The Heteronormative Objectification of Women in the Disney Princess Films: A Study of Brand Advertising and Parents’ Perceptions

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The Heteronormative Objectification of Women in the Disney Princess Films: A Study of Brand Advertising and Parents’ Perceptions

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment Requirements of the Renee Crown University Honors Program at Syracuse University

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Honors Capstone Project in Advertising
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Abstract

Although the Disney Princess franchise portrays its ten princess movies as tales of “happily ever after,” they are filled with negative stereotypes of all kinds; this study in particular focuses on those addressed towards females. Each of these princesses lives in a patriarchal society and her sole desire is to find a man who guides her to happiness. The Princess brand has immense popularity even with these unconstructive stigmatizations of women. This study explores these movies while investigating, through qualitative research, the potency of these stereotypes and whether the parents of the target audience (defined by Disney as ages three to five years old) perceive these messages as damaging.

This study begins by exploring plot details and, through a literature review, three themes prevalent in the princess films: physical beauty, role of family, and the search for true love. In part two, I analyze the impact of the Disney Princess franchise in terms of media outlets and advertising. In a qualitative study, to test the pervasive nature of these stereotypes, I conducted interviews with twelve parents regarding their perception of the impact of the Disney Princesses on their children.

The Disney Corporation has developed a brand that promises innocence and a sense of magic, things that people crave and desire to be a part of. One of the more surprising outcomes of this study was that parents noted that their children engaged with Disney Princess merchandise much more than they did with the films themselves. Further, parents perceived Disney’s influence as promoting imaginative play.
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To my beautiful family who has supported and inspired me throughout my entire life, making me feel like a princess. A special thanks to my grandmother Beanie for igniting my spark and curiosity for life, you inspire me everyday.
Chapter One: Introduction

The storyteller and filmmaker Walt Disney has built a corporation that has continued to create heartwarming films since its creation in 1923. On October 16th, 1923 Walt Disney, and his brother Roy, signed a contract with M.J. Winkler declaring he would produce a series of Alice Comedies, and thus the Disney Brother Studios, later changed to Walt Disney Company, was created (Walt Disney Company). The first animated cartoons that were released all depicted animals in fairytale scenarios. In 1937, with the creation of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Disney released its first Princess film as well as animated human character. The Disney Corporation has continued to create a magical universe in which people can escape their daily realities and head off to a charming land of fantasy and make-believe.

In 2001, Disney Consumer Products Chairman, Andy Mooney, attended “Disney on Ice;” he saw little girls dressed in princess costumes and realized the high demand of Disney Princess products (Setoodeh, “Princess Power”). After this epiphany, he told his team “O.K., let’s establish standards and a color palette and talk to licensees and get as much product out there as we possibly can that allows these girls to do what they’re doing anyway: projecting themselves into the characters from the classic movies” (Orenstein, “What’s Wrong With Cinderella”). The franchise sparked exponential growth for the Disney Company while stimulating the minds of little girls to believe that they could become princesses, find their Prince Charming, and live happily ever after. This
romanticized, Hollywood version of falling in love at first sight, succumbing to one's burning desire to be with her ideal man, and living happily ever after, is the plot formula Disney has consistently used. With the creation of Sofia the First, the first child princess and next to be inducted into the franchise, the Disney Company is trying to break free from this mold. As discussed in later sections, the underlying values of these films are starting to change to represent a more modern time period.

Currently, the Disney Princess franchise includes ten films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Mulan* (1998), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), and *Tangled* (2010). The princesses are either royal by birth, marriage or because of their significant status, or representation of heroism. Their male counterparts typically control the women within these films. “Mainstream Disney Studies in general presents a retrospective picture: a princess caught in an aggressively patriarchal society” (Do Razario 35). Throughout all ten films, women are represented as objects, seen only for their beauty. Men control them as their passivity guides them from the care of their father, or ruler, to that of their husband. They relentlessly desire to find a man who will take care of them, for all that one needs to have a happy, successful life is a husband.

As theorized by scholars, the media are immensely pervasive outlets that enforce particular ideas and beliefs to the mass public. “Much of what we know about, care about, and think is important is based on what we see in the media.
The media provides information, entertainment, escape, and relaxation and even help us make small talk” (Lind 1). Due to its overwhelming authority, people often trust and believe what the media tells them. This could be harmful for the target audience of the Princess films, as they are young children who are extremely vulnerable to media messaging. “Historical work on the fairy-tale has shown how far its development depends on the dominant value systems of the culture that appropriates it” (Westland 241). Typically children become so enthralled by these Princesses and their fairytale lives that they, in turn, want to be just like them. The brand has created a transformative identity that little girls seek to have. This is extremely detrimental, as “research has shown fairy tales may help to shape a child’s view of the world…narratives for a family audience also have an influence on the cultural ideals of evil, goodness, womanhood, manhood, and fantasies about love (Hecht 1). In this study it becomes evident, from speaking with parents, that in their view, their children do not really care about the princesses’ stories rather they care about the character of the princess. The children seemingly want to embody the princesses’ lifestyles and personas, demonstrating that the brand supersedes the films. They do not understand the negative implications of women when they are always shown as impossibly skinny, flawlessly beautiful and helpless without a man’s guidance. Further, kids are unable to pick up on the subliminal messages throughout these films such as that they all resemble Europeans, even those of ethnic backgrounds, and that women should be willing to change who they are in order to satisfy the needs and wants of a prospective man.
Interestingly, although the Disney Corporation has gone under a lot of scrutiny regarding the negative stereotypes present within its films, parents reveal that some of their young children may not even watch the films. The evil characters and villains within these movies frighten children, causing them to engage with the Disney Princess brand primarily on a commercial level. They try to embrace the princesses’ personas and duplicate their identities through dress up. Parents applaud imaginative play as it means their children are spending less time interacting with technology and more time living as children.

The Disney Corporation’s advertising has helped increase the brand’s success. “Young girls, ages 3 to 5 years old, are the target market for Disney Princess multimedia and an accompanying line of licensed toys, collectibles, apparel, and household goods featuring the film characters” (Wohlwend 2). These Princesses are omnipresent within these girls’ lives due to the constant branding in numerous outlets. A promotion run by children’s shoe store, “Stride Rite,” as discussed in later chapters, gives children the idea that they in fact are princesses and deserve to be treated like royalty. In doing so, the media creates unrealistic expectations for these children and their ideas regarding society. “Children do not just watch the princesses, they interact with them as well (Hecht 2). The purpose of this study is to investigate how the messages and themes from these fairytales negatively impact young girls’ perception of love and gender.

In the coming sections, this study will provide a brief history of the Disney Princesses since the first film was created in 1937. Through academic literature review, I examine some of the prominent messages within the ten animated films
such as: the importance of one’s appearance, family life, and the necessity of finding true love. In addition, the study explores the correlation between the Princess franchise’ success and its media and advertising presence. Looking at several components of Disney’s media campaign, as well as the company’s prominence in the marketplace, is vital to understanding the enormity of this company’s success. Additionally, I interviewed parents of young children regarding their opinions of this brand. As becomes clear, these parents not only found the Disney Princesses to be harmless, but thought that their children engage with the brand through imaginative play more than they do by watching the movies and understanding the films’ plots.

**History of Disney Princess Films**

*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, produced in 1937, was the first full-length animated feature film to appear in the United States of America and altered people’s perception of true love. “Disney’s implementation of love at first sight in the film was entirely American, replacing the medieval European idea of coupling strangers” (Wright 98). Throughout its animated princess films, “the romantic comedies Disney wishes to emulate contained love, sentiment, and romance in addition to the necessary element of humor” (Wright 98). The familiar story follows a young woman, Snow White, who is threatened with death by her stepmother, a jealous queen. Snow White hides out with the seven dwarfs in their small woodland cottage. She repays them for letting her stay with them by cleaning and cooking, traditionally female roles. The queen, in disguise, feeds her a poisoned apple, which causes Snow White to fall into a deep slumber, only to
awaken by the kiss of her Prince. Snow White’s kind and trusting personality inspires love and faithfulness in the dwarfs, animals she interacts with and the prince, as well as with the audience. Released during the Great Depression, the film provided audiences with a temporary distraction and sense of optimism. The story and the animation techniques were unique at the time, which granted its success as it won several Academy Awards and is still watched by today’s generations (IMDB.com).

Thirteen years after Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was released, Cinderella hit the silver screen in 1950. Cinderella is forced to live with her evil stepmother and two stepsisters after both of her parents die. Her sole responsibilities are to take care of them as well as their house, again, conventionally womanly duties. The King wants his son to find a suitor and make grandchildren a goal that illuminates the idea that women are used for their beauty and bodies. The King creates a Royal Ball where his son will find his love. Meanwhile, Cinderella works tirelessly as a drudge, and is helped by her animal friends (mice and birds), to sew a dress that is destroyed in a jealous rage by her stepsisters before she can go to the ball. At the stroke of midnight Cinderella’s fairy godmother saves her by helping her get a new dress and transports her to the royal ball in a pumpkin carriage. Ultimately, Cinderella is selected by Prince Charming and the two live happily ever after. This film was rewarded for its success with several awards and most importantly, three Oscar nominations in 1951 (IMDB.com).
The least successful of the Disney Princess films, *Sleeping Beauty*, was released in 1959. The story begins with the birth of a young princess, Aurora, who was granted three fairy godmothers, all of whom shower her with gifts such as having the ability to sing and to be beautiful. Unfortunately, a wicked fairy curses her to a deep slumber upon her sixteenth birthday, when she is magically awakened by the kiss of her future husband, Prince Phillip. This film had an underwhelming amount of success in the box office, making only $2,548,698 in comparison to the $7,514,749 *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and $5,165,881 *Cinderella* made, in their opening weekends (IMDB.com). Many fans noted that Aurora was only present for eighteen of the seventy-five minutes of the movie (Deslaurier 1). Due in part to its terrible performance, it was the last animated feature-length film Walt Disney was involved with before his death in 1966.

In the first three Princess films there is a notable lack of fatherly presence. However, these women are still shown performing traditional roles of a patriarchal society such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of others. In 1989, the company released *The Little Mermaid*, based loosely off the Hans Christian Andersen story (IMDB.com). This was the first of the Princess films in which fathers began playing a larger role. Ariel, a more rebellious female protagonist than ever shown before, seems as though she is defying patriarchal order by declaring that she does not want to follow the lifestyle of a princess. However, she ultimately must “choose between voice and access: to enter the ‘human world’ she must give up her agency of expression, her ability to speak” (Ridgeway 1). In a carefree manner, Ariel decides to give up her individuality in hopes of being
with Prince Eric. In this exchange Ariel encourages women to change in order to satisfy the wants of a man. This movie was received quite well by audiences, grossing $9,814,520 in its opening weekend in America, and won two Academy Awards as well as being adopted into Broadway production (IMDB.com).

*The Little Mermaid’s* success made those at the Disney Company realize that they had once again found the formula that would entice viewers and lead to box office hits. Just two years later, in 1991, *Beauty and the Beast* was released. Belle was the first princess to care about learning and attaining knowledge, as she was often seen perusing books. She is pursued by a hyper-masculinized figure, Gaston, simply because of her beauty, demonstrating that women are objectified by their appearance. Prince Adam morphs into the beast after a spell is cast on him; the only way for him to break the spell is to learn to love someone and earn her love in return. Unluckily, Belle and her father get lost on one of their travels and consequently end up trespassing through the Beast’s castle. In order to save her father’s life Belle agrees to live in the castle. Belle and the Beast do not get along at first yet through a series of trials and tribulations the two end up being friends as he grants her access to the palace library. Belle professes her love for him upon his deathbed, which brings him back to life and they live happily ever after. This film did better than its predecessors as it won several awards including four Grammys, three Golden Globes, and an Oscar nomination (IMDB.com).

In 1992 *Aladdin* was released in which a beggar, Aladdin, meets Princess Jasmine who has escaped from her castle to seek a life of normalcy. This is the first time Disney uses a princess from an ethnic background, in this case, from the
Middle East, which evokes a sense of mystery and eroticism. Jasmine and Aladdin fall in love yet due to her high status she is only able to marry a prince. However her father, the Sultan, understands Jasmine and Aladdin’s love for one another and ultimately permits her to marry whomever she wants, and they live happily ever after. This was the first Princess film in which the Princess was not the main character of the film, the male protagonist was. It brought great success ultimately winning two Academy Awards for its soundtrack (IMDB.com).

After the creation of Aladdin, the Disney Company saw that creating princesses of different ethnicities and backgrounds could to appeal to a larger audience. In Pocahontas (1995), Pocahontas, the daughter of a Native American tribal chief falls in love with an English soldier, despite having been promised to marry someone else. Tribes and soldiers began to fight when it is discovered that Pocahontas and her White lover, John Smith, secretly met in the woods. Although Pocahontas is different from several other princesses in that her main goal is not to find love and marry, the love between her and John Smith is undying and allows for a happy ending.

Chinese culture is the setting for the film Mulan (1998). Interestingly, Mulan has no ties to royalty and is only considered a princess because she embodies a heroine through her duties within the army. The story retells an old Chinese folktale in which a young maiden disguises herself to fight in the army in place of her weak, wounded father. She ends up defying the odds and successfully fighting in the army while also winning the heart of General Shang. She demonstrates courage and intelligence in ways Disney Princesses hadn’t before
her. This film went had great success in the box office, grossing $22,745,143 in its opening weekend, and was nominated for an Academy Award for its outstanding soundtrack (IMDB.com).

In 2009, Disney created the first African American Princess, Tiana in *The Princess and the Frog*. The movie, set in New Orleans, depicts Tiana, a hard-working, motivated girl who dreams about opening her own restaurant, characteristics most of the earlier Princesses lacked. However, her enthusiasm comes from her passion to cook, a hobby mainly associated with women. She is transformed into a frog after kissing Prince Naveen who is converted into an amphibian due to voodoo magic. The two break the spell in order to fulfill their dreams and live happily ever after. The movie was nominated for three Academy Awards and won a slew of other honors (IMDB.com).

The last of the ten Princess films so far is *Tangled* (2010), a retelling of the classic tale, Rapunzel. Her “mother,” Mother Gothel, kidnapped Rapunzel from her palace soon after she was born because she wants Rapunzel’s magical healing powers to thwart the aging process, allowing her to stay young and beautiful. To prevent Rapunzel from finding out about the outside world, or even worse separating from her, she forbids her to leave her tower. A young adventurer, Flynn Ryder, stumbles upon her tower one day, scales it and is held captive by Rapunzel, as she thinks he is a criminal and has never been exposed to strangers before. She realizes that he is her solution to leaving the tower and begs him to take her to see the floating lights that are released by the King and Queen every year on Rapunzel’s birthday. Rapunzel defies Mother Gothel’s wishes and
embarks on this adventure with Flynn, ultimately finding her real parents and true love along the way.

The next film to be released will feature Sofia the First, the first child princess. It is evident that the Disney Corporation is trying to change the female protagonist’s motives and backgrounds. Clearly, as Sofia is a child the focus of the story will not be on romance.

From the creation of Snow White to the most recent princess, Rapunzel, over seven decades have passed causing a significant change socially in the way society approaches appearance, romance, and gender. And the Disney films have very slowly changed along with the changing expectations. “Though these films were not grouped together until the twenty-first century, the cultural interpretations of love popular during each film’s creation impact the entire collection” (DiPirro 11). Snow White, Cinderella, and Aurora are all White, whereas Jasmine, Mulan, Pocahontas and Tiana all represent women of other ethnicities and races. Furthermore, these characters are acquiring a sense of determination and motivation, rather than simply succumbing to every wish their superior makes of them. But, despite some of these alterations, the Disney Princess films have still continued to embody negative stereotypes regarding gender as they encourage women to believe that in order to have some success they must be beautiful and their biggest goal in life is finding a man.
Chapter Two: Methods

This study utilized qualitative analysis to examine the ten Disney Princess films. It focused only on the ten princesses that have been officially inducted and incorporated into the franchise, excluding other animated characters within Disney movies. An image of these princesses can be found in Appendix 2, Figure 1. Previous research has indicated several themes that are omnipresent within these films, including those revolving around one’s appearance and the power of beauty, the role of family in the princess’s lives as well as how realistic the search for love actually is. Critical research and analysis helped to determine the presence of these themes and how prominent they were within the films. There were several subthemes that were analyzed through this research.

The first theme, the power of beauty, analyzes the importance of being beautiful and draws on previous studies. It also expresses how colors are used symbolically to represent different emotions and stigmatizations regarding the characters. The second theme, role of family, includes an analysis on the fundamental role of fathers, the presence of stepmothers, and the representation of the elderly. The last theme, one’s quest for true love, is broken down into subthemes of the protagonist’s sole desire of finding a man and the lack of time spent as a couple before declaring their love.

