Investigating the Possible Effects of Disney Princess Culture on Young Women:

Approach, Ideals, and Gender Roles Within Intimate Relationships

by

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Abstract

Disney Princess culture (DPC) conveys strong messages regarding the criteria of a model intimate relationship through the repetition of themes within the Disney Princess movies (DPM). Children have been shown to internalize the messages they receive from entertainment media, including animated films. The target audience during the steady release of DPM's in the 1990's and the rise of the Disney Princess franchise in early 2000's are now women who are entering committed intimate relationships and/or parenthood. Using a self report online survey, this study aimed to investigate and identify possible correlations between the amount of DPC women consumed as children and their current approaches, ideals, and gender roles within adult intimate relationships. A significant negative result was observed between *amount of influence* and *influence rating* (Spearman's ρ = -.605, p = .017) i.e. women who perceived DPC as more influential within their intimate relationships also rated said influence more critically. Further research in this area could assist child entertainment providers in producing socially conscious media and increase counsellors' understanding for more effective therapy.

Acknowledgements

For Mom, Dad, Anita, and Sam.

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The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible effects of Disney Princess culture (DPC) on the intimate relationships of young women. Specifically, the focus was on the potential correlations between amount of DPC consumption and three aspects of intimate relationships: approach, ideals, and gender roles. By gathering more information on any existing associations, the study aims to contribute to a better understanding of how children's entertainment relates to experiences later in life, allowing for the creation of content with a more positive impact. The same information will hopefully also add to the current discourse on how to effectively counsel women on issues pertaining to intimate relationships.

In recent years, Disney has been trying to produce material that is more in line with today's shifting societal views on social justice (Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2004). Feminism is an especially noticeable one within both characters and thematic material (Towbin et al., 2004; Wiersma, 2001). The Disney Princess franchise, first created in 2000 (Mooney, 2004), is a great example in this change as the content of the movies have been breaking out of the familiar patterns of princess movies released in the 20th century (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011).

The Disney Princess movies (DPM) can be split into three separate eras: classic, renaissance, and modern. The classic era consists of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). The princesses within these movies are standard damsels in distress awaiting the rescue by their knights in shining armour. They are depicted as individuals lacking power, strength, ambition, resources, and courage who would not be able to

resolve problems on their own. The storylines are also stereotypical as they all consist of a

beautiful girl who is kind, forgiving, and patient, willing to endure some sort of hardship while

daydreaming about their life's goal - true love (Layng, 2001; Pelton, 2009; Wiersma, 2001).

The renaissance era consists of *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991),

Aladdin (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Mulan* (1998). Third-wave feminism began in the early

1990's, a movement that is reflected in the DPM's of this time (Erchull et al., 2009). The

princesses in this era begin to display the agency and ambition absent from the previous group.

While the princesses are still kind and beautiful, the final rescue is still performed by their male

counterparts, and the ultimate objective is still finding true love, the princesses step out of the

damsel in distress stereotype. They have ambitions other than achieving happily ever after

through true love and assist in their own rescues as opposed to breaking down in tears (Wiersma,

2001).

The modern era currently includes *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), *Tangled* (2010),

and *Brave* (2012) (The princesses of *Frozen*, released in 2013, have yet to be officially included

in the franchise). Since the princesses of this era were not present during the childhoods of the

participants, they will not be covered in the scope of the study. It is still important to note,

however, that Disney has continued to move in a more feminist direction by including princesses

who fight their own battles, have clear personal ambitions other than love, and actively defy

traditional gender roles (England et al., 2011; Wiersma, 2001).

It is obvious that DPC has changed since the release of Snow White in 1937, making

significant progress in creating material that empowers women through strong female leads. The

main messages around love and happiness, however, are still present albeit in decreasing

importance. Therefore, Disney and DPC still have room to grow, such as shifting from the

removal of traditional values from their products to actively introducing empowering content.

The last decade of the 20th century saw the release of princess after princess, ultimately

culminating in the creation of the Disney Princess franchise in 2000 (Orenstein, 2006). During

this time, a new princess was introduced just as the craze of the previous one died down,

ensuring the popularity of Disney princesses never waned. The girls who grew up amidst this

constant stream of new DPM's are now young women who are currently entering committed,

potentially life-long partnerships. As DPC contains strong messages regarding intimate

relationships, this immersion during childhood could have left lasting impressions that are

present in their life as an adult couple.

This current study hypothesizes that there is a relationship between the amount of DPC a

participant consumed in her childhood and her current intimate relationships, namely in

approach, ideals, and gender roles. Here, approach is referring to a participant's method of

initiation both in the establishing of the relationship (e.g. does she wait to be asked out?) and

within the relationship itself (e.g. does she initiate physical intimacy?). Ideals are the "should's"

that a participant applies to her relationship (e.g. there should be no conflicts). Gender roles are

the beliefs and values the participant holds towards what it means to be a man or a woman within

a relationship (e.g. men are providers, women are homemakers).

This hypothesis is based on several observations that have been made in previous

research. The first is that children absorb beliefs and attitudes from the ones modelled to them by

both living and inanimate sources, i.e. parents and media (Epstein & Ward, 2011; Ey & Cupit,

2013; Oseroff-Varnell, 1998; Papadoloupos, 2010), with the frequency of exposure correlating

with the strength of influence (Eggermont, 2004). Second, the existing literature indicates that women and couples who engage in intimate relationships that are similar to those depicted in DPC and/or enact characteristics found within the messages of DPC experience less success and more intra and interpersonal psychological discomfort (Campbell et al., 2001; Eastwick & Neff, 2012; Niehuis, Lee, Reifman, Swenson, & Hunsaker, 2011; Rodriguez, Hadden, & Kenn, 2015; Overall, Fletcher, & Simpson, 2006). The hypothesis also contains the assumption that despite the infinite number of factors involved in the connection between two individuals, demonstrations of behaviours and beliefs contained in DPC can be studied and considered in relative isolation without losing validity.

The key variables present in this study are the participant's environment and experiences. The childhood environment within which the participant consumed DPC varies depending on factors such as family structure, the modelled relationships, socio-economic status, parents' and siblings' attitudes towards relationships, and the consumption of other relationship modelling media (e.g. novels, music videos, TV shows) (Berglas, Angulo-Olaiz, Jerman, Desai, & Constantine 2014; Epstein & Ward, 2011; Ey & Cupit, 2013; Oseroff-Varnell, 1998). The intimacy-related experiences of the participant varies depending on the relationships they experienced during adolescence and any positive and negative lessons gleaned from them (Shulman & Kipnis, 2001). Variations in adult environment such as access to post-secondary education also need to be taken into account as exposure to feminist literature in college environments are suggested to have significant influences on intimate relationships (Yoder, Perry, & Saal, 2007).

Procedurally, the study attempts to provide some controls by selecting a relatively homogenous sample (i.e. middle/upper-middle class, college educated, residing in Pacific North America) to limit the effects of varying SES, culture, access to education, etc. To control for experiences that can have large influences on their intimate relationships (e.g. sexual trauma, strict religious beliefs, exceptionally chaotic parent-parent and parent-child relationships), participants were not included if they indicated the presence of any based on their own perception.

If the recent developments in technology and advertisement are any indication, it will soon become borderline impossible to avoid contact with products by vast entertainment conglomerates such as Disney. With the existing research on intimate relationships suggesting that DPC will have a likely negative impact, increasing consumption necessitates increasing understanding. By contributing to that pool of knowledge, this study aims to steer children's media in a more feminist direction to foster happier, healthier intimate relationships when they reach adulthood. This study also aims to support the women who grew up with DPC through the education of their counsellors to improve therapy efficacy and the education of the women themselves to increase insight and self-awareness.

