

## **“How Far I’ll Go”: Navigating Individual/Communal Identity in *Moana* and Disney Princess Narratives**

*Finding oneself* has become an integral and driving concept across Disney animated princess films. Many of the studio princesses’ iconic songs reflect this trend, wherein the film narratives will center an individual character within and often against her community. Prominent examples include sequences like “Part of Your World” in *The Little Mermaid* (1989); “Just Around the Riverbend” in *Pocahontas* (1995); and “How Far I’ll Go” and “I Am Moana” in *Moana* (2016). In a sense, these Disney films organize their characters’ individualities and senses of self around a dialectical tension between individual and communal identity. According to the Walt Disney Company, Ariel “[loves] exploring her underwater home” but “[dreams] of living on land as a human.” Likewise, Pocahontas and her friend Nakoma “[float] down the river in their canoe ... in awe of the untouched beauty around them”; Pocahontas is “a free spirit always on the lookout for adventure.” And lastly Moana “is inspired to leave the safety and security of her island on a daring journey [across the ocean] to save her people ... along the way, Moana fulfills her quest and discovers the one thing she’s always sought: her own identity.” In each of these examples and beyond, the characters’ relationships to identity are compounded time and again by the films’ complex uses of *water* as both setting and metaphor. I argue that water’s roles in the films compound the characters’ experiences in negotiating their torn selfhood between individual and communal identity. This paper will therefore explore the intersections between identity and representations of water across several Disney princess films. First, I will examine how these films handle the negotiation of individual and communal identities before ultimately asking to what extent these narratives attempt rhetorically to universalize the notion of selfhood in ways that might dismiss diverse, lived experiences.