

Comparing gender transformation in Disney adaptation: resexualization in animated and live-action Peter Pan, Alice, and Pleakley

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Abstract

This study examined how gender representation changed in Disney's live-action adaptations of Peter Pan, Alice in Wonderland, and Lilo & Stitch, focusing on the shifts that appeared when animated characters are reinterpreted for contemporary audiences. The research question addressed two questions: the resexualization types and gender transformations in animated versus live-action adaptations. The study used a qualitative description design by comparing both versions of each movie. The analysis examined visual redesign, character behavior and dialogue context to identify changes in gender expression and gender characterization. This method was used to observe how each adaptation reshaped the psychological and symbolic dimension of the characters. Finding indicated two resexualization types: RT1 Gender Alteration and RT2 De-objectification. In Peter Pan, the live-action adaptation reshaped Peter from a dominant, cheeky, and impulsive boy to a more introspective and emotionally expressive character, reflected in his behavior, dialogue, and visual expressions. This RT1: Gender Alteration also signaled stronger anima side, seen in his empathy and emotional awareness. In Alice in Wonderland, Alice evolved from a passive, dependent girl to an active, confident leader, reflecting RT1: Gender Alteration and greater animus expression. Her appearance was updated to a mature style, demonstrating RT2: De-objectification. In Lilo & Stitch, Pleakley's character shifted from feminine to neutral men's clothing, reflecting RT2: De-objectification and increased animus side, making his characterization more balanced. The study concluded that these adaptations reshaped not only visuals but also the internal logic of character identity. Disney's reinterpretation responded to modern cultural expectations by emotional literacy and gender expression. This shift showed characters redesign across media forms can reshape gender identity for new generation viewers.

Keywords: Gender Representation, Masculinity, Femininity, Adaptation, Anima and Animus.

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Introduction

Popular culture was not only a mirror of social reality but also an agent of constructing social values and roles. Popular culture was not neutral; it was a place where meanings were continuously produced. In popular culture, film was a medium through which gender was visually and narratively portrayed (Storey, 2018). Film industry modified character portrayals to fit social values and audience expectations. As a consequence, gender representation was often modified to align with cultural and ideological norms. For example, female characters who were once depicted as passive were now represented as assertive, while traditionally dominant male characters were portrayed as more emotionally expressive. This increase of change of gender representation aligned with Gill's (2007)

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writing, contemporary media frequently reproduced hegemonic gender norms under the discourse of diversity and in live-action adaptation reconfigured Peter Pan into an empathetic emotional character. We argued that the gender transformation in Disney's live-action remakes had not yet been examined through the framework of resexualization and the anima-animus dynamic. Earlier studies in Disney adaptation tended to focus on general representation of the Disney character rather than comparing how the character's gender performance mutated across animation and live-action. For instance, a study by [Garabedian \(2014\)](#) examined how Disney transformed the gender expectations in modern princess narratives but did not analyze each character's transformations through resexualization. Another study on Disney adaptation by [Andres Saputra et al. \(2023\)](#) focused more on the mutation of the character without exploring how gender traits were altered. Meanwhile the resexualization theory by [Purnomo et al. \(2025\)](#) mainly used video game characters as its object of analysis. Departing from these issues, this study aimed 1) to identify and classify the types of resexualization represented in Disney's animated films and their live-action adaptations, and 2) to describe the transformation of gender representation from Disney's animated films to their live-action adaptations.

This study employed the Theory of Resexualization by [Purnomo et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Jung's \(1959\)](#) anima animus theory. The first theory was applied to examine how gender was resexualized in the live-action adaptations through processes of visual, symbolic, and narrative restructuring. This framework provided the identification of transformations in gendered bodies, gestures, and performative cues across different media and cultures. The second theory was implemented to analyze the psychological dimensions of these changes by tracing shifts in the balance of masculine and feminine energies that shaped each character's motivations and subjectivity. Through the combined findings of these two theoretical approaches, this study explained how gender reconfiguration operated across Disney's live-action remakes of *Peter Pan*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *Lilo & Stitch*, particularly in the transformations observed in the anima–animus dynamics of Peter, Alice, and Pleakley.

