

Extended Essay

A study of the changing representation of Alice in the films Alice in Wonderland (1951 Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske and Clyde Geronimi) and Alice in Wonderland (2010, Tim Burton)

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Introduction

Alice in Wonderland's recreation by Tim Burton in 2010 was the stepping-stone of Disney's representation of female characters. The character of Alice in the live action remake by Tim Burton, 2010 possess many 'unconventional' qualities and skills as a leading female protagonist, which differentiates her from any other ordinary Disney princess or character. Her change in representation from weak and dependent in the 1951 film to a more brave and independent character in Burton's adaptation is prominently explored through the mise-en-scene as well as being captured by lighting and dialogue. From the very moment Alice is introduced in the film, it is clear that her representation is far from the Alice shown in the 1951 adaptation. This is evident through her rebellious act of eloping her own engagement to the moment she fights the jabberwocky. These events of Alice show how Disney has progressed from showing excessive female domestication in films like *Snow White and Cinderella*, to a more contemporary and worldly view with female characters increasingly portrayed in a stronger and more powerful light. Along with this change has come an increase in violence, battle scenes and fearsome fictional creatures in Disney movies across the board. This change in Disney's approach may have occurred because of the changes in society's views, as well as reaching a wider audience. (Disney's live-action remakes explained: Why now and what's coming?, 2017).

The 'American dream' was known to be at its highest point in the 1950s, where people believed in conformity and equality (Floyd, n.d.) This idea could be reflected in Alice's dream coming true, similar to the people living in America. However, the idea of everyone being the 'same' (F (Floyd, n.d.) is contradicted through Alice's representation of being dependent in the 1951 film.

Alice's change in characterization will be the key research area that will be explored throughout the whole essay. As well as this, the rise in violence in the more recent live action film by Tim Burton will be investigated in relation to Alice's representation in the 1951 and 2010 film adaptations. The research area

will be approached through the investigation of film techniques, which will include cinematography, lighting, mise-en-scene, sound and dialogue. Moreover, the director's role and social context will also be discussed in this essay as a measure of the influences the two areas have had on their films.

Overview of female representation & violence in Disney

The portrayal of women in Disney films are currently questioned. From the traditional representations of being "subservient" (Grant, 2012) and dependent in films such as, *The Little Mermaid* and *Sleeping beauty*, to films like *Tangled* and *Moana*, where the female protagonists are shown to be brave and independent. A heroine's need of "a handsome prince, a tiny waist, a pearly white smile and an urgent need to be rescued," (Judith Welikala, 2012) is gradually diminishing in favor of the aforementioned stronger representation, as seen with Alice in the 2010 remake. Her representation as a weaker, dependent and vulnerable character in the 1951 version is contributed to the then common representation of women in the film industry such as *Cinderella and Snow White*, reflecting societal trends around World War I and The Great Depression (Age, 2003)). Even though women began to work in the 1950's, they were still perceived to be "followers," rather than leaders (Age, 2003) which may have contributed to Alice's character traits in the 1951 film.

One of the major differences between the original and the live action Alice in Wonderland is the rise of "violence involving scary images and situations," as suggested by critic Robert Ebert, which manifested in the form of a 'PG' rating (Ebert, 2010). Moreover, Ebert thought this story was never meant for children as it included "deep" and "dark" imagery, along with a "little sadism embedded," (Ebert, 2010) This shows how far Disney has gone to amplify the use of violent imagery, which will be discussed further throughout this essay with the relation to Alice's characterization.

Cinematography and Mise-en-scene

Characterization of Alice- 1951

The cinematography and mise-en-scene in many of the frames is used to demonstrate unique aspects of

Figure 1: Alice listening to her mum reading a book at 2:18 seconds (1951 adaptation)



Alice's character, as well as instill a more realistic sense of violence and terror within the audience. In figure 1, the focus on the wreath shows her femininity, as it is an accessory female typically associate with. The flower holds connotations of fragility and delicacy, displaying Alice's vulnerability she holds as a protagonist. The panning movement used earlier, showing her mother reading a

book to her, is followed by a medium shot of Alice resting on a tree branch as seen in figure 1. She seems disinterested in the book and instead is preoccupied with the flower crown. Although it is common to find attention deficiency in pre-adolescence, it is also a female stereotype to be more interested in beauty accessories and less so in education or learning (Tarrant, 2005). Furthermore, the fact that she is being read to rather than reading herself, depicts her as a passive and dependent character. This reflects how women were commonly considered in 1950's, to excel at domestic chores, breed a family and not pursue a further education (Hammond, n.d.).