Each of these films was watched between two and five times to determine what themes I thought were most prevalent. This was done by taking notes as they were being viewed. Moreover, as all of these movies are musicals a fair amount of research was done analyzing song lyrics.
Critical analysis and research were done to understand Disney’s success through its media vehicles. It was necessary to create a scope of how powerful the media can be and this was completed by compiling data and evaluating statistics of children watching television and movies. It also provides information on the notoriety the media has in shaping the mind of young children. Surprisingly, the Disney Princess franchise does not rely on advertisements but rather utilizes cross-promotions and brand-extensions to put princess products into a variety of settings. Therefore, it is necessary to look at some examples of these. Lastly, it focuses on the present situation of this Princess franchise and its latest, less-traditional advertisements.

The final part of this study was completed through qualitative research in which twelve parents from New York and New Jersey, all of whom have children, mainly daughters, between the ages of three and nine, were interviewed. Due to the small sample size these results can not be generalized for the public. The interviews took anywhere from ten to twenty-five minutes and included a variety of Disney franchise related questions. Although the target age group for the Disney Princesses is between three and five, speaking to parents of children who were just over the target provided insight as to whether the brand was still intriguing. In selecting these parents, there was no prior knowledge regarding the children or parent’s views and opinions regarding these Princesses. Moreover, two women provided insight about this brand through the eyes of their sons. Interviewing one father gave some idea of how gender relates to our perspectives of these stereotypes. The list of parents and children, along with their children’s
ages can be found in Appendix 1, however their names have been changed to provide them with anonymity.
Chapter Three: Common Themes

Importance of Appearance

All the Disney princesses are stunningly beautiful and exemplify the “what is beautiful is good stereotype.” These protagonists are guided by others on their journey and ultimately find success by its conclusion. Through a series of studies it was discovered that “attractive characters displayed higher intelligence, lower aggressiveness, and greater moral virtue. Moreover, physically attractive characters were more likely to achieve positive life outcomes at the film’s end and were more likely to be romantically involved” (Bazzini & Doris 2697). This type of story structure further enforces the “what is beautiful is good” stereotype by teaching young girls that beauty is imperative to success.

We are taught from a young age that beauty is a positive quality and is beneficial to possess. Before we can formulate sentences and coherent thoughts we are socialized into liking objects and people that are attractive. A study done by Langlois and colleagues in 1987 showed babies between the ages of 2 and 3 months old, as well as 6 to 8 months old, side-by-side photographs of gorgeous and ugly women. Both groups of babies looked at the attractive women longer than those who were unattractive, even when they were shown the pictures at separate times (80). Making all the Princesses beautiful, while all the villains are obese or ugly, the Disney Company reinforces the idea that one’s physical appearance is a manifestation of one’s personality.
Despite the differences in the ethnicities, backgrounds, and plots within these Princess films, one thing remains the same throughout all of them: they are all beautiful. They are all very slender with large eyes, wide smiles, big busts and tiny waists. Moreover, the princesses are always shown fully dressed and with makeup on, regardless of what they are doing or what time of day it is. This stresses the idea that women must always appear beautiful because that is what is most important, and necessary to them finding a man who they can take care of.

Good characters exhibit juvenile traits such as big eyes and round cheeks and are drawn in curves, smooth, round, soft, bright and with European features; villains are drawn with sharp angles, oversized and often darkly.

Animation… evokes certain psychological responses and attitudes towards an object.” (Artz 118)

In several of these films “a woman’s value was determined by her appearance rather than her abilities or intellect, women are helpless and in need of protection… [and] overweight women are ugly, unpleasant and unmarried” (Towbin et al. 31). One’s beauty and their likelihood of marriage is directly linked, further enforcing negative gender ideals that women must be beautiful or they will not be happy or successful. One who is not beautiful becomes cryptic and devilish.

The animators from Disney use colors symbolically throughout these films to represent different emotions. The color white is intended to evoke a sense of purity, innocence and happiness, whereas black is used to highlight evil, villainy, and dismay. In Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, “the whiteness of Snow
White’s skin, as well as the ‘whiteness’ attributed to the seven dwarfs’ furnishings, suggest an equation of ‘white’ with goodness” (Hurley 223). Just as white is used to represent the goodness of Snow White, the color black is used to enhance the evil nature of the Queen whose innate jealousy of Snow White stems from her desire to be the fairest in the land. She is bitter and seeks revenge on Snow White as implemented through various obstacles she puts in her way. She wears black clothing, “lives in a black castle that has black rats, a dangerous black forest containing black bats, and black owls” (Hurley 225). She is killed, off screen, by black vultures whereas Snow White is surrounded by white birds and greets her prince on a white horse.

Snow White’s beauty is seen as the ultimate desire from the opening of the film. Her evil stepmother, the Queen, yearns to be more attractive than Snow White, asking the mirror everyday, “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all (Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs 1937). She is “adamant on being labeled the prettiest woman in the land and, as the film progresses and she attempts to have Snow White killed for her beauty, the wicked Queen illustrates that she will go to extreme lengths to achieve status as the ultimate beauty” (DiPirro 22). Both Snow White and the viewers are taught that good looks are of the utmost importance.

Cinderella is a beautiful young woman blessed with blonde hair and blue eyes. She has much fairer skin than her evil stepsisters and stepmother, implicitly foreshadowing their malicious nature. Both her father and fairy godmother have white hair and when her father discusses his dreams of grandchildren, a blonde-
haired boy and girl appear on the screen. In the happily ever after ending, Cinderella rides off in a white carriage, one that was transformed from a pumpkin.

Throughout Disney’s *Beauty and The Beast*, there is an overwhelming amount of white and black symbolism. “Early in the film we learn that the Beast, once a prince, has been punished for his selfishness because he offended a blonde enchantress…for this perceived offense, [he is turned] into a big brown beast” (Hurley 226). The beast’s rescue by Belle, a white character, supplements the notion that good triumphs over evil, just as white triumphs over black. Moreover, Belle is always presentable in a dress or gown with her hair tightly pinned back, emphasizing the necessity to always appear beautiful.

The creation of Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* indicated a shift from the traditional blonde or brunette protagonists to acknowledging women appear in many different ways. Ariel is a red-haired, blue-eyed mermaid beauty. Upon the film’s introduction seven mermaid princesses are displayed, all of whom are White, skinny, beautiful, and wearing minimal amounts of clothing to highlight their slender bodies. Ariel is tricked into thinking she is being helped by the large sea witch Ursula, a large and terrifying villainess who makes Ariel’s life more difficult. Ariel’s red-haired, blue-eyed, beauty is counteracted by Ursula’s repulsive appearance; Ursula is obese and purple-skinned with large black octopus-like tentacles. This makes it easier for audiences to root for Ariel and against Ursula. When Ariel encounters Prince Eric for the first time she is captivated by his “stereotypical male attributes- broad shoulders coupled with muscular arms and legs and a shock of dark hair falling intriguingly over his
forehead” (DiPirro 47). Physical appearance is the gateway to any relationship and just by looking at him Ariel has fallen in love. Her automatic desire to be with him based on his beauty reinforces the idea that with beauty comes love.

Moreover, *Aladdin* was the first Princess movie that featured a princess who was of a different ethnicity. She “could very easily be an ‘exotic’ version of a Barbie doll with her cinched waist, voluptuous bosom, long hair and flawless features” (Hurley 226). She typically wears a light blue top, which exposes her stomach and arms, and matching harem pants. The message is that it is necessary for women to expose their bodies to the world in hopes of attracting a suitor. Pocahontas, of *Pocahontas*, also demonstrates exotic qualities with her darkened skin, long black hair, slightly slanted eyes and slender appearance. This enforces the notion that regardless of what ethnicity one is, beauty is universal and doesn't change.

*Mulan* challenges the ideals that Disney has implemented thus far regarding appearance and gender. She is found in both army apparel as well as beautiful gowns. Throughout the song “Honor To Us All,” Mulan’s elders give her a makeover in hopes of making her more attractive to men. They tell her, “men want girls with good taste, calm, obedient, who work fast-paced, with good breeding and a tiny waist” (*Mulan* 1998). This makes it explicit that it is necessary to be skinny and beautiful in order to attract a man. Her transformation is elegant and although she appears more feminine, she still maintains her traditionally male characteristics such as strength, courage and steadfastness.
The most modern of the princesses—Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* and Rapunzel from *Tangled* demonstrate that although they have dreams of their own, it is necessary to be beautiful in order to live a life of happiness. The first African American princess, Tiana, from *Princess and The Frog* demonstrates that even though Disney is trying to establish diversity, it is still necessary to be skinny with large eyes and a bright smile. Moreover, Rapunzel epitomizes stereotypical femininity with her long, golden brown hair, unique freckles, large green eyes and wide smile. She is always wearing purple and pink, colors traditionally associated with femaleness. Her gift, being able to heal and restore youth for hundreds of years, is what makes her so appealing to Mother Gothel in the first place. Gothel is terrified of appearing old and haggard and therefore goes down a path of crime and deception in order to attain what is ultimately the most important thing for a woman—beauty.

The protagonists of these films fulfill unrealistic expectations of beauty, which are then perpetuated as the norm to mainstream society. Giving young girls the idea that they must be beautiful or they will not succeed is incredibly harmful. Within many Disney movies, characters are encouraged to follow their dreams. However, is it possible to pursue a dream when bogged down by negative stereotypes and unrealistic expectations?

**Role of Family**

Family is an incredibly important aspect of one’s life and helps shape one’s beliefs, opinions, ideas and perspectives. It is important to have a family
that is supportive and strives to see each member happy. In these films, families are often shown using hostility and manipulating one another. In fact, every Disney Princess comes from a broken family; most often, they are deprived of their biological mothers. Only 50% of the princesses have fathers present and only 30% have mothers present, demonstrating a lack of parental involvement and control. The role of stepmothers within these films evokes pain and suffering. In *Cinderella*, Cinderella is manipulated by her evil stepmother who essentially enslaves her, making her do all the household chores, and is not allowed to talk back. At one point in the film, Cinderella is ordered to redo the tasks she has just completed so that she is occupied. In *Tangled*, Rapunzel is taken from her biological parents shortly after her birth and is raised by a wicked “false” mother who pretends to be her real mother. These stepmothers possess an extreme amount of control and are often jealous of the beauty and status their daughters are capable of. Additionally, with the exception of Ariel, all the characters are only children, without siblings, keeping them isolated from being with others of the same age.

Fathers play a fundamental role in the upbringing of their Princess daughters, especially in *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas*. Both Belle and Pocahontas rebel by disobeying their father’s wishes; however, they both rebel for their fathers proving their motives to be selfless. Throughout the film Belle and her father Maurice have a positive relationship in which they enjoy each other’s company. Belle disobeys Maurice’s wishes for her to leave the Beast’s castle when he is imprisoned by offering herself to the Beast
in exchange for her father’s freedom. “Her rebellion—her disobedience—is to sacrifice herself for him” (Wynns & Rosenfeld 97). Similarly, Pocahontas’s defiance is also unselfishly motivated. After awaking from a dream Pocahontas runs to her father, Chief Powhatan, to tell him that something exciting is going to happen to her. Her father then tells her that one of the tribesmen, Kokoum, has asked for her hand in marriage. However, she feels her dream coming true when she meets and falls in love with John Smith, even though her father disproves of him because he is White and not of tribal descent. She puts her life on the line when Chief Powhatan tries to kill John Smith. She is willing to sacrifice her life in order to provide peace among her family and community members in addition for her own happiness and love.

Both Pocahontas and Belle are offered the ability to make decisions on their own, without their fathers’ guidance. Maurice believes that the Beast is not ill natured when Belle tells him so. Moreover, Chief Powhatan tells Pocahontas “‘You must choose your own path’ (Pocahontas 1995) indicating he trusts and supports whatever decision she makes” (Wynns & Rosenfeld 99). This paternal support enables the Princesses to test themselves and confide in their abilities as opposed to simply relying on others to make decisions for them.

In Aladdin and The Little Mermaid, the protagonists have an inauthentic relationship with their fathers. Jasmine and Ariel “displays behaviors consistent with daughters in families that encounter difficulty negotiating adolescence, especially in the area of rebellion” (Wynns & Rosenfeld 99). Jasmine and her father, the Sultan, get into arguments because of Jasmine’s desire to find true
love. She is supposed to be married by her next birthday, which is in a few days, but does not approve of any suitors. The Sultan feels compelled to follow the law and therefore gets into arguments with Jasmine for her unconventionality. She runs away and meets Aladdin, ultimately returning to her father’s palace to help save his life. In *The Little Mermaid*, the large, muscular and dominating, Triton speaks down to Ariel, condemning her liking for the human world more than the merworld. He bans her from going to the surface of the ocean ever again in hopes that he will, once again, be able to tame her. He has such little confidence in her he hires the lobster and composer, Sebastian to watch over her and make sure she stays out of trouble. When she finds Prince Eric and falls in love, Triton loses all faith in his daughter, and she turns to Ursula, Triton’s archenemy, for help. Ariel then signs Ursula’s contract stating that she will become human, ultimately leaving her father’s ocean and starting a life of her own.

Ariel and Jasmine are both denied freedom by their fathers who seek to control their lives. Their rebellion is not only fueled by their own desires but also the longing to spite their fathers who don’t understand their wants and wishes. These faulty relationships lead the protagonists to use other characters in order to attain their dreams.

Other prototypical characters are the older positive women in these films. The elderly women often possess wisdom, courage and power and are often depicted as fairy godmothers. This is evident through the fairy godmothers that bring both Cinderella and Aurora peace of mind and a bit of help during their struggles. This is also true for Mama Odie from *Princess and the Frog* as she
instills wisdom into Tiana and guides her on her magical journey. Further, they provide these princesses with reassurance that they are strong, beautiful women who will succeed and overcome any obstacles they face.

However, not all older characters represent knowledge and understanding. Just as people associate old age with being wise, many individuals also correlate this with being lonely, depressed and senile. Nearly half of the older characters portrayed in Disney Princess movies, such as Maurice from *Beauty and the Beast*, are “portrayed in a less than positive light, and as forgetful, angry, or crotchety. Children bombarded with these and other negative stereotypes may understandably develop unfavorable impressions of seniors…” (Lilienfeld et al. 18). This anti-aged stigma is also true within *Tangled* as the creatively named, Old Man, is shown being belligerently drunk and silly. He provides comic relief to scary plot sequences in which Rapunzel is venturing for her life. His laughable character presents a mockery of those who are older, highlighting one of the primary themes of this story, Mother Gothel’s overwhelming fear of getting old. Several of the older characters however, portray a sense of encouragement and allow the characters glimmers of light from their struggles.
Quest for True Love

In order to be happy, Disney films present a world in which a woman must fall deeply in love and find her soul mate, one she can provide for and be guided by for the rest of her life. Within these films, all of the protagonists seek to find happiness through their male counterpart. These romanticized films don’t teach children that falling in love is a part of life and a step in starting a family. Rather, they encourage women that their sole desire should be to find a man they can succumb to, aside from their fathers.

Disney portrays romance-focused happy endings as the only possible conclusions for the heroines’ tales. Even in films where heroines have personal goals throughout the films (such as Belle’s desire take her father’s place as a prisoner in the Beast’s castle or Ariel’s curiosity about life on land), they are ultimately rewarded the only way a Disney princess truly can be—with romantic love (DiPirro 20).

The greatest pleasure a woman can have is finding a man to live her life with, regardless of any other desires she may have.

The majority of the Princesses sing about their desire to find true love and be swept off their feet. The introductory song in Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, “I’m Wishing,” is about her yearning to find true love. She croons, “I’m wishing for the one I love to find me today” (Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs 1937). This puts her in a passive position as she is hopelessly waiting for a man to come and find her, rather than being proactive in her pursuit. However, this
film was released in 1937, a drastically different time period in which women were not seen as aggressive or independent. Moreover, Snow White desires romance so that she could be saved from her current life in which she is under the rule of her immoral stepmother. Here, her desire can be seen as a way of saying love can enable people to overcome any obstacle thrown in their way.

Similar to Snow White, Cinderella wants nothing more than to be saved from the rule of her evil stepmother. Moreover, she is virtually helpless in trying to achieve her dreams and assumes a submissive role and needs others to take care of her. The song “So This is Love” encapsulates the desire of falling in love with lyrics like, “so this is love, so this is what makes life divine” (Cinderella 1950).

