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## Marketing of Gender Stereotypes through Animated Films: A Thematic Analysis of the Disney Princess Franchise

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MARKETING OF GENDER STEREOTYPES THROUGH ANIMATED FILMS:  
A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE DISNEY PRINCESS FRANCHISE

By

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Bachelors of Arts in English

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2009

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

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The Graduate College

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## **Thesis Approval**

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**Marketing of gender stereotypes through animated films: A thematic analysis of the Disney Princess franchise**

is approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## PREFACE

Like many children growing up in the 1990s, I loved Disney's animated films, specifically the Disney Princesses. These characters were in some way a part of my childhood. As I grew up, technology advanced, I was able to re-experience each of the films repeatedly by VHS and later DVD viewing. These characters were core figures of my childhood and have always held a special place in my heart. As the franchise has expanded I have continued and will continue to support the brand. Through graduate school my love for Disney evolved through research on the brand. This project allowed me to take a special interest to an academic level and undertake research on a subject dear to my heart. The gender principles the company imparts through their films in this particular franchise interest me and the lack of research on recent releases pushed me to add to the body of established research to encompass princesses from the its inception through its current lineup.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	iii
PREFACE .....	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
Background .....	3
Purpose of the Study .....	8
Significance of the Study .....	11
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY .....	18
Literature Review .....	18
Gender and the Media.....	19
Representations of Gender in Disney Films .....	21
Female Depictions in Traditional Disney Films .....	22
Female Depictions in Contemporary Disney Films .....	24
Traditional Male Images .....	26
The New Man in Disney .....	27
Impact of Gender Stereotypes in Peer Interaction .....	29
Methods .....	30
Screenshot Outline .....	35
CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION .....	40
Findings .....	40
Domestic Female: Traditional.....	40
Domestic Female: Contemporary .....	45
Heroic Male: Traditional .....	49

Heroic Male: Contemporary .....	52
Physical Appeal: Traditional .....	56
Physical Appeal: Contemporary .....	60
Damsel in Distress: Traditional .....	63
Damsel in Distress: Contemporary .....	66
Color Cue .....	69
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION .....	74
Limitations and Future Research .....	81
REFERENCES .....	83
CIRRICULUM VITAE .....	88

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Visually-based representations of gender in the media — specifically in film and television — have unequally portrayed the quantity and quality of male characters versus female characters since the advent of modern forms of entertainment. Film in particular has been male dominated just in terms of the number of lead characters who are men. The development of lead female characters has been a slow process but has shown steady progress in recent decades.

One common agent of criticism for gender stereotypes has been Disney's animated films. Previous research on animated films within the franchise has found the existence of gender stereotypes. More recent releases provide additional avenues to examine and compare gender portrayals from classic films with contemporary releases to gauge the changes over time. Hoerrner, in a 1996 study, noted that decades of research concerning gender portrayals in Disney films has revealed that viewers consistently consume "erroneous and demeaning depictions of women" (Hoerrner, 1996). Through Disney's films, viewers have encountered gender roles that align with societal expectations, but it is not clear if the depictions in recent animated films have changed along with the times and corresponding reforms in society. Researchers have explored the quantity of female characters in their studies and to a lesser extent the types of characteristics such depictions provide.

This thesis explored Disney animated films, both past and present, through a thematic analysis and analyzed and measured gender stereotypes across the Disney Princess brand chronically gauging the change in illustrations. The Disney Princess

franchise currently has 11 members, each the main protagonist of an animated film, beginning with Snow White of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), Aurora of *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), Ariel of *The Little Mermaid* (1989), Belle of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Jasmine of *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Mulan* (1998), Tiana of *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), Rapunzel of *Tangled* (2010), and Merida of *Brave* (2012) as the latest addition. These female characters were grouped together for the first time in the late 1990s by Andy Mooney and are comprised of both princesses and heroines. However, not all princesses associated with the Disney brand are included in the franchise.

This study focused on the central female and male character of four films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937); *Cinderella* (1950); *The Princess and the Frog* (2009); and *Tangled* (2010). Through analysis, it first examined patterns of stereotypes in the first category films of from 1937-1975. Second, it compared the repetitions of themes and patterns found in the first set of films to those in the second set released from 1976-2012. Such analysis compared past and present illustrations to gage marketing of gender stereotypes and the change, or lack thereof, over the years. Lastly, it analyzed how color is being used to reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes present in the films. This study provides further research into Disney's marketing of gender standards within their Princess brand by identifying what earlier films depicted and comparing them to illustrations of modern movies.

## **Background**

Children have been exposed to images that illustrate gender stereotypes for generations past and will continue to do so for generations to come. These images have created and reinforced traditional gender roles and images and continue to do so. The portrayal of gender stereotypes has been said to create gender role images and expectations among the youth who view them. Through everyday readings, viewing and interactions, children are learning, following and developing meaning (Baker-Sperry, 2007). Classic fairy tales once only available in print have been turned into colorful illustrations and provide images to accompany the storyline.

While print media have traditionally led in depictions of men and women, visual media have increasingly — especially in the later 20<sup>th</sup> century — dominated social interpretations of gender roles (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 46). Two of the most popular platforms of visual media for mass audiences are television and film, and by the mid-1980s, there were more women in leading roles, but still there were twice as many men on screen (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 47). These ratios for television extended across to film. However, these two agents illustrated visually negative gender stereotypes and their struggle to keep up with societal changes warranted cause for criticism.

As visual media continue to increase in popularity, the time spent viewing such media increases as well. The American Medical Association has documented that American children spend a large portion of their awake time viewing television (Giroux & Pollock, 2010, pp. 2-3). During this time, the media entertains and educates. Young children are highly susceptible to such learning because these are the developmental

years and the visual aspect of television and film helps impart two fold, visually and verbally, cultural, social and gender standards.

Henry Giroux and Grace Pollock noted that Walt Disney thought of a child's mind as "a blank book," and during their early years, much of their mental book is written which will be the foundation for principles of the rest of their life following early childhood (2010, p. 17). Recognizing that learning was not confined to the classroom one can only question what social and gender standards Walt Disney aimed to impart onto children through animated films as well as what current principles that the Disney corporation is teaching children.

Gender stereotypes have been found to be present in a variety of children's programming since the inception of television, one most notable source has been animated cartoons (Hoerrner, 1996). From the very beginning Disney animated films have captured and captivated audiences. Children's entertainment has been identified in conjunction with animated films for many years. The 1937 release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* by the Disney Corporation, has identified them as one of the main providers of media in general and children's entertainment specifically (Hoerrner, 1996). Early Disney films contained female characters, as main protagonists, who were seen as visual role models. Through these central female figures concerns arose, from both parents and social scientist, about the values that these illustrations teach (Dundes, 2001). Their popularity among children and adults has led a handful of researchers to assess character portrayals within these films over the years (Bazzini, Curtain, Joslin, Martz, & Regan, 2010).

Research in the 1970's by Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz found explicit and implicit messages in relation to societal power structures especially regarding gender in children's literature. The digital age of media has shifted children's literature to a visual medium onto the big screen and into the home. It has been proven that children learn in a more persuasive manner through visual media such as video than in written form as the traditional fairy tale story. Children's entertainment has been dominated by the Disney Corporations full-length animated films since the 1930's and still serve as current visual forms of age-old fairy tales. What was once the main form of children's entertainment, before the age of television and film, were transformed to the current visual media platforms allowing them to continue to be popular and viewed today (Haddock, Lund, Tanner, Towbin & Zimmerman, 2004).

Visual media over time has evolved from its traditional form of print most notably, the fairy tale, which "is one of the longest existing genres of children's literature" (Hurley, 2005). It has served as a staple of childhood entertainment and education since its written form. Initial stories served as teaching aids through the main moral of the story. The Disney Corporation is the "Stories R Us" for children and is used for teaching about social and cultural standards much like the traditional fairy tale (Ward, 2002, p. 1). As these stories were transformed into visual illustrations, such messages were often lost and the notion of innocence and enchantment became the most important factors or so it seemed.

"Fairy tales are the first stories we hear, and though they are meant to enchant and entertain, they also offer us a means of addressing psychological conflicts" (Cashdan, 1999, p. ix) and often impart cultural, social and gendered principles. Such psychological

conflicts provided the foundation and were an important aspect of the fairy tale, the moral of the story. By shifting attention off the story's moral, Disney was able to eliminate some of the psychological conflicts present in written form, which often served as a source of concern among parents. The aural nature of storytelling leaves the visual element to the imagination of the person listening, which can be altered, based off their personal experiences and often the fairy tale story is deemed one-dimensional because of this flaw.

An evolution of media to a visual platform brought change across the generation and not just the medium. The advancement of modern media through television in America during the 1920s created a medium to reach a mass audience and offered the element of visual appeal paired with a sound component. This advancement also affected films, which were silent until 1927, creating a double threat to a once one-dimensional genre. Through indication of behaviors, which are easier to illustrate in visual form, media began to depict a wide variety of gendered actions both in television and films. Specifically for the visual transformation of the fairy tale to animated films, the Disney Corporation redirected the focus on visual aspects, such as the look of characters and their concrete actions, two major areas that communicate gender standards. In contrast to the print form, visual illustrations were able to benefit significantly from aural elements and did so through the incorporation of music. The musical element created another means of entertainment and reinforcement. Pairing such illustrations with the charming element of music has the ability to appeal to and communicate gender standards to two senses, sight, and hearing, at the same time creating higher probability of transmission and retention of principles illustrated.

As the Disney Corporation began to conquer the realm of animation with original creations and short films as early as the 1930s, they took a step back in time and a step forward in the animated history, producing in 1937 the first full-length animated film, which was based off a fairy tale, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. This monumental moment for children's media reinvented the traditional fairy tale by providing a new platform to express age-old customs and "changed the public's view of fairy tales forever" (Cashdan, 1999, p. 40).

Through cinema, Disney has reclaimed and redeveloped the fairy tale. "Most vivid memories of fairy tales come by way of Walt Disney" (Cashdan, 1999, p. 1) as they have dominated the world of children's entertainment. The alteration of such tales to suite the target audience, young impressionable children, and please their parents created a unique combination of mixing traditional with contemporary, and has continued to be a pattern with recent releases of the twenty-first century and beyond.

Initial depictions, dating back to the 1930s, illustrated women in traditional roles that were acceptable of the culture and society of the time. Over the course of several decades however, times have changed as have social and domestic conditions, but the illustrations are still present. "Fairy tales written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were intended to teach girls and young women how to become domesticated, respectable, and attractive" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003).

The emergence of technology created visual depictions of traditional gender roles aimed at young children who are most susceptible to absorption of such stereotypes without even being aware of the underlying nature of the content. The replicated roles of a forgotten time have always created a concern in current times and the extent to which

these illustrations mentally imbed themselves into the youth of today has been a concern of many researchers. However, before you can measure the degree to which such illustrations are affecting the audience you must first analyze and identify the existence of such principles.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine gender role portrayals and stereotyping surrounding the collection of Disney Princess films including the most recent additions that have not yet been analyzed. “When a conglomerate like Disney dominates such a vast stretch of popular culture, it can define and even dictate basic assumptions about everyday life and social relationships” (Ward, 2002, p. 131). The Disney Princess franchise provided such a platform for children entertainment and education.

Disney Corporation has various sub-brands within the company most notably the Disney Princess franchise. The franchise is comprised of both Disney princesses and heroines. Originally founded with nine members, Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan and Tinkerbell, the brand later removed Tinkerbell and created a separate Disney Fairies franchise. The original members of the brand either had a royal bloodline, married into royalty or embodied princess like qualities through inner values. Since its foundation three additional princesses have been coronated into the franchise, Tiana, Rapunzel, and Merida. Two additional princesses, Elsa and Ana of *Frozen*, are expected to be coronated into the franchise although no date has been determined as of 2014.

Disney films inspire at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles, values, and ideals than more traditional sites of learning, such as public schools, religious institutions, and the family (Giroux, 1994). Through the movies and merchandise, the brand has reached and conquered their target audience. Digital animation created colorful illustrations for classic childhood stories that captivated young children's minds. The notion that the Disney Princess franchise is targeted at young girls is itself a gender stereotype. However, the reasoning behind the brand and its name were not within the scope of this study; rather, whether what principles they are intentionally or inadvertently marketing in regards to gender roles and stereotypes. "Because Disney aims its films particularly at children, additional issues are involved in its persuasive role" (Ward, 2002, p. 4).

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, fairy tales portrayed women characters that were socially acceptable for the period and emphasized qualities of domestic traits, beauty, and pleasant demeanor, which were valuable assets to women of that time. Fairy tales during those times were "intended to teach boys and girls appropriate gendered values and attitudes" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003).

These dated elements in fairy tales did in fact remain present in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), reflecting similar social norms in the United States at the time. However, World War II brought women into the work force in great numbers. Their arrival created a realization of the capabilities and diversity of females as equals to their male counterparts and a social change began to take place. The return of men home from the war and back into the workforce was met with hesitation from some women who felt that their new place was

in the workforce and not in the home. The dynamics of the country had started to change to align with modern customs. Women continued to work in masculine occupations instead of the home sector, creating a new era.