In figure 1, the medium shot focuses on Alice- she is the dominant contrast of this frame due to her vibrant clothes and hair. The dress, headband, and bold lip, further highlights her femininity. The use of make-up at such a young age emphasizes her attention to physical appearance, which further reflects the feminine stereotype of appearance over education (Tarrant, 2005). The white apron, which is usually worn by women at the time they do their domestic chores- an expectation that was set by society during the 1950s (Gardiner, 2015). This expectation continued through media platforms, with advertisements adapting to these aforementioned societal views. In appendix 1 and 2, the common message shown in each of the adverts are: women are only destined to do domestic chores, which is further supported through the use

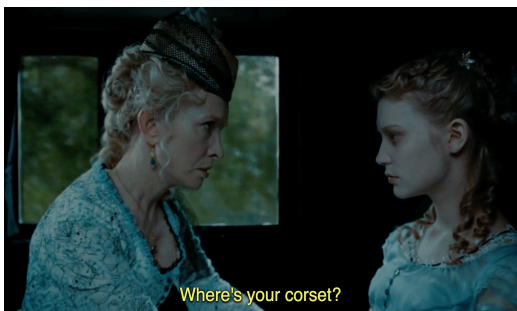
of an apron. This mirrors the appearance of Alice in the 1951 film, suggesting that although she is so young and vulnerable, she is being raised to follow the above-mentioned role of women in society. The color white represents her innocence and purity, while the apron links to domestic women that are represented as weak and dependent, similar to Alice 1951 character traits.

She is described as a “rosy-cheeked, ruby-lipped darling,” by critic Bosley Crowther in the 1950’s (Crowther, 1951). The ‘rosy-cheeked’ description is suggestive of a young, vulnerable, and sweet girl; the color descriptions ‘rosy’ and ‘ruby’ have connotations of love, passion, and tenderness, all of which are very relatable to a female personality. This critic also compares Alice as “a sister of Snow White” and “all the fairytale princesses,” (Crowther, 1951). Although, Princesses are the epitome of femininity, which further supports Alice’s portrayal as a stereotypically female character, the relationship between Alice’s character with the fairytale princesses can be viewed differently; 1950’s Alice does hold characteristics such as her physical appearance and vulnerability that supports the link between the Disney princesses. However, the absence of a leading male figure in Alice in Wonderland 1951 is one of the key elements that drives her character away from princesses. Her own and independent journey that the audience follows shows that she is still capable of surviving without the presence of a male character, similar to *Merida from Brave* presenting her temporary independence.

Characterization of Alice- 2010

The later adaptation retains aspects of Alice's character including the blue dress, fair skin, and blonde hair, as seen in the medium shot in figure 2, when compared to figure 1. Keeping these traits of Alice contrasts to the brave representation she attains throughout the whole film. The pale colors in the background blend in with the gloomy setting, reflecting Alice's serious expression. Her mother's positioning of her arms on Alice in figure 2, along with her stern expression suggests that Alice is forced to be in this situation.

Figure 2: *Alice and her mother on their way to an event (at 3:16 seconds, 2010)*



Although, Alice 2010's character development from the weak delicate girl in the 1951 film to a more powerful representation, is contrasted to her chronic sagging posture, which is an indication of people who don't feel comfortable within themselves, suggested by a psychologist (Whitbourne, 2012). Showing her lack in confidence and control, while presenting her as a character that

is disorientated and confused within herself, which shows her temporary weakness. Figure 2 also contradicts figure 1, where Alice 1951 is seen sitting outdoors on a tree branch. The view of the sky and trees in the background link to nature and freedom that Alice 1951 is given by getting the opportunity to experience this, which is contrasted to her common weak representation.

