

Does gay pay:

**How does the Walt Disney Company manage
the risk and reward of increasing LGBTQ
representation?**

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LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) equality has spread into every corner of society, including, education, family, politics, entertainment and business. The Film & TV industry is very big business, making global revenues of \$234 billion in 2021¹. Media provides a platform for LGBTQ stories to be represented accurately and positively, or inaccurately and negatively. The power of media as an ideological tool is demonstrated with the 'Hypodermic Needle Model'², which suggests that all media 'injects' a message into the minds of its audience. If someone only watched TV about crime in New York, this person would be more likely to believe that New York was more dangerous than in reality³. If LGBTQ people are represented in the media as evil and immoral, audiences are more likely to believe this message.

In the past, most media companies deemed LGBTQ representation as secondary and unrelated to corporate success. The priority of the media industry is to make content, and thus money, not to promote social activism. Recently, CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) has become crucial to all businesses⁴. Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) is an imperative part of CSR - which includes LGBTQ inclusion. The recent surge in LGBTQ representation across media is not goodwill, rather a recognition that LGBTQ inclusion is good for business.

As LGBTQ representation in the media is such a massive topic, I will focus my analysis on the Walt Disney Company.

Disney is a perfect case study for LGBTQ representation. Disney has been beloved by its customers for generations, it is a cultural mouthpiece for American and western society⁵.

¹The Business Research Company. (2021, January). *Global Film and Video Services Market Report 2021*. Retrieved July 2022, from Businesswire: <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20210910005333/en/Global-Film-and-Video-Services-Market-Report-2021---Opportunities-and-Strategies-to-2030---ResearchAndMarkets.com>

²David Croteau, W. H. (2021). *Media/society: industries, images, and audiences* (Vol. 7). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

³Morgan, M. (2010, February). *The Mean World Syndrome - Desensitization & Acceleration*. (ChallengingMedia, Producer) Retrieved June 2022, from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msfu8YCCc8Q>

⁴BP (2021, June). *Diversity, equity & inclusion report 2020*. Retrieved July 2022, from bp.com: <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/sustainability/bp-diversity-equity-and-inclusion-report-2020.pdf>

⁵Humanities_jen. (2017, February). *Disney's Impact on American Culture*. Retrieved June 200, from Artificial Empires: <https://artificialempires.wordpress.com/2017/02/21/disneys-impact-on-american-culture/>

Disney products reflect the changing attitudes of society, including LGBTQ representation. I have selected events that demonstrate the changing LGBTQ representation at Disney. These events are arranged roughly chronologically, portraying the evolution of Disney's LGBTQ representation. These events cover a variety of Disney business sectors, showing how LGBTQ representation differs throughout the company.

I conducted video interviews with media professionals, demonstrating a representative picture of the real-world media industry. The interviewees do not represent their respective companies, their quotes are their own personal opinions. The participants include; Rich Ferraro (GLAAD Chief Communications Officer)⁶, Ollie Wiggins (BBC Studios Lead Creative, Disney Channel Creative)⁷, and Tom Duthie (Marvel and Lucasfilm Script Editor)⁸.

Disney has usually maintained a culture of diversity and inclusion. Which, for such a vast and historic institution, whose priorities ultimately lie with shareholders, is a surprise. Rich Ferraro states, "Disney has really strong values when it comes to LGBTQ representation, they have all the right internal policies". This was not always the case. During the Golden Age of Hollywood from the 1930's to 1960's, the Big 5 Hollywood Studios maintained narrow-minded LGBTQ representation. The 'Hays Code'⁹ stipulated what could and couldn't be shown in US films between 1934 and 1968, banning any representation of homosexuality. Hence, antagonist characters often became 'queer-coded'¹⁰. Performance and appearance would suggest, but not define, certain characters as LGBTQ. Simon Mccallum, a regular contributor to LGBTQ media scholarship, describes these stereotypes as the "disturbed homosexual villain"¹¹. In the past, Disney created these damaging stereotypes and

⁶Author, I. b., 2022. *GLAAD Chief Communications Officer Rich Ferraro Interview*. [Online] Available at: <https://youtu.be/QFhtEAXncjo>[Accessed September 2022].

⁷author, I. b., 2022. *BBC Studios & Disney Channel Creative Ollie Wiggins Interview*. [Online] Available at: <https://youtu.be/UiiAx9CT3Bc>[Accessed September 2022].

⁸Author, I. b., 2022. *Lucasfilm & Marvel Script Editor Tom Duthie Interview*. [Online] Available at: <https://youtu.be/35PKeuNrv0s>[Accessed September 2022].