Literature Review

The following literature review examines the existing discourse on DPC and its possible effects on intimate relationships. First, there will be an overview of the history of the Disney Princess franchise followed by an analysis of the main themes and topics within its movies. Next, the methods of DPC consumption will be addressed by investigating the pervasiveness of DPC in children's media and entertainment. Finally, the possible effects these messages could

have on women and their intimate relationships will be discussed to establish the reason for this study as well as the its possible applications in the future.

In-depth Look at the Disney Princess Line

　　　　History. The Disney Princess franchise was established in January 2000 by then Disney Consumer Products Chairman Andy Mooney as a "longterm lifestyle brand for girls" (Mooney, 2004). At is conception, it included nine princesses: Snow White from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), Cinderella from *Cinderella* (1950), Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* (1989), Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), Jasmine from *Aladdin* (1992), Pocahontas from *Pocahontas* (1995), Mulan from *Mulan* (1998), and Tinkerbell from *Peter Pan* (1953) (who was soon removed from the line-up) with Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), Rapunzel from *Tangled* (2010), and Merida from *Brave* (2012) being added on in later years as the new movies were released (Brigante, 2013). Since the study is discussing the possible effects on young women who consumed DPC as children, this review will only be looking at the princesses that were included in the lineup during the time period when the study participants were the target audience.

　　　　While the official Disney Princess franchise was created in 2000, the movies themselves span most of the 20th century. These movies can be categorized into three chronological groups: early (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*), middle (*The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Pocahontas*, and *Mulan*), and late (*The Princess and the Frog*, *Tangled*, and *Brave*). These categories also apply when the movies are examined thematically, with the movies including progressively less heteronormative content as time went on (England et al., 2011).

Common themes, topics, and messages. Few people would have trouble naming themes that appear time and again in fairy tales. The first ones that come to mind are probably "happily ever after" and "love at first sight". Obviously, nearly all the DPM's include both but they also contain more insidious messages on beauty, heteronormativity, and female agency (England et al. 2011; Layng, 2001; Wiersma, 2001).

It was love at first sight. Out of the eight princesses, Belle and Mulan are the only ones who take longer than 24 hours to fall in love with their prince. This theme is particularly evident in the three earlier movies (England et al., 2011; Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman, & Lund 2003; Wiersma, 2001). Aurora and Snow White both appear to fall in love with their princes instantaneously after little to no conversation. Aurora and Prince Phillip sing about their love as they share their first dance in the forest but the encounter ends without them even exchanging names.

Snow White flees from The Prince (several names have been adopted by fans but according to Disney historian Dave Smith, no formal name was ever chosen [1998]) upon their first meeting and peeks out demurely from the curtains once she is back in the castle, obviously enjoying The Prince's attention. Later in the dwarfs' cabin, she sings about how she wishes to marry him despite the fact that up until that point, the only thing Snow White says to The Prince is "Oh! Oh!". They also do not exchange names. Both these princesses spend a significant amount of the movie unconscious, leaving zero opportunity for interaction with their respective love interests. Prior to their becoming unconscious, Aurora and Snow White both ran away from the princes and yet, upon waking, are both jubilant to find themselves being kissed by a virtual stranger.

Cinderella arguably does not fall in love instantly as by the time she and Prince Charming are singing about their love, it was close to midnight, after what appears to be several hours of dancing. Other than this encounter, the next meaningful interaction between she and Prince Charming is their wedding.

Love appears to take longer to develop for the princesses of the middle era movies, with the exception of Ariel, who is willing to sacrifice everything to be with Prince Eric despite not having said a single word to him. Both Jasmine and Pocahontas fall in love with Aladdin and John Smith respectively after one day. While Jasmine and Aladdin do actually converse throughout the day, Pocahontas and John Smith return to the lack of communication of earlier movies as they do not speak the same language.

Beauty and the Beast and *Mulan* are the only two movies in which love appears to develop over a period of time. The exact amount of time is unclear in both movies but it would not be unreasonable to suggest it happened over the course of several weeks to months. It is important, however, to point out that in both instances, special circumstances around the appearance of the characters (and their accompanying connotations) likely played a large part in slowing down the progress of love. For Belle, loving the Beast arguably constitutes as bestiality and Li Shang loving a disguised Mulan would have meant he was non-heterosexual (Tanner et al., 2003).

In these circumstances of love at first sight, it would be reasonable to assume the love is based mainly if not solely on physical attractiveness as instantaneous love leaves little time for the couples to get acquainted. While several princes are first intrigued by the princesses' beautiful singing voice (The Prince, Prince Phillip, and Prince Eric) it's the princesses' physical

beauty that causes them to fall in love (Parsons, 2004; Pelton, 2009). It is certainly possible for physical attraction to lead to the formation of deeper, more meaningful connections but the tendency for DPM's to jump from love at first sight to married and happily ever after conveys the message that physical attraction alone is sufficient for maintaining a lifelong partnership (Tanner et al., 2003). This clearly represents an unrealistic way of choosing intimate partners as the initial passion experienced in a relationship can alter and diminish an individual's ability to accurately assess the differences between themselves and their partner (Campbell et al., 2001). Without active communication and an integrative conflict resolution style (integrative conflict resolution is defined as a resolution method that includes a marked effort to understand and empathize with one's partner in a positive atmosphere), these differences could become serious conflicts that contribute to a breakup or an abusive relationship (Shulman, Tuval-Mashiach, Levran, & Anbar, 2006).

  And they lived happily ever after. These six words are appear at the end of countless fairytales and bedtime stories (Sweeney, 2011; Tanner et al., 2003). They serve to extend the happy ending beyond the last page, reassuring children that their beloved characters continue to live joyful, perfect lives in the unwritten chapters that follow THE END. The happy ending that precedes those lines is typically based on the joining of princess and prince in a wedding, actual or implied (Aurora, Snow White, Cinderella, Ariel, and Jasmine), or a confirmation of their love

for one another (Belle, Pocahontas, and Mulan[1]).

There is an obvious formula to these DPM's. The pair meet, fall in love, get married, and live happily ever after (Pocahontas is some what of an exception as she does not leave with John Smith. The ending, however, does depict their love as everlasting as if they were wed.). Either implicitly or explicitly, the movies end with the message that love = marriage = eternal happiness (Parsons, 2004). In fact, *Beauty and the Beast* ends with the following exchange between Chip and Mrs. Potts.

Chip: Are they going to live happily ever after, mama?

Mrs. Potts: Of course, my dear. Of course.

The other movies may not have been as blatant but the message can hardly be lost considering all the conflicts are exclusively pre-marriage. In DPM's, once physical attraction occurs, it is automatically followed by love, marriage, and happiness, a domino effect that is only hindered (but never stopped) by the extrinsic forces trying to keep the couple apart (Layng, 2001). Ultimately, their love always triumphs, leaving them to enjoy their perfect future (Martin & Kazyak, 2009). This depiction of post marriage life as natural and effortless is almost completely opposite to real life, where falling in love is easy but maintaining love requires a

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[1] While Mulan's ending is the least explicitly romantic when viewed from a Western standpoint, it would almost fit into the wedding ending category when the cultural context is taken into account. 'Meeting the parents' is similar to an engagement announcement in China as it typically happens after the couple has decided they would like to get married. The man is then invited to the woman's house, where he hopes to prove himself worthy to her family and to receive his future father-in-law's blessings (That's why Li Shang, a powerful general, was so nervous meeting Mulan's family!). However, since this study is based on the thoughts and experiences of women in Canada, Mulan will be categorized based on a Western point of view, where the movie ends with Mulan and Li Shang in love but not married.

constant effort to communicate, understand, and empathize with one's partner (Campbell et al.,

2001; Dijkstra, Barelds, Groothof, & Bruggen, 2014; Eastwick & Neff, 2012).