Although, Alice 2010 still retains similar traits that repress women, there are still major differences between the two characters. An interviewer refers to the 2010 Alice as "tough" (Burton, Reinventing Alice's look for the 21st century, 2010), a word that the 1951 Alice would never be associated with. The pale make-up used on the later Alice has a direct disconnect to the vibrant make-up worn by the animated Alice, where the 2010 Alice is much less indicative of stereotypical femininity and beauty.

Burton mentions that Alice's "purpose is not just to look pretty in a space and time, but to reinvent the world she's in" (Burton, Reinventing Alice's look for the 21st century, 2010). By saying this, it shows that

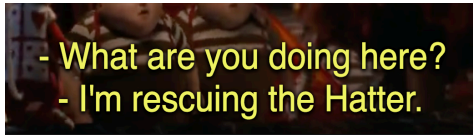
Alice unlike other Disney female characters: she is not conventionally there to look beautiful, but to lead and oppose unjust authority. Unlike the previous versions, this Alice is a strong, independent and courageous woman, similar to appendix 3 and 4. Burton has attempted to build a character that matches the representation of women today as powerful leaders (England, 2010); he describes his depiction of Alice as a “modern look at a woman” (Burton, Reinventing Alice’s look for the 21st century, 2010). This contributes to the many reasons why Alice’s representation transformed into a character that is expected to be seen on screen today. In the modern society, women are seen as much more independent and brave individuals (Tarrant, 2005), which is reflected through the many female characters in films today such as *Margaret from The Proposal* and *Merida from Brave*.

Dialogue

Representation of Alice’s character

Changes in the content and tone of Alice’s dialogue between the two adaptations reflect the evolution of her character. Nonetheless, there are moments in the film, where her character doesn’t support the “modern look at women” (Burton, Reinventing Alice’s look for the 21st century, 2010) Burton intended to present. In appendix 5, Hamish’s mother says that Alice “can be easily distracted.” As mentioned earlier, it is common for children to show signs of attention deficiency, which links Alice’s character to a child- that holds connotations of vulnerability and weakness. This displays how the evolution of Alice’s character in the 2010 still remained qualities that supports female stereotypes of dependency and weakness (Tarrant, 2005). Moreover, her lack of dialogue in this scene shows her disinterest in the conversation, while Hamish’s mother tries to draw attention towards her marriage. Her lack in concentration presents her childish behavior, as well as displaying her innocence and weakness due to her absence in dialogue at 8:20seconds.

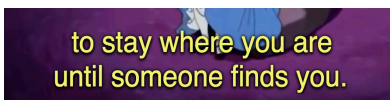
Figure 3: Alice preparing to save Hatter (at 58minutes, 2010)



Even though, there are moments where Alice 2010 contradicts her prominent representation, she can still be seen as an evolving independent character, when compared to the 1951 film. Alice

mentions that she is determined to rescue the Hatter (figure 3, 2010), showing her desire to help others, establishing her as a loyal friend. By using the active voice “I’m”, Alice is shown to have made up her mind to save him, presenting her as a dedicated and confident character, unlike figure 2. The pronoun “I’m” is suggestive of Alice taking the responsibility and lead to save the Hatter, presenting her as an independent and courageous person, unlike the one in the original film. Moreover, Alice being a female going to ‘rescue’ a male figure, goes against stereotypes of female weakness. The fact that Alice is embarking on her own mission to save another peer, shows the evolution of female protagonists and their attainment of increasingly powerful roles in Disney as well as film industries across the world such as *Miranda Priestly from The Devils Wears Prada*. Burton’s intention of making Alice a powerful and independent character (Burton, Interview with Tim Burton, 2010), is seen not just in figure 3 but in her actions and dialogues throughout the film.

Figure 4, Alice roaming on her own, at 54:07 seconds, 1951)



In figure 4 (1951 adaptation), Alice states as part of a song that she will remain in her place “until someone finds” her, showing her dependency on

Figure 5- Alice falls into her river of tears, 1951



others to rescue her, typical of the traditional depictions of Disney’s princesses including *Snow White* and *Cinderella*. The use of “help me” (figure

5) further shows her vulnerability. Although her young age invokes some sympathy, these dialogues nevertheless portray her as a character incapable of finding her way out. This does not only display her weak character, but also someone who lacks the ability to be resilient and is unable to be innovative. This is contrasted to Alice in the later adaptation, who is constantly seen saving other characters like the Hatter, and is shown to be a pillar of strength and courage.