⁹Hays, W. (1930, March). *The Motion Picture Production Code of 1930*. Retrieved July 2022, from [www.umsl.edu](http://www.umsl.edu/~gradyf/theory/1930code.pdf): <https://www.umsl.edu/~gradyf/theory/1930code.pdf>

¹⁰Butler, J. (1988). Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory. *Theatre Journal*, 40(4), 519-531. Retrieved from <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3207893>

¹¹Mccallum, S. (2017). *Who can you Trust?* [Book] London: Bloomsbury. P.106

ignored LGBTQ representation altogether¹². In *Peter Pan* (1953), Captain Hook dresses in a graceful pink and red costume, parades a well-groomed moustache and flowing hair, and exploits the young 'lost boys' – a clear antagonistic LGBTQ stereotype. This stereotyping continues with Shere Khan in *The Jungle Book* (1967), Jafar in *Aladdin* (1992), and Scar in *The Lion King* (1994). Disney was never an exceptionally discriminatory studio, they only subconsciously followed the trends of representation demanded by contemporary society. Disney has always followed the simple and safe strategy to “Minimise risk + Maximise Audiences = Maximise Profit”¹³, as identified by the media sociologist David Hesmondhalgh. Disney minimised LGBTQ representation, as demanded, which maximised audiences and increased revenue.

From the 21st century, LGBTQ inclusion was moving up the agenda for Disney and other studios. Ollie Wiggins supports, “Look at how films were 10 plus years ago, when LGBT people tended to be the butt of jokes. I think we’ve come a long way”. LGBTQ representation at Disney Parks is particularly noticeable. The Disney ‘Fairy Tale Weddings’ package diversified into the same-sex couples market in 2007. Ceremonies are held across “World-famous theme parks, award-winning Resort hotels and luxury ocean liners”¹⁴, all starting at \$7,500 in 2022. Disney World Florida held its first ‘Gay Day’¹⁵ in 1991, where around 3,000 guests organised a shared trip to Magic Kingdom. These ‘Gay Days’ have since become one of the largest Gay Pride events in the world with over 150,000 attendees each year. This attendance equals over \$16 million¹⁶ daily ticket revenue for Disney. It costs Disney nothing to extend their events to LGBTQ people, instead they profit millions.

Disney has also sold official rainbow-themed merchandise¹⁷ during pride month for many years. Rainbows and rainbow flags have long been associated with the

¹²Lang, N. (2017, March). *Disney's Long, Complicated History with Queer Characters*. Retrieved July 2022, from Harpers Bazaar: <https://www.harpersbazaar.com/culture/film-tv/news/a21506/disney-gay-lgbt-characters-history/>

¹³Hesmondhalgh, D. (2019). *The Cultural Industries* (Vol. 3). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

¹⁴The Walt Disney Company. (2022, August). *Disney's Fairy Tale Weddings & Honeymoons*. Retrieved August 2022, from Disneyweddings.com: <https://www.disneyweddings.com/weddings/locations/>

¹⁵Cloud, J. (2010, June). *How Gay Days Made a Home at Disney World*. Retrieved July 2022, from TIME: <https://web.archive.org/web/20100616123925/http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1995839-1,00.html>

¹⁶Moore, T. (2022, April). *Walt Disney World Ticket Prices 2022*. Retrieved June 2022, from WDW Magazine: <https://www.wdw-magazine.com/walt-disney-world-ticket-prices/>

¹⁷Kiley, R. (2022, May). *Disney Debuts First Ever 'Pride Collection'*. Retrieved July 2022, from Pride: <https://www.pride.com/news/2022/5/20/disney-debuts-first-ever-pride-collection>

LGBTQ community. LGBTQ community. Although, this branding does not explicitly support Gay Pride itself, many children and adults just appreciate rainbows generally - with no awareness to the LGBTQ association. In 2018 this merchandise was rebranded as 'Rainbow Mickey', and in 2019 as 'Rainbow Disney'. This branding is purposefully vague, 'Rainbow' is neutral language while 'Pride' or 'LGBTQ' is left-wing politically loaded. This careful branding allows Disney to market this merchandise to more progressive customers, while conservative customers shouldn't take offence. Disney was capitalising upon the lucrative LGBTQ brand image. Ferraro agrees, "Because so many companies do campaigns during pride month, they're always marketing to our community. And what we always say is it's hollow, unless you're speaking out about LGBTQ lives year-round". An exchange is occurring here. Companies can market to the LGBTQ community to improve revenues or brand image. In exchange for these benefits, these companies must support the LGBTQ community when called upon.