Many of the Princesses only see the man they fall in love with briefly before being swept off their feet, perpetuating the notion that a woman’s appearance is her most defining characteristic. True love is often confused for initial lust in several of these films, encouraging the idea that “physical appearance is the most important thing when entering an intimate relationship.” Moreover, this “tends to present the image that marriage is the ideal goal in life for all people” (Towbin et al. 368). This is true of Snow White as she only meets the Prince once before marrying him. Further, Prince Charming instantly falls in love with Cinderella, because she appears to be the most beautiful at the ball. When the spell her fairy godmother cast on her ends at the stroke of midnight, Cinderella is unaware that she is dancing with Prince Charming. They do not recognize each other and evidently know very little of one another despite being used as the picture perfect representation of true love. Socializing young girls to
think that love is instantaneous and can rescue them from any hardships they are facing just sets them up to face disappointment when they come to terms with reality.

Aurora of *Sleeping Beauty* spends the majority of the time she is awake fantasizing about finding a love so genuine and so rare it will complete her. She shares this passion with the animals within the forest, both through dialogue and in the song “Once Upon a Dream.” Upon meeting Prince Phillip she nervously runs away. Just as all male characters within the Disney Princess films do, Prince Phillip persists in trying to learn about his female counterpart. When finding out that she will never be able to be with Phillip because of her arranged marriage she becomes upset and distraught. Her overly upset persona is incredibly strange, since she has just met this man and barely knows anything about him. However, just as in all Disney Princess movies a happy ending is necessary and when Prince Phillip awakens Aurora with his kiss their true love is symbolized.

In *The Little Mermaid*, Ariel becomes deeply enthralled in Prince Eric after her first glance at him. Eric announces that he hasn’t found his love yet but “When I find her, I’ll know. It’ll hit me-- bam-- like lightning!” (*The Little Mermaid* 1989). He claims that when he finds the woman of his dreams he will just know, because, after all true love is instantaneous. Meeting Eric changes Ariel’s desires from wanting to understand and live amongst humans, as indicated through the song “Part of Your World,” to wanting to be a human so that she can live happily ever after with Prince Eric. She loses her own desires and motives as she is so smug and caught up in her feelings. Furthermore, although Ariel loses
her ability to speak, in an effort to live out her human desires, she is still able to win over Eric proving that affection is derived from physical appearance. At a mere sixteen years of age Ariel decides that Eric is the one she wants to be with her for the rest of her life and they choose to marry. With her father’s approval they sail away looking happy and blissful, as their connection has unified them.

Just as Ariel asserts her independence by following her dreams despite what others may say about her, Belle dares to make her own decisions in hopes of living in a world in which she feels more accepted and liberated. Although Belle is a smart young woman, her dreams “of a more interesting, exciting life are fulfilled through marriage alone” (Douglas 297). Love is pertinent in many aspects of Beauty and the Beast. It is not just Belle’s desire to find true love that causes this film to be so romantic, but the Beast is told that he can return to being a Prince if he can “learn to love another and earn her love in return” (Beauty and the Beast 1991). He shows Belle his kindness by saving her from being attacked by a pack of wild wolves, ultimately fulfilling the stereotypical role of having to save a female who is incapable of helping herself. However, this courageous rescue allows Belle and the Beast to bond and learn about each other as they now look at each other with passion and gratitude. He gives her the gift of utilizing his library, filled with books, to help her escape from her detained mental state. Eventually when Belle kisses the Beast he is transformed again into his human state and they live happily ever after.

Aladdin differs from most of the other Disney Princess movies in that, due to Jasmine’s religion, she is summoned to an arranged marriage. However,
Jasmine escapes from her castle and stumbled upon Aladdin who is instantly mesmerized by Jasmine’s beauty. They begin to learn about each other and discover they are falling for one another as they sing “A Whole New World,” while riding on Aladdin’s magic carpet. Aladdin proves his love for Jasmine by using his street-smart ways to save her and her father from the villain, Jafar. By rescuing them, Aladdin proves to Jasmine’s father, The Sultan, that he is worthy of his daughter, ultimately allowing The Sultan to change the rules stating a Princess can only marry a prince. Despite class differences and religious customs, Aladdin shows that true love can prevail and help overcome all obstacles.

Mulan and Pocahontas were the first of the Disney Princesses to defy the stereotypical idea that they must be submissive within society and hope for a man to save them. Rather, they are strong, brave, independent women who focus on the good of a community as opposed to a selfish desire to find love. Upon Pocahontas’s first encounter with John Smith they catch each other’s gazes for a long time. Although initially she flees from him, Smith convinces her to get out of her boat and come with him by offering his hand. This initial physical contact is also the start of their emotional journey as he shows that he will help guide her, despite not speaking the same language. Their love grows from sharing their passions with each other; Pocahontas spends quite some time teaching John about her tribe and what they believe in. Yet despite this, John Smith is the one shown actively pursuing her. Typically in these films, the woman is relentlessly pursuing her suitor. However, the usual love story ensues as Pocahontas’s father wants her to marry a man named Kocoum; Kocoum and John then must duke it out to see
which is most worthy of her love. When John kills one of the tribesmen and is about to be killed by Pocahontas’s father, Pocahontas declares her love for him. She acts as his savior and although they part ways, he ventures back to Europe and she stays with her tribe and family, their actions towards one another shows that true love never dies.

Mulan is a self-empowered young woman who puts the needs of her community before her own by disguising herself as a male soldier to fight for her father in the army. She meets her love interest, Captain Shang, when he is chosen to be the leader of her army. She stares at him for an exaggeratedly long time, indicating her arousal and interest. After he teaches her military skills, she ends up having to save the entire army by triggering an avalanche. As if that wasn’t enough of a feat, Mulan proves her strength by saving her entire country from the Hun army that sneaks into the imperial palace. She is a positive representation of a female character but, like the rest of them, she falls hopelessly in love and it is clear what her life will become.

Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog*, talks about finding love in the beginning of the film, in which she is depicted as child. Her White friend, Charlotte, fantasizes about falling in love with a prince and teases Tiana about it. Love is a crucial element in *The Princess and the Frog*. Tiana and her mother have a conversation about her father who dies in the beginning of the film. Her mother says, “Your Daddy may not have gotten the place you always wanted but he had something better. He had love. And that's all I want for you, sweetheart. To meet your prince charming and dance off into your happily ever after”
In the most recent Disney Princess film, Rapunzel falls victim to her unrelenting sense of curiosity and adventure. When Flynn Rider stumbles into her tower she becomes very alarmed, as she does not know how to deal with other people since she is typically secluded. Rapunzel beats him and knocks him out with a frying pan. When he awakes she convinces him to help her leave the castle and explore the world. At the romantic climax of the film, she achieves her goal of seeing the floating lanterns, the young lovers sing, “I See The Light.” They sing to each other, “And it’s warm and real and bright/ and the world has somehow shifted/ all at once, everything is different/ now that I see you” (*Tangled* 2010). Their love for one another guides them and, quite literally, allows
Rapunzel to see the light. The lights symbolize her freedom but also the opportunity she has in love, as she is only able to see them because of Flynn.

What Disney seems to be saying is that true love is the ultimate goal, the determinant for these characters to ultimately attain happiness. These women have one path: to transition from the rule of their father to that of their lover. So eager to find love, they often get overwhelmed by attraction and commit without testing their feelings or the suitability of their potential mate. Femininity becomes merely a counterpart to being desired and wanted. This underlines the notion that, for a woman, physical appearance is essential in finding love, and consequently, happiness. There is no process to falling in love: the characters meet their lovers briefly, demonstrating that one’s exterior appearance is all that matters.
Chapter Four: Influence of Media & Advertising

According to statisticians at Cybercollege.com, in the United States of America, 98.5% of households have at least one television, while 90% have two or more. Of these houses 87% have at least one DVD or DVR player. Gradually, there has been an increase in recognition of the detrimental consequences of television, such as leading to lack of physical activity, obesity and an exposure to violence. However, many children are still tuning in; 81% of children between the ages of two and seven watch television alone and unsupervised. An astounding 54% of children between the ages of four and six-years-old claimed they preferred watching television when giving the choice between that or spending time with their fathers. Moreover, televisions are omnipresent, as 70% of day care centers use one on an average day (Cybercollege.com). The prevalence of televisions within society makes the messaging of the programming that much more powerful.

The media are pervasive outlets that stream hundreds of advertisements daily. With the power of modern technology, such as DVR, people are able to save their favorite programs and watch, and re-watch, them as much as they would like. Disney films were originally shown in movie theaters but are now available on demand through the television and DVDs.

As the world continues to become more digitalized and technologically advanced, children may be coming to terms with their emotions, fears, and desires through various screens. “Small children are likely to…” feel some of their earliest
familial attachments as they view a favorite media character, and even experience the beginnings of emotional empathy as they follow the adventures of a well-liked media protagonist” (Wilson 88). Children understand societal norms and standards and create their frame of reference by seeing pop culture through technological resources. Furthermore, “past research additionally indicates that watching televised gender portrayals has an effect on individuals’ real-world gender-based attitudes, beliefs and behaviors” (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro 131). Kids grow up and think the ideologies present in these films are proper indications of how they need to act in order to be a successful member of society. Girls aim to be just like their favorite princesses and find their “Prince Charming” while boys may be encouraged to be hyper-masculine and dominant.

Gender stereotypes are displayed throughout television programming. According to a thirty-year study of television, done by Witt (2000), women were underrepresented as compared to men; “approximately two-thirds of characters on television are male, a percentage that has stayed consistent since the 1950s.” Therefore it is imperative that the women who are shown to be positive role models. Additionally, women are portrayed as younger than men, attractive and thin whereas men are shown as “rational, ambitious, smart, competitive, powerful, stable and tolerant” (Towbin et al. 22). However, it is interesting to note that according to a study done by Thompson and Zerbinos (1995) that analyzed 175 episodes of 41 cartoons on American television, “cartoons produced after 1980 showed less stereotypical gender behavior than those produced before 1980”
Regardless of the progress that has been made over time, there are still negative ideologies.

Children often get their ideas regarding gender and relationships from media sources. According to theorist William Corsaro, there are three primary sources of “childhood symbolic culture,” “the various representations or expressive symbols of children’s beliefs, concerns and values” (Tonn 4). These three sources are children’s media, literature and mythical figures. Children use their imaginations and surroundings to come to terms with society and better understand the way in which our world operates. The messages transmitted from the Disney Princess movies are thought to be harmful to the youth as they encourage the young to believe in an unrealistic world, one in which animals and imaginary creatures help people achieve their goals, the girl always gets the guy, and happily ever after really exists. Interestingly, the messaging of the movies is not always transparent to children. In my talks with parents, as detailed later in this study, some young children are too frightened to watch the movies and therefore simply become enthralled with maintaining a princess persona.

The Disney Princess franchise advertisements try to evoke a sense of identification between young girls and the characters on the screen they wish to emulate. In 2007 the franchise included “over 25,000 products and it contributed greatly to the rise of Disney marketing sales from $300 million in 2001 to $4 billion by 2008” (Collier-Meek et al. 555). These numbers have only grown since that time as more products and varieties of these products have been created. These products include “animated films, DVDs, toys, fast-food meals, music
CDs, books, interactive webpages, video games, costumes, clothing, bed linens, school supplies, makeup kits, and even Cinderella cleaning supplies” (Wohlwend 57). Although there are several branded categories of products, the three that seem to have contributed the most to the Disney Princess’s growth are dolls, role play and books. This proves that children are not fully engaging with the actual films but rather the ideas and personalities that are represented. For every individual need or want, Disney has created a Princess-branded item, allowing children to constantly surround themselves with images of these princesses. “The pervasive availability of consumer products associated with the Disney Princess films blurs the line between play and reality, allowing children to live in-character” (Wohlwend 58). Little girls can become their favorite princess by wearing costumes, jewelry and having decorations similar to the ones found in the films.

Despite the thousands of Disney products available on the market, Mulan and Pocahontas are represented the least, as supported by Figure 5a, 5b, and 5c found in Appendix 2. This illustrates “to young girls that women such as the two (the only non-White princesses who are not sexualized the way Jasmine is) do not always fit into the pink-and-purple Disney princess lifestyle” (DiPirro 75). This portrays that strong, steadfast women are not beautiful enough to be remembered. “Mulan and Pocahontas, arguably the most resourceful of the bunch, are rarely depicted on Princess merchandise…their rustic garb has less bling potential than that of old-school heroines like Sleeping Beauty” (Orenstein, “What’s Wrong With Cinderella”) Their independence deters them from the feminine label and therefore, Disney believes they would not sell as well or as often.
There are a plethora of Disney commercials; often Disney joins with a toy conglomerate, such as Fisher Price or Mattel, to create a product that can be sold mainstream. Within the majority of these advertisements young, white girls are shown playing with dolls and aspiring to be just like their favorite princess. More recently, these advertisements feature children of other ethnicities as the company continues to diversify itself. The narrator is always a woman encouraging other women to follow their dreams and other cliché notions that Disney often tries to enforce into their fantastical world of magic.

Disney also has a history of cross-promoting, and has a long association with the world’s largest toy distributor, McDonalds. Several Disney characters have been replicated into toys and figurines given to young children if they order a Happy Meal. The toys are always gender specific, as the Princesses will be given to girl consumers and more masculine figurines will be offered to boys. McDonald’s and Disney ended their cross-promotional contract in 2006, as a result of Disney wanting “to distance itself from fast food and its links to the epidemic of childhood obesity” (Abramowitz 2006). But the two corporations rejoined forces in 2008 for the Princess and Pirate themed Happy Meals in honor of “The Year of a Million Dreams” celebration at the Disney amusement parks. Each meal included a toy, Princess for girls or Pirate for boys, which came with a collector card that could be redeemed for prizes such as a free beverage at McDonald’s or a vacation to Walt Disney World for a family of four. The Princess Happy Meal collection offered a selection of accessories iconic for the eight princesses included in this collaboration.
The eight ‘Become a Princess’ role play accessories include Ariel’s magical wand, Sleeping Beauty’s crown, Belle’s perfume necklace or a bracelet, Cinderella’s toy slipper accessories or a ring and gloves, Jasmine’s toy headband and Snow White’s magical mirror, allowing every girl to transform herself into a Disney Princess (mcdepk.com).

This collaboration reminded children, and their parents, of the power the Disney Princesses have. Additionally, it allowed for kids who might not be able to afford the princess collectibles and merchandise to feel included in the Princess community by having some toys to play with. This extends the brand as Disney can now reach a new, low-income market.

When ending the partnership with McDonald’s, Disney ensured that they went to larger measures to discourage obesity and poor nutrition. As a result, the Disney Princesses have found their way into many nutritional and healthy activities and products. As a sign of this trend encouraging health and activity, a branch of the Disney Corporation called, “runDisney” created the Disney Princess Half Marathon weekend in 2008. All participants receive a t-shirt that is branded with the princesses along with other goodies, and are greeted by the Princesses themselves as they run the course of the race. This weekend is designed to “focus on the attributes every princess possesses: commitment, courage, determination, fantasy, perseverance, and strength” (runDisney.com). Participants often dress up and complete the half marathon dressed as their favorite Disney Princesses, seen in Figure 4 of Appendix 2. In addition to the half marathon there is the “Royal Family 5k” which parents can do with their children, special kids races, banquets
and most interestingly, the “Fit For a Princess Expo.” This event spans over two-days and features celebrity runners and seminars on how to live nutritiously and best complete the Princess Half Marathon Course. Moreover, it gives participants a lot of merchandise including sunglasses, apparel, footwear and foods. Events like this appeal to adults more than children, proving just how versatile the Disney Princess brand has become.

Throughout this run several Disney characters including the princesses are placed in various checkpoints to cheer on runners and encourage them to keep going. “The Disney Princesses are the inspiration for the events and will focus on the attributes every princess possesses: commitment, courage, determination, perseverance and strength” (runDisney.com). Moreover, there are events with the characters before and after the race as well as for the participants’ children.

Running a marathon requires a tedious training process in which one must have serious dedication and commitment. Since Disney is trying to change the reputation of the Princess franchise it makes sense that they would support events that require positive character traits as opposed to passive, negative ones.

In addition to being sold as toys through fast food retailers and other famous corporations, the Disney Princesses have found their way to other food products, races, vacations and many more. Nabisco released Disney Princess food products along with Pillsbury and Betty Crocker. According to “Disney Princess Power,” in 2009, Disney created a Princess shop at 450 “Toys ‘R’ Us” locations nationwide. The merchandise that was included ranged from toys to electronics to stationary and home products. In the same year, famous wedding designer Kirstie
Kellie created a line of plus-size bridal gowns for the Disney’s Fairy Tale Weddings collection (40). Making dresses for larger women reaches yet another market that may feel excluded by the images perpetuated by Disney.

