

Young Boys and Disney: A Qualitative Study of Parents' Perceptions
about their Sons and Disney Media

by

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ABSTRACT

This current study analyses parents' views on the influence and impact Disney has on their sons. Few research studies have focused on the impact Disney has on young males. This study assists in filling that research gap. Using a qualitative approach that included interviews with 11 parents and the theoretical framework provided by Social Learning Theory, my study sought information about parents' perceptions of how Disney media and Disney merchandise may be influencing their sons. Common themes discovered from coding the interview transcripts were that parents were unaware of the variety of companies owned by Disney, that parents like Disney, that they use Disney media and merchandise as a teaching opportunity, and that they notice an absence of leading male roles in Disney media. Parents identified newer Disney franchises (Marvel, Pixar and *Star Wars*) as having more influence on their sons, that their sons preferred live action over animation, that their sons' interest in Disney products was tied to their ages, and that Disney books and Disney produced music was not as interesting to their sons as were action movies. There was a desire expressed by parents for the need to control the somewhat obsessive interest of their sons in particular Disney merchandise and the tendency for their sons to view traditional Disney media as something only girls are interested in. Parents felt that without the new Disney franchises (Marvel, Pixar and *Star Wars*), Disney would have limited influence on their sons.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Boys will be boys, or so the saying goes. It has been said that if a young boy is holding a stick, that he will then turn that stick into a sword. Banerjee and Lintern (2000) found that males are born with traits of a ‘typical man,’ but as they grow up, the idea of a ‘typical man’ is constructed by the culture around them starting around age 4. This construction originates from many different sources, such as family, friends, school, and media. According to Coyle, Fulcher, and Trubütschek (2016), there has been an increase of media focusing on gender within the past years. Media includes news stations, radio, advertising, music, and movies. My research focused on what parents of sons perceive about Disney media’s possible influence on their children. Chapter I discusses the focus of this thesis, provides a brief review of the literature, explains social learning theory, research questions posed, and as interviews with the qualitative methodological approach used.

Many researchers have already taken the first step in examining how gender is portrayed in media. Studies have looked at gender in radio (Diamanka, 2016; Martin, Muela-Molina, Reinares-Lara & Rodriguez-Guerra, 2015), news and television (Bunker & Bryson, 2016; Gustafsson, Sikstrom, & Lindholm, 2015; Matthes, Prieler, & Adam, 2016), and even movies (Rogan, 2016; Van den Bulck, 2015). This current research’s major focus is to determine how parents perceive Disney media influences on their sons.

The purpose of this study is to understand the influence Disney has on the social construction of gender by young males according to parents. This research gathered information from interviews with parents of boys to see how parents perceived the impact of Disney media on their children

The results of this study add to the growing body of literature about possible media influences on children. In a time where the concept of gender has become more fluid and the binary terms of male and female often do not fully reflect how individuals are constructing their gender identities, this research provides additional information about how gender identity is being formed.

Review of Literature

Boys will Be Boys

In today's world, sex and gender are sometimes used interchangeable, and "until the early 70s, little if any distinction is made between sex and gender" (Ballard-Reisch & Kline, 2016, p. 8). According to Boldt (2002), sex is biological and based on a person's sex at birth. On the other hand, gender is what people identify themselves as. For this study, parents with children who are born as a male, biologically are the subjects being analyzed.

My focus was to discover what, if any, influence Disney media has on young boys' behavior and attitudes about what it means to be male. Do boys only identify with male characters or are they able to identify with characters for both sexes? This research analyzed how the parents view their sons, but also considered the discourse, the way of

observing how groups are talking about femininity and masculinity such as acting, talking, playing, dressing (Gee, 1996).

Children are influenced in many aspects of their lives. Previous research has looked into how children are taught to 'do girl,' meaning acting the way a girl should act (Paetcher, 2003; Wohlwend, 2011). Wohlwend (2011) examined how young males 'do girl.' Do they play with girl dolls and how do their peers react (both male and female)? The study found that boys 'doing boy' leads to social judgment from their peers.