Disney never officially condoned these 'Gay Days'. This event was externally organised by paying customers. Disney World only welcomed these customers to the park as normal. There is no mention of any Gay Pride event in Disney World material. The 'Disneyland Pride'¹⁸ remains the only official Disney gay pride event in 2022. Disney also never stopped protests against 'Gay Days' from far-right religious groups. This includes the American Family Association who believe that 'Gay Days' have, "violated Disney's obligation to maintain a family-friendly atmosphere"¹⁹. Disney plays to both sides of LGBTQ equality, and enjoys the benefit by isolating none of its customer base. Tom Duthie elaborates, "Because Disney is such a massive company, they are gatekeepers of popular culture. As gatekeepers of popular culture, you must represent the views and needs of your audience. And as the political situation changes, you will need to reflect that". Disney is adapting their products to align with the changing "views and needs" of their audiences. When enough customers ask for increased LGBTQ representation, Disney will slowly oblige. Disney has introduced inclusive changes over many years, bit by bit,

¹⁸Walt Disney Travel Company. (2022, June). *Disneyland Paris Pride*. Retrieved July 2022, from [Disneyholidays.co.uk: https://www.disneyholidays.co.uk/disneyland-paris/planning-holiday/disneyland-paris-pride/](https://www.disneyholidays.co.uk/disneyland-paris/planning-holiday/disneyland-paris-pride/)

¹⁹Caton, D. (2022, June). *Florida Family Association airplane banner campaign*. Retrieved July 2022, from Florida Family Association: https://floridafamily.org/full_article.php?article_no=1010

ensuring progressive customers are satisfied - and more traditional customers are not isolated. Hence retaining the largest customer base and revenues possible.

Disney customers around the world have different cultures and expectations of LGBTQ representation. Disney must cater to as many of these opinions as possible to keep customers satisfied. Film & TV needs a global reach to make back its expensive production budgets, which comes with increased national and public scrutiny. It is difficult to please everyone with LGBTQ representation in Film & TV - so smaller, more specialised products can showcase progressive representation with less risk. Disney acquired Marvel for \$4 billion in 2009²⁰ and Lucasfilm (including Star Wars) for \$4.05 billion in 2012²⁰. Marvel and Star Wars are undoubtedly mainstream global brands, with each franchise often quoted as having the largest fandom on the planet²¹. Marvel and Star Wars also have a smaller, more dedicated community of hardcore fans. Such communities are evidenced by the 'JediTempleArchives'²² forum with 4,400 fan-made Star Wars action figure reviews, and the 'Marvel Database'²³ encyclopaedia with over 200,000 fan-made articles. Marvel was primarily a comic book publisher, with the largest market share in the comic book industry²⁴. When Disney acquired Marvel, Disney now held this massive stake in the comic book industry. Comic books are more specialised, non-mass market media²⁵ - where fans from western countries are usually the primary audience. In these comics, a surprisingly large amount LGBTQ representation is present. The 'Marvel Database' lists 67 LGBTQ characters across all Marvel comics²⁶. This is significantly more than the 12 explicit LGBTQ characters in Marvel films. The Star Wars 'Wookieepedia' encyclopaedia lists 125 LGBTQ characters

²⁰Johnston, M. (2021, July). *7 Companies Owned by Disney*. Retrieved August 2022, from Investopedia: <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/markets/102915/top-5-companies-owned-disney.asp#:~:text=Disney%20acquired%20%20Toy%20Story%20creator,Marvel%20Entertainment%20for%20%244%20billion>

²¹O'Brien, B. (2016, November). *15 Movie Franchises With The Most Loyal Fanbases*. Retrieved 2022 August, from The Richest: <https://www.therichest.com/world-entertainment/15-movie-franchises-with-the-most-loyal-fanbases/>

²²Paskovics, C. (2022, August). *Research Droids Reviews*. Retrieved August 2022, from Jedi Temple Archives: <https://www.jeditemplearchives.com/content/modules.php?name=JReviews>

²³Fandom.com. (2022, August). *Marvel Database Home*. Retrieved August 2022, from Marvel Fandom: https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Marvel_Database

²⁴Alverson, B. (2022, April). *Comic Store Publisher Market Shares - Q1 2022*. Retrieved August 2022, from icv2: <https://icv2.com/articles/markets/view/50881/comic-store-publisher-market-shares-q1-2022#:~:text=Marvel%20Comics%20market%20share%20increased,from%2031.7%25%20in%20Q4%202021>