Recently Disney has started taking into account the negative reputation it is gaining due to the stereotypes and ideologies it perpetuates. On September 27, 2012 Disney released a series of empowering promotional videos on the Disney YouTube Channel entitled “I Am A Princess,” that showed children of all different ages, backgrounds, and ethnicities. These commercials are also aired on the Disney Channel. Girls are seen in a variety of settings such as with their friends at a play date, running through fields and playing with dogs, surfing, racecar driving, and many others. As the clips of each of these “princesses” are being shown the narrator states, “I am a princess, I think standing up for myself is important, I think standing up for others is more important but standing with others is most important.” In addition to discussing being strong-willed, independent and a beneficial member of a community, the narrator continues to inspire viewers by exclaiming; “I believe compassion makes me strong, kindness is power, and family is the tightest bond of all” (YouTube.com). The narrator continues, “I’ve been told I’m beautiful but I know I’m strong,” symbolizing the strength and power women possess. Disney highlights important qualities that should be found in young women rather than encouraging them to relentlessly pursue a man. There are images of the Disney Princesses throughout the commercial. The clip of Rapunzel reinforces the necessity of staying true to yourself and keeping your word as she tells the audience that “when [she]
promises something, [she] never ever breaks that promise” (YouTube.com). The videos end with a little girl saying, “I am a princess, long may I reign” (YouTube.com). These commercials are inspiring and encouraging, a healthier change from the traditional stereotypes of passivity Disney has given its princesses in the past. “In reframing their princesses as strong and generous and brave, Disney is clearly working to answer its critics who have been railing against the messages in princess movies for years” (Kempner, “The Disney Paradox”). Moreover, according to a Huffington Post article, “it’s an attempt to take back the term that’s become associated with frilly pink dresses and fawning over princes, by the company that made it so” (“Disney Princesses: Disney Encourages Today’s Princesses to be Brave and Strong”). It is clear that Disney is finally retaliating against the scrutiny they have been under because of the stereotypes in their films.

Most recently Disney has been promoting its cable television channel “Disney Junior,” to preschool children. This channel features Sofia the First, the newest and only child princess, and has stolen viewership from Nick Jr., causing their ratings to plummet more than 50 percent according to Nielsen data (Barnes & Chozick). Just as Disney encourages children to engage with the princesses on a branded level, “merchandise relayed to Disney Junior shows is already catching fire among retailers. Disney said it expected sales to surpass $1.5 billion in its current fiscal year, a 50 percent increase from last year” (Barnes & Chozick). This channel is supposed to be educational and instill good values and morals in these young children. Surprisingly, there has been little uproar about the prevalence of
Princess Sofia who is seen “wearing a purple gown and tiara [and] attends a prep school run by the three fairies from ‘Sleeping Beauty’ (Barnes & Chozick). An image of her is provided in Appendix 2, Figure 2. According to Barnes and Chozick, mothers aren’t interested in programs promoting academic goals as much as they are with exposing their children to emotion-based storytelling that teaches good behavior and values. Disney Jr. is proof that this corporation is extending itself and trying to reach viewers at the earliest age possible.
Chapter Five: How Parents See the Disney Princesses; Is This Real or Make Believe?

Despite the negative stigmatizations Disney produces regarding women, their advertising and brand image have contributed to their tremendous success. In order to get an idea of how moms feel about the brand, I interviewed twelve parents from New York or New Jersey, all of whom have children, mainly daughters, between the ages of three and nine. It is important to note that all respondents were of White or Hispanic decent, therefore biasing the results. The interviews took anywhere from ten to twenty-five minutes in which the participants were asked a variety of Disney franchise related questions. Although the target age group for the Disney Princesses is between three and five, I spoke to parents of children just over the target to see whether the brand still intrigued them. I had no knowledge of the children or parent’s views and opinions regarding the Disney Princesses; although, interestingly almost all choose to engage with this brand. Additionally, two of the women I spoke to gave me insight about the Princess brand through the eyes of their sons. Moreover, I interviewed one father to get a better idea of whether gender relates to our perspective of these stereotypes and if his impressions were similar to those of the women. Table 1, which can be found in the Appendix 1, lists all the participants’ names and their children’s ages, whose names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

While conducting these studies certain topics continued to come up. Parents find it heartwarming that the Disney Corporation creates an outlet for
children to engage in imaginative play and act childish. They fear that the world forces children to grow up too quickly yet the Disney Princesses help these children engage in imaginative play. It is an opportunity for these kids to disengage from being technologically involved and actually enjoy the naivety and simplicity of being children. The most fascinating discovery was that several of these children aren’t watching the films or learning about the characters, they are simply trying to embody them physically. Their engagement with the Disney Princess franchise is mainly materialistic, as evident by their keen obsession with Disney merchandise.

One mother, Marion, of a 5½ year old son and a 1½ year old daughter exclaimed, “If what the parents are getting from these movies and stories, and even American fairytales and rhymes, they’re a little bit condescending for women. I think if you teach them the lessons out of it there is something about the magic behind being a princess, living in a castle, and having Prince Charming rescue you. I think it is totally harmless if parents don’t get worked up to believe in it.” Allowing one’s children to use imaginative play and live in a fantasy world is a positive experience. Marion then went on to state, “I’m a big believer in imaginative play, something kids don’t do enough of these days, and if it helps them bring on some strong imagination then I’m all for it.” The digital revolution we live in has children growing up very quickly, depriving them of their naivety from a young age. They are always playing on iPads or watching television and being stimulated by something other than their imagination. Mothers feel it is important that their children remain children and embark on journeys using only
their imagination. If dressing up and acting like a princess allows them to do this then it is not a negative but rather a positive experience.

Dani, the mother of nine-year-old Isabelle and three-year-old Matt expressed her gratitude for providing children with unrealistic experiences. “I think it’s okay for a four-year-old to be happy and think of a fairytale. There are so many disgusting things going on in the world that I don’t want a four-year-old to have any sort of that reality check.” A USA Today article released in 2004 supported this notion; “In all the books and movies, the princess ends up the winner—there’s always a happy ending. It doesn’t last. But it’s nice to let kids feel that way” (Strauss, “Princesses Rule the Hearts of Little Girls”). These movies provide children with the ability to use their imagination and escape from the cruel realities of the modern world.

Most of the parents in this study further claimed that they were familiar with the Disney Princess franchise because of their children. When they were young, they were not as mesmerized by the Disney characters and their glamorized lifestyles as children are today; the increase in popularity is doubtlessly due to Disney’s prevalence in the media and intensive promotion of merchandise. This could also be a result of the Princess franchise itself not existing during their childhoods; the Disney films were merely movies they would see when they were released. Melissa, a mother of three children: Julie, 9, Allison, 5, and Jon, 3, said that her childhood was “less princess focused… they were just Disney characters and I don’t think we considered any of them to be a princess. I think we just watched all of them and liked them equally.” The enormity of the
media has created a gateway for children to become interested in the characters and live their lives in this fantasy world. They didn't see anything negative in the Disney Princesses or any part of this enormous empire. A fairytale does not need to instill realistic values into its audience simply because it is a fantastical story and parents agree that it is not the job of Disney to educate and inform their children about life’s realities and how they should act. Jamie, the mother of a four-year-old girl, Madison, was not particularly disturbed by the Disney Princesses or any part of the Disney brand in general.

Parents continuously emphasized their desire for their children to immerse themselves in the princess brand and enter a fantastical land of happiness and innocence provides children with enjoyable experiences. Many acknowledged that, although the target demographic is girls between the ages of three and five, their children were watching and interacting with these princesses before they reached the age of three. Paul told me his daughter Amanda’s first objet was a Snow White blanket. “She didn’t get a teddy bear, it was a blanket and attached to it was a Snow White head.” From the time these children can even open their eyes they are being exposed to this brand. In fact, it becomes such a part of whom they are and whom they want to be that they become obsessed with owning everything related to the Disney Princesses.

Many of the parents enlightened me that although their children idolized the princesses and adored the brand, they hadn’t seen the majority of the movies because of the scary nature of some of the characters. The Disney Princess brand is having extreme success not because of the journeys of these characters, but
rather because they embody physical beauty. Danielle told me that her daughter “didn’t see any of the movies because there is always a witch or evil being…she only knew who they were from talking about the princesses or buying little dolls or dressing up…she’s not interested in their story at all.” The scary nature of these characters causes really young children to shy away from the actual films and just engross themselves in their characters. Melissa elaborated, “the [movies] really are scary, but they like the idea of it. They like the dress and all the stuff that goes along with it, the movies just terrify them.” Due to the children not watching the films but rather just enjoying their appearance and the idea of being a princess, the parents were not concerned about the negative stereotypes mentioned. However, although there are negative ideologies within these films, they also teach children to never stop believing and to fight for their dreams. Having kids who are simply engaging with the franchise on a purely commercial level demonstrates the enormity of the Disney Princesses as a brand. They are not identifying with the characters’ stories or lives; rather, their engagement and dedication to the princesses are mainly a desire to emulate physical beauty by owning the products. Interestingly, parents were not concerned that their children are simply connecting with the Disney Princesses on a materialistic level. Melissa expressed that she thought the branded items were absolutely brilliant, “the majority of them would not care otherwise. I would get so excited when they would come out on movies but they don’t watch them more than once because they just don’t care.” The generation gap is prevalent here, as the enormity of the media has altered the
way these children think and what they desire. They are so used to being automatically stimulated by using their parents’ iPads or computers that they don’t want to watch two hours of film, they want to be their favorite princess whenever they want.

It is evident that although children are not familiar with the actual storylines of these films, they are voracious consumers of Disney Princess merchandise. With several hundred thousand branded items, it is no surprise that children are aware of them and actively pursuing them. Despite children being the target for this Disney brand, the parents are ultimately the ones who buy into it. Interestingly even though Marion’s daughter Grace is only 1½ and not yet engaged in the Disney Princess brand she acknowledged that her daughter is going to want the toys and memorabilia because “kids are into collectibles.” She continued, “I think Disney does a really good job at marketing it even though they don’t have a particular store,” for just these princesses.

Everyone interviewed owned some sort of Disney paraphernalia, including clothes, lunchboxes, dolls, costumes, makeup sets, backpacks, cups, and the movies. Some of them simply had hand-me-downs from relatives or friends while others made frequent trips to various stores to continue buying some of these 250,000 products. Janet, the mother of three-year-old Bari, exclaimed, “she has lunchboxes, every single princesses’ dress up outfits twice, one in the small size and now in the bigger version, every character set of the small figures, three different lunchboxes, one backpack and tons of clothing.” The majority of the merchandise these children owned related to dressing up, whether they were
costumes, high heels, or makeup kits. Kids do not care as much about the plot lines or story component of these princesses, rather they just want to emulate them physically. Although it is harmless play, the idea that these children seek to live in a fantasy world in which they are catered to, is harmful.

Children find the Disney Princess products to reflect their ideal lifestyles. The Disney Corporation has taken branding to a new level in terms of this Princess franchise. Every experience one could have in life is now altered to involve the princesses. Walking down the isles in the supermarket children are automatically driven towards any product that has the princesses’ faces on it. Danielle, mother of three-year-old Annie, shared a story in which she went to buy her daughter a pair of Disney princess shoes at the store Stride Rite. She told me that they always put a princess sticker on the prospective princess who is trying on the shoes. “They bring them out [the shoes] on a pillow and when they purchase the shoes they get a certificate congratulating them on finding the perfect fit and wishing them to live happily ever after.” (An image of this certificate is shown in Figure 3 of Appendix 2). It is not only just about finding the perfect man to spend your life with, but now everything is warped to be seen through this looking glass for perfection and happiness. Further, this raises unrealistic expectations that every time a girl goes to try on a pair of shoes she will be treated like a princess. It may be damaging in the long run to mold girls into believing it is normative to act and be treated like a princess.

Stride Rite ran their “When the Shoe Fits” promotion from September 27-October 31, 2012. The entire campaign was dedicated to “bringing this fit-for-a-
princess experience to life in our stores, our goal is to make girls feel special while emphasizing the importance of the ‘rite fit’ for children and adding a little magic to our expert measuring and fitting process” (“When the Shoe Fits” Event Provides Little Princesses with Expert Fitting and New Cinderella Shoes”). The promotion extended to social media, as moms were encouraged to visit Stride Rite’s Facebook page to enter for a chance to win the “Perfect Fit Princess Sweepstakes.” The grand prizewinner was offered a special screening for “her and 50 of her ‘royal court’ for one of the following princess themed pictures: *Cinderella, Princess and the Frog, Tangled, Pocahontas,* or *The Princess Diaries* in addition to limo transportation and refreshments. Significantly, Stride Rite chose to include movies that represented diversity such as *The Princess and the Frog and Pocahontas.* The only film that represents the more traditional views of the Disney Corporation is *Cinderella,* allowing children of all ethnicities and background to feel as though they are eligible for the royal treatment. However, *The Princess Diaries* is not a Disney Princess movie or animated film, creating a sense of inconsistency within the promotion. This film, released in 2001, stars Anne Hathaway and Julie Answers and is a tale about how to act like a princess. Training these children to believe that everything that comes their way should be fit for a princess is harmful. It is unnecessary to create these branded experiences, however, it is promotions like these that encourage children to get swept off their feet when they see a Disney Princess product.

As discussed previously, Disney broke its ties with McDonalds in an effort to prevent childhood obesity, and is now trying to encourage people to pursue
healthier lifestyles. Bethany, the mother of Jaclyn (5), is participating in the “runDisney” marathon, referenced earlier. She emphasized the importance of Disney is “trying to get people of all ages going out and getting physical,” especially because we live “in a society where people are spending more time sitting around watching TV and there’s an obesity problem with children.” Emphasizing activity as opposed to passivity indicates that Disney is changing the roles that women should assume.

Surrounded by their children who seem to be obsessed with these Disney characters, it was surprising to learn that most parents did not know how many official princesses belonged to this franchise. Of the twelve parents interviewed, eight of them did not know there were ten princesses but guessed anywhere from seven to twelve. Of the three parents who did know the exact number of princesses, two of them sounded apprehensive to answer and it was evident they were just guessing. The parents who tried to list the names of the princesses almost always forgot to mention Mulan and Pocahontas. This supports their lack of popularity due to having fewer branded merchandise. Parents, as well as their children, are guilty of neglecting the characters that they don’t see on the shelves of retailers since they are engaging primarily on a commercial level. Despite the prevalence of these characters and the importance they have in children’s lives, many of the parents seemed ignorant to the simple details surrounding this franchise.

When asked what associations they made with the word “princess,” almost all of the adults claimed that they thought of Disney characters, dresses, or
merchandise. They don’t actually think about the princesses themselves but rather
the brand as an entity. Dani, mother of a 3½-year-old son, Matt, and a 9-year-old
daughter, Isabelle, associated the word “princess” with the feeling of happy.
Ultimately, it made her think of Disney. The Disney Princess franchise has
branded itself so efficiently that when people, not just children, hear the word
princess they automatically make associations with the Disney Corporation.
Interestingly, Melissa claimed that this Disney franchise altered her perception of
the term “princess.” She stated, “When I had my first child it had a slightly
negative connotation…princess was a spoiled brat of a child. If you called your
daughter a princess it was not a great thing. I think because of this Disney
thing…it doesn’t have this bratty negative connotation anymore, it’s more
character-based association than personality-based.” Disney revolutionized the
way the word “princess” is perceived by creating an innocent connotation, rather
than a derogatory one. With the upswing in popularity of Disney Jr., it is apparent
that Disney is trying to change the connotations they have created with the word
princess. They no longer want it to represent women needing to find a man and
wearing pink frilly dresses. Instead, they want it to encourage strength and
perseverance, courage and honesty.

There is not a clear favorite when it comes to the Disney Princesses but
the majority of these children seemed to fluctuate between Belle, Cinderella and
Snow White. This could be an indication of the White participants seeking to
identify with a princess who looks like or acts like them. This could be a
reflection of the participant’s race, as one chooses their favorite princess based on
whom they can identify most with. Children tend to change their minds on which their favorite princess is quite frequently. Despite many children not having a favorite, all the princesses that were mentioned in this category were of the first films to be created; nobody preferred Tiana or Rapunzel, more recent films with evolved characters.