   Men are subjects, women are objects. When DPM's are coded for stereotypical

representations of gender, the overarching theme that begins to appear is that male character do

things, whereas female characters have things done to them (England et al., 2011; Murnen,

Greenfield, Younger, & Boyd, 2015). This discrepancy in agency appears in all the movies

discussed in this study to different degrees and can also be found in the related merchandise of

the Disney Princess franchise (Murnen, et al., 2015; Weirsma 2000). Within movies, female

characters typically need to be rescued from a conflict whereas male characters perform the

action that ends the conflict. Within the franchise's other products, there is a significant

difference in the frequency with which male and female characters are depicted as performing an

action (England et al., 2011; Layng, 2001; Murnen et al., 2015, Wiersma, 2001).

   This theme is quite obvious in the early era movies as Snow White, Aurora, and

Cinderella all fit the 'damsel in distress' archetype rather nicely. Their lack of agency is prevalent

throughout their movies. Snow White, for example, first has her life threatened by The Queen,

then has her life spared by The Huntsman. She then displays some agency within the next

portion of the movie by giving orders to the forest animals and reinforcing rules with the dwarfs.

(It is interesting to note, however, that Snow White only displays agency when performing

domestic duties and during interactions with the dwarfs and forest animals, i.e. when she is doing

women's work and interacting with child-like individuals and pets.) The Queen then tricks and

poisons her, the dwarfs place her in a glass casket, which allows The Prince to see her and wake

her from her comatose state by kissing her, before literally carrying her away and riding off into

the sunset to live happily ever after. None of the actions or choices, tricking, poisoning, glass casket, discovering, kissing, waking, and riding off, are performed by Snow White herself. She plays no part in her own rescue and does not contribute anything that helps end the film's conflict, relying instead, on the actions of those around her to achieve her happily ever after ending (Layng, 2001).

  Sleeping Beauty takes it a step further by basing the entire film around the actions others perform on Aurora. The movie begins with the fairies bestowing their gifts, followed by Maleficent casting her curse. Upon meeting Prince Phillip in the forest, he is the one who initiates contact and leads during their dance. On the fateful day she returns to the castle, Maleficent takes control of Aurora's mind and leads her to the spindle where the curse causes her to fall into a deep sleep. Aurora then spends the next twenty minutes of the movie asleep while Phillip battles his way through Maleficent and her dragon, finally waking her with true love's kiss. Aurora hardly makes any decisions or displays any agency in the entire movie and certainly contributes nothing to her rescue (England et al., 2011, Wiersma, 2001).

  Cinderella differs a little from Snow White and Aurora in that Prince Charming plays a comparatively small role in Cinderella's rescue. Instead, she is saved time and again by the other characters in the film, often without her asking. She lacks the initiative to even think of ideas to help herself. She only had a dress for the ball because her animal friends made one for her. When the stepsisters fly into a frenzy and rip up her gown, Cinderella does nothing to stop them. Instead of trying to fix her dilemma, she sobs in the garden until her Fairy Godmother appears to conjure her gown, shoes, and carriage. Once back home, her stepmother locks her in her room but thankfully Cinderella's animal friends come to the rescue again, freeing her just in time to try

on the slipper. Only in the end of film does Cinderella display a small moment of agency when she produces the matching glass slipper after the first one was broken.

In the middle era movies, DPM's do move in a more feminist direction by introducing princesses who are rebellious, headstrong, and perform actions during the movie including turning things around and rescuing the male character (Dundes, 2001; England et al., 2011; Wiersma, 2001). A more detailed look, however, quickly reveals aspects of the princesses what have not changed much from the older movies (Dundes, 2001; Layng, 2001; Wiersma, 2001). Despite making or attempting to make decisions for herself, each princess is under the control of a male character (King Triton for Ariel, Chief Powhatan for Pocahontas, The Beast for Belle, The Sultan for Jasmine, Li Shang for Mulan) (Tanner et al., 2003). They are still placed in predicaments by the villain that requires their prince to perform the final rescue (with the exception of Mulan).

The different levels of agency and action are also present in the merchandise of the franchise. When various products were coded based on traditionally male or female characteristics, it was found that 61% of images of male characters depicted them as in motion/ performing an action compared to only 22% for female characters (Murnen et al., 2015).

Rewarded suffering, punished agency. This theme may serve as an explanation for the lack of agency within female characters in DPM's. They are often punished when they rebel against the situation they are in but are rewarded if they endure suffering in silence (Parsons, 2004). Female villains further emphasize this as they are characters with agency who use it to cause mayhem. They are depicted as evil and ugly where the princesses are good and beautiful. This connection of agency to evil also occurs at the end of every movie with a female villain.

They, along with their power and ambition, are always vanquished in the end, usually by a prince who was inspired by the passive beauty of the princess (Layng, 2001).

The princess is made to suffer in various ways (Parsons, 2004). Snow White and Aurora are both stripped of their royal status. Snow White and Cinderella are forced to work as maids despite being a princess and from a well to do family, respectively. Ariel, Jasmine, and Pocahontas are all stifled by their controlling fathers. Mulan endures intense training and ridicule from fellow soldiers. Belle has to cope with being imprisoned in a castle by the emotionally unstable Beast. Pocahontas is judged and shunned by her tribe for loving John Smith (Wiersma, 2001).

The princesses from the early era movies plus Belle grin and bear their suffering with a positive attitude while waiting for some outside force to rescue them. Later on, the princesses do have their own ideas and desires but acting on them almost always results in a negative outcome (Layng, 2001). Jasmine runs away from the palace but is kidnapped by Jafar. Ariel makes a deal with Ursula to become human but she risked being turned into a polyp and losing her voice forever. Mulan joins the army but is left to die in the snow when her identity was revealed. Pocahontas defies her father to be with John Smith, only to have him almost killed before her eyes. With the exception of Mulan, it took a man stepping in to save the princess from the mess she caused by choosing to go her own way. Regardless of the nature of the suffering, these princesses were all rewarded at the end of the film. Essentially, the movies are saying that if a woman endures the problems life throws at her, she will be rewarded with a prince and live happily ever after together (Layng, 2001; Parsons, 2004; Tanner et al., 2003). (Pocahontas chose

not to leave with John Smith but the everlasting nature of their love was repeatedly stressed, i.e. she was still rewarded with true love.)

Disney Princesses - They're Everywhere

The Disney takeover of industries targeting children began in the 80's (Orenstein, 2006). During this time, they "discovered" separate advertisement target groups like toddlers, preteens, tweens, etc. Up until that point, products were either geared towards children or adults but Disney realized that by breaking the children's market into distinct groups, they could increase profits by urging parents to purchase new items whenever their child enters a new stage of development (Coulter, 2012).

Today, it would be close to impossible for a girl growing up anywhere in the world with even the slightest connection to Western consumerism to not encounter the Disney Princess franchise in some fashion (Orenstein, 2006). For those growing up in Western countries, DPC could be introduced before the child is even born through parents decorating the nursery with princess products. After birth, Disney has made sure there are princess products available for any occasion until the girl has reached her teens. Movies, dolls, picture books, costumes, birthday paraphernalia, clothes, school supplies, lunch boxes, jewelry, on and offline games, the list goes on and on (Coulter, 2012; Sweeney, 2011). By aggressively marketing the Disney Princess line as a "lifestyle brand", Disney made 3 billion dollars globally off of the franchise in 2012 (Mooney, 2004; Ng, 2013).

Reasons for Research

During the release of the middle era movies (1989 - 1998), little girls were being presented with princess after princess. There was a flood of merchandise accompanying each

new release, not unlike *Frozen* today. When the Princess franchise was created in 2000, it re-energized the early era films and brought them along with their more traditional messages back into the limelight (Orenstein, 2006) .