When children play, they might act like a princess or a prince (Thorne, 1993). Thorne (1993) and Maclean (1999) found that children have varied interpretations when it comes to set gender characters. Many times, if children step outside of expected and binary gender lines (boys dressing like girls, playing with dolls, etc.), there are consequences from their peers or an adult. These consequences shape the views children have about gender, and they then try to fit the mold their culture has shaped for their sex and gender.

There are some gender stereotypes that are seen within children's play, which they learned through watching friends, family, and others within their society. While doing a yearlong ethnographic study of children in a kindergarten classroom, Blaise (2005) found that children regulate their-peers' speech, practices, and play time. By doing this, they are exhibiting dominant gender and modeling after what society constructs them how to behave. Children learn quickly what it means to be a boy and what it means to be a girl.

At an early age, children are unaware of what gender is, and how to act according to a certain gender stereotype (Ruble, Balaban, & Cooper, 1981). Kohlberg claimed that children are not able to fully understand gender until age six (Zmyj & Bischof-Löhler, 2015). Zmyj & Bischof-Löhler (2015) state that to define gender constancy, one needs three components: a) gender labeling, b) gender stability, and c) gender consistency. As children grow, they learn what gender is, as well as what their gender is, through the culture around them. Davis (2003) discovered that children frequently reject stories about brave princesses or a story about a kind and tender prince.

Theoretical Framework: Social Learning Theory

Every person grows and learns in many different ways. Many theories have been created to attempt to explain learning. The issue with previous theories is that they “provided intriguing interpretations of events that had already happened, but they lacked power to predict how people would behave in given situations” (Bandura, 1971, pp.1-2). Bandura (1977) writes about social cognitive theory, where social behaviors are developed by observing people, media, and other cultural influences. People then adapt to their observations to fit in with others around them.

Observing and adapting to what one sees is classified as learning or social learning theory. Social learning theory was created and developed by Rotter and Bandura, and renamed to social cognitive theory in Bandura’s later work (Bandura, 1977; Educ, 2015; Rotter, 1954). This theory attempts to explain “how social influences impact the beliefs and actions of individual members of society” (Educ, 2015, p. 379). Influences range from media someone is exposed to, beliefs parents passed on to their children, and

the culture someone was raised in. A prime example of Disney doing this would be Bennett & Schweitzer's (2015) study about girls wanting to have their hair like Elsa's, Anna's, and Rapunzel's. Social learning theory can be found in experiences and modeling (Bandura, 1971).

Bandura (1969) examines the behavior of a model by looking at particular patterns within the behavior. "Most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example" (Bandura, 1971, p.5). Bandura explains that behavioral patterns can be shaped and reformed into a new pattern by punishing or rewarding. For example, a young boy throws a rock through a window, and the mother then grounds the child for his behavior. The young boy does not throw rocks at the house anymore. The pattern of the boy throwing a rock through a window has been shaped into a new pattern through punishing. If the boy then goes and helps clean up the broken window, and the mother gives him a candy bar for his behavior, he is being rewarded. This is all shaping his behavior into new patterns. This theory has been used to analyze behavior within social groups, media influence, and social identities (Educ, 2015). For this study, social learning theory will be used to analyze how parents see the impact Disney has on young males.

Disney – From a Mouse to the World

When looking for Disney branded media items, parents are able to find them in most places. "From the birthday parties they (children) attend to the clothes they wear to the books they read at night, Disney is there" (Coulter, 2012, p. 146). Disney is not just a fad that children go through, but the brand stays with them throughout a lifetime. The

branding starts at a young age with Mickey Mouse, then moves on to Disney movies, such as *Snow White* or *Aladdin*. Soon, children are introduced to Disney Channel to watch *Girl Meets World* or *Wizards of Waverly Place* or an original Disney Channel movie like *Camp Rock*. Finally, children get older and start watching movies like *Star Wars* or *The Avengers*, which Disney also owns (Chris, 2009). If your child is one of the few that is not under the powerful influence of Disney, movies, television shows, branded shirts, soundtracks, toys, and other Disney merchandise are still possibly influencing them (Coulter, 2012).