²⁵Miller, J. (2021, December). *2021 Comic Book Sales to Comics Shops*. Retrieved August 2022, from Comichron: <https://www.comichron.com/monthlycomicsales/2021.html>

²⁶Fandom.com. (2022, August). *Homosexual Characters*. Retrieved August 2022, from Marvel Database: https://marvel.fandom.com/wiki/Category:Homosexual_Characters

across the Star Wars universe²⁷. There are just 2 explicit LGBTQ characters in Star Wars films. Improving representation in blockbuster films is risky, as audiences are larger and more globalised - with some countries banning on-screen LGBTQ representation²⁸. Film & TV needs a global reach to make back its expensive production budgets, so it must comply with national censorship and conservative audience expectations. Increasing LGBTQ representation in specialised fan products, rather than in expensive Film & TV, entails less financial risk for Disney. Improving representation in comics and novels can keep more progressive fans satisfied. It is sensible to keep fans happy, as these customers can spend a disproportionately large amount with Disney compared to other customers.

Disney has been trialling LGBTQ representation across its children's TV portfolio. Like with specialised fan products, there is less risk for Disney increasing LGBTQ representation in children's TV - as smaller budgets and profits are attributed to children's TV²⁹. Disney children's TV audiences are often younger and from western countries. Ferraro elaborates on recent surveys³⁰ which show younger audiences are more receptive to LGBTQ media, "Now 1 in 5 of Generation Z are LGBTQ. The industry is recognising that, if we don't include LGBTQ people, we're gonna miss a huge amount of audience and a growing demographic". I created my own survey³¹ regarding LGBTQ representation in the media, the average respondent age and location was skewed to 19 years and York. 52% of respondents were 'more likely to watch Film & TV featuring LGBTQ representation'. No respondents were 'less likely to watch Film & TV featuring LGBTQ representation'. This demonstrates that over half of younger viewers seek out Film & TV with LGBTQ representation, and the other half are impartial. With the media industry in cut-throat competition for

²⁷Fandom.com. (2021, December). *LGBTQ+ individuals*. Retrieved August 2022, from Wookieepedia: https://starwars.fandom.com/wiki/Category:LGBTQ%2B_individuals

²⁸McNary, D. (2020, March). *'Onward' Banned in Several Middle East Countries Due to Lesbian Reference*. Retrieved August 2022, from Variety: <https://variety.com/2020/film/news/onward-banned-lesbian-kuwait-oman-qatar-saudi-arabia-1203526359/>

²⁹BBC. (2021, November). *BBC tariff range of indicative prices for the supply of commissioned television programmes*. Retrieved July 2022, from BBC Business and contractual information: https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/commissioning/site/tariff_prices_for_independents.pdf

³⁰Jones, J. (2022, February 2022). *LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%*. Retrieved June 2022, from Gallup: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>

³¹Author. (2022, August). *Google Forms*. Retrieved August 2022, from LGBTQ+ Representation in Film & TV: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1fjzxbJHgnLPcqQpbQCmksbtaCwBZlleeXm1Cckq-2VI/viewanalytics>

audiences³², and grappling to attract younger viewers to secure their company's future, this LGBTQ marketing advantage should be capitalised upon.

Problems arise when children's TV with LGBTQ representation is sold overseas. Many countries have banned politically insensitive topics, including LGBTQ representation, from their nation's media. Companies selling productions to these countries must ensure any offending topics are cut out. Wiggins experienced this situation when working on *Andi Mack* (2017-2019), "It had the first LGBT main character on a Disney children's show. We weren't allowed to air it in some countries like Poland. I did ask, "do we think that is the right decision?". *Andi Mack* aired for three seasons on Disney Channel and received acclaim for its innovative LGBTQ representation³³. This publicity also brought criticism from some viewers. An article detailing *Andi Mack*'s LGBTQ representation received 205 comments, one reading "What garbage! Promoting mental health issues in kids SMH (shaking my head)"³⁴. Parents may deem LGBTQ representation as inappropriate for Disney Channel television aimed at 6-14-year-olds. Parents may shield their children from such television - which will cause viewership to drop. Duthie asks, "At what point in childhood do you start thinking about sexuality in a complex way? I think that's something a lot of parents are uncomfortable with". Although children may already be familiar with LGBTQ topics. As Ferraro states, "Some in the right-wing have demonised diversity as a bad word or as a threat to children somehow, when really LGBTQ people are in their daily life". Another comment from this article reads, "it is not Disney's responsibility to teach my child"³⁴. Disney's corporate "responsibility" is to entertain, and to a certain extent inform – not to "teach". This echoes thoughts from Wiggins, "Disney said it's not really our responsibility to educate people, to change perceptions. They were there to sell a programme". Disney's fundamental remit is to sell a programme, but today's business needs and social activism often come into conflict. As some customers call for Disney to advocate for social justice