Studies have shown that children internalize and replicate behaviours and messages that they are exposed to (Epstein & Ward, 2011; Ey & Cupit, 2013; Oseroff-Varnell, 1998). The exposure can come from a variety of sources. Children have been observed imitating the sexualized dress and movements seen in music videos (Ey & Cupit, 2013). Young adults have been found to adopt their parents' views on gender roles and replicate their methods of conflict resolution (Epstein & Ward, 2011; Taylor & Segrin, 2005; Trotter, 2010.) During an interview on relationships, 79.6% of participants in the study (aged 19-28) stated that the media influenced their relationships and 74% stated that their parents did (Berglas et al., 2014). Perhaps the young adults of today are learning more and more from the relationships seen onscreen and online and less and less from their parents.

Aside from originating from a myriad of sources, the messages modelled towards children can also have various positive and negative effects on them in adulthood. Studies show that when a child is exposed to more traditional gender roles and conflict resolution styles from their parents, they may go on to navigate their own adult intimate relationships in a similar fashion (Shulman et al, 2006). Unfortunately, traditional views and behaviours are correlated with an external loci of control, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and a lack of relational efficacy (Taylor & Segrin, 2010). On the other hand, feminist views in undergraduate women was found to correlate with higher self esteem, increased sexual assertiveness and satisfaction, and more egalitarian expectations within intimate relationships (Yoder et al., 2007).

In terms of the DPM's discussed in this literature review, it is evident that Disney has attempted in recent years to turn their stories and characters in a more feminist direction (Wiersma, 2001). Compared to the princesses of the early era, the princesses of the middle era are obviously more developed characters containing both stereotypically feminine and masculine traits (England et al., 2011). Even so, these 90's princesses still convey problematic messages just like their predecessors.

DPC is pervasive throughout the Princess line, albeit in different amounts. It is a culture where there are expectations and ideals on how a relationship should begin and progress. The ideal relationship sparks to life in an instant when an attractive man approaches an attractive woman, then progresses to true love at a rapid pace. The only issues that arise are due to outside factors that try to break them apart but the man will be able to solve any problem because he loves his beautiful partner so much. Once the conflict is resolved, the woman, who has endured whatever necessary, is rewarded with a marriage where the love is perfect, easy, and everlasting.

This marriage would contain defined gender roles that can be pushed from time to time but never actually broken. The woman can have her own beliefs and desires but when times get tough, it is the man's job to take care of things. He is the one who leads and directs in the relationship. She follows happily because being married to an attractive, powerful, wealthy man was all she ever truly wanted; attaining it meant everything else in life would fall into place and remain that way.

Obviously this type of relationship is unrealistic. Studies have shown that having rigid ideals, expecting specific behaviours, subscribing to traditional gender beliefs, lacking in conflict resolution skills, and selecting partners for their extrinsic aspirations can all negatively affect the

duration and quality of the relationship in addition to the psychological wellbeing of its participants (Campbell et al., 2001; Eastwick & Neff, 2012; Niehuis et al., 2011; Overall et al., 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2015; Shulman, Mayes, Cohen, Swain, & Leckman, 2008). This type of relationship, however, was also the type that surrounded today's young women when they were little girls. It was glorified and presented as the type of relationship everyone should aspire to have, because everyone wants to live happily ever after (Hylmo, 2006; Martin & Kazyak, 2009).

Altogether, the information collected in this review points to a few ways this study could be potentially useful. It can be used to supplement counselling for both young women and couples by providing another way to interpret narratives or an alternative path to explore, hopefully leading to new insights and personal growth. It can also be used to increase the quality of children's entertainment. Studying the possible effects of different messages could help guide studios in the production of increasingly feminist, social justice oriented material.

Conclusion

For most of today's young women, the Disney Princess line was an endless albeit unavoidable source of entertainment throughout childhood. It was unfortunately also an endless and unavoidable source of messages that are correlated with unhealthy, unfulfilling, and unhappy relationships. Whether or not these messages actually had a negative impact, no one's ideals, approach, or beliefs on gender roles within intimate relationships develop in a vacuum. Therefore, a deeper understanding of all three could lead to higher quality counselling and more awareness in children's entertainment.

Method

This study utilized a cross-sectional, self report online survey geared towards identifying any possible correlations between childhood DPC consumption and the participants' lived experiences in intimate relationships as adults. The survey contained questions answered through bipolar, Likert-like scales (0-5, each question specifically indicated what each end of the scale represented) a that covered the participants' experiences with DPC and their thoughts, feelings, perceptions, etc regarding intimate relationships and gender roles. The data was collected and analyzed on the SPSS program using Spearman's rho.

Participants

The of this study consisted of 23 female identifying participants. Their ages ranged from 21- 31 years with the mean age being 24 years (SD = 2.30). All were residing in Vancouver, BC at the time of the study. Almost all of the participants were highly educated having attained a bachelor's degree or equivalent (91.30%) and several were working on a post graduate degree (21.74%). In terms of ethic backgrounds, 13 participants identified as Caucasian (56.52%), 8 identified as Asian (34.78%), 1 identified as Hispanic, and 1 identified as both Asian and Hispanic. Based on Pakvis's definition of SES groups (2016), the majority of the participants were of middle to upper-middle class, with 7 participants (30.34%) from upper-middle class (described as professionals with accumulated wealth), 13 participants (56.52%) from average-middle class (middle management or highly skilled blue-collar jobs), and 3 participants (13.04%) from lower-middle class (blue-collar, "dead-end" jobs with little accumulation of wealth).

To select the participants, individuals from my social circle were contacted via Facebook Messenger with an invitation that explained the nature and reason for this study along with

information regarding policies on privacy and consent (see Appendix B for all notices). The

message also included a link to the online survey if they wished to participate and requested the

participants who did complete the survey to notify me on a separate message after they have

done so. In order to be considered, the individual must be between 20 - 35 years old, identify as

female, and have had some sort of contact with the Disney Princess franchise during their

childhood. They also had to be either pan-, bi-, or heterosexual and had engaged in an intimate

relationship with at least one male identifying individual.

The reasons for criteria above are as follows:

- Age Requirement: The study's aim is to investigate the possible effects of childhood

    DPC consumption on women within their intimate relationships.

    Therefore, all the participants had to have been children sometime

    between 1989 (when the regular release of princess movies began

    with the introduction of *The Little Mermaid*) and early 2000's

    (introduction and rising popularity of the franchise).

- Gender Identity: Only female identifying individuals were selected as the scope of

    the study mainly covers the messages in DPC that pertained to/

    were geared towards girls.

- Sexual Orientation: In order to limit variables and strengthen validity, participants must

    have experienced at least one intimate relationship that resembles

    those depicted in the DPM's. As the princesses all fall in love with

    male characters, participants must experience heterosexual

    attraction (i.e. individual's sexual orientation could not be

homosexual or asexual) and have been a part of a heterosexual

couple (experience is required as the study is asking participants to

answer the survey based on their lived experiences).

The first draft of the survey questions was completed and sent to my supervisor and two

of my classmates (who did not participate in the actual study). They were asked to provide feed

back on the clarity of the survey questions, ease of access to the website, as well as any typos/

logistical errors. The survey was edited according to said feedback sent to the Institutional

Review Board (IRB) along with the potential recruitment letter. Once IRB granted approval, the

recruitment letter was sent to potential participants and the survey was turned off draft mode and

made accessible via the link provided in the recruitment email.

If the participant decided they wished to take part in the survey and clicked on the

provided link, they were taken to the online survey hosted on www.sogosurvey.com (see

Appendix C for a copy of the survey). The survey's settings ensured that only individuals who

were provided with the link could access the page (was unsearchable through other means). At

the end of the survey, participants were prompted to notify me, allowing me to accurately report

the ages, ethnicities, etc present in the sample. In order to maintain anonymity, the survey did not

ask for/ record identifying information and I did not visit the survey stats page or keep track of

the order in which replies were received (to prevent inadvertently matching reply number with

the specific participant). While not intentional, the anonymity of the participants was further

increased by the fact that several individuals informed me that they did not notify me

immediately upon completing the survey for various reasons, ensuring the order of notification

emails did not match the order of the responses on the website.