Figure 6, 7 and 8, Alice talking to Bayard the bloodhound (at 43:47 seconds, 2010)

Figure 6

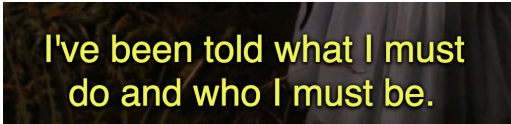


Figure 7

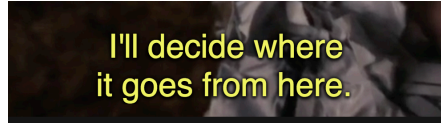


Figure 8



Alice's choice of words further demonstrates her dominant personality. In figure 6, her use of a loud tone with the bloodhound suggests her frustration with the situation as she is constantly being “told what” she “must do” and who she “must be.” Her reluctance to be controlled and ordered further highlight her independent and decisive traits- far from the earlier female stereotypes of subservience and submission (Holt). This shows how Alice 2010 is distant from Alice 1951 because she is more determined and strong-willed, unlike her previous representation. However, she then takes a stance to herself “decide where it goes from here,” (figure 7) and says, ‘I make my path’ (figure 8) as would be expected of her nature. The word ‘path’ suggests a vision, aim or an end goal which in her case is finding her way out of Wonderland, and perhaps along the way helping as many others as she can.

Sound

Themes & Character

The use of sound in both adaptations greatly reflect their contrasting tones, through the presentation of the scene: Alice falling into the rabbit hole. The magical and slow non-diegetic music used during Alice's fall into the hole in the original film, gave a mythical feeling to the scenario. The use of enchanting music juxtaposes the dangerous and unexpected condition of falling into the hole. By using such sounds, they have attempted to ease the situation, which is further standardized by her picking up a book and examining it during her fall, providing a more comfortable viewing for children. Young audiences conventionally enjoy magical and fantasy settings shown through Disney's similar creations such as *Peter Pans Neverland*, which the aforementioned sounds help create. This music builds an emotional bond between the audience and characters, while providing a more interactive experience.

This is in contrast with the 2010 remake, where the same event of her falling into a hole is demonstrated in a very different light. Such as the use of fast pace and loud non-diegetic sounds, unlike the slow mythical sounds in the earlier film, support Alice's very dangerous situation, building up the tension; this music aids in raising a sense of concern and fear for her, drawing feelings of sympathy within the audience. This displays the difference in approach the two films took in the same event, where one focuses on making it seem magical, while the other aims to show a riskier side of it. This riskier side is further displayed through the diegetic sounds of Alice screaming while falling into the hole in the 2010 film. Screaming is a very predictable reaction to this situation, quite different to the 1951 Alice's unrealistic slow-motion floating in the earlier film's same scene. The screaming emphasizes Alice's feelings of being scared and shock, which differentiates her overriding representation of being brave and bold, making her more relatable to the average person. Overall this highlights the newer adaptation's darker tones, as well as Alice's more realistic and identifiable representation in terms of the uses of gratifications theory when compared to the earlier 1951 film.

Violence & Character

The chase sequence (at 23 minutes) between the Bandersnatch and Alice in the 2010 film features a lot of loud and vibrant non-diegetic and diegetic sounds. The buildup of music from the moment the Bandersnatch is in picture, allows the audience to understand that danger is approaching towards Alice, which contributes to the tension being created. The Bandersnatch's loud growls near Alice creates an eerie situation for her and the audience, especially for children. This is continued till the last battle scene between Alice and the jabberwocky, which mainly consists of diegetic sounds of the jabberwocky howling, along with the collision of swords, emphasizing the fight scene and connoting ideas of war. The jabberwocky's deafening roars reflect Alice's terrifying situation, in which she is missioned to fight on her

own. The loud volume and intense musical score supports the frightening nature of the creature, as well as highlighting the underlying dark themes and amplification of violence in the film itself. The enhancement of violent and frightening imagery as portrayed through intense music, when compared to the 1951 adaption, is manifested in the later film's PG rating (Ebert). Not only does this display violent imagery, but also portrays Alice 2010 as a brave and courageous character, reflected through her use of the sword. The sword is a symbol for protection, leadership, strength, and courage, (Sword Symbolism and Sword Meanings, n.d.) all traits that Alice 2010 possesses. The fact that she takes it upon herself to fight the jabberwocky shows her braveness and loyalty towards Wonderland.