³²Harvard, C. T. (2021). *Disney, Netflix, and Amazon Oh My! An Analysis of Streaming Brand Competition and the Impact on the Future of Consumer Entertainment*. Memphis: The University of Memphis.

³³IMDb. (2018, April). *GLAAD Media Awards 2018*. Retrieved August 2022, from IMDb.com: <https://www.imdb.com/event/ev0000286/2018/1/>

³⁴Evans, G. (2017, October). '*Andi Mack*' Character To Come Out As Gay: A Disney Channel First. Retrieved August 2022, from DEADLINE: <https://deadline.com/2017/10/disney-channel-andi-mack-character-come-out-gay-1202194584/#comments>

more, and others call for Disney to leave politics alone, it is difficult to see which side Disney should follow.

In March 2022, the Florida senate passed the 'Parental rights in education' bill³⁵ - or the so-called 'Don't Say Gay' bill. This state law prohibits discussions of sexual orientation and gender at Florida public schools from kindergarten to third grade. Widespread controversy around this bill evidenced Duthie's claim that, "America is extraordinarily divided at the minute". Disney and Florida are inherently connected. Duthie supports, "The fact that it took so long for Disney to comment on this is a bad thing, but there's probably a lot tied up in it. Disney World is in Florida. I'm sure there's certain tax breaks that they're getting". Disney generated \$75 billion economic output for Florida in 2019³⁶. Florida politicians were willing to grant Disney around \$580 million in tax breaks³⁷. Commenting on an issue so divisive as the 'Don't Say Gay' bill would jeopardise these financial benefits and upset many Disney stakeholders. Ferraro believes outside stakeholders cannot break Disney's silence on political issues, "I would argue that external pressures are not going to move CEO's the way we were once able to, but the employees are".

To protest Disney's silence on this bill, Disney employees created the website 'whereischapek.com'³⁸, named after Disney CEO Bob Chapek. This website instructed Disney employees to participate in a 15 minute and full day walkout. On March 7th (the day before the bill passed) Disney released a company memo detailing why they could not formally oppose this bill, stating, "Corporate statements do very little to change outcomes or minds"³⁹. On March 9th (the day after this bill passed), Disney finally opposed the bill with a full apology⁴⁰. Disney was widely

³⁵Shrai Popat, H. H. (2022, March). *Florida lawmakers pass 'Don't Say Gay' bill*. Retrieved July 2022, from BBC NEWS: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-60576847>

³⁶Lori Rozsa, T. C. (2022, April). *Florida legislature passes bill repealing Disney special tax status*. Retrieved July 2022, from The Washington Post: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2022/04/21/florida-legislature-passes-bill-repealing-disneys-special-tax-status/>

³⁷Gilchrist, T. (2021, July). *Disney Gets \$580 Million in Tax Breaks in Florida Move*. Retrieved August 2022, from Los Angeles Business Journal: <https://labusinessjournal.com/media/disney-580-million-tax-break-florida-move/>

³⁸Anonymous. (2022, March). *Scheduled Walkout Plan*. Retrieved August 2022, from Disney Do Better Walkout: <https://www.whereischapek.com>

³⁹Weprin, A. (2022, March). *Disney CEO Bob Chapek Addresses Company's Response to Florida's "Don't Say Gay" Bill*. Retrieved August 2022, from The Hollywood Reporter: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/business/business-news/disney-ceo-bob-chapek-florida-dont-say-gay-bill-response-1235105879/>

⁴⁰Rubin, D. (2022, April). *Leaked Disney CEO Video Feels Like a Hostage Video as He Begs for Mercy*. Retrieved August 2022, from YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TMmp7_eOUSI

criticised for this U-turn. From March 2nd to March 8th, Disney experienced a continuous stock price fall⁴¹. During this time, Disney was facing mounting pressure just before the bill passed. This stock fall halted on only the two days Disney released statements - as if investors hoped tensions had cooled. The stock then fell again amid backlash from these statements - as if investors feared Disney had lost touch with customers. In big companies like Disney, employees must feel valued and have a voice to their company. Disney employees had little voice over this crisis. It was employee revolt which caused Disney's U-turn. Ferraro believes employee influence is only increasing, "Now if you're working for a major global brand, from the Disney situation, I think brands are now on notice. Because they don't want walkouts from LGBTQ employees". These events evidence the fragile and crucial connection between LGBTQ awareness and employee, customer, and shareholder interests.