There have been many changes in society since the creation of Snow White in 1937. Therefore, one could assume that the ideals and notions within the more recent films should reflect those of mainstream society today and not be as misogynistic. Snow White and Cinderella are featured longest, 924 seconds and 655 seconds respectively, in a dependent and submissive state. However, Tiana and Pocahontas are shown for the longest amount of time, 1,072 seconds and 664 seconds respectively, asserting their independence (Hecht 2011). Parents interviewed observed this change as they all agreed the morals and messages in the more recent films are inspiring and motivational. Simply by demonstrating women of various nationalities and ethnicities, Disney is encouraging diversity and preaching that all children can take part in this fantasy world. Danielle, mother of three-year-old Annie, exclaimed, “They’ve always had personality, but they’re definitely more independent now. What did Snow White do? She was pretty and kept house for some dwarfs. Whereas, Rapunzel in Tangled goes out and does all kind of stuff.” The mother of 3½ year-old Alexa agreed, “the newer ones are showing women can go out on their own, showing that they can be tougher, they can stand up for themselves. Whereas the earlier ones they cooked, they cleaned, they did the typical chores a woman would do in that day.” Janet
elaborated on this by stating, “I think the underlying messages are changing but they’re staying in the same roles. Years ago there was no empowering message it was just a love story. You still have all these lovey, gushy stories but now you can do it on your own, you’re as good as a man…” The modern films actually enhance the children’s perception of their own independence and make them believe that they truly can achieve whatever they desire. Although negative stereotypes persist throughout all these films, the modern ones are attractive both to children and to their parents.

Almost unanimously, parents claimed their daughter’s favorite colors were purple and pink. Jamie believes this is a result of societal expectations and norms, not strictly a result of the Disney Princesses, most of whom are adorned in pink and purple. When her daughter Madison was asked about her favorite color she stated it was pink because “that’s a girl color and it’s pretty;” she also mentioned that it made her want to be one of the Princesses. Melissa’s daughter Allison’s favorite color was originally just pink, but now she likes anything “pretty.” Kaya, the nine-year-old daughter of Katherine, claimed her favorite colors were purple and orange. She seemed to display the least interest in the Disney Princess brand and was the only child whose favorite colors were not pink and purple. This further proves that girls are socialized to like pink or purple and while Disney enhances this message, those who are not as involved with it don’t necessarily fall victim to this stereotype.

Generally, the parents interviewed are not bothered by the messages within the Disney Princess brand. They believe it is their jobs to make their
children into well-rounded individuals and expose them to a variety of avenues. Parents seemed to feel that while they could perceive some of the negative stereotypes in the Disney Princess films, these were not shaping their children. Danielle said, “You have to remember that kids do know what’s real and what’s not. My daughter is 3 and when she puts on a princess dress, she feels like a princess, she doesn’t think she has to change anything about her.” Janet reinforced this idea, “she gets that it’s a movie and Prince Charming isn’t going to kiss her and she’ll wake up.” Even Paul, the only male participant, exclaimed,

I think my daughters are well rounded enough to know that they are just movies…if you were asking me if I just thought that with what she saw on the screen it made her feel she should cook, clean and be motherly, and there was no reinforcement from my wife or I, then yes. But we sit and watch the movies and talk to them about it and that’s not real life, they know it’s pretend.

Parents support their children’s interactivity with the brand claiming that it gives girls the message that they can be anything they want to be. The Disney Princess films and merchandise enable children to play and use their imagination. It is not as though they enter a submissive world in which they sit around and wait for a lover, rather, they understand it’s make believe. There is more to these children’s lives than just the Disney Princesses.

Although not targeted towards young boys, while this study was very limited in looking at male children it included, this demographic plays with and
involves themselves in the Disney Princess franchise. They are not very interested in the stories that have to be told but are more interested in the merchandise and paraphernalia they can play with. In referencing her son, Dani said, “if you met Matt there is nothing feminine about him but he likes to dress up as a princess, he plays with the princesses all the time.” Interestingly, he also uses the dolls and figurines as superheroes. Dani continued, “so he would take Cinderella and Aurora and be like ‘Come on Batman…’ now he creates scenes with both Batman and the princesses, Batman saves the princesses.” Without watching the movies he still plays under the notion that men must rescue women therefore proving this is embedded within our society.
Chapter Six: Conclusion

The results of this qualitative study indicate that parents are aware of the negative stereotypes within these Disney Princess films, yet they are not alarmed by them. This could be attributed to some of the young children engaging on a solely materialistic level, as opposed to with the actual stories of the princesses themselves. They immerse themselves in a world of imaginative play in which they need Disney merchandise and apparel.

Disney perpetuates and promotes negative gendered stereotypes, mainly on a materialistic level, as evident from speaking with these twelve parents. Their children are not watching these films repeatedly despite their access to them. They are choosing to absorb these princess ideologies through dress up and imaginative play. As evident from this study, parents support their children doing this as it means they are not engrossing themselves in technology. However, being exposed to promotions, such as the one by Stride Rite, creates unrealistic societal expectations for these young children.

As can be seen by its more recent princesses, gradually Disney has taken a stronger stance on what it means to be a princess and has included less gender specific ideas within these princess films. Although the company is certainly not progressive in teaching children to be independent and follow their dreams, it is responding to public scrutiny. It is evident, from the works analyzed throughout this study that these films have ideas and stereotypes within them that are harmful. However, in their minds, it is the job of the parents to mold the minds of
their children. They are responsible for teaching them societal norms, encouraging them to feel empowered and reach for the stars, and to be confident in their endeavors. After speaking to this small sample of parents it is apparent that they see little to no harm in these movies.

Children who are totally princess obsessed will grow out of it; as children mature and develop they understand more about reality. Andy Mooney supports that by stating,

I have friends whose son went through the Power Rangers phase who castigated themselves over what they must’ve done wrong. Then they talked to other parents whose kids had gone through it. The boy passes through. The girl passes through. I see girls expanding their imagination through visualizing themselves as princesses, and then they pass through that phase and end up becoming lawyers, doctors, mothers or princesses, whatever the case may be” (qtd. in Orenstein, “What’s Wrong With Cinderella”).

The Disney Princesses do not reign eternally in the minds’ of these children. Rather, according to these parents, films and merchandise offer the children an outlet in which they can use their imagination to play and live in a world free of terrorism, harm, and reality. This type of play, and the ability to embody someone else, is freeing and the parents believe it helps children to discover their own identity, thoughts and values.
### Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Child(ren)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marion</td>
<td>Scott (5), Grace (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>Annie (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Janet</td>
<td>Bari (3½)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>Amanda (4), Alana (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>Alexa (3½)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bethany</td>
<td>Jaclyn (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dani</td>
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<td>Kaya (9)</td>
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<td>Melissa</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gail</td>
<td>Gabriella (6), Maya (7 months)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maxine</td>
<td>Sophie (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>Madison (4)</td>
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INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

ABOUT SELF:

1. When you think Princess, what words or ideas pop into your mind?
2. Did you watch a lot of Disney movies when you were growing up?
3. What skills do you think these princesses teach young children?
4. Do you think these films evoke negative stereotypes? If yes, have you always? Of what sort?
5. Do you know how many princesses there are? Can you name them all?
6. Have you noticed a change within the Princesses as time goes on?
7. What do you think about all the branded princess events and merchandise?
8. Is there a line Disney is crossing with all of its branded merchandising?

ABOUT CHILD:

1. At what age was your daughter introduced to the princesses?
2. Who is her favorite? Do you know why?
3. What is her favorite color?
4. Does your daughter have a lot of princess merchandise?
5. Do you think that children learn social skills from watching these princesses?
6. Has she ever gone to Disney World?
INTERVIEW WITH JAMIE

So, she does have a lot of stuff?

Yes

Did you watch princess movies when you were growing up?

Yes

So you were raised into it?

Yes

Did you think anything bad about them when you were watching them?

No

Do you think anything bad about them now?

No

You don’t think they have any negative gender stereotypes or ideals that they enforce?

No, I think I don’t though because I never viewed them like that and Isabelle doesn’t view them like that. She just sees it as they’re pretty, she just views it as a cartoon almost.

Do you know how many princesses there are?

Snow White, Cinderella, Ariel, Mulan, Belle, Tiana, Sleeping Beauty, did I miss any?

Yeah, there are ten of them. Pocahontas, Rapunzel-

Oh, I didn’t know Pocahontas was a princess!

So do you think the princess brand has evolved as time goes on?

In terms of their nationalities, they’re more diverse.

Do you think children learn social skills from them at all?

I think she can. I don’t think she does. Obviously the theme of the movies is to show a woman waiting around for a man. She doesn’t really watch the whole movies, she’s more into Annie and shows. She mostly has her princess figures and sets them up and plays with them. I guess if she was watching the full movies all the time maybe it could.
I was like “how do princesses dress?” and Madison lifts up her shirt and shows her stomach. So I asked her if she thinks they show their stomachs? She said no but couldn’t elaborate.

I don’t think there’s anything bad from them. My mother loved them, I love Disney World.

Same, I love Disney but you don’t think it socializes them at all. Earlier she said, “I like pink because I’m a girl” so I went “well my favorite color is blue and I’m a girl.” She told me that was her second favorite but then she went “I have to like pink because I’m a girl and those are girl colors.”

I don’t think that comes from the princesses though I think that comes from school and what her friends like. Which maybe has to do with the princesses but girl stuff is pink; look at her microphone, her bedding. I don’t think it’s necessarily a princess thing I think it’s society, Adam’s favorite color is blue.

Cool, well thank you!

INTERVIEW WITH MARION

Grace’s how old?

Grace is 5 ½ and Scott’s almost 1, she’s not really there at the princess level… No she has not gotten into princesses yet but I’m sure its on its way

Has he watched any of them?

He still likes Mickey Mouse and he also, there was a new movie they came out with on the Disney channel called “Sofia the First”

Ah yes, she’s the next princess don’t tell but I just blew her cover (laughs)

Yeah, well he knew all about it and he watched a little of it and said, “yeah you know it’s too much for girls” (starts revealing information about prospective interviewee) From what I know they marketed the hell out of it and I went to the store and they had DVDs and memorabilia and all that bullshit so they obviously know that kids are going to want all those bells and whistles to go along with it

Yeah, she’s actually being released on the big screen this year. She’s the newest princess, the first child princess and believe it or not she’s supposed to be Hispanic-

Even though she’s blonde?

Did you watch these movies when you were growing up?
Uhmm, you know what, no, when I was growing up, I came here from Prussia when I was seven so I was never really into it the way that kids are today. I was more into Cabbage Patch Kids and Barbies. That was my fault so we didn’t really have princesses we had Barbie, Barbie had lots of princess outfits but I wasn’t really into the Barbie, I mean princess, brand. The thing is I know that Grace’s gonna be into it because they’re collectibles and kids are into collectibles but ya know, I think Disney does a really good job at marketing it even though they don’t have a particular store like Nickelodeon they have an MTV store they have all this other stuff kids go in and get there Yo Gabba Gabba stuff

From what you do know of the princesses do you think that they teach children anything bad or evoke any stereotypes or you think its just-

I think, for the most part, it’s harmless. I’m kinda of the feeling that I don’t really like girls just playing too much with all this gender specific stuff I like more gender neutral and I, ya know, it’s all about this fabulous lifestyle and kinda desensitizes them to realize but it’s nice make-believe for them. Ya know, for the most part its harmless its not demoralizing women if anything it’s making girls get a little more confident with who they are. I’d like to see how they grow these princesses up, ya know, how do they evolve. I haven’t really seen much more since the fairytales, I think the messaging is pretty good with some of them, ya know like Ariel, and in Beauty and the Beast is kinda nice because it teaches them to be nice to others and so forth so I think it’s all good as long as the messaging is good and to be honest with you I like anything that will keep kids away from all this technology. I really do, there is way too much technology and these kids turn into mush and if anything I’m a big believer in imaginative play, something kids don’t do enough of these days, and if it helps them bring on some strong imagination then I’m all for it.

So I know you said Gabby hasn’t gotten into princess stuff at all but does she own anything, like shirts, books, silverware…

No but she will I’m sure. I think it defines them at a certain age but I think that they grow out of it at a certain age, like seven or eight

Wow spot on, their market is 3-6

Yeah, exactly

Do you know how many princesses there are?

No, I know that there is Belle, I would say four or five

There are ten.

You see, there you go, I’m not sure. I don’t think they capitalize on it, shouldn’t these Princesses have shows on Disney Jr. and a movie released
every couple of months, maybe a museum. They really haven’t done all that much, I’m sure it would be heaven to these girls.

I think a huge problem is that these movies really teach girls to be passive and search for a man, so it’s interesting that you say that about Belle and Ariel because Ariel gives up her voice to meet Eric and in Beauty and the Beast, Gaston literally says “you’re a woman you can’t read because then you’ll think and even worse, get ideas.” Granted it was a totally different time period in 1950 when some of these movies were released but even still today with Tiana and Rapunzel, women are too ignorant on their own to do anything so they go from the reins of their father to the rule of their husband. I think that it’s total bullshit and people read into it a lot and forget the purpose of a fairytale. But I guess they’re really trying to shake that image now.

You know, if you’re talking to young girls at that age all they are thinking is daddy is the man. Daddy takes care of them. Do I think they’re gonna grow up thinking that they’re gonna need a man to take care of them? Probably not, but is that the tone that Disney is putting out there? Yeah, probably the old movies but the new ones shouldn’t be doing that. Would I stop Grace from watching them because I think parts are ridiculous, NO. When Scott watches super heroes, because yeah, I’m gonna blast you to outer space. Chalk it up to stories written for little kids. If what the parents are getting from these movies and stories, even American fairytales and rhymes, they’re a little bit condescending for women but I think if you teach them the lessons out of it there is something about the magic behind being a princess living in a castle and having Prince Charming rescue you. I think it is totally harmless if parents don’t get worked up to believe in it.

[conversation continued regarding irrelevant topics]

INTERVIEW WITH DANIELLE

Hi Danielle, this is Melanie Greenblatt how are you?

Good, how are you?...

So Marion told me your daughter is obsessed with the princesses.

Yes, I know a lot about these princesses what are you doing with them?

Well I have to write my thesis for the Honors Program so I chose to write it on the Disney Princesses because I’m obsessed with Disney so my project is fulfilled in three parts. The first part I’m doing a lit review and talking about the stereotypes it has. Then, I’m an advertising major, so I’m doing an analysis on their advertising and media which helped the brand to boom from nothing to billions of dollars in just a few years. The last part is I want to interview moms with children between the ages of 3 and 7 to see if what I’m studying is noticeable in real life.
So, you said you know a lot about the Princesses, what pops into your mind when you first hear that?

Well, let’s see. I was a Disney fan even before I had kids. When I think about Disney Princesses I probably think of the dresses first because of my daughter and then the movies and all the merchandise.

So you don’t actually think about the princesses themselves but probably the brand?

Yeah, probably. You know there are so many princesses now.

Do you know how many princesses there are?

I can count them off, I don’t know the number off hand. There are some that they put in the princess category but they aren’t actually princesses, ya know like Mulan and Pocahontas.

Well they actually are princesses. So in 2001, this man went to this convention and saw all these girls wearing pink and dressed up like the Disney princesses so they created this whole franchise. Now there are ten of them and they have to be inducted, it’s like a really serious process.

I’ll tell you. We went to Stride Rite to get my daughter a pair of princess sneakers and they have branded it down to, you go into the store to buy sneakers. And, they always put a sticker on the kid with their shoe size. The sticker has a princess on it, when they bring the shoes out for the kids to try on, they bring them out on a pillow. When they purchase the shoes they get a certificate congratulating them on finding the perfect fit and wishing them to live happily ever after. It’s serious stuff with the licensing program.

Wow! So you don’t mind the branded merchandise?

I don’t, but I’m a marketing/promotions/advertising person so I’m totally fine with it but I’m sure there are lots of people who are not okay with it.

Do you think they’ve evolved as time goes on? I mean, you said you used to watch them when you were kids. So obviously Snow White is not visibly like Tiana but do you think that the actual story line and the messages that they teach young children have evolved over time or do you think it’s the same story with a different character playing the lead?

No, I think it’s changed a little bit. I think they’re definitely more, they’ve always had personality, but they’re definitely more independent now. What did Snow White do? She was pretty and she kept house for some dwarfs. Whereas, Rapunzel in *Tangled* goes out and does all kinds of stuff; Meredith in *Brave* doesn’t live happily ever after with a guy. Tiana wasn’t a princess to start out with, until she married a prince.
They’re either princesses by birth, status, or because of marriage. So, Mulan isn’t actually a princess but because she is a heroine and wants to fight in the war for her father she is deemed a princess. So, at what age was your daughter introduced to the princesses?

She’s been into it for a little while, probably since she was 1 ½ or 2.