These traits however, are not seen in Alice's 1951 character. The diegetic sound of Alice crying in the 1951 film as she can't find her way out of the hole (at 9:55 minutes), is majorly exaggerated through the loud volume, along with the dramatic non-diegetic background music. While Alice is crying, the music in the background is contrastingly light and comedic, almost as if her crying is humorous. Although it would be expected for young girls to cry in her situation, the background music creates a sense of mockery, further exemplifying Alice's representation of being weak. As well as this, the target audience being young children, also contributes to the reason for creating such a light and humorous effect on this scene. This effect created can be viewed in two ways. Firstly, it gives the children an impression that crying can be amusing or comical, however at the same time it sends a warning to the audience about wanting fantasies to be real and what the consequences of it are when it turns to reality such as Alice's dream coming true.

Lighting

The lighting techniques used in both adaptations of Alice in Wonderland significantly contributes to Alice's representation, as well as the rise in violence. Which can be seen particularly in Burton's version that features a great amount of light versus darkness, which is known to be taken from German Expressionism.

Figure 9, Alice attempting to rescue the hatter (at 1:00:20 seconds, 2010)



unsafe situation. This causes the audience to feel anxious and empathize with Alice due to her closeness to the Bandersnatch. The use of lighting on one side draws attention to the eye of the Bandersnatch, which she uses as leverage against the creature. Her possession of the Bandersnatch's eye further displays her brave and fearless nature. Her calm and collected expression further reflects her intelligent and astute traits, unlike 1951's representation of Alice.

Figure 10, The end battle scene, where Alice fights the Jabberwocky (at 1:29:39 seconds, 2010)



This representation of Alice is followed through to the last battle scene. The use of chiaroscuro lighting in figure 10, creates a gloomy and dull setting, matching the fight scene occurring in the frame. The high-key lighting on the left side of the frame (figure 10) focuses on one side of Alice, emphasizing her dominance. However, the gradient from light to dark lighting may reflect Alice's journey through the film, evolving from an innocent girl to a powerful fighter as seen in figure 10. Her innocence is further shown in appendix 6, where the use of chiaroscuro lighting focusing on one side of her face, shows her worried and scared expression. This is supported with the presence of dark and dull lighting, setting a mysterious mood, as well as matching Alice's feelings. The lack of lighting in appendix 6 foreshadows her loss of innocence, where the use of bright lighting representing her purity, while the darkness presenting her change in character.

Her change in character is further supported through the bright lighting focused on Alice which could suggest that she is the only hope to save the Wonderland from the Red queen, once again highlighting Alice's powerful role in the film. The darker lighting implies upcoming danger which in this case is the Jabberwocky, and creates fear within the audience for what is to come.

The high-key lighting shone on Alice causes the sword to glisten, highlighting the importance of the weapon. As discussed earlier, the sword connotes war and battle, which is exactly what is occurring in this scene. However, it can also be argued that the lighting used to show her worried and scared expression contrasts to the brave and strong connotations her character and sword holds. Though this displays her temporary weakness, it is also expected for Alice to be scared in the dangerous scenario she is put into, which presents her as a more realistic and relatable character to the audience. Nonetheless, her courage and bravery to save Wonderland, shown through the chiaroscuro lighting surpasses her temporary weakness, presenting her evolution as a character from 1951 to 2010.