[Purnomo et al. \(2025\)](#) identified two main forms of resexualization: RT1, Gender Alteration, that involved altering a character's gender identity, appearance, or behavior to align with cultural norms or market expectations; and RT2, Sexual Objectification/De-Objectification, which either amplified or reduced sexual traits to adjust the character's appeal or realism. The authors argued that resexualization served as a bridge between creative reinterpretation and cultural adaptation. This process helped address intertextual loss—the fading or erosion of meaning that occurred when a work was adapted into another form, such as from animation to live-action. To preserve meaning, the process employed three key strategies: (1) signaturization (preserving key traits), (2) alternation (introducing deliberate variation), and (3) intratextualization (embedding changes within the narrative logic).

In *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* ([1959](#)), Jung explained that the anima and animus are two archetypes that represent the feminine aspect in the male psyche and the masculine aspect in the female psyche. Jung believed that psychologically, all humans have both masculine and feminine traits. The anima influences the emotional side of a man and often accounts for feelings that seem irrational. Jung also explained that the development of the anima helps men become more open to feminine qualities such as emotional expressions, spirituality, intuition, imagination, creativity, and inner sensitivity. Jung believed that just as the anima creates emotions and moods in men, the animus shapes a woman's thoughts and opinions. According to him, when a woman is strongly influenced by

her animus, she may appear stubborn, controlling, argumentative, fond of gossip, and inclined to dominate others ([Prakoso, 2021](#)).

Resexualization functions similarly in film, as adaptations reinterpret gendered identities and bodies to conform to current cultural, commercial, and ideological norms. Film serves as a social practice that creates and disseminates meanings of masculinity and femininity, as highlighted by [Turner \(2006\)](#). Similar to Hall, [Prysthon \(2016\)](#) viewed film as a site of negotiation where alternative and dominant discourses meet. In this context, resexualization in film adaptations reveals deeper psychological reconfigurations of gender within narrative and visual form, reflecting both changes in the anima–animus balance and changes in cultural representation.

Method

This study used a descriptive qualitative design to analyze gender transformation and resexualization in three Disney characters, Peter Pan (*Peter Pan*), Alice (*Alice in Wonderland*), and Pleakley (*Lilo & Stitch*). The analysis compares the character's animated versions with their live-action adaptations. The research used purposive sampling, selecting only characters and scenes that show the clearest and most significant indicators of gender change. These characters were chosen because they display visible shifts in appearance, emotional expression and symbolic traits that directly relate to the research question.

The data consist of visual frames, dialogues, body movements, costuming and narrative moments taken from the official Disney animated movies and their live-actions. The researcher collected the data by watching both versions of each movie, identifying scenes that contain explicit or symbolic gender modification and taking photos using cameras to document the visual change from the official Disney platform.

The data were analyzed using [Spradley's \(1980\)](#) method. Four stages of analysis are applied: domain analysis, taxonomic analysis, componential analysis, and cultural theme analysis. First, in domain analysis, Purnomo et al.'s (2025) theory of resexualization and Jung's (1959) anima-animus theory were applied to identify the initial domain of gender transformation in the live-action films. Second, in the taxonomy analysis, the identified forms of resexualization and anima-animus shift were organized into Jung's anima-animus archetypes were also used to interpret deeper psychological shifts in gender portrayal. Third, the componential analysis examined how the categories produced in the domain and taxonomic stages relate to one another. Finally, the cultural theme analysis interpreted the broader meanings that emerged from these patterns, producing thematic conclusions about how Disney's live-action remakes reconstructed gender roles and character identities. For clarity of the analysis, the article presents only the most representative and analytically significant scenes, ensuring that the findings directly address the research question and reflect the strongest evidence of gender transformation.

Results and Discussion

To address the research question, this study examined the gender transformation found in selected animated and live-action scenes. The analysis focused on four primary data points that represented the most significant shifts in characterization across versions. These findings were organized to show how resexualization mechanisms operate within each adaptation and how the changes in visual design, emotional behavior, and narrative function reflect broader cultural movements in gender

representation. The results were presented in four subsections, each highlighting one major transformation identified in the comparative data.

The result and discussion of this study examined how Disney's contemporary adaptations revealed shifting constructions of gender through analysis using Purnomo et al.'s (2025) resexualization theory which focused on Gender Alteration (RT1) and Sexual Objectification or De-Objectification (RT2) and Jung's (1959) theory of gender expression which is connected to two archetypes: the anima (feminine side of the male psyche) and animus (masculine side of the female psyche). By comparing the characters Peter Pan, Alice and Pleakley across both versions, the study showed how their gender expression, appearance and behavior are reshaping to fit modern cultural values.