Just like post-World War II, as society continually evolves, established corporate structures have kept their customary and often outdated approaches. Although technology has advanced the principles and foundation, which most major corporations were built on, have remained, and stood the test of time. As sales and box office success continues to increase, there seems to be little or no need for adjustment. The Disney Princess franchise, specifically their animated films, is an applicable product for which analysis is often suggested due to their target audience, young impressionable children, and the dated period from which the original, but still readily available, films were produced.

During the same time as World War II, there was the commencement of animated moving images that ushered in a new era of children's entertainment. "Film is a powerful storyteller; employing narrative, visuals, and music enhances its power to communicate" (Ward, 2002, p. 5), this added with modern technology provides Disney with essential tools to continue to dominate children's media. The addition of color technology revolutionized children's entertainment. No more were illustrations boring and dull black, whites and greys but an array of wonderful colors that were able to capture and captivate the audience. As visual media expanded with television and film in the realm of technology, access to this medium became a common feature socially and culturally and the main means of entertainment globally. Over the years, the Disney brand has continued to gain financial achievements. "In 2008, despite the economic recession, Disney had one of its most profitable years on record, generating \$37.8 billion in sales"

(Giroux & Pollock, 2010, p. 19). Such success is evident in other brands across the company however, the Disney Princess franchise is one the most notable and successful for it is the “leading lifestyle brand for six-to nine-year-old girls” (Giroux & Pollock, 2010, p. 19).

The Disney Corporation has expanded into several sub-brands and these franchises are growing at enormous rates. Merchandise for the Disney Princess brand introduce classic princesses to a contemporary audience. However, the animated films, that visually illustrate principles and values, are the most notable features of the franchise. Although, research has analyzed gender portrayal in the franchise, few researchers have focused on gender stereotyping in the latest additions to the brand. Through examination of recent films, this study aimed to add further information to the body of literature on the themes and patters present to determine if contemporary releases have evolved from the dated classic depictions.

### **Significance of the Study**

Mass media researchers have been interested in gender portrayals in Disney’s animated films since the late twentieth century. The idea that children learn from media is no longer just a thought but an extensive range of theories that has been supported over the years by research but what consistent messages are being conveyed is the main concern. Possible effects of the illustrations and the imitation of such gendered images have warranted extensive research in this area and the Disney brand widespread popularity created avenues to explore such questions. “The popularity of Disney animated films and the growth in their production and releases affirm Disney animated

films as significant communicators in the public sphere that beg to be examined more closely” (Ward, 2002, p. 5).

The established theoretical background has examined past Disney films and created a foundation for evolving the research into contemporary illustrations to gauge the progression and or need for change with such depictions. Disney films have been an integral part of American culture for 70 years, with scores of animated movies aimed specifically at young children and reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes. Such classics are well known to children across the world as a result of availability (Callister, Magoffin, Moore, & Robinson, 2007), and new releases are becoming equally as popular. Past Disney films may be dated in their depictions of social norms from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, but their presence in popular culture has remained strong due to re-releases of otherwise vaulted movies, along with anniversary editions that continue to dominate the world of children’s animation.

The “Disney baby” is a term coined by David Forgacs and is defined as those born after 1925 and who “were taken as a child to see Disney films, read Disney comics, and owned some Disney merchandise” (Forgacs, 2008). They grew into Disney adults raising another generation of Disney babies. This generation passage has reinforced the gender images depicted though the Disney brand across generations. Disney has become an empire of popular culture and a teaching medium for many children today like those of the past. The repeated viewing over the years has created and strengthened the absorption of gender images depicted. One theory on the strengths of gender messages in Disney films is the Social Cognitive Theory which suggests that children are more likely

to imitate a character's behavior when repeatedly exposed (Coyne et al., 2013) another is the pro-social nature of character behaviors in the films.

“Social Cognitive Theory posits that a character’s behavior is more likely to be imitated if exposure is repeated” (Coyne et al., 2013). Repetitive viewing offered by home video, as available with Disney movies, creates gender role reinforcement. In addition to repeat viewing, factors such as situation and motivation of characters, which could influence how actions are perceived, may affect perceptions. These elements appear more frequent in visual form than in written. “Higher levels of exposure to gendered messages are likely associated with stronger effects on children’s gender socialization,” concluded Collier-Meek and colleagues (2011).

Disney Princesses’ popularity increases with each release or re-release, and also exposes age-old gender roles or reinforces gender stereotypes with each release. Gender stereotyping has created gender perceptions for young children and they adapt these illustrations and utilize them in day-to-day routines. Research has established that pro-social behaviors vary between genders and such factors can determine what is interpreted and by whom. Repeated exposure provides a child with a greater chance of acknowledging and remembering such behavior depictions increasing the likelihood of imitation. Coyne and colleagues defined pro-social behavior in a study that examined the multidimensionality of such behavior in Disney films as “any voluntary behavior meant to benefit another” (2013). They found that Disney films are abundant in pro-social nature and contain on average one pro-social behavior per minute (Coyne et al., 2013). The perception of such illustrations on young children continues to reiterate illustrations specifically traditional gender stereotypes, especially with the Disney Princesses brand.

These depictions have created categories of acceptable media entertainment and have separated animated entertainment into gender categories seen most notably among the Disney Princess movie brand.

Scholarship has not however explored every facet of media production, leaving analysis of color representations in characters outfits an open field for research, an area of study especially ripe with animated films because of the highly stylized frames that convey particular messages. Likewise, children may be the most highly influenced audience members of media, liable to gender expectations expressed in cartoons. Media availability has increased over the years and is a part of daily life for most children, especially those living in America. The advancement of technology has increased the rate to which children are exposed to media and has made it readily available on a continual basis. Such access has made media easily obtainable and increased the viewing of mass media in visual forms. These visual depictions capture the audience, especially young children, and draw them into a world of fantasy or fantasy mixed with reality to make it appear real. The latter can be confusing for youth who cannot distinguish between the two and take the illustrations at face value. Perceptions of such depictions could be misinterpreted and then imitated incorrectly in their behavior and actions. These replicated actions also aid in setting societal and cultural standards to which they will model their lives after. Such depictions have affected many areas including peer interaction and gender role expectations and portrayal and created functions of doing boy and doing girl.

Most gender attributes are associated with a specific color from birth. These colors that reflect gender identity create gender stereotypes. Previous research has found

that “color plays an important role in children’s emergent gender stereotyping” (Callister et al., 2007) and carries through to other aspects of their lives. It has been suggested by prior research that children search for gender related signs and color associations are an important factor for such indications. Their relatability creates a more likable illustration. Understanding how children make these color choices is an important aspect to understanding gender stereotypes in other areas. Coloring books that feature Disney princesses are generally among top-sellers for girls (Karniol, 2011). These illustrations are then reinforced through their childhood in the form of animated features most notably Disney movies adding another dimension to the gender stereotype portal.

Stereotypes that have been around for centuries are now visually depicted in current media through Disney films. Stuart Hall defined a representation as the meaning of something said or depicted (1997, p. 16). Culture allows representations to find support within a specific group. Stereotypes are constructed off of social representations and have shared beliefs about the attributes of a group (Schaller, 1996). These representations originate from one belief, which are then shared and agreed upon with others, often within a culture, and communicated through media. Starting in the mind of an individual, the adaptive nature of the stereotype is its ability to replicate itself in the minds of others (Schaller, 1996). By imbedding itself into the minds of those with whom they are created by and communicated with stereotypes construct inclusive categories of specific groups. As culture creates stereotypes the media often reinforces them visually. Repeated exposure allows a higher possibility of a representation being imitated as suggested by the Social Cognitive Theory.

These illustrations may not be current with the era but are still available and viewed by the youth of today. “Children’s programming continues to feature primarily males characters designed to appeal to a male-viewing audience” (Green & Oliver, 2001). However, the Disney Princess franchise is dedicated to featuring female characters but still it is not the magnitude of female characters but rather the standards such characters are illustrating to the viewing audience. The authors noted that often characters are illustrated, both male and female, in stereotypical manners surrounding their role, demeanor, and emotions. The visual nature of these depictions engrosses the audience and creates a connection, which is often admired and imitated. Such imitations are then carried over into everyday life recreating and reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes. These features play a significant part of in understanding and taking action against such gender stereotypes and their effects on children.

“Disney’s image of itself as an icon of US culture is consistently reinforced through the penetration of the Disney Empire into every aspect of social life” (Giroux, 1994). “This “world view” of gender stereotypes fed to children in television programming makes it easy for them to accept stereotypes in reality as well” (Hoerrner, 1996). It is these illustrations that are one of the most effective learning tools for American children (Gillam & Wooden, 2008) making the real instructors for children media outlets and not schoolteachers.

The thesis suggests that female depictions in Disney films have stayed one-dimensional, as male depictions have evolved substantially. “Perhaps Cinderella best illustrates the Disney pattern of subjugating and stifling heroines’ voices and self-hood” (Henke, et al., 1996), while Tiana best illustrates the new age heroine of the twenty-first

century. But be it traditional gender image or new age the illustrations revert back to domestic skills and the ideal image as beauty as a common moderating factor and a main stereotype for female characters because in the end beauty always prevails or so we are being taught this by Disney stereotypes.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

A significant amount of recent research in the social sciences has focused on the media effects on gender-related behaviors. More specifically, media scholars have paid particular attention to the role the films of the Disney Corporation have played in shaping gender perceptions among children. Much of this research utilized content analysis as the primary method for examination. Research on the Disney Princess franchise specifically has found content analysis as well as thematic analysis useful in analyzing a number of factors present in the brand.

#### **Literature Review**

The following literature review describes studies that have used mostly content analysis and a thematic analysis while examining Disney brands. A study by Callister and colleagues in *Journal of Aging Studies* in 2007 concluded that children linked gender to illustrations as a greater sign over color suggesting “color is a less important cue for children when it conflicts with other gender-linked cues” (Karniol, 2011). From the drawings, the data conclude, “children of each gender used a greater variety of color for the figure stereotypically associated with their own gender” (Karniol, 2011). Collier-Meek and colleagues explored the theories of the constructivist approach and cultivation theory in a content analysis of Disney gender role portrayal. “Both suggest there may be an effect of viewing gendered stereotypes upon children” (Collier-Meek, Descartes & England, 2011). Martin and colleagues in a 2002 article in *Psychological Bulletin* proposed the constructivist approach that suggests that children beliefs about the world

are developed based off their interpretations, observations and experiences. “Cultivation theory posits that exposure to television content helps develop concepts regarding social behavior and norms” (Collier-Meek et al., 2011). Hoerrner also cited it “as helpful as it explains how exposure to visual media skews children’s perception of the world towards the unrealistic mediated world they see on the screen” (Hoerrner, 1996).

### *Gender and the Media*

Previous research focusing on gender representations in the media has often studied the effects of television viewing on the behavior and development of children (Frueh & McGhee, 1980). A 1980 study measuring viewing patterns on 64 French children ranging from first to seventh grade in connection with gender-role stereotypes was conducted. The data conducted by Frueh and McGhee concluded, “heavy television viewing may contribute significantly to children’s acquisition of stereotypic perceptions of behavior and psychological characteristics associated with males and females” (1980). The study derived through previous research done during the 1970s from social scientist that established that gender role stereotypes were grouped into six areas.

- (1) Females who tended to be much younger than males, and were more likely to be depicted either as being married or about to be married;
- (2) Females who were most likely to be cast in a leading role when some family or romantic interest was central to the plot;
- (3) Males who were more likely to be cast in serious roles, while females were more likely to be cast in comic or light roles;

- (4) Males who were most likely to initiate violence, while white females were most likely to be victims;
- (5) Females who were less likely to get away with violence, and when they did, they demonstrated it;
- (6) Females who tended to be depicted as more attractive, happier, warmer, more sociable, fairer, more peaceful, and more useful, while males tended to be represented as smarter, more rational, more powerful, more stable, and more tolerant (Frueh & McGhee, 1980).

Their study of Kindergarten through Sixth Grade children concluded that children who spend more time watching television exhibited greater stereotypic perceptions in gender categories than those who spend less time watching television (Frueh & McGee, 1980).

Since the 1980 examination done by Frueh and McGhee, there has been a continued interest in children, television and gender roles. In 1990, Nancy Signorielli examined images depicting gender roles on television and the impact of these images through a literary review of past research. Stating television as an avenue for learning she believed that its ability to share stories visually was a vital feature because it was capable of teaching different characterizes and behaviors to mass audiences. Through her observations, she noted that male characters outnumbered female characters three to one. Also, she observed that women were seen less often than men, and when they did appear, they were usually younger and also more attractive (Signorielli, 1990). Relating her finding to the effects they have on children perceptions in real life, she concluded that children learn characteristics and which genders are attached to such characteristics because of television exposure.

### *Representations of Gender in Disney Films*

Haddock and colleagues found in a 2004 study that the Disney Corporation is a major contributor to the general genre of children's media (Haddock et al., 2004) due to the availability of such content in video form, which allows it to be purchased and viewed repeatedly. Additionally, it was suggested by Collier-Meek and colleagues in study published in 2011 that children learn in a more persuasive manner through visual media such as video than in written form. "Higher levels of exposure to television have been correlated with more traditional ideas of gender roles" (2011).