Conclusion

Alice's character evolution from 1951 to 2010 has been portrayed using mise-en-scene, lighting and dialogue, along with underlying features of dark and violent themes. Which one has witnessed through her progression from a conventional female with stereotypical weakness and materialism, to a more fearless and independent personality. Along with this character transformation has come a rise in violence and battle scenes, and visuals have taken a darker turn. The battle scene, Jabberwocky, and Bandersnatch are a few of the many elements that show this amplification, which has been aided by various film techniques including chiaroscuro lighting and intense sound effects. The introduction of violence and battle scenes is mirrored throughout other Disney remakes, including *Maleficent* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

The movement of Disney from the archetypal stereotypes of females- manifested as the changes in Alice's character- shows their attempt to bring in equality and reflects current societal values (Grant, 2012). An increasing number of protagonists are female characters- fearless girls and women with the skill set to fight their own battles, such as the 2010 Alice.

The majority of early Disney films featured bright colors, unbalanced happy endings and an idealistic view of the world; most of their films could be classed as fairytales, with the overarching target market of young girls. Along with the change in female character representation discussed earlier, has come the enhancement of fight scenes and violent imagery, which may be an attempt to appeal to a wider range of ages and greater number of boys. It is evident, that many of the remakes now such as *Beauty and the Beast* also feature the inclusion of violence, reflecting onto the change in societal expectations and trends.

Overall, changes in Alice's character representation and the amplification of violence between the two adaptations have been established through the use of cinematography, lighting, sound, mise-en-scene and dialogue techniques. The introduction of new characters such as the Bandersnatch and Jabberwocky

further contribute to the film's darker themes. The distinct difference between the two Alice characters shows Disney's willingness to modernize their classic tales, mirroring current societal values and appealing to a wider range of audience. Burton's Alice in wonderland had gross earnings of 1 billion dollars worldwide, along with two Oscar awards (mojo, n.d.), evidence of Disney's evolution from a small company producing cartoons, to a leading production house with a record-breaking viewership.

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Filmography

Alice in Wonderland (1951)

Directed by: Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske and Clyde Geronimi

Studio: Walt Disney Productions

Alice in Wonderland (2010)

Directed by: Tim Burton

Studio: Walt Disney Productions

Cinderella (1950)

Directed by: Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske

Studio: Walt Disney productions (Walt Disney Animation Studio)

Sleeping Beauty (1959)

Directed by: Clyde Geronimi, Iles Clarke, Eric Larson, Wolfgang Reitherman

Studio: Walt Disney productions (Walt Disney Animation Studio)

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937)

Directed by: David Hand, William Cottrell, Wilfred Jackson, Larry Morey, Perce Pearce, Ben Sharpsteen

Studio: Walt Disney productions (Walt Disney Animation Studio)

The Little Mermaid

Directed by: Ron Clements and John Musker

Studio: Walt Disney Productions (Walt Disney Animation Studio)

Tangled (2010)

Directed by: Nathan Greno and Byron Howard

Studio: Walt Disney Animation Studio

The Devil Wears Prada (2006)

Directed by: David Frankel

Studios: 20th Century Fox and RatPac-Dune Entertainment

The Proposal (2009)

Directed by: Anne Fletcher

Studios: Touchstone Pictures, Mandeville Films, Kurtzman/Orci

Appendices

Appendix 1- 1950 advertisement

LADIES' HOME JOURNAL

Meet "Doctor" Homemaker!

Specialist in Proper
Family Nourishment

She's smart! She's thrifty! She makes her food dollars go a long, long way. Although her husband's income would not be considered high, her family is among the *best nourished in town*. Her title may be just plain Mrs. Homemaker, but when it comes to proper feeding of her family, *she's a specialist!*