RT1: Gender Alteration

The comparison between Peter Pan in animated movie (1953) and its live-action adaptation (2023) shows a big transformation in the character's emotional and gender presentation. In the data shown in Figure 1, we can see that the 1953 animated version shows Peter as a dominant, impulsive, a cheeky teenager and rarely shown sadness or fear, aligned with mid-20th century ideals of traditional masculinity. The earlier narrative provided no scene that shows Peter expresses his emotional side, self-reflection or regret.



Figure 1. Peter Pan in Peter Pan animation (00:45:06) and live action (00:49:13)

In contrast, the 2023 live-action adaptation presented Peter as a more introspective and emotionally expressive person, which can be seen through visual expression and the dialog context. The visual expression was often more varied, showing sad, happy, and serious expressions. The movie added a new scene and expanded dialogue. The context of the scene and the dialogue was Peter talking about his feelings of regret to the past relationship with Captain Hook. He told Wendy about it. In this interaction with Wendy, Peter talked about how close they were, recognizes how their paths have changed and admits the sadness that comes with losing that bond. The scene also presented how Wendy responds with concern and emotional support. By providing a supportive conversational space through Wendy, the movie showed a shift toward the idea that emotional expression in boys and young men was acceptable and even necessary. This interaction not only allows Peter to articulate his feelings but also highlights the presence of anima expression, as the narrative frames emotional openness as part of rather than a threat to his identity. Through this additional exchange, this adaptation introduced forms of gentleness, empathy and emotional awareness that were not present in Peter's earlier characterization.

By using Purnomo et al.'s (2025) resexualization theory, the transformation of character Peter Pan from the 1953 animated movie to the 2023 live-action adaptation showed a clear shift in resexualization type RT1: Gender Alteration. The modern version presented Peter as more visually and

emotionally expressive. His expression was often seen as more varied. There were more sad, fearful, and serious facial expression in the adaptation version, while in the old animated version showed Peter with far more limited visual expression, consistently presenting neutral look like happy, cheeky, and confident, the same as traditional masculine portrayals. His behavior was also more reflective and empathetic. His willingness to show regret and share his past emotional experiences when talking about his story with Captain Hook showed a narrative change toward contemporary expectations of masculinity. Wendy's supportive response also reflected a modern cultural environment in which emotional openness in boys and young men was allowed and validated. This interaction suggests that the 2023 version adaptation not only changes the way Peter's character was described but also updated the social context surrounding a boy's life.

Based on (Jung's, 1959) anima-animus theory, the development of Peter's character reflects a stronger presence of his anima, as seen in his empathy, introspection and emotional responsibility which were absent in the old version. The contrast between the two versions indicates a movement away from traditional, emotionally distant masculinity toward a more balanced gender expression.

However, the transformation of Peter Pan's characters in the 2023 live-action version did more than update the plot and visual design; it reconstructed the logic of masculinity within the narrative. The movie showed Peter in a world where emotional expression was treated as a meaningful part of his character development and relationships. This narrative environment reflected today's cultural values that viewed emotional literacy and relational maturity as essential components of masculine identity. The updated characterization marked a renewal from mid-20th-century notions of traditional masculinity. In this way, the live-action adaptation changed the image of Peter Pan character as a figure whose gender expressions aligned with today's expectation of modern audiences.

In summary, these findings confirmed that the 2023 adaptation applied the theory of RT1: Gender Alteration and reshaped Peter's gender expression into a more emotionally open form. The movie also showed a clear transformation in Peter's masculine identity, shifting from the less emotional version of the 1953 version to a more balanced, anima-granted representation.



Figure 2. Alice in *Alice in Wonderland* animation (00:02:35) and live action (00:22:02)

Resexualization was also found in other Disney's adaptations in *Alice in Wonderland* animated (1951) and live-action versions (2010) as shown in [Figure 2](#). The data indicated as comparison between Alice's character in the animated and live-action versions. The data showed Alice being caught by Queen of Hearts' minions in the animated version of *Alice in Wonderland*. Meanwhile the other data depicts a scene where Alice was on the battlefield to fight Jabberwocky, a monster on Queen of Heart's side. It suggested a change in Alice's gender identity and behavior.