Disney is not just an animation company, but now they have their hands in media networks, parks and resorts, and licensing publishing. Disney is one of the world's largest creators of high-quality entertainment across media platforms (Walt Disney Company, 2015). Now Disney owns various other companies such as Pixar (Laura, 2006) and Marvel Studios (Chris, 2009). Disney's brand is more than just the companies that they own or the logo. When the movie *Tangled* came out little girls everywhere did not want to cut their hair, but instead grow it out to be just like Rapunzel (Bennett & Schweitzer, 2015). Jump a few years forward *Frozen* opened to the public, and girl all across the world wanted to braid their hair just like Anna and Elsa (Bennett & Schweitzer, 2015). Disney has "an intuitive grasp of the power of fables" (Star Wars, 2015, p. 2).

A big part of branding is knowing the audience you are wanting to target. Brands look at age, gender, race, and the overall culture of their target audience. Coulter (2012) examines the relationship between children and the media. She writes about how markets are "socially constructed categories of meaning" (p. 151) that tries to understand their

consumers, and then inform them of new products. One consumer audience that has started to grow in the 20th century was the field of children's media. Disney started around the same time and was able to tap into the industry of marketing to children. This is how Disney became the huge company it is today. "Disney knows who these markets are, what they want, where to find them, and how to talk to them" (Coulter, 2012, p. 147). Disney found an untapped market and has thrived ever since.

Having such a wide range of audience, Disney has a powerful force within the world (Driscoll, 2016). Like many celebrities, corporate companies, and world leaders, having so much power comes with great responsibility. Disney movies are not just used in storytelling, but are also used in the classroom to teach (Hurley, 2005). According to Garofalo (2013):

[A]pproximately 200 million people watch a Disney film per year, 395 million people watch a Disney-produced television show each week, 212 million people listen to Disney-produced music each week, 50 million people visit a Disney Theme park per year, and 42 million people per year make a purchase at a Disney store. (p. 2825)

Like the character in a Disney story, the company can use its power for good or bad. Disney produces ideologies through its stories, which children see and attain the ideologies as social norms or certain ideas, and my study seeks to see parent's perceptions on how the influence of Disney plays a part in how young males are constructing their gender.

Research Questions

Previous research has found that children follow gender expectations society sets for males and females. Children model how they act from watching and observing their peers and adults around them. This current study examined the perceptions of parents about their sons' exposure to Disney media.

RQ₁: What perceptions do parents of young sons have about Disney media, merchandise and the trademark?

RQ₂: According to parents, what type of Disney products are most impactful on their sons?

RQ₃: What type of social influence does Disney have on young males?

My research acknowledges the power of narratives, particularly in the stories created by Disney. Narratives are used frequently thru each person's life. "Storytelling is among the most common forms of discourse in human communication" (De Fina, 2016, p. 473). Studies have investigated narratives through email (Georgakopoulou, 2004), social media (Page, 2012), support groups (Harrison & Barlow, 2009), and a retelling of events (Georgakopoulou, 2014). The fact that stories are the artifact and subject in countless studies is a given, but what makes storytelling so important? How is storytelling such a common form of discourse?

Stories are powerful tools. Storytelling "can help build awareness, comprehension, empathy, recognition, recall, and provide meaning" (Singh & Sonnenburg, 2012, p. 189). From back to the stone ages to today's social media world, "storytelling is always a social phenomenon" (Pera & Viglia, 2016, p. 1143). This social

phenomenon can take many forms, such as sculpture, music, and writing. Pera & Viglia, (2016) tell us that something to be presented as a story, the narrative needs four parts: (1) the plot, (2) the characters, (3) the climax, and finally (4) the outcome. They believe that all four parts can happen at different times spread out, like as a movie, or all happen at the exact same moment, like as a painting.

When telling a story, the storyteller should be able to pull at the viewer's emotions and behaviors. Caine and Caine (1991) analyzed the process of learning and found that emotions are the main motivation behind learning. Emotions within a story are needed, because "emotions drive attention, create meaning, and have their own memory pathways" (Jensen, 1998, p. 69). Storytelling triggers certain emotions and sets the listeners into action. Whether the action is to buy a certain brand, to understand a certain event or to influence listeners to play a certain way, stories have a purpose, and the influence of a storyteller remains to be seen.

Method

Participants

For this research, parents of sons were the participants. Interviews were voluntary. Participants were currently a parent of a son between the ages of 2-11. Participants varied in age, cultural background and parenting styles which will be described more in depths in chapter III.

