the same, but he denies. This is the moment that makes Hiro a foil of Tadashi, turning away from his similarity to Callaghan. Hiro starts to take the values of Tadashi as he also sacrifices himself to save Callaghan's daughter, who turned out to be alive in the wormhole, almost quoting Tadashi when he says, "She is alive in there, someone has to help."

The use of the foils make it seem like Disney is trying to teach Kenai and Hiro the right way to live by making them "fight" themselves through the foils. They are showed a visual representation of their actions and beliefs and realises how wrong they are. This aligns with what McCallum (2002) found in her study on the new masculinity in Disney. She found that Disney set up the "old" masculinity against the "new," sensitive masculinity to show that the old masculinity needed to be destroyed. This is similar to what we see with the foils. Not only is the new and "improved" Kenai and Hiro met with the old masculinity, but they are also met with how they used to portray these behaviours. This shows their growth as well as they get to reflect on their past selves.

However, when analysing the foils, the similarity between Callaghan and Kenai becomes visible. They both turn extremely aggressive and vengeful after losing their loved one. They become obsessed with revenge and do not stop to think whether what they are doing are wrong or not. In their attempts they both end up being responsible for someone's death and they do not show remorse after the deaths. The director of *Big Hero 6* explains this as "[Villains] they never see themselves as the villain of the movie. They see themselves as the hero of the movie that are trying to accomplish a task but are not taking something into consideration, and its generally the safety of other people" (Melvin, 2014). Based on this statement and the similarities between Kenai and Callaghan, would that make Kenai the villain of *Brother Bear*? There is no official villain in *Brother Bear*, the closest to a villain is Kenai and Denahi, who is a foil of Kenai. This can have a connection to how male heroes are portrayed with a mix of positive and negative masculine traits (Harriger, Wick, Trivedi & Callahan, 2021). However, where Kenai's story is different from Callaghan's is that he learns from his mistakes and repays them. *Brother Bear* is therefore a redemption story. Kenai is neither a hero nor the villain. He is someone who did something terrible and paid the price.



## 6.0 Conclusion

To conclude, in this critical content analysis I have investigated how hegemonic masculinity and grief is portrayed in *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6*. I analysed the films through three different critical lenses: hegemonic masculinity, maturation, and grief. My research questions were:

- How is hegemonic masculinity portrayed through the experience of grief?
- How is masculinity represented before and after maturation?
- How is trauma used to create character development?

After my analysis I found that both *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* portray hegemonic masculinity through a trauma narrative to catalyse maturation. On the surface the masculinity narratives in *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* seem different from one another. In *Brother Bear* there is a clear narrative about a specific masculinity that Kenai strives to attain. Kenai constantly talks about it, and he is triggered whenever someone dismisses his masculinity. In *Big Hero 6*, Hiro never talks about manhood and masculinity. However, when looking at the themes on a deeper level it becomes obvious that both Kenai and Hiro display traditional masculinity. Both Kenai and Hiro are risk-takers, are afraid to be perceived as weak, and avoid talking about their feelings. However, through their maturation they both unlearn their hegemonic ways of thinking. Kenai stays as a bear to take care of the cub Koda, and Kenai is able to take responsibility for his actions. Hiro becomes a hero to save the people of San Fransokyo and is able to show affection freely. This can correlate to what McCallum (2002) found in *Masculinity as Social Semiotic: Identity Politics and Gender in Disney Animated Films*. It seems that Disney is still using the "bad" masculinity against the "good" masculinity trope to advocate the sensitive and caring man. Both Kenai and Hiro show old, traditional masculine behaviour, which are perceived as negative, and are presented with the new, sensitive masculinity through their peers. In the end they adopt these behaviours themselves. This shows that male characters have had little characteristic changes since the 90's. This finding supports Luisi's (2021) point about male characters having little character development.

Both *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* use trauma as the basis of the maturation narrative. Both Hiro and Kenai lose their older brothers in a tragic event. They both struggle a lot with their emotions. However, *Big Hero 6* has more focus on Hiro's grief while in *Brother Bear*, Kenai's grief is ignored. Even though it is not talked about in the film, does not mean it was not present. His grief is visible through his behaviours after losing Sitka and on his facial expressions. The focus in the films is also different because *Brother Bear* is a redemption story whilst *Big Hero 6* is exploring grief and "treatments" for bereavement. Both how Kenai and Hiro grieve their brothers are affected by their hegemonic masculine beliefs. They do not talk about their feelings to avoid looking weak. Because of this their sadness becomes anger, the accepted emotion amongst men. Their hegemonic masculinity leads to them both resorting to negative coping mechanisms to deal with their feelings. Negative coping mechanisms such as isolation, not expressing sadness, opposition and revenge align with heteronormative masculine behaviour such as risk-taking, power, anger, and not expressing feelings. These behaviours make their grief difficult to cope with. In the end they learn that these mechanisms are bad for them and adopt positive coping mechanisms. Through this they also abandon their toxic masculinity as they realise how it affects them and their peers negatively.

In a way, grief was necessary for changing Kenai's and Hiro's behaviour. If it were not for the extreme emotions that they received after losing their brother, they might not ever have realised the negative sides with their hegemonic masculine behaviour. Grief teaches the boys how to deal with feelings, anger, and other incidents in a non-hegemonic way. This aligns with Tribunella's (2010) writing about maturation and melancholia. The character and the viewer need to be presented with trauma to become knowing of the world. Kenai and Hiro did not just need trauma to grow out of their childhood innocence, they needed trauma to become aware of their toxic behaviours that affected their and others' lives. They might have come to terms with this without the trauma, but their trauma kick-started their maturation. The journey their grief sent them on taught them responsibility, knowingness, and being law-abiding. They not only become better people, but they also became mature citizens in their society.

After this analysis I argue that the life lesson Disney promote in the films is how someone should behave after losing someone as well as how masculinity should be presented in our society. Through these films the viewer is supposed to feel the emotions and adopt the behaviour of the main characters. This can create great discussions in the classroom. Both *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* bring up death and gender roles, which are themes that for the most part is not naturally brought up in the classroom. These are also themes that are important to discuss since they are often overlooked to avoid uncomfortable discussions. Death is a theme that children are met with in both reality and through the media, but they often have little vocabulary to discuss it because adults avoid talking about these themes with children. When it comes to gender roles, our society has a specific expectation about how men and women are supposed to behave, and these expectations are problematic. Even in our time, men struggle with discussing and expressing their feelings. This have caused high numbers in depression and suicide amongst men. Because of this it is important to promote discussing feelings and experiences in the classroom. Not only for boys to unlearn the hegemonic masculine beliefs that have been passed down to them for decades, but for every child to learn how to discuss and express their feelings, and for children to have a safe space to share these feelings. This is the goal of the health and life skills topic in the Norwegian curriculum.

I strongly believe that films such as *Brother Bear* and *Big Hero 6* can be a great way to introduce different topics to the classroom, and to create discussions and reflections about various aspects in our life and our society. Films are not just "empty" entertainment that should just be used for fun, they bring important reflections of our society and teach important life lessons. Our society has always used stories to teach the new generation about life, films have just taken the baton to continue this tradition. I hope to see more of the use of films as an influential resource in the classroom. I also hope that there will be more studies in the future that explore films and Disney, their use of different themes, and how they reflect society and expect us to behave.

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