Alice in both versions experienced quite significant gender transformation. Figure 2 presented data showing character Alice in both animated and live-action versions. One of the scenes in the animated

version of Alice in Wonderland represented Alice's passive behavior. Alice was shown in the animated film as a young girl who is curious and creative. She was more submissive in Wonderland and simply followed events out of curiosity. At the end of the story, Alice was chased by the Queen of Hearts and managed to get out of Wonderland because she wakes up from a dream. In this version, Alice's character was built with a gentle personality, loved to imagine and heavily depended on other characters.

Alice was more active in Wonderland in this live-action adaptation. She was shown as a teenage girl who was trying to figure out who she is, unlike her portrayal in the animated version. As seen in the data, she matured into a courageous adolescent with leadership abilities. At the end of the story, it is evident that Alice battled the Jabberwocky in order to return to the real world. In the live-action version, Alice was portrayed as having more dominant leadership qualities. She could make her own decisions and played a major role in the story.

Alice's actions in the animated version highlight her strong feminine side. She is depicted as a gentle and curious little girl. She could not make her own decisions and highly relied on other characters. However, Alice in the live-action version was modified to be a girl with a dominant masculine side. This shift demonstrated how the live-action *Alice in Wonderland* movie emphasizes the male aspect (animus) in contrast to the animated version. This shift was made so that the character of Alice would be more acceptable to society in that era, which was in line with modern feminism, where society no longer sees women only as objects to be admired but also as capable of making their own decisions about their lives. This change was aligned with Resexualization Type 1 ([Purnomo et al. 2025](#))—Gender Alteration.

Both data also showed a gender transformation in Alice in two different versions. According to [Jung's, \(1959\)](#) gender archetypes, in the animated version, Alice mostly portrayed passive traits and emotional sensitivity, which characterized a strong anima. On the other hand, the live-action version, Alice was more assertive, courageous, and possessed leadership skills, which indicate a dominant animus. This indicated a transformation of Alice's character in both versions, namely the change from Alice's feminine side (anima) in the animated version to a more masculine side (animus) in the live-action version.

RT2: Sexual Objectification or De-Objectification

Alice's appearance was also depicted differently in both versions. Alice was portrayed in the animated version as a little child with a ribbon in her hair, a white apron, and traditional blue clothing. This highlighted her pure, naive, and childlike nature. Such a portrayal reflects the image of women as obedient, naive, and pure, which was common during that era. As a result, she appeared more passive in her interactions with other characters throughout the story.



Figure 3. Alice in Alice in Wonderland animation (01:06:00) and live action (01:36:05)

The live-action adaptation, on the other hand, presents Alice as a teenage girl wearing a sophisticated blue dress. She makes it clear at the start of the story that she will not wear stockings and a corset, which signified her more self-assured and brave personality. She looked more mature and her appearance represented decisiveness in her personality.

According to the resexualization type 2 proposed by [Purnomo et al. \(2025\)](#), Alice in animated and live-action versions have changed in appearance. As displayed in Figure 3, Alice was portrayed as a childish little girl. With a ribbon in her hair and a white apron over her blue dress, she gave off an innocent and naive impression. This representation created an Alice character that was inseparable from the image of a little girl. This appearance was also consistent with Alice's character in the animated version, which is feminine and gentle.

In the live-action version, Alice was portrayed as much more mature than in the animated version. She wore a blue dress that looked more elegant, but still showed a less-than-graceful attitude and even refused to wear her dress properly. Her clothing and attitude reflected the shaping of a new Alice character who is more assertive, independent, and demonstrated the dominance of her animus side. This visual maturation was deliberately presented to support character development and aligned it with the narrative direction the live-action adaptation.

This change of appearance aligned with Resexualization Type 2 ([Purnomo et al., 2025](#))—De-Objectification. Alice's appearance in the live-action adaptation was made less feminine and more mature. This change was made to suit Alice's new character in the modified live-action adaptation.