"The assertion that the media serve as vehicles of women's subordination is a common element among theories of gender and gender socialization" (Baker-Sperry, 2007). In a content analysis study assessing Disney gender roles as illustrated via Disney princesses and male characters romantically linked evidence, suggest that gender stereotypes in characters have an impact on children and their thoughts of gender norms. The study done by Collier-Meek and colleagues provided a "systematic quantitative comparison of the main characters attributes, actions, and outcomes in a thematically unified, highly popular grouping of Disney films" (2011). They hypothesized that gender roles were more clearly defined in earlier movies and princes would display more masculine characteristics and princesses more feminine. Also, they noted the rescue was traditionally a masculine role to be performed by a prince. Lastly, they predicted that the roles would switch over time and the stereotypical illustrations would give way to less gender illustrated actions. Results indicated on average masculine characteristic displayed were higher for the princes than the princesses and feminine characteristics were higher

for the princesses than for the princes. Further analysis concluded that princesses were rescued more than they performed rescues. In contrast, princes characters performed rescues and were rescued the same amount of times. However, although prince's results were androgynous there was a significance factor of the rescues performed by them, which were often climactic, and no princess was able to perform a final rescue without the assistance of a prince.

### *Female Depictions in Traditional Disney Films*

Although children's programming features primarily male characters who appeal to a male-viewing audience (Green & Oliver, 2001), Disney princesses have made progress in the quantity of depictions within the world of animated entertainment. In a 2008 study on the images of gender, race, age, and sexual orientation in Disney animated films, Haddock and colleagues noted two key traits in a sample of 15 Disney movies: including domestic work and ideal image of beauty, as a common illustration of female characters.

Gender stereotypes and behaviors illustrations are very common in Disney culture and their depictions have become more intricate over the years especially those of female characters. A review of a previous study, on Gender Role Portrayal and the Disney Princess, of 16 Disney films revealed that the presented gendered images in the sample were not current with societal developments in gender equality.

The prevalence of domestic work is an important theme in Disney Princess movies, noted Collier-Meek, and a substantial change incorporated by Disney over time was the discontinuation of domestic work as a symbol of femininity (Collier-Meek et al.,

2011). Dating back to 1937, when the first animated Disney movie premiered, gender portrayals were present and helped to identify and reinforce traditional gender expectations from the very beginning with *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Traditional Disney movies such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Cinderella* highlight domestic work and the acceptance of the female characters to perform such tasks. A content analysis by Collier-Meek and colleagues documented gender portrayals by measuring the stereotypical masculine and feminine characteristics of skills and roles performed in these two movies. The study found that most recent films included women with stronger roles than Disney's previous characters.

The feminine beauty ideal and the representation of the ideal in fairy tales has been a continued theme of many Disney movies especially among the Disney Princess Franchise. Its portrayal and maintenance in children's literature has spanned 150-year period. This ideal was a "socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of women's most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain" (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). Women's beauty is glorified in which beauty, for beauty's sake, plays a major role in the story in many early Disney movies (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003).

Previous research published in the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* in 2010 has "found that the attractiveness of a character was strongly and positively correlated with how morally good that character was portrayed" (Bazzini et al., 2010). The study conducted a content analysis on a sample of 21 Disney films. It examined Disney films role in regards to gender stereotyping specifically for a source of social information in regards to beauty and positive attributes. The data gathered concluded that some positive

changes have occurred over the years but the overall illustrations continue to represent a narrow and stereotypical imagery of gender. Bazzini found that central characters were portrayed more favorably and were generally rated as more physically attractive than were secondary characters (Bazzini et al., 2010). The study noted that images depicted coincide with traditional gender roles and stereotypes and were exemplified to highlight their feminine characteristics and roles. These traits include the idea of beauty, which has been a prominent characteristic depicted in many popular Disney films. The data supported the evidence that suggests that the female image associated with beauty is young, slender, and attractive and beauty is more important than brains. Such gender illustrations are present in many Disney films and are a major avenue from which children draw their perceptions.

### *Female Depictions in Contemporary Disney Films*

Recent Disney films, which in some cases are not only animated, continue to retell popular fairy tales often involve women who differ from their earlier counterparts in ingenuity, activity, and independence but not physical attractiveness (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). In a 2001 content analysis examining twenty-first century Disney movies, Dunes noted, "Pocahontas was applauded because of the metamorphosis of the usual docile Disney heroine into an adventurous young woman who stands up for her beliefs" (Dundes, 2001). The author also noted that her character was loyal to her heritage and did not follow the dreamy man but rather upheld her civic responsibility to her people. However, she was still portrayed as beautiful as John Smith fell instantly in love with her upon first sight. Through the data collected, the author concluded that

Pocahontas showed vast improvement over such protagonists as Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty; however, lingering sex stereotypes remained (Dundes, 2001).

The 2009 Disney movie *The Princess and the Frog* introduced the first African-American female princess and protagonist and has been thought to be contemporary in characteristic traits for the period in which the film was released. Fisher and Silber had concluded previously that many African American girls had been taught by the examples of their mothers to become independent, self-supporting, and independent of men (Fisher & Silber, 2000). A content analysis conducted by Collier-Meek and colleagues examining nine Disney Princess movies including the contemporary films *Pocahontas* (1995), *Mulan* (1998), and *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) concluded that “the three most recent movies had princesses who displayed more masculine than feminine characteristics” (2011). In *The Princess and the Frog*, the princess was career-oriented, initially preventing her from socializing and pursuing romantic opportunities (Collier-Meek et al., 2011), a growing empowerment of Disney heroines reflected in shifting depictions of their intimate relationships (Henke, Smith and Zimmerman-Umble, 1996). However, love is still the central element of the storyline. These depictions leave young girls believing that someday their prince will come and rescue them from the job they hate, their mothers house, or any other situation where they are not cheerful to live their happily ever after. Such depictions create false illusions for young children teaching them that love happens at first sight and looks is all one has to go off to be happily ever after. However, illustrations that are more recent have broken the bounds of gender stereotypes and traditional roles, but they still confirm the notion that good and beautiful are synonymous.

Generally, studies on gendered stereotypes in Disney films have concluded that the Princess line reinforces classic depictions of femininity, but their depiction has become more complex over the years, reflecting changing gender roles and expectations in American society (Collier-Meek et al., 2011). This raises the concern of whether or not the Disney Corporation has continued this evolution or have they reverted to the dated behaviors and if so what behaviors do they highlight.

### *Traditional Male Images*

Data collected by researchers has suggested that men in Disney films have primarily used physical means to express their emotions. Men are also more likely to respond to an emotional situation with physical and sometimes violent behavior (Haddock et al., 2004). Consequently, as Giroux in 1994 found, the construction of gender identity for girls and women has represented “one of the most controversial issues in Disney’s animated films” (Giroux, 1994). Female characters were subordinate to males and defined by their interactions and relations with men.

With the emergence of Disney films Walt Disney revitalized numerous classical tales on film with stereotypical and denigrating portraits of females (Downey, 1996). The tales were made into movies with a conventional language style grounded in a patriarchal certainty that give voice to male characters and ostracized females in preservation of the male-controlled society (Downey, 1996).

In a 2004 thematic analysis published in *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, Haddock and colleagues concluded that some positive changes have occurred over the years, but the overall illusions continue to represent narrow imagery of gender and those

depicted coincide with traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Men maintain the image of being physically forceful and non-expressive and women have been demonstrated dependent, occupied with domestic responsibilities, and extra emphasis on their physical attributes with little acknowledgement of their intellectual abilities (Haddock et al., 2004). These conclusions were drawn from a sample of 26 full-length animated Disney films, chosen based on their inclusion in the category of Disney Classics, as well as recent movies (Haddock et al., 2004).

The traditional Disney movie depicts males in masculine roles of king and prince, having obvious social power, while women struggle to attain or maintain status on their own (Baker-Sperry, 2007). These illustrations create viewpoints of gender roles for children at a young age that they often carry well into adulthood. The creation of stereotypes dictates their interactions with the opposite sex and their expectations in many aspects of their life.

### *The New Man in Disney*

Henry Giroux noted in *Animating Youth: The Disneyfication of Children's Culture, 1994* that “Jack Zipes, a leading theorist on fairy tales, claims that Disney’s animated films celebrate a masculine type of power” (39). Noting that traditional characters were depicted as physically attractive it acknowledges its main trait is often physical strength and or bravery. These characters often aid in rescuing or saving a character, often a princess from evil forces. This brave act wins and seals their fate instantly making them the perfect suitor. Courage and bravery mixed with good looks create a happily ever after on screen, but this is often not the case in real life. Valor is

often an attribute associated with the profession of fire fighter, police officer, and soldier but these illustrations are not consistent with animated illustrations. These illustrations create false images and illusions, which children see and then digest, making them vulnerable to such depictions.

Traditional male depictions in major supporting roles of the female protagonist were linked with romantic involvement with the lead female character. For many years, these illustrations were the extent of male characters in animated Disney movies with little variation until their partnership with Pixar. The relationship created the new male of Disney. The merger created a new model of masculinity. Pixar's focus has been the male protagonist and the story lines center on and around that particular character (Gillam & Wooden, 2008). "Unlike many of the princesses, who remain relatively static even through their own adventures, these male leads are actual protagonists; their characters develop and change over the course of the film, rendering the plot" (Gillam & Wooden, 2008). We see these illustrations in *Toy Story*, *Cars* and *The Incredibles*. This alpha male's model helps create gender lines and reinforce traditional stereotypes with breaking barriers with the femininity to the male characters as not seen before.

In a quantitative comparison of main characters in a thematic grouping of Disney films, Collier-Meek and colleagues (2011) hypothesized that gender roles would be clearly defined in earlier movies and princes would display more masculine characteristics and princesses more feminine. Also, they noted the rescue would be traditionally a masculine role to be performed by the prince. Lastly, they predicted that the roles would switch over time and the stereotypical illustrations would give way to less gender illustrated actions. The study concluded that on average masculine characteristics

displayed were higher for the princes than the princesses and feminine characteristics were higher for the princesses than the princes. Further analysis concluded that princesses were rescued more than they performed rescues. However, princes characters performed rescues and were rescued the same amount of times. Although the princes' results were androgynous, they were significant in the type of rescues they in which they participated and assisted. The princes normally performed solo rescues, majority climactic, and they assisted in many others, as no princess was able to do a final rescue without the assistance of a prince.

#### *Impact of Gender Stereotypes on Peer Interaction*

Wohlwend's analysis of behavioral characteristics in many Disney films observed storylines that communicate idealized ways of "doing boy" or "doing girl," (Wohlwend, 2011), meaning, these films have been viewed by a large quantity of American children and are a continuous medium from which they draw gender perceptions. The popularity of such illustrations has been reiterated though literature most often in a classroom setting and the same stereotypes depicted in the films are also present within the text. "Children rely heavily on traditional normative structures to make sense of the world, and they have often accepted gendered expectations as truth" (Baker-Sperry, 2007). These replications have allowed them to create perspectives on gender roles.

Former studies have "showed that children demonstrate their ability to adhere to dominate gender identities by regulating each other's practices" (Wohlwend, 2011). Also, it has been proven that "children often reject non-sexist stories of brave princesses and gentle princes, sometimes responding with tears and outrage" (Wohlwend, 2011). This

hypothesis was studied by the author measuring the ability of children to shy away from such gender stereotypes and norms and play gender-reversed role. The study determined that kindergarten boys broke heterosexual expectations by merely playing with hyper-feminine characters, specifically Disney Princess dolls. However, the male children who played with female dolls did so in an abrasive manner that illustrated a sense of masculinity. They also transformed traditional qualities of the characters to suite their masculine point of view, such as tuning the fairy godmother scary. Also, boys who engaged in the non-traditional gender play excluded females from participation. The study concluded that children who illustrate Disney characters, as depicted in films they exemplify, “anticipated identities and gendered character roles” (Wohlwend, 2011) in some form and bend them to meet their specific needs for comfort.

### **Methods**

This study utilized thematic analysis to record and analyze gender stereotyping in Disney Princess franchise specifically within their animated films. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that allows the researcher to develop meanings from patterns identified. Qualitative analysis encompasses a wide range of methods and is used, especially in media examination, for recording, categorizing, and interpreting individual components of data in a non-numerical format. This style of analysis integrates the researcher, who plays a key component as both collector and translator of data. The flexibility of data collection and analysis has allowed this method of qualitative analysis to be popular among researchers. As translator, the interpretation is constructed from

personal values and factors such as “educational, socio-economic, cultural and moral backgrounds” (Cunningham, 2014).

“There is a considerable overlap among available qualitative approaches in terms of methods, procedures, and techniques”(Vaismoradi, Turuhun & Bondas, 2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis are two methods that are similar and widely used in the examination of media data. Content analysis has been proven beneficial in previous studies analyzing gender roles in visual media, its research provided the foundation for the current study. Jim Macnamara in *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, outlined the use and benefits of content analysis and recognized the methodology as the best research technique to systematically and objectively examine films. Unlike content analysis, this study aims to identify patterns within the themes of the data and therefore utilized thematic analysis.

An idea or assumption provides the foundation for qualitative research, especially thematic analysis, and from those assumptions data is gathered and analyzed to create patterns of themes. Braun & Clarke defined thematic analysis as “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (2006). This specific technique of qualitative analysis was selected for the observational ability it provides to examine and interpret various categories of media and form specific patterns from themes. Its ability to “move beyond counting explicit words or phrases and focus on identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data, that is, themes” is the power of thematic analysis on this particular study (Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012).