Do you know who her favorite is?

It was Aurora, only because she loves pink, but I think she’s moved on to Belle now. One of her Hanukkah presents was a Belle dress. The serious one from the Disney store with the netting and the pink roses it’s insane.

Is her favorite color pink?

Yes.

So you said she owns a lot of the merchandising…

Yes, she has the Aurora sneakers but interestingly she also has Hulk sneakers. She’s not just a princess girl, she’s perfectly happy watching the super heroes too. She has a Minnie Mouse dress, a Belle dress and an Aurora dress.

Does she use them often?

Yeah, between Halloween and Purim and a year ago right now we were on the Disney Cruise… I went to Disney World on spring break in grad school, I went down there for a bachelor party and my husband and I actually just went down there to go to Universal without the kids. We wanted to do the whole Harry Potter thing and our kids aren’t old enough but anyway, the cruise is amazing. I would do it again in a heartbeat, everything about it was easy. Disney takes care of everything, everything is perfectly set up and ready to go, you don’t have to worry too much about anything. The kids had so much fun.

It’s different when you’re older and looking at it but do you think these movies evoke negative stereotypes or teach children certain social skills that aren’t so good?

You know, it’s funny; you can look at it two ways. One way, you can say yes they are because a lot of them are teaching you that you need a man to rescue you and you can’t be independent without it. But on the other hand some of the new princesses are doing their own thing. But then you also get into the Barbie argument as to whether their figures are ridiculous and you can’t actually look like that. You have to remember that kids do know what’s real and what’s not and my daughter is 3 and when she puts on a princess dress she feels like a princess, she doesn’t think she has to change anything about her.
Yeah, I’m still obsessed with Disney regardless of what I’m learning or reading about.

The whole Princess thing wasn’t this much of a thing as when I was a kid. When you went to Disney world nobody dressed up. If you go there now and your daughter doesn't have a princess dress she’s gonna yell and scream at you…and cry because everyone else is dressed up. We walked around Disney Wrold and at least half the girls were dressed up in princess dresses. And on the cruise too, everyone had costumes everywhere. They had a thing on the cruise called a Princess Gathering where a number of the princesses come out and a little girl can wait in line and just meet all of them in one swoop. And I was so impressed because every little girl had a conversation with each princess. The women playing these princesses were so wonderful they were whispering things to the girls, all the girls were smiling, it was just the most precious thing I ever saw.

That’s awesome; I definitely want to look into the cruises. Well, thank you so much, I really appreciate this.

Feel free to call me back any time, I’m happy to help. I did a senior thesis when I was in college and I got a lot of help from other people so I’m happy to do it for anyone else. Good luck let me know how it turns out!!

INTERVIEW WITH JANET

I’m writing my thesis on the Disney Princesses, I know it sounds very educational; it’s a three-part project. The first part is a lit review on all the movies-

My daughter can do that for you, we have seen every movie 7,955 times.

The second part, since I’m studying advertising I’m looking at how their advertising and media has increased sales.

You know they also just introduced a new princess and it’s the first time in years they’ve introduced a new princess. So there is A LOT of marketing and advertising that goes along with that.

Yeah well they introduced Tiana and Rapunzel in 2009 and 2010, so not too recently but not too far. And the third part I’m talking to moms with daughters between the ages of 3 and 7 and seeing their opinions on what the brand does. So Bari is 3?

She’s 3 ½ to be more specific

Do you know what age she started getting into the Princesses?

She started watching at around 2.
Do you know her favorite princess?

Yes, Belle

That’s my favorite princess! Do you know why that’s her favorite princess?

Good question, I don’t know why it’s her favorite. I know it’s her favorite, maybe something about the yellow dress.

Is her favorite color pink?

Purple.

Does she own, aside for the movies, dresses, and lunchboxes etc?

She has lunchboxes, every single princesses’ dress up outfits twice one in the small outfit and now in the big version, she has every character set of the small figures, she has three different lunchboxes, one backpack and she has tons of clothing and we’ve been to Disney twice.

Wow, that’s awesome!

Yeah, we go once a year that’s my commitment to her she can go once a year until we’re really poor (laughs)

Do you know how many princesses there are in total?

Well you have Aurora, Rapunzel, Tiana, Belle, Cinderella, Jasmine, uh, Ariel, Snow White, am I missing any?

Pocahontas and Mulan

Yes! My daughter would have reminded me of that, we watched Mulan last night. I think that is the best movie of all of them for a little girl.

Why?

I think it gives the best message to a little girl that you can be anything you want to be.

Do you think that most of the princess movies evoke negative stereotypes and images for young children or it’s just a movie?

Good question. It definitely creates gender stereotypes, no doubt about it, but I’m okay with it. She likes it and hopefully I send a message at home that that’s not reality and I feel like I do a good job to make that clear.

So it’s just kind of something she can do not that is her?

She gets that it’s a movie and Prince Charming isn’t gonna kiss her and she will wake up.
Do you think that they've been changing over time?

The princesses, yes! When I was a kid Aurora was called Sleeping Beauty she didn't have a name it wasn’t advertised in the same way so it’s evolved.

But do you think the culture has changed or the princesses have changed? So in 2001, this man went to this convention and saw all these girls wearing pink and dressed up like the Disney princesses so they created this whole franchise. So it became this whole Disney Princess phenomenon and they have to get inducted and now it’s a whole process but the actual princesses themselves, do you think they’ve changed?

It has definitely changed, you look at Tiana and Mulan those are stories of women working and achieving whereas Snow White and Aurora are saved by the Prince.

But at the same time do you think that because Tiana is working and she’s cooking, a traditionally feminine quality to have, and her mom makes her best friend’s dresses, ya know what I mean? Do you think that the stories are changing?

Listen, I think that the underlying messages are changing but they’re staying in the same roles. Years ago there was no empowering message it was just a love story. You still have all these lovey, gushy stories but you can do it on your own, you’re as good as a man, you can do that but I think the underlying message is the same.

I think you hit em all, thank you!

I told you I’m up on my princesses, I’m well versed, we don’t mess around in our house about the princesses. My daughter gives children an education. Someone will be like “Sleeping Beauty” and she will be like “her name is Aurora.” She might not know her ABC’s but she knows her princesses. We love it, it doesn’t bother me it, makes her so happy. At 6 in the morning ya know she is fully dressed as a princess, it’s awesome.

INTERVIEW WITH PAUL

Hi Paul! So I’m writing my thesis on the Disney Princesses and I just want to see the parent-view on how they see the brand. So, your kids are?

My daughter, Amanda, is 4 and Alana is younger, she’s almost going to be 2.

Do they both like princesses?

They both love princesses.
Do you know how young Amanda was when she got introduced to it?

Well her first doll, she didn’t get a teddy bear, it had a blanket attached to it and it was a Snow White head. So, at birth. Snow White is her favorite.

Is her favorite color pink?

She waivers back and forth between pink and purple

Besides for the blanket, do they own a lot of merchandise?

They own everything that we could possibly see, they get. And if you know where we can get Sofia, they’re dying for it.

Well her big boom I’m sure will happen in the next two months but I’ll keep an eye out. So you said that they started watching when they were young, do you know how many princesses there are?

Uhhh, Aurora, Cinderella, Sofia I guess counts now, oh g-d off the top of my head I think there’s five? Jasmine I didn't count. I don’t pay much attention to that stuff.

Do you watch the movies with them?

I do

Do you think there are messages in the Disney Princess movies that are negative towards children or socialize them in a certain way or they’re harmless?

I think something interesting about the Disney movies is that they are appealing to adults as well so there has to be subliminal messages. However, I do not think that they impact my children at this time.

You don’t think that they teach girls to grow up and cook and clean and hope for a man to kiss them and save them?

I think if you were asking me if my daughter’s world revolves around what she sees on television or these movies then yeah, is that kind of what it says? That they need to be beautiful princesses and be taken care of and cook and clean. Of course. Cook and clean I don't see as much with the princesses nowadays, I don’t know. I think my daughters are well rounded enough to know that they are just movies. I can’t fully answer your question because if you were asking me if I just thought that with what she saw on the screen that it made her feel she should cook, clean and be motherly, I would probably say, if that was the only thing she saw and there was no reinforcement from my wife or I, then yes. But we sit and watch the movies and talk to them about it and that’s not real life they know it’s pretend.
I agree. There’s all this scrutiny that Disney goes under because of these stereotypes but people totally isolate that from the rest of reality. They should have families that teach them things and the movies are fairytales so it’s supposed to be removed from reality.

I mean my wife and I were both educators so we both realize that teachers are being scrutinized right now but they are just a part of a child’s education. Parents have a lot more to deal with when their kids come home from school or on the weekends and that’s a problem with society today. We don’t take those opportunities the same way we did in the past.

Well, thank you.

That’s it you don’t want me to sing any songs or anything?

Not unless you want to…

INTERVIEW WITH SUSAN

Hi it’s Susan, I’m sorry I missed you.

That’s alright! So I’m writing my thesis paper on the Disney princesses so the first part is a lit review and I’m looking at what Disney’s been criticized for and the things they’re movies represent. The second part, I’m an advertising major, so I’m studying the media and advertising. And the last part is I’m interviewing moms, and one dad, to see if these ideals are perpetuated to the public. Because you’re really the target consumer in the sense that you’re going to be buying things.

Right, okay.

So your daughter is how old?

She’s 3 ½, she’ll be 4 in May

You said she was obsessed with the princesses?

Yeah, she’s a big fan. It didn't hurt that we were in Disney last June.

Was that the first time she’s been exposed to them or she’s been into it for a while?

The first time she was exposed to them was probably from watching movies and now you know she sees big characters in the toy store and at Disney when they were all together it came to life for her and she was like “oh my gosh.”

Does she have a favorite?
Well it kinda varies each day. I’d say her three favorites would be Belle, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty.

Would her favorite color pink by chance?

Pink or purple.

Purple, that’s interesting I keep hearing that which I find interesting because they don’t really market a lot of stuff in purple. Does she own any toys or costumes or merchandise? They have over 250,000 products so I could literally keep listing them.

She has some of the dresses but she doesn't really play or dress up in them. She did do as Belle for Halloween and got dresses from my friend’s kid who’s too big for them. She has toys and dolls, ya know the Barbie like dolls, she wanted a big Princess castle that was her big Christmas present. She also has the movies.

When you were growing up did you watch princess movies?

Yeah I did, I love them all. I collected them and get excited to show them to her too.

Do you think it teaches kids any social skills or stereotypes? Do you think they’re really profound in what they’re teaching or it’s more like they fall in love and live happily ever after and it’s totally harmless?

I think it’s more the latter. At this age they’re so into fantasy and acting things out and trying to be dramatic and learning. It’s cute that she likes to twirl around and likes to act like a princess and likes to call her dad the prince. That’s a special time now that doesn’t last very long so I think it’s okay. She understands that she isn’t going to be like Will and Kate from England or be an heiress so she knows it’s a story and it’s entertainment.

So you don’t think it evokes any negative stereotypes about women in particular?

Well they do all have the same kind of story flow. I don’t think so; I think society today is totally different. It’s nice to live in that fantasy world but I think women can expect more these days. She is also exposed to sports and skiing and other things so it’s not like she’s just living her life in this bubble of the Disney Princesses and that’s all she knows.

Have you noticed a change in them as time goes on or they’re staying pretty standard across the board?

The characters?

Yeah between 1937 when Snow White was created and 2010 when Rapunzel was. The time periods are totally different.
Yeah, there is a difference. The newer ones are showing that women can go out on their own, showing that they can be tougher, showing that they can stand up for themselves. Whereas the earlier ones they cooked, they cleaned, they did the typical chores a woman would do in that day, so I do think they’ve evolved.

Do you know how many princesses there are now?

I have no idea, maybe around ten?

Perfect! Yeah I’m sure the 11th one will come soon with Sofia the First.

Yeah, my daughter loves Sofia and ahs watched that movie tons and tons of times. She’s a different one too, she’s younger, she’s learning, she’s learning to assimilate; she’s breaking the rules, if you will. She’s doing things the typical princess wouldn’t think to do.

So since you said that it’s kind of just a world of fantasy and make-believe, do you think that everything that’s branded with the princesses, ya know you could go to the supermarket and get Princess cookies? Do you think it’s too much?

Well I get it, I’m in advertising so I understand the need to do those line extensions. That’s how you make the money. As a consumer, I don’t personally buy the cookies because it has the Princesses on it. I think that’s a bit too far. Obviously the kid in the supermarket will see that and be like “I want that” just because it has the princesses on it. However, it’s not usually good ingredients or quality food either so I look at that as well.

That’s really all I got…

INTERVIEW WITH BETHANY

Hi this is Melanie Greenblatt

Hi, how are you?

I’m good, how are you?

I’m good, I’m glad you called, so ask away!

Alright so let me give you a little background…I’m a senior at Syracuse University and I’m studying advertising and as part of the Honors Program we have to do a senior capstone so I’m doing mine on the Disney Princesses because I’m totally and utterly obsessed with Disney. We share that in common. Basically, it’s a three part project in which the first part is a lit review, the second part is looking at how Disney’s influence on the media and its advertising has caused the Princess franchise to sky rocket and the third part is I want to talk to moms with kids in the target age group of the Disney Princesses to see their understanding of
the brand and whether they are concerned about the health of their daughters by watching these movies. After reading your blog I see you have been to Disney World several times.

Yes. A LOT!

So did you grow up with the Princesses, or how did you get introduced to Disney?

I didn’t really grow up with the Princesses. I went for the first time when I was ten and during my college years I started going with my family a lot but I still didn’t really know the Princesses. Then my family lives near Disney so when Jaclyn, my daughter, was born we started going a lot and by two she was princess obsessed. But as I tell people, I never really pushed it, she came to it on her own.

So she was introduced to them at around two?

I guess so, either two or two and a half when she started being aware that there were several characters there. Now, at five, she’s very aware of them.

Do you know who her favorite is?

Well when you ask her on any given day she’ll have a different answer. She has the outfits to all of them and now when we’re down there she loves to dress up as them.

Is her favorite color pink?

Her favorite color is pink and purple…. Because Rapunzel is purple.

So you mentioned she has the costumes for everyone

She has the costume for pretty much everyone. She doesn’t have Jasmine and, although I don’t think she is a princess yet she doesn’t like Merida.

Does she have clothes or cups and plates or-

She doesn’t really care about that stuff she does have a lot of the dolls. She is more into acting out things so she likes the dressing up part more.

So I’m assuming you’ve seen all these movies a bunch of times

Yes I have

So do you think children learn any social skills from them or it’s just harmless entertainment?

Honestly, I don't think they’re learning, I don’t know, if you watch the movies, especially the most recent ones, you could find positive messages in all of them. On the other hand I don’t really buy into this whole you
have to be against the princesses. My philosophy as a parent is to expose her to a lot of different things. She loves the princesses but she also loves pirate stuff too and dinosaurs and learning about fishes, and all kinds of things. So I don’t think there’s anything wrong with her being a little princess obsessed.

Especially recently, do you think that there has been a consistent change with princesses over time?

When I was growing up the Disney Princesses were not really all that prevalent until-

2001

I didn’t know the exact date but I know that Disney began to realize there was a market they were missing out on. So growing up I wouldn’t say I didn’t know about the Disney princesses but I knew about the Disney movies. You went to the movies and that was it, you didn’t have the DVD at home and you weren’t watching it five million times.

So do you think that now because media has such a heavy impact on how children are brought up, I don’t remember the statistic but an average American spends ten hours a day watching TV which you obviously have to take into account the whole country. I have a bunch of Pixar movies at school with me, ya know, do you think that since you can just put the DVD in whenever you want and watch it on replay that when you watch women being helpless and needing a man and acting passive, it reinforces this idea more than it did even when I was growing up? I mean, I’m 21 but when I was growing up the Princesses weren’t a big deal I was into Winnie the Pooh and The Lion King because the princesses weren’t as branded when I was a little kid.

Personally, I don’t think so. I don’t think that when kids watch these over and over again they are being brainwashed by any means. I think they like the stories and they’re kids so they watch things over and over again.

I was reading on your blog that you’re running the half marathon, which I have to congratulate you for because that’s a feat. Do you think there’s a line that Disney is crossing in trying to brand everything? I think it’s great that they’re not just branding cookies and things little girls would want but they want people to follow it throughout their lives, you can still love Belle, you can still connect with Ariel. Do you think they’re pushing it too far?