Measures

A self report online survey was used to collect data. This particular method was chosen as online self-report surveys have been shown to produce equivalent results for both qualitative and quantitative studies when compared against the traditional, pen-and-paper version of the same test (A. Weigold, I.K. Weigold, & Russel, 2013). Additional benefits were a) participants could complete the survey at a time and place convenient to them and b) not using an interviewer greatly reduces the chance of interviewer-interviewee interactions affecting data, allowing for a more controlled procedure (Buchanan & Smith, 1999). The self-report aspect was chosen because the study is interested in the participants' personal perceptions of their experiences in intimate relationships as opposed to some outward expressing behaviour which could be coded by third party observers.

The survey included 23 total questions, 22 for study related data and one at the start of the survey to confirm that the participant understood the reason and nature of the study, how the data will be used, the steps taken to maintain anonymity, potential negative effects of participation (emotional distress), their right to stop at any time, and their right of access the thesis upon completion. That page also included the criteria to participate, instructions on how to answer the survey including that they could skip questions they preferred not to answer.

All of the questions from there on used a Likert-like scale system where the meaning of 0 - 5 was restated each time as they changed throughout the survey (e.g. to the question "How much did you enjoy consuming Disney Princess media/merchandise, 0 = hated it, 5 = favourite activity, for the question "How important is physical attraction to you within an intimate relationship?" 0 = not at all, 5 = most important.) Aside from the question itself and the possible

answers, each page contained an "prefer not to answer" option as well as the phone number for the 24 hour Crisis Centre in Vancouver if the participant experienced significant distress.

To the best of my knowledge, there are currently no surveys that directly address the topics for this study. There is, however, an appreciable amount of related studies, many of whom constructed their own measurement tools out of existing ones that have been empirically tested for validity and reliability (Campbell et al., 2001; Ey & Cupit, 2013; Masarik et al., 2012; Schulman & Kipnis, 2001).

The first questions of the survey "How regularly did you encounter Disney Princesses in some form?", "On average, how much did you enjoy consuming Disney Princess media/ merchandise?", "How much did you relate with the Disney Princesses (or a single princess)?", and "How much did you idolize one or more of the Disney Princesses?" attempted to establish some background information on the participants' relationship with DPC. The first question in particular was the independent variable that all other questions were compared against.

The Idealistic Distortion Scale (Fournier, Olson & Druckman, 1983) was used to fashion questions aimed at investigating the ideals of the participant regarding intimate relationships (Fowers, Lyons, Montel, & Shaked, [2001] reports that IDS scored greater than .90 in both test retest reliability and alpha coefficient of internal consistency.). It contains specific items based on actual ideals a participant may have (e.g. "My partner and I understand each other completely." and "My partner has all the qualities I've ever wanted in a mate.") and is meant to provide information for improving intimate relationships through understanding existing discrepancies between ideals and reality (Fowers, Montel, & Olson, 1996). As the scope of this study is does not include such specific examples, the IDS was used to create the more generalized questions

found on the survey (e.g. "Do you have ideal scenarios for different areas of an intimate

relationship?" and "How important is it for your intimate relationships to match your ideals?").

The Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire (Genero, Miller, Surrey, &

Baldwin, 1992) uses 22 scaled questions to assess the mutuality experienced by an individual

within their relationship (internal consistency alpha coefficient of .92, test re-test reliability of .

91). It contains questions such as "When we talk about things that matter to me, my spouse will:

be receptive, get impatient, get bored" where the participant is asked to rate how likely each

answer is to happen from 1-6 with 6 being "all the time". Points addressed in the MPDQ (e.g.

empathy, empowerment, engagement) was used to create similar questions on how the

participant experiences their intimate relationship (e.g. "How much do you rely on your partner

during times of stress?" and "How many conflicts of your intimate relationship are resolved

[both parties find the outcome acceptable]?").

In a study on a couple's conflict resolution patterns and their length of relationship,

Shulman et al. (2006) created an assessment based on the patterns they identified during

observation of couples and existing literature on interaction of couples. This test used a five point

scale (1 = low, 5 = high) to investigate the conflicts of couples in terms of confrontation, quality

of negotiation ability, positive affect, etc. Transcripts from interactions of the couples were rated

on each point by two independent raters, with Cohen Kappas for the scales ranging from .71-.86

(Schulman et al., 2006). Questions from the survey regarding conflicts (e.g. "How often do you

and your partner address conflicts directly?") were based on conflict resolution patterns observed

in that study.

Questions from the survey regarding gender roles (e.g. "Would you be willing to be in an

intimate relationship that followed traditional gender roles?") were based on Taylor and Segrin's 2010 study *Perceptions of Parental Gender Roles and Conflict Styles and Their Association with Young Adults' Relational and Psychological Well-Being*. In the study, they adjusted the Traditional Family Ideology Scale (Levinson & Huffman, 1955) to better fit modern life. It included questions such as "Some equality in marriage is a good thing, but overall the husband ought to have the main say so in family matters." (answered using a 5-point scale). Taylor and Segrin report "reliabilities were calculated for young adult gender role (x = . 81)" (2010).

The end of the survey included two self report questions on participants' perception on how much influence DPC had on their intimate relationships and whether said influence was positive or negative. Those questions were followed by an opportunity for participants to anonymously share any thoughts this survey may have invoked. All together, this last portion was meant to study the participants' own interpretation around their intimate relationships and DPC.

Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed with the program Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Using Spearman's rho, the amount of DPC consumption a participant reported was compared to her answers on the rest of the survey. Additionally, the questions "How influential was Disney Princess Culture on your adult intimate relationships?" (0 = not influential at all, 5 = extremely influential) and "How would you describe this influence?" (0 = completely negative, 5 = completely positive) were compared using the same method.

Spearman's rho was selected as the study was a non-parametric test looking for possible correlations between two sets of ordinal data ("Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation", 2013). Additionally, Spearman's rho was the appropriate statistical test because it assesses monotonic relationships regardless of linearity and because it looks for correlation based on rank as opposed to the raw data ("A Comparison", n.d.). In the case of this study, those characteristics are desirable as the aim was to investigate the existence and direction of any correlations and not in defining a predictive relationship between two variables.

Results

This objective of this study was to investigate the possible effects of childhood DPC consumption on adult intimate relationships. It was done by looking for correlations between the amount of DPC consumed and various factors that research has shown to be associated with the prominent messages found in DPM's. The factors relating to adult intimate relationships are satisfaction with relationship and partner, reliance when stressed, views on traditional gender roles, ideals around relationships and partners, conflict resolution, intimacy initiation, physical attraction, time required to fall in love, amount of DPC influence, and description of said influence (England et al., 2011; Layng, 2001; Weirsma, 2000). The individual factors (see appendix for questions) were compared to the amount of DPC consumption using Spearman's rho (ρ). Amount and rating of DPC influence was also compared using Spearman's rho. Based on the current literature, the study's hypothesis is that DPC consumption will be significantly correlated with the factors listed, specifically, that more DPC consumption will result in participants reporting experiences closer to those that are currently believed to be associated with the messages of DPM's (i.e. less satisfaction with partner and relationship, more reliance on

partner, acceptance of traditional gender roles, increased ideals, poor conflict resolution methods, less intimacy initiation, greater importance of physical attraction, quicker to fall in love, larger and more negative influence) (Campbell et al., 2001; Eastwick & Neff, 2012; Eggermont, 2004; Niehuis et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2006).

Sample

Table 1 (see Appendix A for tables) provides a summary of sample demographics. The sample consisted of n = 23 female identifying individuals. As the survey gave participants the option to skip questions they preferred not to answer, questions number 8, 9, 14, 16, and 19 all had n = 22. For questions with partial response rates, participants who opted not to answer were not included in the statistical analysis of that particular item. In addition, question number 23 (n = 15) on the survey was skipped by one participant and not applicable for 7 as they had indicated DPC had no influence on them, meaning there was no influence for them to rate as positive or negative.