This methodology can be conducted in two ways inductive or deductive. Through inductive data collection the researcher analyzes the data and from what was gathered derives themes. With deductive data collection the researcher has specific themes that they are looking, which is often based off of previous research. As there has been much research done on the Disney Princess franchise in regards to gender roles and stereotypes the data collection selected for this thesis was deductive.

By analyzing gender portrayals across the Disney Princess franchise this study aimed to uncover patterns chronologically in the themes and subcategories of each theme regarding gender stereotyping in the brand. In order to do so the primary element being analyzed is character actions and behaviors via screenshots. Through the main female and male character, themes have been chosen to represent traditional masculine and feminine stereotypes. They focus on the following attributes: domestic female; heroic male; physical appeal; and damsel in distress. These themes examined specific actions, behaviors, and objects associated with subcategories to gather data and identify patterns of gender role portrayal and gender stereotyping.

Primary sources were selected from the entire collection of original animated-films in the Disney Princess franchise, 11 movies. From this compilation a sample of films was generated. For inclusion in the sample all films had to be: 1) based off a fairy tale; 2) the main female protagonist had to be born a human, however, she did not have to remain human throughout the entire movie; 3) the main female protagonist had to present herself as a female for majority (at least 75%) of the movie; 4) no more than two selections from the same decade, with at least two years between releases for films in the same decade beginning with the earliest movie of the decade.

The qualifications yielded six films *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Tangled* (2010). From the six films the two earliest (*Snow White* and *Cinderella*) as well as the two most recent (*The Princess and the Frog* and *Tangled*) were chosen to be analyzed in this study for a clear distinction between Disney's early representations and its more recent ones. (For the purposes of this study, *Sleeping Beauty* and *Beauty and the Beast* were considered films that did not demonstrate a clear contemporary versus past distinction).

Films were split into two categories: 1) Traditional (1937-1989); and 2) Contemporary (1990-present), with two movies for each group. Each Disney movie selected was reflected in the Disney Princess franchise at the time this study was conducted and had merchandise available for purchase on the Disney store website, which is linked to the Disney Princess franchise website. Additionally, VHS, DVD, and BlueRay release have been available for each of the films selected. For three of the four films included in the sample, with the exception of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, DVD and BlueRay disk were currently available for purchase on the Disney Store website that is linked to the Disney Princess franchise website as well.

Previous research identified several themes and codes of gender stereotyping. From those this study, which used deductive data analysis, developed themes to analyze the data. Some of the subcategories operational definitions were developed from a previous study on gender roles with Disney Princesses, England et al. (2011) constructed from Thompson and Zerbinos 1995 study. Not all attributes coded in the previous study were replicated for subcategories in the current study due to the specific objective of

research for this study. In addition to the attributes, England et al. examined the climatic rescue scene to measure androgyny among characters as a main indicator of gender stereotyping, however characteristics to measure these elements were not included in this study as it is only concerned with identifying specific gender stereotypes in the films in correlation to the five specific themes. The operational definitions for each subcategory created measures for analysis. These measures provided validity to the study by identifying the classifications that the data would be analyzed ensuring it stayed within the scope of the study.

Suggestive dress was defined in a 1988 article by Lawrence Soley and Leonard Reid regarding clothing in magazine ads. The authors categorized clothing in four sections: [1] demurely dressed; [2] suggestively dressed; [3] partially clad; and [4] nude. Of these four categories suggestively dressed, which was the closest to the subcategory “sexually suggestive attire,” was defined as including “mini-skirts, "short-shorts, "muscle" shirts, full-length lingerie (unless "see-through" that exposed cleavage or chests), and "hiked" skirts that exposed thighs” (Soley & Reid, 1988).

Researcher Tom Reichert measured sexual attractiveness in magazine advertisements through which the “respondents’ perceptions of the sexual attractiveness of the cover person was assessed with two items (sexy/not sexy; sexually desirable/sexually undesirable)” (2008). However, due to the intended audience of the films and the medium through which they are illustrated, as previous scholars focus on print media, their definition does not pertain to the scope of this study. As a result, the operational definition for the subcategory suggestive attire was created specific to this study.

## Screenshots Outline

The analysis in this study examined four themes related to gender serotyping and gender role portrayal: 1) domestic female; 2) heroic male; 3) physical appeal; and 4) damsel in distress. It used three screenshots for the four films—a total of 12 screenshots (“SS” below) per theme, times four themes, for 48 screenshots. The layout of screenshots fall into the following outline:

### **Traditional (1937-1989)**

### **Contemporary (1990-present)**

*Snow White*

*Cinderella*

*The Princess and the Frog*

*Tangled*

1) dom. fem.

1) dom. fem.

1) dom. fem.

1) dom. fem.

SS 1

SS 1

SS 1

SS 1

SS 2

SS 2

SS 2

SS 2

SS 3

SS 3

SS 3

SS 3

2) heroic male

2) heroic male

2) heroic male

2) heroic male

SS 1

SS 1

SS 1

SS 1

SS 2

SS 2

SS 2

SS 2

SS 3

SS 3

SS 3

SS 3

3) phys. app.

3) phys. app.

3) phys. app.

3) phys. app.

SS 1

SS 1

SS 1

SS 1

SS 2

SS 2

SS 2

SS 2

SS 3

SS 3

SS 3

SS 3

<u>4) damsel</u>	<u>4) damsel</u>	<u>4) damsel</u>	<u>4) damsel</u>
SS 1	SS 1	SS 1	SS 1
SS 2	SS 2	SS 2	SS 2
SS 3	SS 3	SS 3	SS 3

Analysis of the screenshots from “domestic female” are grouped into two categories: 1) domestic work; and 2) helpful. Domestic work is defined as any physical action or behavior pertaining to the home, the household, household affairs, or the family consisting of, but not limited to, cooking, cleaning, sewing, washing clothes, caring for others. Helpful is defined as any behavior of service or actions rendering or affording help, useful when assistance is needed, this requires a specific action performed that gave another person or animal direct assistance including assisting someone or something with domestic work.

Analysis of the screenshots from “heroic male” is divided into six subcategories: 1) professional/noble occupation; 2) independent; 3) physically fit/athletic ability; 4) rescue; 5) adventurous; and 6) intellectual ability. Professional/noble occupation is defined as having a job or career as a commander or leader or being born into an honorable title that will provide power. Independent is defined as not depending on the authority of another, being autonomous or self-governing. Also, able to perform and complete task without assistance of another person, animal or object. Physically fit/athletic ability is defined as a jump or kick that was large enough to require some athleticism. Running is categorized as athletic and muscles are categorized with physically fit. Lastly, hitting or moving something, providing evidence that the character

had a strong physical effect on the person or object. Rescue is defined as the ability to solely rescue someone or thing or to assist (either human or animal) in a rescue that was successful, or as the lead in an unsuccessful rescue. Adventurous is defined as courageous, daring, intrepid and will also include being involved in a rescue or leadership in the face of danger. Also, this category included search or exploration, to want to find and know the unknown. Intelligence ability will be defined as engaging in the intellect, including showing the use of thought. Also, providing information on specific matter(s) and or displaying knowledge with a certain skill(s).

Analysis of the screenshots from “physical appeal” is broken into two subcategories: 1) concerned with physical appearance; and 2) acknowledged for physical attractiveness. Concerned with physical appearance is defined as adjusting physical appearance, tending to hair, applying makeup, posing and or adjusting clothes, for the purpose of making it look better or to draw attention to it. Acknowledged for physical attractiveness is defined as recognized by another character(s) for their physical appearance including body type and attire. This includes any physical expression regarding the beauty or appearance of a character.

Analysis of the screenshots from “damsel in distress” is divided into five subcategories: 1) suggestive attire; 2) weak in physical strength; 3) receives/follows advice; 4) emotional; and 5) being rescued. Suggestive attire is defined as exposed skin in the chest, back and upper leg area, low cuts in top that accentuate or insinuate cleavage or disproportionate cleavage size to physique, high heels, short skirts and/or dresses. It also includes illustrations of petite body type through characters physical attributes, which appears to be thin, small waist and stomach with little or no body fat visible. Weak in

physical strength is defined through a character's inability to succeed in something that takes physical strength. Also, needing assistance from another person, animal, or object to compensate for lack of physical strength. Lastly, not being able to perform or complete something because of lack of physical strength and is also included in the category.

Receives/follows advice is defined when any character asks directly for help, or needs assistance and is open to receiving assistance such that it is clear the character wants it and accepts it. Following advice or instructions given instead of coming up with their own approach is included in this subcategory. Emotional is defined as the expression of both positive and negative representation of feeling. Display of fear (a state of alarm or dread), anticipation (excitement for or at the possibility of accomplishment), surprise, and extreme happiness etc., will also be included. Also, any change in mood as a result of situation or circumstance. This subcategory includes crying in the physical act through tears while showing the face. Also, when a character puts his/ her face down, such that it was no longer visible, and implication of crying with rocking, shakes and sobs. Being rescued is defined as being saved from a dangerous situation.

Every item on screen in a film has meaning (Cunningham, 2014). From the arrangement of objects, the placement of characters, to even the color of clothing these elements are chosen to communicate or illustrate specific messages. Color has been identified through previous research by Callister and colleagues as a strong indicator and enforcer of gender identification and was chosen as an element for examination in this thesis. The main colors associated with gender for female are most notably pink and purple, which are derived from red and violet and are considered warm colors, and blue for male. It has been found that red in regards to clothing is identified as a feminine color

of association due to the warm nature of the colors, in contrast green, which is considered a cool color, is identified as a masculine color (Karnoil, 2011). For this particular study yellow is considered a neutral color association. The color spectrum of 1) violet; 2) red; 3) orange; 4) yellow; 5) green; 6) blue; and 7) indigo considers the first three colors listed as warm color with feminine association and the last three as cool colors with a masculine association. The fourth color yellow, which falls directly in between the two categories is considered neither cool nor warm and therefore has neither masculine nor feminine association but neutrality. In addition to the four themes, the princesses signature outfits, the ensemble and all related accessories in which their character is visually associated with on the website, was recorded for the colors present and accessories that accompany the outfit illustrated. This measure aimed to identify patterns and analyze color association alignment with stereotypical gender behavior to further examine specific gender assignment cues. Additionally, this measure analyzed gender categorizing as color illustrations are used to reinforce gender stereotypes or supplement the lack of stereotypical gendered behavior.

As new animated films are released Disney continues to face criticism and examination for the messages they are teaching to children. This study adds additional research to the ever-growing Disney Princess brand. Although previous research has analyzed gender stereotypes no published works found have included *Tangled* in their analysis. A study published in 2013 in the *Journal of Communication* included *Tangled* in the sample but analyzed the film for pro-social behaviors. This study will add to the body of literature on gender stereotypes and the Disney Princess franchise through thematic analysis of more recent films to see if and how the picture has changed.

## CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Incorporating the four themes previously mentioned, this chapter discusses screenshots taken from each movie and interprets their composition towards constructing gender principles. Through this interpretation patterns will be identified and discussed across the two individual film groups, traditional and contemporary, and then compared. These patterns assess the various aspects of the four themes to gauge the change over time, from traditional films to contemporary films, through implications in relation to gender roles indicated. Lastly, this chapter discusses the gender cue of color in the signature outfit and accessories for each Disney princess from the four films analyzed.

### **Findings**

#### *Domestic Female: Traditional*

The theme of domestic female included two subcategories: 1) domestic work; and 2) helpful. The first subcategory domestic work was found in each of the 12 screenshots for both traditional and contemporary films. These physical actions were concrete making them easier to illustrate and identify visually. However, the subcategory helpful was alluded to throughout all four movies and was occasionally conveyed, although rarely concretely and is present physically in only one of the screenshots chosen for analysis in this thesis.

The two films in the traditional category, *Cinderella* and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, illustrated the princesses in domestic acts of cleaning, cooking, and serving. Although sewing, mending, and washing were mentioned orally, neither

character in this category illustrated these actions physically or visually. The implication of the above-mentioned tasks expresses an importance for domestic acts and their connection to female characters although not illustrated visually. Including these actions verbally still creates an association of the task with female characters. This category yielded princesses, Snow White and Cinderella, that were forced to perform domestic work, however, Snow White later voluntarily partook in domestic work for the dwarfs.

Snow White was a young princess who was forced to wear ragged clothes and complete tasks that soiled her clothing to hide her incredible outer beauty. As Snow White grew older, her beauty matured and could no longer be hidden behind shabby clothes or the dirt from her chores. Cinderella grew up a wealthy maiden whose father achieved financial success. With her mother's passing, her father remarried to provide Cinderella with the maternal figure she lacked. Soon her father took ill and also passed, leaving Cinderella in the care of her stepmother who quickly spent a substantial portion of the father's fortune on her two daughters from a previous relationship. With most of the money gone the domestic help that once staffed the house could no longer be afforded, however, there was still work to be done. These chores became the sole responsibility of Cinderella, a female, as dictated by her stepmother. The backstories of the traditional princesses share one common thread; forced domestic work on female characters.

As a result, princesses in the traditional category were visually depicted in the physical act of cleaning but it was constructed in a manner that illustrated it as strenuous and tedious. Both princesses of the traditional group were depicted cleaning the floors on

their hands and knees. [See Appendix: Screen Shot (SS) 1 “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Domestic Female,*” and SS2 “*Cinderella: Domestic Female*”].