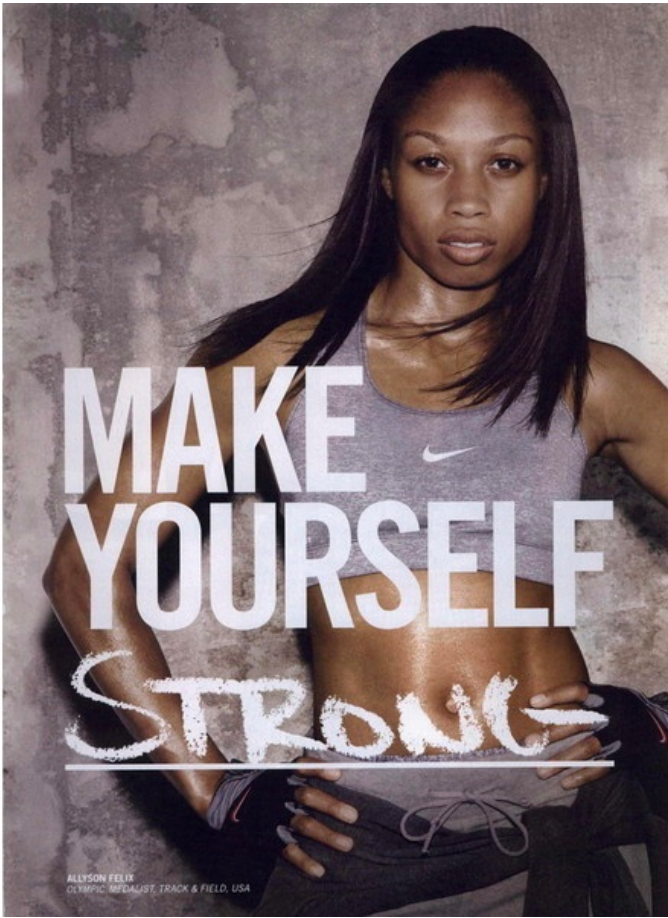
There are many American homemakers just like her but unfortunately not enough of them. She knows the advantages of "waterless" cooking, top-of-stove broiling, roasting and baking. She serves the foods she cooks in the same beautiful utensils in which she prepares them. She is a woman of high degree! Meet "Doctor" Homemaker! She uses GUARDIAN SERVICE!



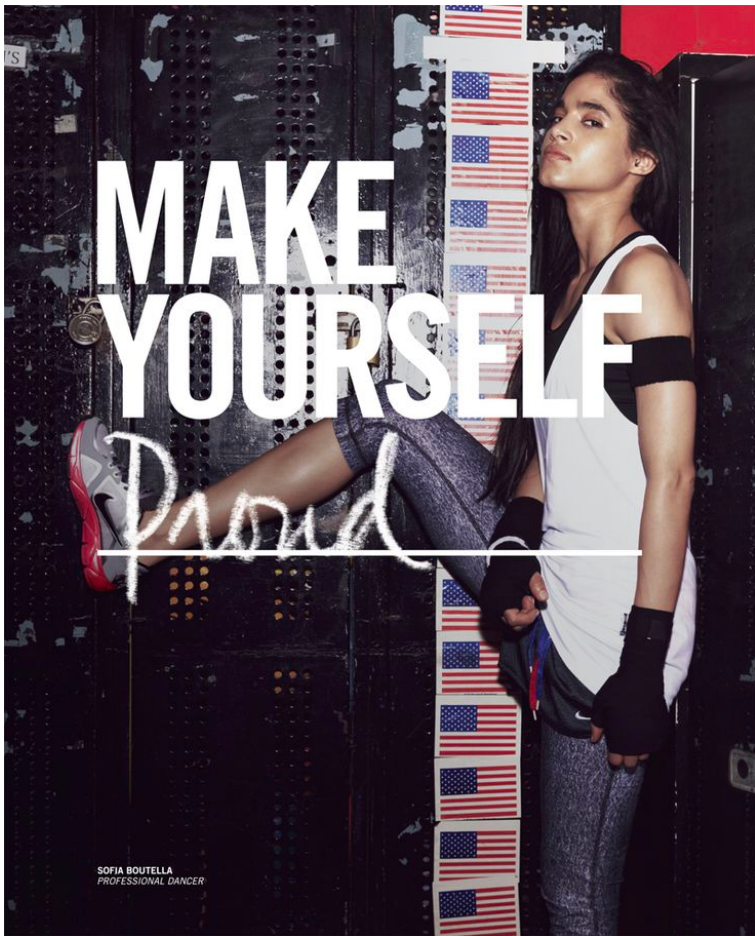
Appendix 2- 1950 advertisement



Appendix 3- Nike advertisement 2010



Appendix 4- Nike advertisement 2010



Appendix 5- Dialogue of Alice's betrothed (Hamish's Mother)



**Now, pay attention.
Hamish said you were easily distracted.**

Appendix 6- Alice roaming Wonderland in search for the cat.