Procedures

Within this study, 10 participants were interviewed. The interviews were held in a location that best fit the participant. Many interviews took place in Amarillo and Canyon,

Texas in the participant's office or home, and each interview was conducted face to face. Participants' interviews were recorded with their consent. These recordings were then kept on a password protected computer.

When interviewed, participants were asked questions (listen in Appendix A) to help further the research. The participant was not required to answer all of the questions, and they were able to opt out of the interview at any time.

Data Analysis and Validation

Once an interview was conducted, participants' recorded interviews were transcribed and coded for major themes. A summary of the major themes identified after the analysis were sent to participants for member check. Second, these findings were reviewed by members of my thesis committee.

Chapter Summary

Disney is a company that owns many aspects of the media and entertainment world. With this kind of control, comes with a lot of power. This current study analyzed the influence of Disney on the younger male generation. By interviewing parents of young males, this research sought to understand the impact of Disney media as perceived by their parents. Social learning theory provided the theoretical lens used to help understand if young boys are in fact being influenced by Disney media. Chapter 2 includes an extensive review of the literature. Chapter 3 explains my methodology in greater detail. Chapter 4 presents the results of my thematic analysis and Chapter 5 offers the answers to my research questions, the limitations of my study, and implications for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II is an in depth discussion of previous literature that centers around this current research study. This current study is analyzing parent's view on the possible influence Disney has on their son(s), and this literature review provides a base created by other scholarly research. The literature in chapter II focuses on gender, Disney, and social learning theory.

Gender is the first base topic reviewed. The goal of studying gender is to see what other research has found when it comes to how gender is seen in today's world, how children see and create gender with themselves (and around them), and how this creation of gender affects day to day activities, such as playing or talking. The second base topic is Disney. This sections looks at the background of Disney, as well as products produced by Disney. Lastly, this chapter discusses how social learning theory was conceptualized, the application of the theory, and how to analyses interviews using the theory.

Gender

Sex and gender are often used to mean biological sex, but many people use these words interchangeably. This is mainly due to the fact that the difference between the two was not made distinct until the mid to late 1900s (Ballard-Reish & Kline, 2016). Sex is biological, and based on how a person was born (Boldt, 2002). Gender is how one identifies it selves, and "shapes how people make sense of themselves" (Rose, Mackey-

Kallis, Shyles, Barry, Biagini, Hart & Jack, 2012, p. 589). Goffman (1976) found that gender roles and identity are a major part of day to day life.

Binary Construction of Gender

Sex is a separate entity from gender, but each culture has an ideal of what each gender should look like (Benton, 2013). Each culture constructs gender differently. “A culture’s definitions of masculinity and femininity shape expectations about how individual men and women should communicate, ... and how individuals communicate establishes gender that, in turn, influences cultural views” (Wood, 2009, p. 20). Huston (1988) researched how people often stray away from the typical roles constructed for each gender. As society changes, men are doing more stereotypical feminine roles, such as being a stay at home dad, and women are doing more stereotypical masculine, such as being a working mom. Individuals are doing now constructing new roles that focuses on an individual, but blurs the gender role lines.

Culture stereotypes attempt to fit each sex into a certain gender role, but gender is different with each individual.

Gender is not inherently biological, but rather is constructed and reconstructed through everyday activities, including the creation and consumption of media content. Yet, hegemonic conceptualization of gender tend to impose binaries that restrict the performance of gender into male and female and imply that such categorization is natural, normative, and inevitable (Liebler, Jiang, Chen, 2015, p. 586)

Cultural binaries are found in movies, stories, television, and more cultural artifacts of what is seen to be masculine and feminine traits (Foss, Domenico & Foss, 2012). Friends, family, and the media influence this stereotypical view about masculinity and femininity roles (Rose et. al, 2012). These cultural influences shape how individuals speak to others (Adi-Bensaid & Most, 2012; Blaise, 2005), view television and movie characters (Maclean, 1999; Thorne, 1993), and even how they play (Paetcher, 2003; Wohlwend, 2011).