Figure 4. Pleakley in *Lilo and Stitch* animation (00:31:36) and live action (01:15:10)

In [Figure 4](#), the data showed Pleakley, a character in *Lilo & Stitch*, was role as an alien operative is to navigated human society in disguise. As a member of the Galactic Federation assigned to monitor Earth, Pleakley had to adopt human appearances to avoid detection while carrying out surveillance and protective duties. In the animated version, his disguise featured exaggerated feminine outfits, colorful dresses with heart icons, vibrant wigs, flat women's shoes, and heavy make-up. He also behaved in a traditional feminine way, often fixing his wigs and lipstick. His disguises—often exaggerated, humorous, and gendered—were central to how he functions within the narrative. Because his characterization was mediated through performative appearance rather than fixed identity, Pleakley became a productive site for analyzing how gendered traits were constructed, exaggerated, or minimized across adaptations. This made his transition from the animated ([2002](#)) film to the live-action ([2025](#)) version particularly relevant for examining shifts in resexualization and gender expression.

Following the resexualization theory proposed by [Purnomo et al., \(2025\)](#), Pleakley's shift from the animated (2002) to the live-action (2025) version showed a distinct change in resexualization type. In the animated version, Pleakley's disguise relied heavily on stylized feminine markers. He wore vibrant

wigs, bright heart-patterned dresses, flat women's shoes and heavy make-up, as illustrated in Figure 4. These markers demonstrated RT2 Objectification. These visual exaggerations functioned to amplify gender cues, where femininity was emphasized for comedic visibility. The animated portrayal used objectified feminine aesthetics to construct Pleakley's disguise, making gender performance central to his characterization.

In contrast, the live-action adaptation applied the opposite resexualization mechanism: RT2 De-Objectification, removing Pleakley's exaggerated feminine traits. His disguise was simplified into neutral men's clothing; he used standard athletic wear, black shorts, and only a minor feminine detail (the pink stripe on the socks) as shown in Figure 4. The visual markers of femininity were minimized, demonstrating alternation and intratextualization to produce a more culturally neutral figure. This reduction reflected softened gendered features to align with contemporary cultural expectations of realism. This shift was also shaped by production considerations. According to [Romani \(2025\)](#), the director, Dean Fleischer Camp, explained that the team needed to adjust elements that would not translate effectively into live-action, noting that a man wearing a brightly exaggerated dress would expose Pleakley's disguise in human society. Within the framework proposed by [Purnomo et al., \(2025\)](#), this transformation reflected alternation and intratextualization.

From the Jungian anima–animus perspective, this transformation represented a shift in the expression of Pleakley's anima, the internalized feminine component in the male psyche (Jung, 1959). The animated version externalized a strong anima through emotional expressiveness, playful mannerisms, and self-styling (adjusting wigs, lipstick, poses). However, the live-action version significantly reduced these indicators: Pleakley no longer engaged in self-styling, displayed more controlled emotional behavior, and adopted neutral clothing. This reduction signaled a partial withdrawal of the externalized anima and a movement toward a more integrated psychic orientation where feminine and masculine aspects were less polarized.

The comparison demonstrated a clear transformation in Pleakley's gendered representation. In the animated version (2002), Pleakley was constructed through RT2 Objectification, as his disguise relied on exaggerated feminine markers and externalized anima. This highlighted an expressive gender performance. By contrast, the live-action adaptation (2025) employed RT2 De-Objectification, reducing these over-feminine traits and showed a more restrained, culturally neutral appearance. This shift reflected a moderation of Pleakley's anima expression toward a more balanced anima–animus configuration. In conclusion, the live-action version restructured Pleakley's gender presentation to minimize exaggerated femininity and aligned the character with contemporary expectations of realism and gender neutrality.

Conclusion

This study examined how Disney's live-action adaptations of *Peter Pan* (2023), *Alice in Wonderland* (2010) and *Lilo & Stitch* (2002) transformed gender representation through the framework of resexualization. The analysis showed that gender transformation in these films went beyond visual updates, reshaping how characters embodied emotion and identity within a contemporary cultural context such as emotional openness, individual autonomy and gender equality. Characters were portrayed as emotionally complex and self-defining individuals rather than as figures confined to traditional gender roles. The findings also showed that Disney does more than simply modernize old characters; these adaptations reflected the studio's choices about which gender values was the

appropriate representation to align with the current social situation about gender inclusivity and empowerment for today's audiences.

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