No, I signed up for the half marathon on a whim but Disney is a business so any way they can make money they’re going to do it. Also, the thing about Disney is they have a bunch of different things with marathons and I think it’s great that in a society where people are spending more time sitting around watching TV and there’s an obesity problem with children, that they’re trying to get people of all ages going out and getting physical.
I would have to agree with that, I was reading an article that talked about Disney ended their partnership with McDonalds because they wanted to separate themselves from this huge epidemic of obesity. I was looking at the website for it and there were all these different components, breakfast with characters, etc.

Yeah, it really does. Come September they have one that’s called “The Tower of Terror” which is the villain one and they have a food and wine one to celebrate Epcot. There are all these different ways Disney is getting people to have fun doing physical activity.

Very cool, so when you hear the word “princess” what associations are you making in your head?

For me that is a hard one because of my blog Disney is such a big part of my life. So I would have to say the Disney Princesses

So what made you start this blog?

It was one of those things where I was putting up pictures of our trips and friends, and friends of friends, started asking me questions about going to Disney World with children so I figured a blog was the easiest way to disseminate this information.

Well I appreciated reading it and it has definitely helped my research.

Yeah I was going to ask you, how did you find it?

I was speaking to another mom and we were talking about the Disney Cruise line and she recommended I look at your blog. That’s really all the questions I have but I really appreciate all the information you gave me and everything.

Of course I’m happy I can help, good luck with your project.

INTERVIEW WITH DANI

Hi, how are you this is Melanie Greenblatt?

Hi, it’s so good to finally talk to you. I feel like I know you already from all that your mom says about you. I’m happy to help you in any way

Well I hope only good things. So I’m writing my thesis on the Disney Princesses which sounds super educational I know-

[Laughs] That’s interesting! So what is your major?

I study advertising and so I’m in the Honors Program and they really let you do whatever you want for your thesis as long as it can somehow relate to your major. So my study is on the Disney Princesses and the first part is a lit review where I’m looking at journals and publications and what other scholars have posted
regarding Disney to show what stereotypes are out there. The second part discusses how the Disney Princess franchise was started in 2001 when a Disney Chairmen went to an ice skating event and saw all these little girls dressed as princesses and realized there is a huge market they weren’t capitalizing on. So I’m doing an analysis on its media and their advertising and how it helped the brand to boom. The third part is I’m interviewing moms with young kids to see if the things that they’re teaching us and what people are writing about is really translating to moms.

Very interesting, where do you go to school again, I forget?

I go to Syracuse. So, your daughter is-

Isabelle’s 9, is that okay for your study?

Yep, that’s alright.

I also have a 3½ year old son, Matt, and I have to tell you I do have some Disney stories for you if you’re interested in that piece of it. It’s an interesting dynamic.

So, when you think princess what comes into your mind?

I think of my kids, I think of all the costumes, I think of happy, I think of Disney world

So when you think princess you think Disney?

I think Disney!

Wow, they really did a phenomenal job of branding this. So even though they weren’t branded. Snow White came out in 1937, which was the start of the princess films. Were you an avid watcher when you were a kid?

I really don’t have any recollection of watching them when I grew up

So you just started watching them with your kids for the first time?

Uhh, well let me say that we went to Disney World every year when I was a kid so I think I was introduced to them there. I don’t really remember watching the movies but I knew all the Princesses from Disney World not necessarily seeing the movies.

Do you know how many princesses there are?

No, I really don’t. Maybe ten, fifteen?

They have to go through this crazy process where they get inducted to actually be considered a princess.

Oh my g-d!
I don’t know if you’ve seen all this stuff for Sofia The First-

Yes!

But, she’s the next princess and it’s a huge deal because she’s the first child princess and believe it or not she’s supposed to be Hispanic

She doesn’t really look it, very Caucasian looking. Matt is actually obsessed with Sofia the First.

You’ve seen the movies and so you’re familiar with all the princesses? Do you know all the stories behind them?

I’m familiar with most of them. See here’s the thing, unless you have particular questions you have to ask-

No, go, go, go, and tell me whatever you want!

My daughter would never watch any of the movies because she was too afraid. So she really didn’t see any of the movies because there is always a witch or an evil being, she never watched any of them. She only knew who they were from talking about the Princesses or buying the little dolls or figures or dress up. Then going to Disney World showed her but she really doesn’t know the story behind a lot of them because it scared her. She’s not interested in their story at all.

Yeah, she’s just interested in the characters?

Exactly! The first movie that was about a princess that she watched was “Enchanted” where she didn’t get scared of the villain. She doesn’t really watch it whereas my son sits down and watches “Cinderella.” So she’s okay with it now, at 9, but she would not watch it at 4, 5, or 6.

So you said she has dolls and stuff, does she have any other merchandise? Disney has over 250,000 branded princess products.

Yes, she has some of the Barbie doll looking things, every kind of dress-up paraphernalia; she has little castles and little figurines to set up the scenes. And forget about the coloring books and art stuff and anything like that. Most of it focuses on dress up and going to Disney. They get you that way. We went to Disney and having breakfast, lunch and dinner with the Princesses you have to have an outfit. For Halloween she has to be a Princess. One time the luggage didn’t get to our room and we had dinner with Cinderella so I had to go out and buy her a whole new costume. Yeah, that’s how much they have these kids brainwashed that I had to go buy another $200 costume while the other one was in transit.

Yeah, I heard you can’t bring your child to Disney World anymore without having them dressed up
It’s a burden enough to pay to go to Disney World you have to buy all the outfits to go along with it.

Is her favorite color pink do you know?

Uhhh, yeah pink or purple.

So I know you said you haven’t watched them as much and you’re more familiar with the characters than you are their stories. Do you think that these films evoke negative stereotypes, or they socialize children to act and think in a certain way?

I don’t think so, I think that what they’re doing now with bringing “Brave,” I don’t know if she’s a princess or if that’s Disney-

Well here’s the thing. Technically she isn’t a Princess because she’s from Pixar but since Disney now owns Pixar they don’t brand her as a princess but they brand her in a princess way so she gets more publicity and people are more interested in her

Which goes against her whole story. From Princess and the Frog and Brave, my daughter has watched those, those messages are really positive. I wouldn’t say so much the other ones were negative but these have such a positive story and gender specific and it’s great that they’re thinking about this now. In fact, one thing that was very interesting, my daughter was not very princess-y. She loved to do all the dress up and stuff. For example, I would not let her nor would she want to do all that betty-boppity-boop, I don't know, they go and dress you up like a princess with make up and do your hair and turn her into that kind of a showcase. I’m not interested in that, but she did not yearn to be a princess.

Just a side note about all the products she owns. Disney, in terms of their advertising, doesn’t really exist independently. They always cross promote with Fisher Price or other huge toy conglomerates but Disney doesn't really advertise those things on their own. But they’re everywhere, I was in the supermarket this weekend and every box of cookies has the princesses on them for Valentines Day and they have half marathons…do you think it’s going too far?

I don’t think it’s going too far. It’s what the kids connect with, it’s sort of like, it is what it is. That’s how advertising works. They have to pick what kids are interested and so I’m not really aggravated by it, I’m an easygoing person. I have a positive connotation of it and we’re consumers so we have a choice to buy it or not buy it. In fact, I don't usually buy things that can be bought plain, this sounds ridiculous. I wouldn’t buy a Disney lunch box, for example, but if somebody wants to buy that then good for them. It’s not swaying me one way or another I think it’s good for people who want a Disney lunchbox or backpack.

Disney’s gone under a lot of scrutiny hence why their newer movies are different than their older ones. They’ve been teaching girls to grow up and be passive and
cook and clean and wait for a man to take care of her for the rest of her life. There’s a lack of motivation for these girls. I see what they mean, yeah, women shouldn’t always be waiting around sitting for a man. Yet at the same time, this isn’t life, it’s a fairytale it’s supposed to be make believe.

Exactly, this is not the place I would expect my daughter to get her values from so it doesn’t bother me in the least.

And that’s the consensus of what I’m seeing that it’s not Disney’s job to educate the children, that’s why you have parents to tell you what is reality. You’re not gonna wake up one day from being kissed by a prince.

And you know what, I think it’s okay for a four year old to be happy and think of a fairytale. There are so many disgusting things going on in the world that I don’t want a four year old to have any sort of that reality check. But I do think it’s nice that these new movies are exposing them to different possibilities.

Right, I would have to agree with that. So I’m interested to hear about your son’s experience.

Oh gosh it’s so fascinating. Clearly it’s because he has an older sister and everything was in the house. I think parents with a son that is first, there son probably wouldn’t be remotely interested. He wants to dress up like a princess. If you met Matt there is nothing feminine about him but he likes to dress up as a princess, he plays with the princesses all the time. In fact, he was obsessed with cars, and trains and Lightning McQueen for about a year and a half or two years straight that we couldn’t wait for him to like something else. His transition into action figures now occurred through the princesses because we didn’t own any sort of super heroes. But he had all the princesses, so first he would play with the princesses. He would play with Isabelle and have them dress up and act out scenes with the castle that we have and dollhouses. But then he started turning them into Batman. So he would take Cinderella and Aurora and be like “COME ON BATMAN” so I was like it’s about time to get the poor thing some figures. Now he creates scenes with both Batman and the princesses, Batman saves the princesses. You know what, I want him to be chivalrous I think it’s teaching him things about how to treat girls, to be kind, to be sensitive. He plays with her dolls and pushes the stroller and they want to play like what mommy and daddy do anyway so I’m very happy that he is going through this sort of play as well…. They should also think about that it’s not only for girls.

Cool, well that’s really all I have it was super helpful though!

Good I’m glad, I hope it was and if you need anything else feel free to call back.
INTERVIEW WITH KATHERINE

Hi this is Melanie Greenblatt, how are you?

I’m good, how are you Melanie?

I’m good it’s snowing pretty hard up here but otherwise can’t complain.

Where are you?

I go to Syracuse University and I’m studying advertising.

OH! That’s fun!

I always say going to class is the best because we just watch about advertisements and learn about them. So basically I’m in the Honors Program and they really let you do whatever you want for your thesis as long as it can somehow relate to your major. So my study is on the Disney Princesses because I am Disney obsessed. The first part is a lit review where I’m looking at journals and publications and what other scholars have posted regarding Disney to show what stereotypes are out there. The second part discusses how the Disney Princess franchise was started in 2001 when a Disney Chairmen went to an ice skating event and saw all these little girls dressed as princesses and realized there is a huge market they weren’t capitalizing on. So I’m doing an analysis on its media and their advertising and how it helped the brand to boom. The third part is I’m interviewing moms with young kids to try to get an idea of whether or not they actually buy into these ideals that people are criticizing Disney for. So, if you could just tell me how old your daughter is and her name that’d be great.

Kaya and she is 9.

Do you know about what age she was introduced to the princesses?

Probably around 4 or 5. She wasn’t really that interested in the princesses other than at Halloween, she always wanted to be one of them. She’s not very obsessed with it. Is that what you’re finding people are saying?

I’m finding it’s very varied either children are totally obsessed with it or just kind of into it for the dressing up like as soon as Halloween comes.

Yeah my daughter isn’t really obsessed with it. Is that okay? I don’t know if you wanted people who are more obsessed with it. She was never really wrapped around it. We didn’t even see that many of the movies.

Do you know how many princess movies there are? To technically be a princess they have to get inducted-

Oh, I didn’t even know about this I feel like you’re going to teach me a few things.
So basically in 2001 a Disney Chairman went to an ice skating event and saw all
these girls wearing pink and in princess costumes, and basically radiating the
brand without it actually having been branded. So he realized this was a huge
market they could capitalize on so they started making it into the Princess
franchise and there are all these rules they have to go by-

Wow!

So they kind of saw from the outside in and worked their way in.

I don’t think that’s so very appealing as a mother, actually. It’s brilliance.
It makes good money and kids at that age; maybe because my daughter
wasn’t involved in it I didn’t get the excitement of it. Just the other day we
saw a girl that was dressed up entirely as a Princess in a place where you
wouldn't normally see this. It’s sweet, it’s really sweet to see a girl so
happy and dressed up like that.

The first princess was Snow White and that was in 1937. Even when I was
growing up I would watch Cinderella but I didn't have to be this princess that
Disney created.

Yeah, that’s kind of how I feel. You know you just watched it you didn’t
want to just dive into it. I don’t know what that says about this day in age
either.

Right well there are over 250,000 Disney Princess franchise products. It’s one
thing when you walk down the supermarket and you see the cookies that have the
princesses on them but Disney also has half-marathons. I mean they’re literally
branding anything and everything they come into contact with. Do you think
there’s a line that they are crossing?

A little bit. I guess if my daughter wanted to but since she’s 9 now I’m
kind of out of it so I’m not as aware of what you’re saying to be honest
with you. Personally, I think it’s a little much as a mom but if my daughter
was interested in doing that I would partake I just don't think she is at that
age.

Right, does she own any Princess branded items?

She does have some I don't really think she goes to them as much as she
used to. I don't know if it’s the age or just her. She’s always had a dress up
box with Princess things in it and wands and stuff like that. With Snow
White and Cinderella, I think Cinderella was her favorite actually. But I
haven’t seen her access it in a while.

But she never had socks, or bedding, or cups or anything like that?

No definitely not.

Do you know her favorite colors?
Orange and purple

Interesting! It’s a whole new ballpark now.

Even when we’re in the store I don’t even think she goes towards Princess items at this time. I think she would rather reach for something with a singer like Taylor Swift or [laughs], anything with singers or gymnastics.

Do you know who her favorite princess is?

I know that her favorite princess was Cinderella when she was young.

So Disney has been under some scrutiny about the messages the movies have in them. The whole idea that in all these movies you have a woman who is passive and waits for a man to take care of her and they live happily ever after as she assists him in his life. Do you think that kids learn social skills from these films or it’s just harmless entertainment and it is what it is?

Um, I actually think that when we were younger we may have thought of it more as a fairytale truth. I think kids these days are a little wiser, they see more. I think they enjoy it and they understand it. I’m sure you have those that would but I don’t necessarily know if they do go there. Kids see so many different things now too.

So because there is so much media influence nowadays and you can buy the DVD, so you can watch “Mulan” six times a day if you had the urge too, do you think that it’s overload? I mean Disney movies aren’t supposed to be educational-

Yes, it’s the parent’s job to educate and expose them to other things. There are so many other things that I think kids can just look at it and enjoy what it is. I’m hoping kids just do that and appreciate all the other avenues they can access.

So you mentioned that you think it’s a bit much how much Disney is branding. But do you think that helps reinforce theses stereotypes or it’s kind of like you would let your daughter do whatever she wants as long as she understands it’s just for play.

Yeah I would say that, Kaya for sure it was just for play. I think it’s worrisome if a child is constantly trying to be a princess. I think it is overdone and what they do; it’s wonderful to sit and have breakfast with the princesses but that’s not what I think when I think of Disney. The money they make, and the money they charge, if it were less it’d be okay. What I’m saying is the extent to which they go and the cost to which they think thing through, if a child is eating breakfast with a princess and another kid walks in they’re going to want to eat with a princess. But I don’t think all kids really want that as much as Disney thinks they do. They have a good thing going though, I think part of it is a scam in a way and part of it is lovely.
Has she ever been to Disney World?

Do you know she has never been to Disney World!

That’s sad!

We’re going this year.

Well two things about that. First, if she asks to go on Dumbo, let her because we ran out of time when I went and to this day I still tell my mom she should have let me gone and I wont forget it.

How many times did you go to Disney?

I went twice.

Some people go so much. I only went once and I went in California but I just remember “It’s a Small World” and I can’t wait to go and see it as an adult. There is a magic about Disney that I think is absolutely beautiful. It’s a place of magic and magic is missing in a lot of kids’ lives now and it’s wonderful to go and see it alive at the same time. I guess I just never had Kaya be totally obsessed with it but I think it is wonderful in the particular time.

It’s a double-edged sword in a lot of ways.

YEAH! I think they’ve gone off the deep end in a lot of ways. But from what I know of it and what Kaya will see when we’re there it’s pretty magical and pretty incredible.

That’s really all I have but thank you so much for your time.

Oh you’re welcome! I hope I was able to help you even though I’m not a huge Disney person. I hope to get to read your paper some day! Good luck with that if you need any more help, let me know.

INTERVIEW WITH MELISSA

Hi, how are you?

I’m good how are you?

Good.

That’s good, so tell me about your project.

Yes, so basically I’m in the Honors Program and every senior has to do a thesis and you could really do it on anything so I picked the Disney Princesses because I’m Disney obsessed. It’s a three-part study: the first part is a lit review and I’m
looking at what other people have said about the stereotypes they evoke and the messages in them. The second part, I’m an advertising major, so I’m trying to understand the success between the Disney Princess franchise and that of its advertising and what they’ve been doing in the media. The third part is me talking to moms and seeing if everything everyone is saying is actually translating into the home and something mothers are worried about. So just to start, do you mind telling me your children’s names and ages.