The physical exhaustion associated with Snow White scrubbing the steps in the outside garden gives the idea that the outdoors are never really clean. One can assume that this could be a daily task, and if not daily, still a task that will always need to be performed. Although we only see her scrubbing the stairs the act implies that she intends to clean the entire outdoor floor. This implication is supported by the scene following the above mentioned screenshot in which Snow White looks up and sighs and then returns to the well to replenish her water bucket used for cleaning. This creates the message that domestic work is an everyday task, and conventional chores are never fully completed. Additional gender standards are implied through the illustrations, which only depict female characters performing domestic tasks. These illustrations created gender associations with the tasks individually and domestic work as a whole and identified such work as a female undertaking.

Cinderella’s depiction differs from Snow White while cleaning the floor in that she is inside, and the area that she must clean is defined by the camera angle, showing her small figure in the middle of a large floor, on her hands and knees with a soapy bucket, rag, and brush. [See Appendix: SS2 “*Cinderella: Domestic Female*”]. Although, Cinderella performs several domestic acts prior to this one. She feeds the animals, makes breakfast for her stepmother and stepsisters, and serves them their food in their bedrooms at which times she picks up their laundry and receives other task to complete throughout the day. However, the floor cleaning scene act is emphasized through the length of time the camera spends on this scene. The entire scene is just over a minute long, which may

seem like an hour to a young child, the scene displays the room from different angles over the course of time to continue to engage the target audience; young children with limited attention span. Paired with the lengthy time frame, the repetitiveness provided thorough the whimsical feature of bubbles reflecting Cinderella's image cleaning the floor reiterates the importance of domestic acts. The bubble feature creates a direct appeal to the target audience, as bubbles are fun and unique. This combined with duplicated images that depict gender standards creates a greater force and possibly a stronger impact on the viewing audience especially children.

One unique feature present in both domestic tasks of cleaning the floor was that the two princesses were illustrated with objects that were of small ratio in comparison to the space that they intended to cover [See Appendix: SS1 "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Domestic Female*," and SS2 "*Cinderella: Domestic Female*"]. This visual imagery conveys the message that regardless of the tools one has to assist them with their chores the real power lies within. This imagery emphasizes the significance of their personal strength. In addition to tools, the demeanor of the women while performing their tasks was an essential element.

Each of the two princesses were pleasant while performing their tasks even in forced situations. Cinderella was illustrated visually completing her task while maintaining a pleasant attitude. When called upon several times she never raises her voice in objection or disgust. This illustrates the nonvisual element of patience. We see her going about her tasks without complaints and her facial expressions do not show discomfort or displeasure for the tasks she performs. Like Cinderella, Snow White goes about her task with similar facial expressions and is even visually depicted as smiling

while scrubbing the ground [See Appendix: SS1 “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Domestic Female*]. These facial gestures express the importance of the enjoyment of domestic tasks for females in these roles.

Although, we do not physically see Cinderella cooking it is implied that she prepared the food she serves as well [See Appendix SS1; “*Cinderella: Domestic Female*”]. Snow White is physically illustrated preparing food for the dwarfs [See Appendix SS3; “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Domestic Female*”]. However, she is not forced to perform this task but chooses to perform these actions upon her free will. The irony of Snow White choosing to perform a domestic task to show her usefulness to the cottage is that she connects her worth with her domestic work. The significance behind the messages lies in the background of the princesses, who were brought up in estates that initially provided all of these services for them. They apparently learned to perform such tasks and do so with ease and elegance. These images serve as mental motivation for inspiring gender related behaviors and specifically depict the relationship between domestic work and female gender regardless of economic status.

Lastly, for the traditional category, helpful was reiterated though several aspects, but was seldom illustrated visually, as most domestic acts were carried out for the benefit of another. The absence of human help for the princesses with domestic work was significant to the theme. We see both Snow White and Cinderella receiving help, but only from animals in relation to domestic work.

While cleaning the dwarfs’ cottages, Snow White receives help from the forest animals who all pitch in to clean up [See Appendix SS2; “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Domestic Female*”]. Cinderella’s morning routine was accomplished with the

help of the birds and mice from the making of her bed to the washing and dressing of her body. The birds, that are illustrated genderless, are present but the male mice are escorted from the room and only the female mice assist Cinderella in her dressing routine. The lack of human assistance, especially male, to the female characters but the presence of magical animal assistance is sending the message that domestic work is the responsibility of the female and that males are not to trouble themselves with domestic tasks.

### *Domestic Female: Contemporary*

The contemporary film category, like the traditional, illustrated each princess cleaning, cooking and or serving food. Tiana is raised in a working class family and developed a love for food and cooking. She learns from her father that good food can bring people together and hard work will take you far. She is the only princess who receives advice on the benefits of domestic work. Although she is not forced by another individual into servitude she in a way forces herself into servitude as a means of achieving her dreams. She is captive to her dreams and therefore performs these domestic tasks towards achieving these dreams.

Unlike Tiana, Rapunzel is born into a royal family and is gifted with magical powers from a magical flower used upon her mother while she was pregnant. This magical flower served as the fountain of youth for one old woman who upon discovery of its disappearance sought to locate it. Connecting the princess to the flower, she soon realized that the new princess held the same magic powers through music. Stealing Rapunzel as a baby, she takes her deep into the forest and hides her away in a tall tower with no direct entrance where she keeps her captive. However, Rapunzel grows up with

no knowledge of this and spends her entire life in the tower where she cleans and cooks, not by force but for entertainment.

Cooking was the dominant act in *The Princess and the Frog* and was the only film that visually depicted the future princess as a child partaking in a domestic act [See Appendix SS1; “*The Princess and the Frog: Domestic Female*”]. Princess Tiana is seen cooking at a young age. Although her age is not specifically identified, it is expressed through the need of assistance from a chair for her to stand on in order to reach the pot on the stove. This change was not presented visually in the other contemporary film or in either traditional movie. However, before cleaning Rapunzel acknowledged the acts she performed as her morning tasks were her daily routine. Through these words, one can interpret them as implying that she has been doing these acts, perhaps daily, for some time and maybe even years, perhaps since a young child. This new element of linking domestic work to young children could be attributed to the desire to imbed the importance of domestic acts into females at younger ages. By depicting images of characters that are relatable in age range and gender teaches young girls not only should they be learning domestic traits but also suggesting that they start at a young age as to have such skills mastered by the time they meet their prince charming.

The two contemporary princesses were illustrated differently than the traditional princesses in the performance of their domestic acts. In each contemporary film, the princess performed a task by choice rather than force. The manner in which they implemented these tasks differed from those in the traditional category as well. Tiana was employed as a waitress at two restaurants. Although, he chose this profession over other available options, her occupation sends the message that women should work in positions

acceptable to the domestic traits they are expected to learn. Taking pride in her work, she serviced her guests and went above and beyond to provide excellent service. She took pride in the execution of her work and this was illustrated through her physical actions and attitude. She served her customers with a big smile and a spring in her step and chose to work rather than hang out with friends.

Much like Tiana, Rapunzel's attitude and actions illustrate her doing domestic task show excitement and fun. She is illustrated with brushes on her feet that give a look similar to skates with the mop in her hand. The amusement in the situation is illustrated thought a huge smile on her face [See Appendix SS2; "*Tangled: Domestic Female*"].. Even when performing the task of sweeping the floor she does so with simplicity, amusement, and a smile [See Appendix SS1; "*Tangled: Domestic Female*"]. She swept the floor with a glide and sway that expressed approval and enjoyment for the act that she was performing. Each domestic act is implemented to highlight the fun and enjoyment of it and not the laborious and strenuous component.

The domestic act of servitude was present across both categories in all four films. Tiana, who turned into a frog, performed domestic servitude in both dimensions, human and animal [See Appendix SS3; "*The Princess and the Frog: Domestic Female*"]. While employed as a server she was illustrated serving in her work environment as well as outside of her work place, at the La Bouff mansion, while in human form. Upon turning into a frog, Tiana, who was not being paid to perform these tasks, cooks, and serves Prince Naveen, who was in the form of a male frog [See Appendix SS3; "*The Princess and the Frog: Domestic Female*"]. This voluntary act implies that a female should want to be helpful and perform domestic servitude acts not because she has to but she should

desires to especially for males. After cooking a swamp gumbo, she then exemplifies the helpful and domestic work subcategory and serves the gumbo to the prince. Illustrations like these imply that regardless of the situation you find yourself in as a female you are always expected to perform domestic acts including serving.

The act of serving was illustrated in both categories, traditional and contemporary, concretely by the physical act, and indirectly through object association. The physical act is implied more often through suggestion with items than depiction. Serving trays functioned as the primary object of association with the act of serving [See Appendix SS1; “*Cinderella: Domestic Female*”, SS2; “*The Princess and the Frog: Domestic Female*”, and SS3; “*Tangled: Domestic Female*”]. Three of the four princesses, with the exclusion of *Snow White*, were illustrated with serving trays. Chronologically the amount of trays the princesses carry grew in numbers over the years. Beginning with lucky number three for Cinderella, who holds one in each hand and balances the third on her head [See Appendix SS1; “*Cinderella: Domestic Female*”]. Tiana, balances four plates standing on one leg, she holds the first three identical to Cinderella and the fourth with the opposite leg from balancing [See Appendix SS2; “*The Princess and the Frog: Domestic Female*”]. Lastly, Rapunzel demonstrates the ability to balance five plates, one on her head, and two additional balanced on each hand and forearm [See Appendix SS3; “*Tangled: Domestic Female*”]. The exaggerated illustrations of such depictions reaffirms the task and highlights items associated with the act of service which refer back to the initial task, implying a new message of service capabilities.

The above interpretations produced several patterns. These patterns show a change over time through the theme and provide possible interpretations of illustrations

for domestic work, approaches to domestic work, and the relationship between the ages of the character depicted when introducing domestic acts. Also, with regards to service there is a significance emphasis on the act and an increase and in the amount of objects one is able to balance when performing the act to further highlight the deed.

### *Heroic Male: Traditional*

Screenshots collected for heroic male theme in the traditional category fell into one of five subcategories with noble occupation as the most prevalent being conveyed in each of the six screenshots. Physically fit/athletic ability, intellectual ability, independence and adventurous appeared individually or in various combinations in at least one screenshot. Although, rescue was depicted it was not illustrated in a climatic way as to concretely display physical illustrations.

Traditional males were identified simply as prince and were given no definite names. Snow White's prince was simple referred to as "the prince," and Cinderella's as "Prince Charming." The lack of identification shows the simplistic nature of their illustrations. Not only did the princes lack identification they also lacked substance in character. Their personality was conveyed through their physical appearance, which focused on their outward appearance and noble association. This created the notion that men should be chosen not by their inner characteristic but by their looks and rank alone as illustrations communicating the male characters noble association dominated the traditional category.

The prince in *Snow White* [See Appendix SS1; "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*: Heroic Male"] communicates his noble association through his clothing. His

clothing is ornamented, showing no wear or tears, with puffed sleeves and paired with a hat containing a feather. This image conveys the lavish nature of his outfit through these features. The same is seen in Prince Charming's outfit in *Cinderella*, which was illustrated in a portrait, in royal attire embellished with gold tassels on the breast and shoulders [See Appendix SS1; "*Cinderella*: Heroic Male"]. The photograph of his clothes from the portrait was the same for the prince's physical depictions in the film. Both princes remain in the same attire, as illustrated in all six screenshots in the traditional category, that they are introduced to the audience in throughout their entire appearance in each film.

Their clothing is essential to their identification because as their clothing stays consistent the character is easily identifiable as the prince each time they are depicted on the screen. This creates a visual association with their attire and their character, a prince, and reiterates their noble association. Such associations go beyond the realm of wealth and money and create significance to the kinds of physical traits and mannerisms one should seek in males.

Their actions reiterate their nobility, but their dress distinguishes them. When Prince Charming meets Cinderella he bows [See Appendix SS2; "*Cinderella*: Heroic Male"]. The prince in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is illustrated bowing as well and taking his hat off to Snow White, a display of proper manners acquired through proper education, and revealing his golden sword [See Appendix SS2; "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*: Heroic Male"]. The physical act conveys the action of a true gentleman but the object frames him as a protector who is suited with the necessary tool to defend him and others. The prince in *Cinderella*, which followed *Snow White and the Seven*

*Dwarfs* in creation, was illustrated in a royal portrait decorated with a large, long golden sword [See Appendix SS1; “*Cinderella: Heroic Male*”]. The enormity of the items links the object to strength and power implying qualities males should possess which could be obtained through instruments requiring skill. This illustration displays both his noble association and intellectual ability, as sword fighting is an art form as to swing a sword and strike your opponent takes skill. The golden color of each sword further suggests their noble background as it expresses the luxurious nature of the objects alluding to its expensive value rather than being made of a common material such as metal as blacksmiths produce and sell to the peasant community. These elements, which appear insignificant individually, like the trivial elements in their clothing, collectively imply a heroic and noble character by setting the character apart from common people. By highlighting such elements these illustrations create the implication that men should be well dressed and their attire will identify and define their honorable character. However, these depictions also convey the message that their honorable characteristic should align with their physical appearance.