Gender Stereotyping

Each culture has their own idea of what a man and woman should act and look like. This is also known as stereotyping. Hall (2003) describes stereotyping as narrowing individuals to important skills and characteristics. Stereotyping occurs most commonly in gender and race, but is how people understand what is around them (Vermeulen & Van Looy, 2016). “Gender is the one personal characteristic that most quickly captures people’s attention and provides the strongest basis for social judgement” (Nikolova & Lamberton, 2016, p. 357).

Gilmore (1990) found that cultural gender stereotypes are hard to live up to, and that males socially judge other men on how manly each are. The status of being masculine is earned (Bosson and Vandello, 2011), meaning that the ideal man, or someone’s ‘manhood,’ is difficult to achieve, but simple to lose in social settings (Vandello, Bosson, Burnaford & Weaver, 2008).

Gender stereotyping is creating certain assumptions based on someone’s sex (Jacobson, 2005). Individuals attempt to make sense of the world around them, and try to

fit many people within a common group, such as males or females. Trying to make sense of large groups “is better understood in terms of *typing*, which is necessary in order to assign people to wider categories such as group membership based on gender” (Vermeulen & Looy, 2016, p. 287). If someone’s sex is that of a man, they then should show the gender traits that stereotypically men display. Siann (2013) found that most cultures create gender differences that men have more power than women. If an individual sees a male character in a movie, the expectation is they would have masculine traits. If characters in movies and television are based on culture stereotypes, does this impact how children now view men and women?

Gender Play

When playing, children’s imagination takes over. Most people think of dolls as a girl’s toy and action figures as a boy’s toy. Wohlwend (2011) did a study observing young males on how they played with girl toys. Wohlwend (2009) found that companies, such as Disney, would target certain genders with certain products. Toys, such as dolls, are artifacts that children perform their gender identities through, (Carrington, 2003), and Disney has produced toys for children to play as a certain gender. Through playing, dressing, and speaking, children are able to play as any Disney character.

Many ethnographic studies have found patterns through gender play. Gender stereotypes are seen persistently on the playground through the way children play (Boldt, 2002), and if a child plays outside of the ideal gender norms, the child has consequences set by their own peers (Bulter, 1990). Children know dominant gender identities, and adhere to them by regulating each other’s play and speech (Blaise, 2005). A princess is

seen as a toy or a character a girl should play as, and Captain America is seen as a character for boys. It is not okay for boys to play as a princess, but it is more socially expectable for girls to play as a superhero (Blaise, 2005).

Doing Gender. As children grow up, they quickly realize the do's and do not's of what one sex can and can't do, and children are able to see the difference of equality with gender (Blaise, 2005). Thorne (1995) found that one of the worst names for a young boy is being called 'a girl.' Blaise (2005) found that the

dominant forms of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity are influenced by heterosexual discourses, which are defined as stereotypical gendered norms and expectations considered appropriately male and female, including society's expectations of males and females to fall in love and sexually desire a member of the opposite sex. (p. 86)

Children are shaped at an early age to 'do gender,' and play and act like a 'normal' boy or girl should (Blaise, 2005). Blaise's (2005) study looks at how children 'do gender,' and how it effects the children's play, speech, and other basic day-to-day activities.

Blaise stepped inside a kindergarten classroom to observe how children interact with each other when it comes to gender. She found five main discourses in her research when it came to 'doing gender:' "wearing femininity, body movements, make-up, beauty, and fashion talk. Although these gender discourses focus primarily on femininities, they show how gender is constructed in relationship to hegemonic masculinity" (Blaise, 2005).

Blaise (2005) found that boys and girls present themselves as a certain gender at an early age.

Children construct being masculine or feminine in many different ways, and there is not one way to become a certain gender. Davis (2003) found that young children understand that society thinks it key to get their gender 'right,' by the way the child plays, the clothes they wear, and the way they talk. 'Doing gender' and finding the 'right' gender to be a 'normal' boy or girl is important to children early in their life.

Boys need to play like boys, and girls play like girls. Wohlwend (2011) researched the outcomes of how two young males would react, plus how their friends would react, to them playing like a Disney princess or other 'girly' toys, such as dolls. Based on Blaise's (2005) study on 'doing gender' and Paetcher's (2003) study on 'doing girl,' Wohlwend (2011) wanted to know how do young males 'do girl,' and found that when boys blur gender roles, the boy's friends would object. Even at an early age, boys playing with girl toys lead to social judgement from their peers.