Julie is 9, Allison is 5, and Jon is 3

Okay, and so I’m going to mainly focus on Allison but feel free to throw in any other information about any of them. Do you know at what age she was introduced to the Disney princesses?

Well she was introduced at birth. When she was born her sister was 4 and she was in it at that time. It’s always been around her but I didn’t notice her really getting into it until, I would say, at around 3 ½.

And you said Julie was really into it?

I thought she was really into it but now I’m seeing Allison and she’s definitely more into it than Julie was. Julie had a few costumes that she would play with; she had the books and some of the movies. It’s funny she didn’t really watch the movies so much for her it was about playing dress up and playing with the toys. Allison on the other hand is way more into it, she always wants to be dressed up and in a princess outfit and it’s still going. She’ll be 6 in July and it’s always on the top of her list for her birthday: dresses, or accessories, or princesses she doesn’t have yet.

Do you know who her favorite princess is?

She is not very loyal, she does one for a while and then will switch. She wants to be all of them so it moves around.

Do you know her favorite color?

Allison, well it started as pink and now she likes anything pretty. If I want to put her in something gray or navy or white she’s not into but if it’s pink, purple she likes it.

So I know you mentioned they have costumes and movies and books, do they own any other branded merchandise?

Let’s see, we have dolls, books, makeup sets, costumes, I can’t think of anything else

Did you use to watch these Disney movies when you were growing up?

I did, I think it was less princess focused. I remember from my childhood seeing “Bambi” and we had “Snow White” but they weren’t the Disney
Princesses back then. They were just Disney characters and I don't think we considered any of them to be a princess. I think we watched all of them and liked them equally.

Do you know how many princesses there are?

Oh I can’t even imagine, ten?

Exactly.

REALLY?! Oh, she plays also on the website. I’m trying to visualize in my head because it has all their heads on the top and you pick what world you want to enter. There are games and activities and all sorts of good stuff on there.

So the princesses started in 1937 with the creation of “Snow White.” Like you said, so the Disney Princess franchise wasn’t created until a Disney Chairman went to an ice skating event in 2001. He saw all these little girls dressed and running around in pink and wearing all the Disney costumes but it wasn’t branded or anything related to Disney. So he realized that there’s a whole market to capitalize on because people are already buying into it without it even existing.

A brilliant idea, they had the characters already.

So they created it in 2001 and it went from a few million dollars to billions of dollars in just a few years. There are over 250,000 branded items that are for sale daily so that’s just to give you an idea of how huge this brand has become. So, do you think the princesses have evolved over time or it’s all the same?

To me it seems they’re trying to portray the same messages. But they’re taking on a whole new life, they didn’t have all this interactive stuff. They used to exist in the movie and the story. They try to maintain that pure message of manners and happiness. I can’t think of anything that is different but it is different. Same characters but they’re completely different from when we were children because they have a life now and they didn’t before.

So what they’re going under scrutiny for is that all the movies show women in a passive role and they’re cooking and cleaning and waiting for a man to come. They just go from the rule of their father to the rule of their husband or boyfriend or whatever they are. Do you think that these films actually teach children social skills and that they should live a life like this or it’s harmless entertainment?

I guess it would depend on the kid. I have two girls who are completely different. I would worry that one might be swayed by things like that and then Allison just has her own opinions and I don’t think would be swayed by what she sees. That being said, I think that when kids are watching something repetitively for years at a time something must stick with them. My five year old talks about getting married, all that kind of stuff that I
never talked about at that age. I do think it’s from all these movies and stories, it’s out there way more than it was. Do I think it’s going to affect what kind of woman she will become when she grows up? Not really, I don’t. I think she says things because she is constantly watching it but I don't see it shaping the way she makes decisions as an adult. I would hope once she outgrows this phase of princesses she’s going to grow and mature.

Do you limit the amount of time she can watch them or play with them?

I don’t. We try to limit TV in general but I can’t break it down. There’s three of them so they fight over who gets to pick the show anyway and their little brother usually ends up winning. [laughs]

So when you hear the word princess what associations do you make in your mind?

I think in the beginning when I had my first child it had a slightly negative connotation and to me, Disney aside, princess was a spoiled brat of a child. If you called your daughter a princess it was not a great thing. I think because of this Disney thing and the fact that these girls are playing and using imaginative play and it’s all about these princesses. To me it doesn’t have this bratty, negative connotation anymore it’s more character-based association rather than personality-based. So, I don't think it’s a bad thing anymore.

Are you finding that your kids are more into the characters than the movies?

Yes, Allison won’t watch a lot of the movies because they scare her. They really are scary, but they like the idea of it. They like the dress and all the stuff that goes along with it, the movies just terrify them. You know we have princess board games and the dolls and all of that but she’s not so into the movies. Which is why I think it is so brilliant to come up with this whole thing because the majority of them would not care. I would get so excited when they would come out on movies but they don’t watch them more than once because they just don’t care.

Wow, thank you so much! That was very helpful…

INTERVIEW WITH GAIL

Hello?

Hi this is Melanie Greenblatt, Gari’s roommate

Hi, how are you?

I’m well, how are you?
I'm good thanks

So this really shouldn't take long and I can’t thank you enough. To be a senior in college and have to find moms with daughters between the ages of 3 and 7 is quite the challenge

[laughs] oh no problem, don’t worry about it. How can I help you?

So I’m writing my thesis on the Disney Princesses

[laughs]

I know, sounds super educational, right? So the first part is a lit review and the second part, I’m an advertising major, so I’m studying their advertising and media usage since the brand was created. The third part I am interviewing moms to see if what I’m writing about in the first part is translating into the home and something moms are concerned about it or if it’s just kind of a big to do about nothing

Alright, okay!

Just to start, can I have your kids names and their ages?

Gabriella is 6 and Maya is 7 months

Oh, well congratulations!

And, I’m pregnant again.

Well congratulations again! So at what age were they interested in the princesses, obviously more Gabriella then Maya?

I would say around two

Do you know who her favorite is?

She’s not obsessed like some of her friends were but she certainly liked it. Snow White was her favorite. When Princess and the Frog came out we took her to see it. Where was that? Not at Radio City but at some huge theater in New York, oh the Deggendorf. You could buy separate tickets for another area and there was every single princess set up in its own little stand. They had Ariel from the Little Mermaid and Belle and Pocahontas and they actually got to meet all the princesses. It was like Disney World or something she got to meet every single princess and she was blown away by that.

Does she have a lot of the merchandise? Disney makes over 250,000 products.

We have 249,000, yes we have every high heel under the sun, a lot of the costumes she wears those for Halloween and to play, she has most of the dolls the Barbie figurines, she has stickers, small figurines, g-d she has princess tea sets and tons
I just found out about it but does she play with them online? Someone I spoke to yesterday told me about this whole Disney Princess world online where they have all their faces and you just click one and enter their world. I had no idea that existed

No she doesn't really play with computers. She plays with the iPad so it's kind of whatever games we have downloaded. And she likes watching videos on YouTube. She doesn't spend that much time on the computer as other kids her age but I'm sure she has plenty of time to get into it so I'm okay with it that she's not totally into it yet.

Do you know what her favorite color is?

Pink [laughs]

Alright, sounds good

Typical girl

Did you watch these movies when you were growing up?

I’m sure I did. Ya know I watched them all probably. Beauty and the Beast, the Little Mermaid I watched for sure.

Do you know how many princesses there are?

Twelve

There are ten. So there’s this whole crazy process where they actually have to get inducted to being a princess. See it’s interesting because, well I’m totally and crazily Disney obsessed, and this whole thing is the hugest marketing scam in history.

Oh yeah!

Well what happened was in 2001 a Disney Chair man went to an ice skating event and he saw all these little girls running around looking like Belle and Cinderella and wearing pink. So he was like essentially we have a whole market we are capitalizing on, we’re just not getting the money for it. So now everything, everything, is princesses.

Oh we just went to the Disney on Ice a few weeks ago also

Really, I went for like my seventeenth birthday or something [laughs]

Yeah we did that a couple of weeks ago. She loved it.

Does she dress up when you guys go to events?
Not as more, I feel like when she was younger she did. Not now, now she is too cool for that but when she was younger if she could wear a costume or high heels she would.

So do you think these any negative stereotypes or that children actually learn social skills from these movies?

I have to tell you, she’s not a huge movie person. Silly things scare her. I don’t think she has seen any of the movies in full. She doesn’t like the movies and she’d rather play than sit and watch a movie for an hour and a half. I got her to sit and watch Snow White, we watched most of it but she’d rather play and read and color than watch a movie. She sat through almost all of The Princess and the Frog. Whatever she knows of the princesses she learns from her friends.

So you’re not opposed to her being exposed to it or diving into it?

No, not at all

Snow White was created in 1937 and Tiana in 2009 so there’s obviously a huge time gap. Do you think the changes in society are shown throughout the plot and the princesses have evolved?

Oh definitely with Tiana that’s like your modern princess. Look, because she doesn’t watch them I haven’t seen them. I’ve seen all those movies a while ago…but that was a very long time ago. Of course they’ve evolved it’s totally different but I remember when we were watching Princess and the Frog it was definitely a more modern princess.

But you don’t know exactly what ways made you feel that?

I don’t. You know, she loves the princesses but I can’t be good to judge because she’s not totally into it.

Last thing, when you hear the word “princess” what associations do you make?

Cinderella. I think of her right away I don’t know why. To me she is the princess at the ball with the glass slipper and the whole dress. To me that’s the epitome of princess. For me, I just feel like I think Cinderella.

Well thank you!

If you have any questions let me know! Good luck, bye!

INTERVIEW WITH MAXINE

Hello

Hello?
Hi, how’s it going?

Good! My sister told me this is about Disney Princesses, which is right up her alley-

That’s perfect. So just to give you an idea of what I’m doing; I’m in the Honors program and every senior has to write a thesis and I’m writing mine on the Disney Princesses because I’m Disney obsessed. I’m studying advertising so I am doing a three-part study in which the first part is a lit review. Disney’s been going under a lot of scrutiny so it’s just analyzing what other people are thinking and the stereotypes they’re bringing up. Then, I go onto analyzing their media presence and advertising since the start of the franchise in 2001. Then I’m interviewing moms to see if what I talked about in part 1 is actually translating into the home or if it’s a big to do about nothing. So just to start, when you think “princess” what words pop into your head?

Well my daughter’s probably the start, I call her my little princess. I mean when you think of princess you think of special, and loyalty, and, you know, someone that stands out in a positive way. Now they have Sofia the First and, do you know about that one? I watch all the Disney movies with her but I think that over the years they’re a little more geared towards adults sometimes. There’s things that say that a child might not totally understand.

Do you have any examples or references of what you’re talking about?

Yeah, well in “Toy Story,” well, there’s just adult things that go on in these movies. I don’t think it’s anything too inappropriate it’s just geared towards adults, and goes over a child’s head.

Right, did you watch these movies when you were growing up?

I did, but I think that I watched them more now because I have a daughter. I feel like I definitely did watch them or if I didn’t watch them as a kid I watched them when Chelsea was little, and my brother was little, so I was exposed to them then. I remember always wanting to get Chelsea the princess movies like “Beauty and the Beast.” Because I had younger siblings I was exposed to them in that way but I’m sure I watched them as a kid.

Do you know how many princesses there are to date?

A bunch, isn’t there eleven or twelve of them?

Well there’s ten because Sofia the First hasn’t been inducted yet. It’s a whole process in actually becoming a princess so she’s going to be the eleventh one but since the movie hasn’t come out yet she isn’t a princess.

So the last one was Tiana?

No, Rapunzel was 2010, Tiana was 2009.
Her favorite two princesses are Ariel, the little mermaid, and Rapunzel. And lately she likes Aurora. I just got her a bed, I changed her crib to the toddler bed to the bed. To motivate her to go in the bed and stay in the bed I got her a whole Ariel sheet set with the comforter and pillow cases and sheets. I put the stickers with different princesses all around her room. It works a little bit, it’s really a good motivator.

Does she have a lot of other princess merchandise?

She has nightgowns, pajamas, the videos, the dolls, the Disney castle, pretty much anything, the wands, the costumes, pretty much anything you can get her. First she was obsessed with Dora and then as soon as she turned 2½ she was turned onto the princesses.

And how old is she now?

Three

Oh so she’s just been into it for half a year now

She makes me plays the CD like 95 times in the car, she sings it, she knows all the words, it’s really cute.

Do you know what her favorite color is?

Her favorite color [asks her daughter] pink, I was going to say that

So do you think that these movies evoke any negative stereotypes?

You know, none of them that I’ve watched really aggregated me or anything. I think they’re kind of sweet. They all end up with a special man and all of that and it always has something negative that turns into something good in the end.

You don’t think they’re learning any social skills from them?

I mean, I do think that tv shows like Dora have exposed her to Spanish. She’ll count in Spanish for me but you know she’ll want to do something like the princesses something. What do you mean in particular?

So basically the franchise has gotten a lot of heat because throughout all the movies the women just cook and cleans and as soon as they find men they’re life is happy. It’s not really teaching women to be motivated and go out and do things for themselves.

Yeah, you’re kind of right in that aspect. Usually the mom and the dad have to work now, definitely changed since Disney first came out. You are right it is maybe, I agree with what you said.

But you haven’t noticed a change from Snow White to Tiana or Rapunzel?
Oh yeah, there’s tremendous change, definitely. I mean Snow White, there’s a lot of sexual connotations in these movies too. In “The Little Mermaid,” one of the castles is like phallic, it’s like each movie has something sexual in it. The kids don’t pick up on it, also, I think in a way I like, I’m a divorced mom, so, umm, it’s sweet in a way to me. I might have a different view because I kind of want that prince to come and rescue me, you know?

But you’re not opposed to her watching it or anything?

No, no but I usually watch it with her. I don’t leave her alone watching them I’m always sitting next to her.

Well that’s kind of my stance on it and I’ve spoken to a bunch of moms so far. Even though Disney has some negative images in these movies it is not their job to be teaching them how to live their lives, that’s the role of the parent. A concern is that because media is so prevalent now and all these kids are playing on iPads and they own the DVDs so they can watch these movies sixty-five times a day if they want. Because of the repetition of these stereotypes and societal notions that they’re eventually going to think they can’t do anything on their own.

They also have different, I agree with what you’re saying but they also have parents as role models. She sees I’m a working mother, so she knows that she would want to work as well. I mean, I grew up with a mom that was always home and didn’t work but I always knew that I wanted to be a teacher since I was a little girl. I had the mentality that when I was ready to go out in the work force that I would go out and do it.

Well thank you very much, that’s really all I have.

Okay, well, yeah, I hope it helped. Even the color in Snow White to now, the change in the color, you know what I mean? It’s completely different that is why they recreate and remaster them. All right, well good luck with your thesis if you need anything else just let me know.

Thank you so much I appreciate that.
Appendix 2

Figure 1:

This image depicts all ten princesses to date. Left to right: Ariel, Pocahontas, Jasmine, Belle, Rapunzel, Aurora, Cinderella, Tiana, Mulan and Snow White. Those characters with ethnic backgrounds appear smaller and are placed towards the rear. It was a decision by Disney marketers, that when depicted together in one image, no princess would look at another one, but all would gaze out at the viewer (Codenamesailorearth.blogspot.com).

Figure 2:

Sofia the First, is the next Disney Princess and first child princess in a film to be released in 2014. She is supposed to be of Hispanic origin but as this image shows, she has fair skin (Maitland, “Disney Unveils Newest Princess Sophia the First for Toddlers”).
Figure 3:

This image depicts a little girl after receiving her Certificate of Perfect Fit at Stride Rite. Behind her is one of the in-store posters used by the Disney Company in this cross-promotion (mamaofalltrades.com).
Who needs workout attire when men and women choose to complete this half marathon fully adorned in the costumes of their favorite Disney Princess or character? Even the men are dressing up as princes or princesses, proving that Disney has overtaken the idea of dressing up as royalty (Orlandosentinel.com).
These three images demonstrate the lack of ethnic princesses found on Disney Princess merchandise. Pocahontas, Mulan, and Tiana are rarely found on these products, perpetuating the idea of beauty as being White. These three photos were taken by the author at a K-Mart in Syracuse, NY.
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Janet. Personal Interview. 11 March 2013.

Katherine. Personal Interview. 7 January 2013.


Langlois, Judith H., Jean M. Ritter, Lori A. Roggman, and


Maxine. Personal Interview. 27 January 2013.