The prince in *Snow White* was the only male character in conventional human form, as a dwarf is considered a mythical creature, illustrated in the film and this feature coincides with his independent nature. He appears alone in his first scene riding on his horse opposite the castle wall. In the next frame he is climbing over the wall, which displayed his athletic ability and adventurous nature, as he does not know what he may encounter once over the wall, especially since he was traveling alone [See Appendix SS1; “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Heroic Male*”]. Disappearing until the closing scene, he once again is illustrated approaching alone without any company. These illustrations,

which are the extent of the prince's depictions in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, highlight his independence simply by representing him alone each time. This illustrated his lack of dependency on others as he required no help to hop over a wall or transport the princess back to his castle [See Appendix SS1 & SS3; "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*: Heroic Male"].

The same applies to Prince Charming, who was always illustrated in physical form separate from his father and the Duke and had just returned to the castle after being away. His absence shows his independent nature and implies the ability to venture out and explore away from his home. The prince's ability to self-regulate shows the independence of their character and associates the action with the male sex creating gender perceptions.

#### *Heroic Male: Contemporary*

The contemporary group had a decline in the subcategory noble occupation as only one of the two males was of royal association, Prince Naveen in *The Princess and the Frog*. Of the six screenshots, this subcategory appeared in only two. Prince Naveen is identified as a prince from his first visual illustration. He is depicted in a royal outfit of cream and gold with embellishments on the breast and shoulders, much like the attire of Prince Charming [See Appendix SS1; "*The Princess and the Frog*: Heroic Male"]. However, he is also adorned with a sash and a crown to further distinguish his noble association. The crown was an object not present with the traditional princes [See Appendix SS1; "*The Princess and the Frog*: Heroic Male"]. This new object is directly associated to his royal status and identifies him as noble even when the visual

illustrations do not convey that association physically. These added features appear with the initial illustration to communicate his noble association, which was not always illustrated through his appearance [See Appendix SS3; “*The Princess and the Frog: Heroic Male*”]. Unlike traditional princes, Prince Naveen was not branded solely through his outward appearance specifically his outfits. As traditional princes remained in their royal attire through each of the films in their group, contemporary princes shifted away from this measure. Prince Naveen, although initially introduced in his royal attire, was illustrated in ordinary clothing [See Appendix SS3; “*The Princess and the Frog: Heroic Male*”]. These images highlight the importance of the initial royal illustration of the prince. The first appearance is often the most notable, and it presents the prince in such a notable manner that it visually creates a noble perception imbedded in the audience’s mind for his character, regardless of appearance in attire and or form. However, towards the end of the film, Prince Naveen returns to his royal attire and is depicted in on outfit, outfitted with gold embellishments on the breast and shoulders and sporting his sash but without the crown [See Appendix SS3; “*The Princess and the Frog: Heroic Male*”].

The initial royal association is also important to the character of Prince Naveen as he is transformed into a frog. However, while still in human form, he undergoes a wardrobe change, this feature was not present in either male of the traditional category. Contemporary males, non-royal attire, depicted sleeves that are situated upward in the way that exposes the skin of the forearm [See Appendix SS3; “*The Princess and the Frog: Heroic Male*” and SS1; “*Tangled: Heroic Male*”]. This element is present among ordinary clothes for both contemporary males and is a change from traditional depictions that illustrated the males fully covered. The exposed areas allude to muscles and draw

attention to the forearms, which bring focus to any actions done with their hands and arms. Attention created by this detail highlights movements done with the arm often associated with physical ability. While rescuing the satchel Flynn hangs on to a tree branch by with one arm the other clutching the bag [See Appendix SS2; “*Tangled: Heroic Male*”]. While climbing up the tower once again his action focuses on his arms directly as they he uses arrows, which he holds in his hands, to climb up the tower [See Appendix SS3; “*Tangled: Heroic Male*”]. Even when simply running Flynn pumps his arms as he moves drawing attention to his arms and exposed forearm [See Appendix SS1; “*Tangled: Heroic Male*”]. All of these actions express his physical ability, strength, intellectual knowledge of skills and adventurous nature. The exposed part of his arm captures the viewer’s attention and draws greater attention to the actions he is performing. All princes with the exception of Flynn Rider in *Tangled* were of royal lineage. However, the lack of noble occupation did not diminish Disney’s ability to depict and in classify him as a heroic male through other elements such as his physical activities.

Traditional princes were one-dimensional and their noble association was paired with minimal physical elements most often connected to attire that further communicated their royal connection and provided enough contextual information it also support their heroic image contemporary princes saw a shift away from this pattern. Although this category revealed a decline in the noble/profession occupation subcategory, this group revealed an increase in the physically fit/athletic ability and adventurous categories. These two subcategories comprised majority of the elements that communicated heroic male for the contemporary group. These elements seemingly insignificant individually but collectively create gender perceptions.

Over the years, the princes in the Disney Princess franchise films have seen a shift from one-dimensional to two-dimensional. Traditionally princes were featured in supporting roles with little screen time and were mostly depicted with the princess. Additionally, little information was disclosed on their background with the exception of noble connection and other elements illustrated were limited to objects that supported this main category. In contrast to their traditional counterparts, contemporary princes have seen an increase in the amount of screen time as well as the quality of interactions. Princes in the contemporary category were depicted individually in scenes that provided insight into their character often displaying skills.

However, one of the biggest shifts was in the physical attributes of the male characters in their appearance specifically their attire. Both set of films presented minor elements with large significance. This pattern was presented several times though different elements specifically in sleeves in both groups. The sleeves, which were present in both groups represented wealth and noble association for the traditional category but strength and physical and athletic ability for contemporary males. Male characters evolved from being strictly identified through their outfits paired with indirect objects to reiterate noble association to objects that directly identify them royally. The swords were indirect associations to noble relation, because of the golden color, in contrast to the crown, which created a direct association to royal connection. Additionally, contemporary males were more diverse and expansive. The contemporary male characters provided subplots to the main female characters, as we learn about them and receive insight into their backstory as well as their personality.

### *Physical Appeal: Traditional*

Physical appeal was illustrated concretely through a character's concern for his or her personal attractiveness more often than depicting them as an object of esteem through the admiring gaze of others. Princesses in the traditional group were illustrated performing actions that communicated concern for their personal appearance. Actions illustrating the princesses concerns or enhancements of their physical appearances were present in five of the six screenshots for the traditional group with only one screenshot concretely depicting the princess as the object of admiration. However, the latter subcategory was conveyed verbally several times in both films.

Of the five illustrations depicting the princesses concern for their physical appearance, hair was the primary feature of concern for both princesses. This element was highlighted and adjusted for physical enhancement by each princess in the traditional category and was present in three of the five screenshots for this subcategory. Hair was one element of their physical appearance that the princesses were able to modify to enrich their physical charm. This particular feature, regardless of their drab attire, could be amended to add physical appeal.

Snow White, even when she was illustrated in the drab attire she cleaned in, took pride in her appearance regardless of her outfit. Although she could not change her drab cleaning attire when she met the prince by surprise in the garden she ran away and made sure to groom her hair before returning into view to greet him [See Appendix SS1; "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Physical Appeal*"]. This depiction creates the general implication that despite ones attire, even if they are just cleaning, their physical appearance is still important. Specifically this illustration indicates when meeting a male

a female should enhance whatever features possible so that she can to appear more in the most physically attractive manner.

Cinderella, in contrast to Snow White, was not concerned with her physical appearance because in the absence of male suitors she grooms herself for her personal gratification. However, like Snow White, she chose her hair as an element of enhancement. The first illustration of the character Cinderella in her present age in the film is set in her bedroom with her waking from a night of sleep. Upon sitting up in the bed, prior to even stepping foot out of the bed, she takes loose her hair, which was braided, and grooms it with a brush she keeps on her nightstand [See Appendix SS1; “*Cinderella: Physical Appeal*”]. It is the first task she performed of the day and highlights her concern for her physical appeal. Although no male suitor was around it can be implied that she was planning for the possibility of meeting one. This illustration conveys the message that the first thing that should be on a females mind when she wakes up is what she looks like and how can she better her outward appearance. Also, it implies that appearance is the top priority of females and task to enhance physical appearance should be conducted immediately in the morning. Enhancing these elements should be the first task of the day before all others because one never knows what the day holds and whom she could meet throughout the day. Although no male suitor was around it can be inferred that she was planning for any possibility, which creates a standard of physical aspiration for the female gender.

Later, as Cinderella is depicted cleaning the floors, she pauses her task to groom her hair and admire herself in a reflection of a bubble [See Appendix SS2; “*Cinderella: Physical Appeal*”]. This concern with her appearance in the mist of her task once again

indicates the importance for physical appearance. Also, this action and the hair element were highlighted through a double illustration provided by the reflection in the bubble reinforcing the significance to the act. Although, Cinderella's hair was covered in a bonnet she still adjusted it in a manner to beautify both it and herself. The accessory did not hinder her desire to enhance features that can improve physical attractiveness. Each traditional princess had an accessory that adorned their hair when depicted in drab attire, Snow White was fitted with a bow and Cinderella a bonnet [See Appendix SS1; "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Physical Appeal*" and SS2; "*Cinderella: Physical Appeal*"]. This created further focus on the hair component. In addition they were each illustrated with red lips, suggesting the presence of lipstick which is directly associated with makeup, which created attention and focus to their facial features regardless of their attire.

However, regardless of their attire, drab or fabulous, each princess was concerned with their physical appeal. Their concern for their appearance was present and highlighted in dangerous situations. These illustrations were depicted after the transformation of the traditional princesses outfits from drab cleaning attire to their fabulous signature outfits. After being led into the woods by the huntsman who was ordered to kill her, Snow White was warned and ran away. Frightened she takes off running into the woods. In such a state of fright one would assume that the main subject of concern would be safety. However, in Snow White's case she flees in a way as not to tear or dirty her dress [See Appendix SS2; "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Physical Appeal*"]. Before running off she is visually illustrated lifting the hem of her gown so that it does not drag on the ground. She proceeds to run, holding it in her hand the entire time.

This illustration suggests that even in a state of fear, you must preserve your appearance. Also, it implies that when performing a task one should be conscious of their physical attractiveness and display concern for their personal appearance.

Both implications were present in *Cinderella* as well. Once realizing that it was almost midnight Cinderella flees out of the ball in a race against time. Not wanting to be exposed to the prince she must leave before the magical spell wears off. Even when strapped for time Cinderella was sure to preserve her appearance by preserving her outfit and grabbing the hem of her gown and fleeing [See Appendix SS3; “*Cinderella: Physical Appeal*”].

Although the physical attractiveness of each traditional princess was acknowledged by another character these actions were rarely visually depicted. This element was conveyed more orally than visually. However, Snow White was visually illustrated as an object of physical attraction. Upon her sleeping death Snow White was placed in a glass coffin because her beauty was too great to be covered even in death. The forest animals and dwarfs were illustrated mourning and admiring her in this state [See Appendix SS3; “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Physical Appeal*”]. This illustration represented and depicted their acknowledgement of her physical beauty. The element was further communicated when the prince arrives and is so stunned by her beauty that he wants to kiss her even in death. The messages implied by these illustrations create gender principles for customary actions to enhance physical appeal for the betterment of oneself as well as others. Additionally they create an ideal image of beauty for females and express the importance of this element.

### *Physical Appeal: Contemporary*

Like their traditional counterparts both subcategories, concerned with physical appearance and acknowledgement for physical attractiveness were present in the contemporary films as well. Also, their hair was the feature highlighted to emphasize their physical appeal. However, unlike traditional princesses this element appeared in both subcategories. This category also saw an increase in presence and complexity in the second subcategory, acknowledged for physical attractiveness. Although, traditional princesses were acknowledged for their physical attractiveness it was not illustrated concretely. This subcategory was visually illustrated in each contemporary film and the illustration exhibited both the object of affection and the facial expression of the admirer, which was not present in the traditional depiction. The addition of this element created strength in action as well as the message being conveyed from the depiction.

Illustrations supporting this subcategory were present in four of the six screenshots for the contemporary princesses. Each screenshot for *The Princess and the Frog* featured an element of this subcategory and was the main feature of two screenshots in the film. Although Tiana was not concerned with her physical appearance often, she was the object of admiration for more than one male character in the film. During the opening song she is illustrated taking the trolley to work when she catches the eye of a male passenger who smiles down at her [See Appendix SS1; “*The Princess and the Frog: Physical Appeal*”]. This concrete facial feature paired with his gesture of offering her his lapel flower visually acknowledges her physical appeal. Another example of this subcategory was also depicted during the opening song of the movie by another character. Prince Naveen, who has just arrived in New Orleans, is roaming through the

streets playing his banjo with a jazz band. Upon seeing Tiana, who is outside of the restaurant clearing tables, he comes over, stops playing his instrument, and gazes at her with a smile that expresses his acknowledgement of her physical attractiveness [See Appendix SS1; “*The Princess and the Frog*: Physical Appeal”]. The facial expressions of male admirers clearly define the action and object of affection, which was not present in the traditional category. These illustrations imply that females should be, and aim to be, the object of admiration for males creating gender perceptions. It also characterizes females as the admired and males as the admirer creating additional gender standards.