Analysis Values

Based on the available information on the possible effects of DPC-like messages on intimate relationships, the study hypothesized that more childhood DPC consumption would be associated with relationship experiences that more closely resemble those described in the current discourse. All together, the study contained 21 calculations performed using Spearman's ρ (first 20 items with *amount of DPC consumption* and last 1 between *amount of influence* and *influence rating*). The calculations returned 1 statistically significant result, with 14 of the remaining 20 displaying trends that align with the hypothesis (see Table 2 for values).

Within the results, amount of influence was found to be significantly negatively

correlated with influence rating (Spearman's ρ = -.605, p = .017), as in, higher levels of

perceived DPC influence on intimate relationships were associated with more critical ratings of

said influence. While it was the only one that yielded statistically significant results supporting

the hypothesis, 14 out of the remaining 20 applicable survey questions (amount of DPC

consumed excluded as it was the independent variable, amount of influence vs influence rating

excluded as it has been addressed) returned values that follow the trend expected in the

hypothesis. Out of the suggested trends, the more robust ones were childhood enjoyment

(Spearman's ρ = .362, p = .089), level of satisfaction with partner (Spearman's ρ = -.311, p = .

148), amount of ideals (Spearman's ρ = .388, p = .068), rate of partner bringing up conflicts first

(Spearman's ρ = .311, p = .159), and balance of decision making (Spearman's ρ = .415, p = .

055). These results support the hypothesis as larger amounts of childhood DPC consumption is

expected to be associated with participants reporting enjoying interacting with the Disney

Princess franchise. Having more contact with the messages of DPC would also suggest that the

participants would be less satisfied with their partners and have many ideals regarding their

relationships. It would also suggest that participants may subscribe more to traditional gender

roles such as male partners being more dominant by bringing up conflicts first, as well as an

imbalance in the amount of decision making between the participant and her partner.

The items that produced results opposite of those expected based on the hypothesis were

relating with princesses (Spearman's ρ = -.380, p = .863), amount of partner's reliance on

participant (Spearman's ρ = .390, p = .072), rate of directly addressing conflicts (Spearman's ρ =

.022, p = .924), rate of participant bringing up conflicts first (Spearman's ρ = .263, p = .226), and

length of time to fall in love (Spearman's ρ = .114, p = .605). These contradict the hypothesis as

supportive trends would have been associations between higher levels of childhood DPC

consumption and relating strongly to the princesses, partners relying less on the participant,

fewer conflicts that are addressed directly, fewer conflicts that are brought up by the participant

first, and a shorter amount of time required for the participant to fall in love.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the possible relationships between the

amount of DPC consumption in a woman's childhood and the characteristics of her intimate

relationships as an adult. Specifically, the study focused on her approach to intimate

relationships, her ideals within them, and her views on gender roles. Ultimately, the results could

be used to provide a clearer understanding on how media targeted towards young girls could

potentially influence their lives as adults, hopefully leading to the creation of material that

encourages the development of healthier, happier intimate experiences.

Close examination in past studies have shown that certain messages appear time and

again within DPM's (England et al., 2011; Layng, 2001; Weirsma, 2000). The study covered

four: *it was love at first sight; and they lived happily ever after; men are subjects, women are*

objects; rewarded suffering, punished agency. Based on the current research on how children

internalize the messages around them (Papadopoulos, 2010) and the experiences of individuals

participating in intimate relationships similar to those within DPM's (Eggermont, 2004; Epstein

& Ward, 2011; Ey & Cupit, 2013; Oseroff-Varnell, 1998), this study hypothesized that there

would be a relationship between the amount of DPC consumption in childhood and the DPC related elements of intimate relationships.

In support of that hypothesis, this study found a significant negative relationship between the amount of perceived influence by DPC and the rating of said influence. Participants who reported DPC as more influential within their intimate relationships also rated the influence more critically. This is in tandem with the current discourse in that research shows intimate relationships displaying adult versions of DPC messages are more likely to be unsatisfactory and/or unsuccessful (Campbell et al., 2001; Eastwick & Neff, 2012; Niehuis et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2006).

Within their research, Taylor and Segrin (2010) discovered that "young adults' gender roles were more strongly associated with that of their mother versus father". They also found that participants who held more traditional gender roles were more likely to have an external relational locus of control, poor conflict resolution skills, and experience more psychological distress. Conversely, those who held more egalitarian gender roles were more likely to have an internal relational locus of control, effective conflict resolution skills, and less psychological distress (Taylor & Segrin, 2010).

This current study fits well with Taylor and Segrin's findings in several ways. First, the main protagonist in DPM's is obviously the princess. Regardless of their actual age within the films, the princesses all appear to be in their late teens or early twenties, likely coming across as more of a maternal figure than a peer to young viewers. This maternal characteristic, according to Taylor and Segrin, could enhance the influence of DPC on the participants (2010). Second, the same study used a sub scale of Levinson and Huffman's (1955) Traditional Family Ideology

Scale to assess participants' beliefs on gender roles. In the TFIS, femininity is connected with ideas such as *women are too emotional, women should obey men, women should be chaste* and masculinity is connected with ideas *such as men should provide, men should be strong and ambitions, men should be leaders within the relationship*. Within DPM's, those ideas are well represented by both the princesses and their partners, with princesses easily breaking down in tears, submitting to male characters, and visibly unexperienced in intimate relationships to signify chastity (England et al., 2011; Layng, 2001; Weirsma, 2000). Similarly, the male characters are usually represented as the provider of a better life, ready to fight the antagonist, and the one leading in the progression of their relationship (Tanner et al., 2003). The fact that participants of this study who reported higher levels of DPC influence also gave more critical influence ratings falls in line with contemporary reports of traditional gender roles being negatively associated with various aspects of psychological wellbeing (Campbell et al., 2001; Eastwick & Neff, 2012; Niehuis et al., 2011; Rodriguez et al., 2015; Overall et al., 2006).

        While this study did not specifically ask each participant why they rated the influence of DPC within their intimate relationships positively or negatively, the results of the rest of the survey do provide some suggestions on what they may be. The rest of the survey produce no statistically significant relationships but the majority of them displayed a trend in support of the hypothesis. Out of these, the more robust trends indicated that larger amounts of childhood DPC consumption was associated with higher level of enjoyment (when interacting with various products of the Disney Princess franchise), higher amounts of ideals within relationships, less satisfaction with current partners (or last significant relationship), higher rate of the participants' male partner bringing up conflicts first, and a larger imbalance in decision making within

relationships. The fact that higher amounts of DPC consumption was positively linked to amount of enjoyment comes as no surprise - human beings tend to do more of the things we like. The other trends, however, provide support for the hypothesis that is tailored towards this study.

The current research on ideals states that having rigid ideals on how a relationship *should* be has a negative affect on both the individuals of the couple and their relationship as a whole (Campbell et al., 2001). According to Hira and Overall (2010), individuals who try to improve relationships by attempting to change their partners to a version more similar to the individual's ideals experience low success rates and more negative relationship and partner evaluations. In addition, Overall et al. (2006) found that the amount of force an individual applied when attempting to change their partner was negatively associated with their relationship quality and experience. Rodriguez et al., (2015) found that regarding ideals within relationships, intrinsic ideals were the ones which fostered happier relationships and vice versa. The research together supports two of the trends found in this study, in that participants who reported higher amounts of childhood DPC consumption also reported having both higher amounts of relationship ideals and a less satisfactory view towards their partner. Additionally, DPC strongly endorses many extrinsic ideals (beauty, love at first sight, love without conflict, male rescue, etc) which are defined as "those that depend on the contingent reactions of others and are engaged in as a means to some other end" (Rodriguez et al, 2015). While this study did not ask participants to specifically state what their ideals were (examples were provided in the survey question for clarity), it could be argued that if DPC was the source, their ideals would likely be extrinsic and therefore likely to be associated with lower levels of satisfaction with their partner.