Disney has become a more progressive company over many years, and the 'Don't Say Gay' situation accelerated this process. As Chapek explained just after the bill's fallout, "I, and the leadership team, are determined to use this moment as a catalyst for more meaningful and lasting change"⁴⁰. In 2020, Disney announced the 'Reimagine Tomorrow' programme. In 2022, the 'Reimagine Tomorrow' website remains inactive and briefly describes this project as, "Disney's first large-scale digital destination for amplifying underrepresented voices and untold stories"⁴². After two years of failed launch attempts, the purpose and launch of 'Reimagine Tomorrow' remains unclear. The 'Diversity Dashboard' and 'World of Belonging' D&I programmes are also to be launched in 2022⁴³ - both remain equally elusive. Just weeks after the 'Don't Say Gay' fallout in March 2022, Disney employees relaunched 'Reimagine Tomorrow' on a video call. This event was likely organised very quickly to restore confidence in Disney's D&I strategy. As a result, this event seemed vague and unprofessional. Live on call, Executive Producer Latoya Raveneau said, "Our leadership over there has been so welcoming to my like my like not-at-all-secret gay

⁴¹Google. (2022, August). *Walt Disney Co.* Retrieved August 2022, from Google Finance:

<https://www.google.com/finance/quote/DIS:NYSE?sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwiYw6m5gOL5AhUESkEAHXsdCq0Q3ecFegQIEhAa>

⁴²Disney. (2021, September). *Reimagine Tomorrow*. Retrieved August 2022, from Disney.com:

<https://reimagine tomorrow.disney.com/403.html>

⁴³Disney. (2022, February). *The Walt Disney Company 2021 Corporate Social Responsibility Report*. Retrieved August 2022, from Disney impact: <https://impact.disney.com/app/uploads/2022/02/2021-CSR-Report.pdf>

agenda”⁴⁴. Corporate President Karey Burke mentioned her “two queer children” and began crying. Burke also admitted being unfamiliar with Disney’s portfolio in, “One of our execs stood up and said, ‘you know we only have a handful of queer leads in our content’. And I went ‘what? That can’t be true’. And I realised oh it actually is true”⁴⁴. When these words represent a worldwide corporation, talking about the sexuality of family and installing an “agenda” will not be received well. When this recorded meeting was allegedly leaked, critics were quick to expose Disney’s “socio-political agenda”⁴⁵. Disney hurriedly announced numerous D&I programmes immediately following the ‘Don’t Say Gay’ mishap, which implies that Disney are scrambling to correct their recent mistakes. Disney said too little in the ‘Don’t Say Gay’ scenario and too much in this ‘Reimagine Tomorrow’ scenario - a perfect balance is difficult to achieve.

As Disney is such a massive company, it is difficult to assess whether LGBTQ representation has consistently improved across the whole business. Disney fan products and children’s TV are becoming particularly progressive, as less risk is involved in these sectors. Disney Parks and Films remain conservative, as more risk is involved here. Until 2022, Disney displayed safe and cautious LGBTQ representation. The ‘Don’t Say Gay’ fallout sparked a change at Disney to bold and progressive LGBTQ representation. Disney’s long history, sheer size, and worldwide prestige makes them an extremely powerful company – capable of changing opinions around LGBTQ representation. As Ferraro summarises, “What people see in the media, whether it’s news or entertainment, it shapes the decisions that are made in classrooms, in offices, in living rooms, and in the ballot box. It shapes our culture, and it changes behaviour”. LGBTQ representation is improving faster than ever across the media industry and at Disney. This trend will continue for years to come, as opposition from conservative customers becomes marginalised, and support from wider society becomes the new normal.

⁴⁴Newsroom, T. (2022, March). *Leaked Reimagine Tomorrow Disney Corporate Videos Are Shocking*. Retrieved August 2022, from That Park Place: <https://thatparkplace.com/leaked-reimagine-tomorrow-disney-corporate-videos-are-shocking/>

⁴⁵Renegade, V. (2022, March). *Walt Disney Reimagine Tomorrow EXPOSED*. Retrieved July 2022, from YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YP1ZaTF7Tlk>