Like with traditional princesses, hair was an element used to convey physical appeal and appeared in the contemporary category as well. The above-mentioned illustrations share one common physical feature for the princess, which is her subtle curl dangling over her forehead [See Appendix SS1 & SS2; “*The Princess and the Frog*: Physical Appeal”]. The illustration for this feature slightly differs from the trolley screenshot, where her curl is hanging from underneath her hat, its presence among other features illustrated makes it appear as a mere coincidence or menial feature. However, its appearance in the screenshot with Prince Naveen confirms its association with her physical attractiveness [See Appendix SS2; “*The Princess and the Frog*: Physical Appeal”]. The hat draws attention to her facial features and the one curl dangling creates a significant association with the feature [See Appendix SS1; “*The Princess and the Frog*: Physical Appeal”]. The illustration outside of the restaurant highlights it through the angle of her head, because her expression was not the message she could have been illustrated with her head turned hiding the curl, however the animator illustrated the scene to depict this feature. Even when princess Tiana is acknowledged her attractiveness while

at the same time being acknowledged by prince Naveen for her physical appeal the hair feature is once again present [See Appendix SS3; “*The Princess and the Frog*: Physical Appeal”].

Hair as a significant element of physical appeal was present in *Tangled* as well. Known for her long, golden hair it was a featured element in each screenshot as it pertained to both the plot of the story but also created physical appeal. Rapunzel groomed her hair daily by brushing it as to keep it in immaculate condition [See Appendix SS1; “*Tangled*: Physical Appeal”]. This illustration conveyed the message that grooming oneself for personal satisfaction of appearance is an important trait of being a female. However, Rapunzel was also illustrated fixing her hair for enhancement for the admiration of a male [See Appendix SS2; “*Tangled*: Physical Appeal”]. In contrast to the earlier depiction this illustration reverts to implications made in the traditional category that female should enhance any possible element to appear physically appealing to males. The element of hair was also present when Rapunzel was the object of admiration by Flynn Rider appearing with flowers adorned in every curve of her braid [See Appendix SS3; “*Tangled*: Physical Appeal”].

The contemporary film *Tangled* depicted a princess who appeared in the same outfit, her signature outfit, for the majority of the movie. One outfit change took place but did not happen until one hour and thirty minutes into an hour and thirty-one minute long movie. Although she changed her outfit the primary color, light purple, and style of each outfit were similar. So much so that if you did not watch very closely you could have missed it. This new feature communicates that regardless of what you are doing and

where you are, even locked in a tower where you never meet anyone, you should always be dressed in your best. These implications create gender perceptions.

However, the absence of illustrations communicates gender stereotypes. Neither category presented a male who was the object of admiration by a female nor were any males illustrated showing concern for their physical appearance. The lack of these features creates gender perceptions by associating such actions as female qualities and characteristics. Patterns produced by the physical appeal identified hair as a major feature associated with physical appeal when showing personal concern for physical appearance and when being acknowledged for attractiveness. Along with this feature accessories were present in both categories to further highlight this feature. The contemporary category saw a shift in the depictions of princesses acknowledged for physical attractiveness to more concrete depictions. By illustrating the actions and emotions of both the admirer and the admired it intensified the action. Lastly, the contemporary category shifted the focus from the importance of multiple outfits, not depicting Rapunzel in both a cleaning outfit and her signature gown.

#### *Damsel in Distress: Traditional*

Damsel in Distress was illustrated through five subcategories: 1) suggestive attire; 2) weak in physical strength; 3) receives/follows advice; 4) emotional; and 5) being rescued. Of these categories all five were present across the set of 12 screenshots for the entire theme. However, some images were only present in one of the two groups, traditional and contemporary.

In the traditional category each subcategory was present and illustrated visually. Weak in physical strength and receives/follows advice were each illustrated separately in one of the six screenshots for the traditional category. The lead female character in both films receives help but it is not illustrated concretely. As weak in physical strength is problematic to be visually depicted physically it was illustrated in an underlying approach [See Appendix SS3; “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Damsel in Distress*”]. This illustration alludes to the lack of strength that Snow White possesses by depicting her as not being able to walk and instead is being carried off by the prince, her lack of strength is illustrated through his demonstration of it. The illustration creates the notion that females do not have to obtain or demonstrate physical strength in the presence of a male.

Like the subcategory of weak in physical strength, receives/follows advice is only illustrated concretely in one screenshot for the traditional films. Although this action was verbally alluded to it was only physically present in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and was not illustrated in any of the other three movies in both the traditional and contemporary category. Snow White is depicted being led by the forest animals through the woods after asking for help in finding shelter [See Appendix SS2; “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Damsel in Distress*”]. Not only is she physically led by the animals, who initially lead her by grabbing ahold of her cape and leading her, but once they let go she continues behind them. Depictions like this one create the presumption that females are too weak to carry out certain tasks, even in regards to physical strength, and therefore must rely on others human or magical animals for help. By illustrating her, a female, following the advice of animals it put female comprehension on a lower platform than all

others present in the film. Additionally, the screenshot suggests a rescue by the animals for Snow White.

This same rescue element was present in the illustration that depicted her as being weak in physical strength. As the prince carries her off, just as when the animals led her to the dwarf's cottage, she is escorted out of a dangerous situation [See Appendix SS2 & SS3, "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Damsel in Distress*"]. The need of an escort linked to the female characters creates gender implications of females as the weaker sex. The illustration of the prince rescuing Snow White [See Appendix SS3; "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Damsel in Distress*"] encompassed the subcategory suggestive attire as her dress emphasizes her small waist creating a relationship between the female gender and petite body image especially the element of thinness. The main female characters of the traditional category are shown in dresses with cinched waists that flare to highlight the thinness of the waist and illustrate a petite frame. Like Snow White's depiction this element is present on Cinderella as well [See Appendix SS1 & SS3; "*Cinderella: Damsel in Distress*"]. Both illustrations encompass this visual element and construct an ideal body image for females. These images imply that despite tasks at hand or life changing obstacles that are presented to females all women must always look a certain way and have a certain body style to be rescued, and must therefore strive to be sexually appealing to males.

However, not only are physical ideals being conveyed but emotional concepts as well as the emotional subcategory was present in four of the six screenshots in the traditional category. Although almost every screenshot conveys some degree of emotion the ones included for analysis illustrate this subcategory concretely as defined in the

methods section of this thesis. Each concrete illustration of emotion for the traditional princesses was depicted through the physical act of crying. This subcategory was present in one screenshot for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* [See Appendix SS1; “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs: Damsel in Distress*”]. After running through the woods Snow White collapses on the ground in the forest crying. *Cinderella* illustrated this element in each screenshot. After having her dress torn apart by her mean stepsisters Cinderella runs out the house with her face in her hands crying and into the garden where she collapses on a bench and continues to verbally sob with her face still in her hands [See Appendix SS1 & SS2; “*Cinderella: Damsel in Distress*”]. Later after being locked in the tower by her wicked stepmother Cinderella sobs against the door and tears began to flow out of her eyes [See Appendix SS3; “*Cinderella: Damsel in Distress*”]. These visual illustrations link emotions in general and crying specifically with the female gender creating gender implications and principles.

#### *Damsel in Distress: Contemporary*

Although several subcategories were present in the contemporary category not all were illustrated in the screenshots chosen for analysis. Receives/follows advice was rarely depicted concretely and therefore is not present in any of the six screenshot of the contemporary category. Like the traditional princesses weak in physical strength was illustrated in one screenshot in the contemporary category. Princess Tiana was falling and could not physically support herself due to a lack of physical strength [See Appendix SS3; “*The Princess and the Frog: Damsel in Distress*”]. Additionally, like the traditional illustrations the lack of physical strength is visually constructed through a display of the

quality through a male reinforcing earlier established implications. This image also suggests the act of women needing to be rescued. As Tiana was in a dangerous situation until prince Naveen's display of strength saved her, once again associating the act of a rescue with male characters.

In comparison to their traditional counterparts the female characters of the contemporary category saw a decrease in the subcategory rescue as well as the subcategory suggestive attire as they were each present in only one screenshot each. Although there was a decrease in the quantity of illustrations for suggestive attire there was an increase in the intensity of the depiction conveying suggestive attire. The screenshot for this subcategory illustrated princess Tiana with an exposed back [See Appendix SS2; "*The Princess and the Frog: Damsel in Distress*"]. This is the only illustration that shows this manner of exposed skin other than commonly exposed areas such as arms, hands, feet, facial features and neck. This creates the implication of females as sexual objects.

Although several subcategories saw a decrease in visual presence in the screenshots included in the contemporary group the subcategory emotional had an increased presence. Both princesses of this group were depicted crying, however the physical feature of tears was not present in any of the four screenshots that illustrated this subcategory. Princess Tiana is illustrated crying in two separate depictions [See Appendix SS1 & SS2; "*The Princess and the Frog: Damsel in Distress*"]. In each frame her emotions are the focus of the shot as she appears centered and against drab backgrounds. Furthermore, these depictions have hand gestures, which highlight the emotion being conveyed. The illustrations are visually constructed to clearly identify the

emotion of crying. Similar hand gestures are present in both screenshots depicting crying in *Tangled* [See Appendix SS1 & SS3; “*Tangled: Damsel in Distress*”]. By highlighting the action it creates a stronger association with the character. However, unlike *The Princess and the Frog*, *Tangled* pairs Rapunzel with Flynn in each depiction, which looks upon her emotionless. These images clearly define and provide propositions on gender association of males as levelheaded and females as emotional.

Additionally this category, emotional, concretely illustrated fear. It was present in the most recent contemporary film *Tangled*. While traveling through the woods Rapunzel and Flynn hear a rustle in the bushes identifying the presence of an unknown creature. The sound frightens Rapunzel who jumps on Flynn’s back when the animal presents itself [See Appendix SS2; “*Tangled: Damsel in Distress*”]. The look present in her eyes, which are enlarged, convey her fear concretely along with her physical act of hiding behind him. This illustration creates an associate with the female gender and fear as well as the male gender and fearlessness.

As this subcategory has continued to maintain a significant presence over the decades it has created implications not only in the individual films, but across the complete Disney Princess franchise. The increase illustrations depicting emotional females and the lack of these specific emotions attached to male characters create gender implications and standards. Additionally, the associations created through the visual illustrations of negative emotions with female in contrast to their male counterparts construct gender connections for those who are view these images.

The overall theme damsel in distress has seen a shift in the illustrations of suggestive attire. As they have become less frequent the depictions present have

increased in quality and create an intense and penetrating association of females as sensual objects. Weak in physical strength remained the same across both groups and continues to be illustrate female lack of strength through the presence of strength in male characters. There was also a decrease in the rescue scenes as well as receives/follows advice in the contemporary category compared to their traditional counterparts. However, the most notable implications were illustrated thorough emotional depictions. Although, this subcategory was present in both groups contemporary princesses' depictions provided intense illustrations to highlight the action and the association with the female gender. Additionally, the presence of an emotionless male provided further support for the implications illustrated by the contemporary category.

### *Color Cue*

Disney's representation of gender perceptions extends across the company, from the films to the merchandise, specifically the signature appearances for each princess in the Disney Princess franchise. Over the years as the Disney brand has expanded from films to various components, specifically merchandise, these elements, have become significant to the brand for economic purposes. Creating brand association with these items has been lucrative within the Disney princess franchise as each Disney princess has a signature outfit. This element creates another avenue for the brand to impart gender standards in colors, styles, and accessories paired with the outfits.

Films have provided the foundation of the Disney Corporation, in recent decades merchandise increased revenue and led to the creation of individual brands with the company. Most notably among these is the Disney princess franchise, which grew out the

need for authentic princess costumes for the characters in films they produced. These costumes have become the main merchandise method for the brand and trademark item(s) for each film. Each princess signature look can be replicated by young girls through genuine costumes, which contain particular features of the visual illustrations in the films.

Masculine colors are present in three of the four Disney princesses signature outfits examined in this thesis. Patterns regarding color association and style of dress emerged as well as patterns linking color and accessories. These patterns create and reinforce feminine standards.

Disney color cues have no chronological significance for the four princesses analyzed in the four themes. The dresses possessing these masculine colors, specifically green and blue, which are cool or masculine colors, are present in both the traditional and contemporary categories. However, patterns across the brand were present for color association and accessories present and color association and style of dress. These elements create gender association and can overpower the significance of the colors present. These features communicate and reinforce gender perceptions and principles.

These elements are present in earliest Disney princess film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. Snow White is illustrated in a simple close fitting dress with a flared bottom, not an exaggerated ball gown, but the slight flare adds a feminine characteristic. Encompassing three different colors the dress contains both masculine and feminine associated features but is majority yellow, which has a neutral color association. The top of the gown is blue with a white color and red accents along the sleeve. By combining masculine and feminine associated colors together creates a gender balance. This combination equalizes the colors creating a neutral association for the princess. However,

the red ribbon present in her hair is added warmth, which created a feminine association in her ensemble. Overall Snow White has a feminine identity as branded through her signature outfit color and accessories.

Cinderella's dress is light blue a masculine color. Like Cinderella, Tiana is illustrated in a masculine associated cool color. Each color creates an initial masculine perception for the individual dress. However, like Cinderella various elements in the style and accessories communicate a stronger feminine association.

Although the masculine colors are present the style of dress, which are depicted and sold as full gowns, create a feminine relationship. The exaggerated style of dress is only present for these two, of the four, Disney princesses in the sample. In contrast to Snow White's dress, which illustrates a small flare, the full roundness highlights the ensemble and creates an intense feminine appearance and association. This highlights the princess feminine connection although depicted in a masculine color. As females are associated with dresses this intense appearance highlights the feminine element, which creates an importance of the style of the ball gown that has a feminine association and is stronger over the color that is of a masculine quality. The visual association with the style of dress has a stronger effect than the color.