The trends suggesting larger amounts of DPC consumption is connected to higher incidents of the male partner bringing up conflicts first and a larger imbalance in who wears the proverbial pants within the relationship is supported by the DPM's themselves. The movies often depict the relationship between the princess and her partner as one where the man takes control of their interactions. When Snow White first meets The Prince, he is the one who chases after her as she runs away, clearly nervous. When Mulan is hurt on the mountain, Li is the one who approaches her to enact his decision of leaving her to die in the snow. Additionally, seeing as the movies rarely depict obvious conflicts between the two protagonists, it is also worth including that the male character is usually the one who actively seeks the antagonist in order resolve the conflict and rescue the princess (Prince Phillip riding off to kill Maleficient, Prince Eric stepping in to stop Ursula with a harpoon, Prince Charming conducting the search for Cinderella in *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Cinderella* respectively).

Based on the results of this study and the current available research, DPC appears to contain and emphasize content that have an overall negative impact on the intimate relationships of young women. Within the survey, the question regarding amount of DPC consumption in childhood was assessed on a scale where 1 = rarely and 5 = nearly constant, with the average score being 3.35. Seeing as participants rated their consumption level as closer to "nearly constant" than "rarely", it would almost be justified to view their intimate relationships through a "glass half empty" lens. And since the sample consisted of educated, middle or upper middle class women from the Pacific North West, it would not be unreasonable to assume that other individuals within the same demographic could have produced similar survey results. However, as more and more of the girls who grew up immersed in DPC reach adulthood and begin serious,

long-term relationships, there hasn't been a parallel increase in the amount of literature linking

DPC to relationship issues prevalent in that population. Why?

The end of the survey provided participants with an opportunity to add any comments

they wished and those responses may hold the answer. One participant wrote:

I feel that my exposure to Disney princesses may have initially impacted my ideas

regarding how quickly it takes to fall in love and romance prior to my first relationship.

However, that experience trumped any preconceived notions I may have had. I do not

feel that Disney princess culture has impacted my actual relationships, especially those

later than my first relationship. (personal communication, 2016)

Another participant responded:

I went through a pretty dramatic reframing of what my ideal life looked like in my early

twenties, after which I'd say the Disney influence had significantly less of a death grip on

how I saw romance. The ideas of beauty and perfection that [DPC] represent, however,

continue to have an insidious influence on my self expectations to this day. (personal

communications, 2016)

Two of the women I asked to comment on the drafts of my survey (both 23 years old, one is

Asian and the other is Caucasian, both are middle class and have Bachelor degrees, one is also

currently pursuing a Master degree) shared what they would have responded during in person

conversations (they were not part of the study sample). They did feel that DPC had a large

influence on their views of intimate relationships growing up but both reported forming their

own, more realistic views as they entered adulthood. Both attributed this change to real life

relationship experiences and education, stating that access to feminist literature and material both in class and online helped shape their current beliefs (Erchull et al., 2009).

From these responses, it seems that the participants of the survey were influenced by DPC whilst they were the target audience but became more aware and critical of its messages as they grew up. Experiencing intimate relationships first hand and access to feminist literature helped them shake off some or all of the influence DPC had on them, perhaps by providing alternative world views and societal context. Erchull et al., (2009) found this to be the case when they looked into the development of feminist identity, stating "The most common source of exposure was college, indicating that the institutionalization of feminist perspectives in academia through women's studies and other related courses is and important mechanism for women's shift away from passive acceptance." Out of their sample of 165 undergraduate women in the US, Yoder et al. (2007) found that "non-feminist passive acceptance was linked to low egalitarian expectations overall" as well as less assertiveness regarding intimacy. Those associations were not present in participants who had stronger feminist identification. Furthermore, studies show that feminist attitudes are positively correlated with self reliance (Liss, O'Conner, Morosky, & Crawford, 2001), self efficacy (Foss & Slaney, 1986), and self-esteem, (Fischer & Good, 1994).

The findings of this study along with current research sheds light on improvements that can be made within children's media, specifically removing the harmful messages found within DPC and any other source promoting traditional gender roles, unattainable ideals, unrealistic expectations and replacing them with socially aware, education focused, feminist oriented content. The participants in this study were fortunate enough to have access to such material,

allowing them to undo the negative influences of DPC, but that is not the case for all women. Those who do not could continue to navigate their intimate relationships based on DPC and potentially pass that on to their children and so on.

Recently with movies such as *Brave* (2012) and *Frozen* (2013), Disney has been attempting to incorporate more feminist values with considerable success but DPC can still be found if one looks beneath the surface.2 Judging by the amount of progress made between *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Frozen*, however, the future of DPM's and DPC does seem promising. By increasing sample size and surveying individuals of different demographics, more information could be gathered to guide this change in media direction.

Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to a small sample of women and thereby would benefit greatly from an expansion of sample size and demographic. DPC contains some rather insidious messages for boys too (men must be the rescuer, must be strong, successful, capable etc). Considering the omnipresent nature of the Disney princess franchise, DPC has likely affected both genders.

The survey itself would benefit from some adjustments, specifically splitting questions into pairs (one for the participant, one for the partner) where possible (e.g. The question

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2 *Brave* features Merida, a princess who refuses to marry the prince her parents selected, opting instead to participate in and subsequently win an archery contest *with* her suitors, thereby winning "[her] own hand". *Frozen* tells the story of two sisters, Elsa and Anna, in which a common feature of DPC, "true love", breaks the curse of eternal winter. The twist is that the "true love" is actually Anna's love for Elsa. However, Disney was apparently unable to let go of the ultimate successes within DPC, "marriage" and "happily ever after", as Merida agrees to marry the prince in the end to please her mother and Anna falls in love with Kristoff. They end their last scene together with a kiss.

regarding balance of decision making would be changed to "amount of decision making done by participant" and "amount of decision making done by partner"). It would also be interesting to include a qualitative portion where participants had the opportunity to provide context and explanations where appropriate. That would provide a clearer understanding of what future children's media should be aiming for.

Conclusion

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was released 80 years ago to a unanimously positive audience and credited with the creation of a new genre (Frome, 2013). Since then, DPM's have been a staple of the Disney production line, culminating in a vast franchise of 11 princesses as of 2017 with several more waiting for their 'coronation' into the line-up (cite). The line-up itself has followed changing societal trends to include independent, headstrong princesses of varying ethnicities that break the traditional mould of passive femininity.

The newer princesses, however, do not erase the harmful messages woven into DPC by their predecessors who, thanks to the rejuvenation provided by the franchise, will likely remain as popular in the future as it is today. Since the popularity of DPM's doesn't appear to be waning any time soon and there is no way to control what children take in from their environment, there are limited steps we as an audience can take to mitigate the less constructive aspects of DPC. For the women who grew up immersed in the DPC of early and renaissance movies, increased research and understanding into the mechanisms and relationships between childhood entertainment and adult relationships could be useful for both therapists and the women themselves in the navigation of successful partnerships. For the children who are currently the target audience of DPM's, while there is unfortunately no escape from earlier productions, we as

parents, teachers, and counsellors can ensure that they have the education and tools necessary to

discern between the reality they live in and the 'happy ending' in fairytales.

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Appendix A

Table 1 Description of participant demographics.		
	Frequency in Sample	**Percent of Sample**
Ethnic Background		
Caucasian	13	56.52%
Asian	8	34.78%
Hispanic	1	4.35%
Mix Hispanic/Asian	1	4.35%
Highest Level of Education*		
High School or equivalent	1	4.35%
Bachelor or equivalent	22	95.65%
*Enrolled in Master or equivalent	5	21.74%
Socio-economic Status		
Upper-middle	7	30.34%
Middle	13	56.52%
Lower-middle	3	13.04%
	Range	**Mean**
Age	21-31 years old	24 years old (SD = 2.30)
Note: all participants identified as female and resided in Vancouver at the time of study.		
* 22.73% of participants holding a Bachelor's degree or equivalent were pursuing a graduate degree at the time of study.		

Table 2 Spearman's rho values of amount of DPC consumption vs survey questions		
	ρ	p
Childhood enjoyment+	0.362	0.089
Relating with Princess	-0.38	0.863
Idolizing Princess +	0.268	0.216
Satisfaction with relationship +	-0.035	0.874
Satisfaction with partner +	-0.311	0.148
Amount of Reliance on partner +	0.214	0.340
Amount of Partner reliance on participant	0.390	0.072
Willingness towards traditional gender roles +	0.257	0.237
Amount of Ideal Scenarios +	0.388	0.068
Similarity of child/adult ideals	-0.063	0.774
Importance of ideals +	0.207	0.344
Rate of directly addressing conflicts	0.022	0.924
Rate participant brings up conflict first	0.263	0.226
Rate partner brings up conflict first +	0.311	0.159
Amount of conflicts resolved +	-0.060	0.787
Balance of Intimacy initiation +	0.157	0.485
Balance of Decision making +	0.415	0.055
Physical attraction importance +	0.128	0.560
Length of time to fall in love	0.114	0.605
DPC Amount of influence +	0.049	0.823
Amount of influence vs influence rating +*#	-0.605	0.017

Note: *p < .05, +trend follows hypothesized direction

Last item of Table 2 is a comparison of DPC amount of influence and influence rating.

Childhood amount of DPC consumption was not included in said comparison.

Appendix B

Hi _____!

I will be conducting an online survey for my thesis to investigate the possible effects of Disney princess culture on young women within intimate relationships. The survey will focus primarily on the effects this exposure may have to a participants approach, ideals, and gender roles within intimate relationships.

The survey will take approximately 10 minutes with an option to add more in depth answers at the end if you wish. Your identity will be kept anonymous when possible, as in I will have access to your answers (all numerical) but I will not be able to identify who you are based on your answers (unless you explicitly say so within an in-depth answer so please do not do that). No one except myself, my supervisor (Dr. Bruce Hardy), and the Program Director (Dr. Avraham Cohen) will have access to any of the data collected during this process. Participation is voluntary and you can also choose to withdraw from this study at any time.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time for clarification on any aspects of this study. You can also request a copy of the study upon its completion. If you understand the process and nature of the study and would like to participate, please click on the link below. Thank you.

https://survey.sogosurvey.com/k/SsVPTRUsQsPsPsP

Appendix C

Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study. The aim of this study is to investigate the possible effect of Disney princess culture on young women within heterosexual intimate relationships (reason being all Disney princess movies to date are based on heterosexual relationships). Before we begin, here are some qualifiers to ensure that the information gathered is from a relatively consistent sample. Please consider these qualifiers using your own interpretations. A participant must identify with **all** of the points below:

I.   You are between the ages of twenty and thirty-five.

II. You consider heterosexual intimate relationships to play some sort of role in your life.

III. You had some sort of contact with the Disney Princesses franchise during your childhood.

IV. You grew up in a household without 'atypical' or 'uncommon' factors that were significant enough to greatly influence your approach, ideals, or views of gender roles within intimate relationships. (It is up to you to decide what is 'atypical' and 'uncommon'.)

If you said yes to **all** of the above points and wish to participate in this study, please continue on.

Please read the statement and circle the number that is most applicable to you within your current relationship if you are in one, or within a significant past relationship if you are not in one.. If you prefer to not answer a question, please feel free to leave it blank.

1. By selecting 'I Agree', you are indicating that: You have read and understand all of the previous information. You voluntarily agree to participate. You are at least 18 years of age. If you DO NOT wish to participate in this study, please select 'Disagree'. Thank you, Serena Zhang

2. How regularly did you encounter Disney Princesses in some form? (1 = rarely, 5 = constant)

3. On average, how much did you enjoy consuming Disney Princess media/merchandise? (0 =
    hated it, 5 = favourite activity)

4. How much did you relate with the Disney Princesses (or a single princess)? (0 = not at all, 5
    = identified completely)

5. How much did you idolize one or more of the Disney princesses? (0 = not at all, 5 =
    worship)

6. How satisfied are you within your current relationship (or most recent)? (0 = not at all, 5 =
    extremely)

7. How satisfied are you with your current partner (or most recent)? (0 = not at all, 5 =
    extremely)

8. How much do you rely on your partner during times of distress? (0 = not at all, 5 =
    completely)

9. How much does your partner rely on you during times of distress? (0 = not at all, 5 =
    completely)

10. Would you be willing to be in an intimate relationship that followed traditional gender roles
    ('feminine' partner takes care of the home and children, 'masculine' partner is the sole source
    of income)? (0 = not willing at all, 5 = completely willing)

11. Do you have 'ideal scenarios' for different areas of an intimate relationship (e.g. partner, first
    date, sex life, etc)? (0 = very few if any, 5 = nearly all areas you can think of)

12. How similar are your current ideals on relationships to your ideals prior to adulthood? (0 =
    completely different, 5 = exactly the same)

13. How important is it for your intimate relationships to match your ideals? (0 = not important at all, 5 = incredibly important)

14. How often do you and your partner address conflicts directly? (0 = never to almost never, 5 = every time to almost every time)

15. How likely are you to bring up the conflict first? (0 = extremely unlikely, 5 = extremely likely)

16. How likely is your partner to bring up the conflict first? (0 = extremely unlikely, 5 = extremely likely)

17. How many of the conflicts of your intimate relationship are resolved (both parties find the outcome acceptable)? (0 = never, 5 = every one)

18. Does one partner initiate more intimacy within your relationship (dates, sex, romantic evenings, etc)? (0 = equal amounts, 5 = all one partner)

19. Does one partner make more decisions within your relationship (both every day and important decisions)? (0 = equal amounts, 5 = all one partner)

20. How important is physical attraction to you within an intimate relationship? (0 = not at all, 5 = most important)

21. On average (within your intimate relationships as an adult), how long does it take you to fall in love? (0 = no time at all, 1 = less than a month, 2 = two to three months, 3 = three to six months, 4 = six months to a year, 5 = more than a year)

22. In your opinion, how influential was Disney princess culture on your adult intimate relationships? (0 = not influential at all, 5 = extremely influential)

23. If you answered 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5 to the question above, how would you describe this

    influence? (0 = completely negative, 5 = completely positive)

24. If you would like to elaborate on any of your answers, please do so here. Please avoid

    including any identifying information where possible.

Appendix D - IRB Approval

Institutional Review Board

Certificate of Approval

IRB ID#

Principal Investigator (if faculty research)

Student Researcher: Serena Zhang

Faculty Advisor: Bruce Hardy

Department: DASC/MC

Title: Investigating the possible effects of Disney princess culture on young women within

intimate relationships: ideals, approach, and gender roles.

Approved on: April 6, 2016

Renewal Date: April 6, 2017

Full Board Meeting

Expedited Review   (US)

Delegated Review   (Can) X

Exempt

CERTIFICATION

City University of Seattle has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was

found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The Faculty Advisor Bruce Hardy and the student

researcher Serena Zhang have the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory

approvals that may pertain to this research project, and for ensuring that the authorized research

is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original Ethics Review Protocol

submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period

provided there is no change in experimental protocol, consent process or documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures

should be reported to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board's consideration in advance of

its implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the IRB Chair for Board

consideration within one month of the current expiry date each year the study remains open, and

upon study completion.

Brian Guthrie Ph D, RSW, Member of Clinical Registry

Chair IRB City University of Seattle