However, the lack of importance in color association of masculine colors is negated with concrete elements that create feminine association are present. Like, Snow White, both Cinderella and Tiana have clearly illustrated head accessories. This seeming insignificant element has a larger interpretation as it conveys feminine qualities of their signature look with. This element is only present in ensembles that bare masculine colors. The presence of these concrete features disassociates the gender perception from the

color and place the gender value on the accessories. This suggestion is further supported by the presence of gloves and necklaces on the two princesses who appear in masculine associated colors. These elements are not present for either princess who has feminine associated colors in her outfit. Additionally, these feminine elements create a feminine identity for the entire outfit and surpasses the masculine association created by mere color through the quantity and value of their feminine appeal. Overall both Cinderella and Tiana, although illustrated in masculine colors, have a feminine identity as created through their signature outfit style and accessories.

Of the four princesses analyzed Rapunzel, was the only princess whose signature outfit contained only feminine colors. Although, her dress was feminine in color aspect there was no exaggeration in the style of the dress. This evidence suggest that color is a stronger identifier of gender when associated with feminine colors. For Rapunzel there were no accessories associated with her signature look. Further supporting the suggestion that feminine color alone create an intense feminine association. Overall Rapunzel has a feminine identity created solely through the presence of feminine color in her appearance.

The lack of masculine associated clothing style creates an association with dresses and feminine gender. By illustrating the princess in a dress, as 11 of the 12 Disney Princesses are, this creates gender standards of acceptable attire for females. The overall message of the elements featured imply that females can be depicted in masculine colors but should add feminine associated accessories to negate the male identified features. Also, that feminine color association is enough to represent female identity as long as masculine feature are not present. Lastly, it associates feminine attire as acceptable on in female associates styles specifically dresses.

Overall the color cues present in the signature outfits imply a feminine association. Although dresses contain masculine colors more often than feminine elements identifying its connection are represented to create a feminine identity. As both masculine colored dresses contained long gloves, head accessories, a necklace and are styled as full ball gowns. These elements, especially in the quantity that is present, created a stronger feminine identity than offered by the mere color association. In contrast outfits that contained gender neutrality in color representation featured a feminine associated element of a head ribbon in her signature appearance. Lastly, feminine associated colors were not exaggerated in style nor paired with accessories. Although these elements add feminine association, the lack of these elements present do not create a masculine identity, just clearer feminine connections.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION

Disney is a powerful cultural entity that has dominated children's entertainment since the late 1930s and continues to do so today. The popularity of the Disney Princess franchise has continued to increase in popularity and has become a staple of quality family entertainment. Their popularity is rooted in the foundation provided by the storyline constructed from age-old fairytales. Their targeted audience, young impressionable children, create controversy and criticism on the gender implications created through the films being produced and released. As youth are shaped by their exposed principles the four above-mentioned themes have significance in creating, teaching, and reinforcing gender values. Youth of today primarily view Disney films depicting several gender standards including those mentioned in this thematic analysis that identified patterns that create gender associations and reinforce gender stereotypes to viewers.

The visual nature of these depictions engrosses the reader and creates a connection, which is often admired and imitated. Features that create a connection to gender are illustrated in a manner that encourages imitation among the viewing audience who may be unaware as to what is really being taught. Such imitations are then carried over into everyday life recreating and reinforcing gender roles and stereotypes. These features play a significant part in understanding and taking action against such gender stereotypes and their effects on children.

The data collected for the domestic female showed consistency over time with minor variations. Patterns identified a change overtime in the execution and manner of

domestic illustrations from forced harsh tasks to voluntary pleasurable acts. The association of such acts, from a negative to a positive connection, create an encouraging relationship between both the task and gender in current society. Although the reason behind the domestic acts and the execution of such tasks have evolved, the continued presence is most significant as its mere presence still creates gender stereotypes in connection with females to domestic tasks. The consistency of the depictions over the years create and reinforce gender standards as they continue to be replicated across the brand. By representing these acts in connection with the female gender shows little progression as their continued existence align with a traditional societal viewpoint. These replicated acts paired with repeat viewing continues to emphasis the connection between domestic acts and the female gender. Additionally, the age element has begun to show itself as a factor of importance in contemporary films. By depicting young females in domestic roles it encourages the female gender to acquire and become interested in domestic work earlier, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but the reasons behind the domestic acts have not changed as they are still performed for the benefit of others especially males. As technology has evolved the domestic female has been a consistent factor in the Disney Princess franchise. Overall, the domestic female theme, that is present in both traditional and contemporary films, show little meaningful change overtime.

Heroic male theme produced patterns identifying an overall dramatic shift in illustrations from traditional male characters to contemporary. In contrast to their traditional counterparts, who are shown as one-dimensional, contemporary male characters were complex in the quality of their characteristics and saw an increased

presence in the quantity of their illustrations. The patterns presented by this theme create gender implications for both male and female characters. As female characters show minute change, male characters show drastic change chronologically. Changes of this degree highlight the importance of male characters presence. The evolution of their depictions change with the times rather than keeping with traditional norms unlike their female counterparts. These changes in illustrations, as well as the lack thereof, create gender ideologies. The heroic male theme creates an intensified positive association for the male gender through the illustrations. Male characters show extensive evolution over the brand and the depth created from these changes continue to create a positive association with being male as these characters are linked to honor and strength. However, traditional princes who were ornamental have a positive gender association as male characters receive credit for being noble and strong without having to really do anything expect be male. The positive qualities of the theme are overshadowed by a negative association through characteristics identifying heroic males as strong, independent, skilled and intelligent and not extending these qualities to female characters as well.

Physical appeal showed modification across the subcategory of personal concern for physical appeal. As traditional princesses were overly concerned with their physical features contemporary princesses showed less concern for their personal appeal. However, sometimes less is not always best. Although this element presents underling gender implications its overall presence has a positive association with the female gender. The promotion of concern for personal appeal could be seen a powerful and liberating feature for females in constructing self-worth instead of negative gender standards.

However, the most significant element of the subcategory was it was only illustrated through female characters. This lack of extension creates gender associations for both male and females as the category should be illustrated two fold encompassing both genders. As the quantity of personal concern decreased, this theme saw an increase in characters who were admired by others for their physical beauty. The subcategory created additional gender connections by identifying males who were generally cast as the admirers, while females were often the admired. Once again, this subcategory has the ability to promote the beneficial and influential female quality of self-worth. However, these types of roles create gender stereotypes and do not promote or create a progressive connection to gender.

Contemporary princesses, in the damsel in distress theme, in relation to their traditional counterparts saw a decrease in several subcategories. This decrease was present in receiving and following advice, rescuing and suggestive attire. However, although the quantity of images decreased in suggestive attire there was an increase in the intensity of the images illustrated. These images still create gender stereotypes and highlight a negative association with the female gender by presenting the idea of them as sexual objects. Although weak in physical strength was present across both categories its consistency conveying the weakness of female characters through the strength of a male characters creates gender stereotypes for both male and female with a negative association for female gender. Lastly, as emotional was present in both traditional and contemporary films the latter saw an increase in their illustrations. The depictions in this subcategory created patterns that linked emotions, specifically negative emotions of fear and crying, to female characters. This theme created patterns with an overall negative

association with the female gender and the illustrations created and reinforced negative female stereotypes that did not extend to both genders and were dominated by female characters.

Color cue analysis produced several patterns and concluded that each signature outfit had an overall feminine association although rarely identified solely through color. This overall implication was created through elements of feminine association, which showed a greater presence when masculine color cues are present. These associations were created through the presence of features such as gloves, necklaces, and head accessories, and only represented when masculine elements of color were presented. However, when outfits contained only feminine associated colors no additional elements or accessories were present. There were also no elements that create masculine representation in any signature outfit. Overall the signature ensemble with masculine colors presented more feminine associated features to counterbalance the masculine association and create an overall feminine identity. Additionally, there was no chronological color pattern identified through this analysis.

From all data examined, both physical actions and visual components, patterns suggests and support gender implications existence across the brand. These principles are present and communicated in various elements from the films, through which they are conveyed concretely, by actions and behaviors and latently in visual aspects, which are underling correspondents, of color association and cues in signature outfits.

Stereotypes that have been around for centuries are now visually depicted in current media though Disney films especially in the Disney Princess franchise. Although not current with the era they are still present and continue to be viewed by the youth of

today. Images providing gender standards for domestic female and heroic male, as well as those that associate an ideal physical image of gender and damsel in distress were present in each of the four films analyzed in this thesis. Over the years these illustrations have changed in the manner through which they are conveyed but the continued presence reinforce age-old gender standards with a modern spin. Technology plays a major role in the world of animated films as it has the ability to affect what and how the viewer sees the illustrations. As technology advances the elements that highlight gender principles and exaggerate the acts that define gender stereotypes has the ability to become bigger and better. At what point does it stop being about the storyline and begin being about the technology and has the animated film industry as a whole reach this point already?

The thesis suggested that female depictions in Disney films have stayed one-dimensional, as male depictions have evolved substantially as has been supported by patterns produced in the domestic female and heroic male theme. Be it a traditional gender image or new age the illustrations continue to revert back to domestic skills and the ideal image as beauty as a common moderating factor and a main stereotype for female characters as illustrated through the domestic female, physical appeal and damsel in distress themes. Disney continues to suggest that domestic work as female tasks, being male and strong is synonymous, beauty always prevails, and females are emotional.

Over the decades the Disney Corporation has grown and expanded to encompass various components in addition to the original platform of animated films. However, this medium, which includes fairy tale based movies, had seen success in years of economic suffering. The 2008 economic recession had little effect of the company's profits as they reported \$37.8 billion in sales, making it one of its most profitable years (Giroux &

Pollock, p. 19). During years of decline in societal economic status, the company created additional avenues of revenue through the creation of sub-brands, most notably the Disney Princess franchise. Some people had begun to believe that the popularity of the fairytale in animated films were diminishing. Recent releases through this sub-brand has seen record ranking success and reestablished interest in both the franchise and the previous collection of fairytale based princess films. In addition to the resurgence of popularity in animated fairytale films Disney has continued to extend the fairytale from its traditional format into the regular film format with human characters. These films, although suitable for young audiences and older adults, are aimed at the preteen age bracket, which include children who grew up on Disney films. This new element provides additional avenues to teach and reinforce gender standards. However, whether or not this is the aim of the company expansions or if it is all about the bottom line remain unknown.

The motivation for studying gender stereotypes within the Disney Princess franchise was due to the lack of analysis on recent films and the scheduled releases of future films. As Disney continues to release films based off of fairytales with a main female protagonist and coronate these characters into the franchise it will create additional data to be analyzed within the brand. Currently there are two princesses, Elsa and Ana from *Frozen*, who are awaiting scheduling for coronation into the franchise and a *Frozen 2* film has been confirmed to be in the works. These films will create new characters for analysis through the four themes and color cue association conducted in this study.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

This research contributes a unique feature through its examination of color cues in the signature outfits of each princess included in the sample. As each signature outfit is available for purchase through various avenues, the Disney store, Disneyland and Disney World, and online at Disney.com, these costumes began to play a major role in the lives of many American children, both those who wear them and those who see them worn. No previous research has covered this aspect of the characters in relation to gender principles although it is a leading source of revenue for the brand. This study adds a new component to the body of previously established research.

As this thesis is a thematic analysis and examined only the data from four of the films, this presented a limitation of the study, as there are seven additional films that could provide further data and patterns with in the theme presented. Additionally, the exclusion of verbal language presented a limitation as it is a possible indicator and reinforce of gender principles because dialogue has to potential to have a powerful influence on gender perceptions. Lastly, reliability is a common limitation of qualitative research due to the various interpretations that could be concluded from the data and was a possible limitation of this study.

Future research could examine the relationship between the gender perceptions and the role societal revolutions play in changes of gender principles across the Disney Princess brand. Since this thesis only examines the color association of the four princesses included in this sample, further research could extend this color cue analysis to the seven princesses not included and to any additional princesses that join the franchise. Also, additional research could expand to examine if the differentiation between the

shades of light and dark masculine and feminine colors have significance to gender perceptions. This thematic analysis provides an overall representation of gender principles within the current Disney Princess franchise, but an analysis of each individual film will provide further insight into the changes over time and additional themes constructed through recent releases.

Although, the Disney Princess franchise is dedicated to featuring female characters the male characters have seen the greatest evolution in the capacity of their characteristics while female characters have seen little significant changes overtime. Does the Disney Corporation feel as though these depictions are sufficient because they have continued to draw mass viewers, but then what accounts for the evolution of male characters. Or do the views and opinions expressed align with the leadership of the Corporation? These questions warrant additional research into the corporate structure of the values of those in leadership roles within the Disney Corporation to see how their values influence the illustrations across the different brands not just the Disney Princess franchise.

Media today are not what they once were as the presence is ever increasing and the viewing audience continues to grow. The popularity of mobile technology in cellular phones, tablets, and computers allows the world of media to find a home any and everywhere and with anyone. As animated films began to become an individual activity through these devices, the content that the leading company for children's entertainment will continue to be criticized and analyzed for their illustrations.

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CIRRICULUM VITAE

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