Wohlwend (2011) found that when boys are playing with opposite sex toys, they tend to pick toys or dolls that are on the masculine side. For example, if a group of children are playing with dolls, the boys in the group are more likely to pick the doll that represents the brother or father, or even the animal of the group. When the boys do pick a doll that is a girl, they change the storyline by giving their princess a superpower. Children know the gender role, and at an early age want to make sure they are following society's idea of what a man or woman would do. Fitting into the correct gender is very important, and if one does not fit the gender criteria society and their peers have shaped, they are then socially judged (Davis, 2003). If a child does not 'do gender' correctly, they

will attempt to change their actions to fit the stereotypical gender norms, even if it does not fit with their identified gender (Bem, 1981).

Gender Consistency

Gender consistency is how children learn that gender is set, and does not change over time. Gender classification is something that children quickly develop. Like adults, children create categories (or stereotypes) by using gender (Lee, Liao & Ryu, 2007). Martin and Ruble (2004) found that within six months after being born, a child can distinguish male and female voices. Within nine months, a child can point out males and females within photos. Around a child's second birthday, they can start classifying by gender (Huston, 1985), by age five, a child can start grouping and creating more gender stereotypes (Martin & Ruble, 2004), and around seven a child can fully grasp the gender schema (Serbin & Sprafkin, 1986).

Gender consistency is claimed to be present within a child around age four (Bem, 1989; Slaby & Frey, 1975) to seven (Emmerich, Goldman, Kirsh & Sharabany, 1977). Gender consistency has developed many different age ideas from different studies. Slaby & Frey (1975) asked children questions about their gender, Emmerich et al (1977) played games from the opposite-sex with children to understand gender of others, and Bem (1989) showed children pictures of other children who dressed up as both genders. Slaby and Frey (1975) and Bem (1989) found that children are able to understand gender consistency with themselves around age four. Emmerich et al. (1977) found that children are able to understand gender consistency within others around age six or seven.

Gender constancy is not only understanding one's own gender, but also understanding others' gender as well.

Gender constancy is defined as a consisting of three components: a) the ability to correctly label the sex of another individual (gender labeling), b) the understanding that an individual's sex is constant across time (gender stability), and c) the understanding that perceptual transformation, such as dressing up like the opposite sex, does not change sex (gender consistency) (Zmyj & Bischof-Löhler, 2015, p. 456).

Kohlberg (1966) is one of the first to introduce gender constancy, and proposed that gender constancy and cognitive development corresponds. Kohlberg (1966) analyzed gender identity within cognitive development, and suggested once a child fully identifies with a certain gender, the child then is constantly that gender for life, which is defined as *gender constancy*.

Gender in Media

Today, media is a major part in everyday lives. Movies, television, and other forms of media has set how men and women should be seen, as well as constructing how people view masculinity and femininity (Damme & Bauwel, 2010). The difference in genders within the media is made distinct, and these differences are communicated to the viewers who then want to become like the characters within the media (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005).

Men are seen as strong and smart (Liebler et al., 2015), and women are seen as conventional and domestic (Zhou, 2009). Damme and Bauwel (2010) stated that "boys

are often connected with 'doing' in the public sphere (e.g. rational, ambitious, aggressive and independent), whereas girls are associated with 'being' (e.g. passive, vulnerable, sensitive and dependent" (p. 19). Men are typically 'defined by their meaning for the male heroes,' but if they are not the hero type, they are seen as weak (Lemish, 2010). Male characters are commonly seen as muscular and athletic, but their appearance is not the main focal point. They are normally defined by their abilities, but an attractive male is generally casted or created (Brown, Steele & Walsh-Childers, 2002).

This is opposite for women. Women characters are seen as attractive and dress provocatively more than men (Zurbriggen, Collins, Lamb, Roberts, Tolman, Ward & Blake, 2007). Gill (2007) found that "a sleek, toned, controlled figure is normatively essential for portraying success" for women (p.150).

When looking at gender portrayal in children's television (Disney, Cartoon Network, and Nickelodeon), Luther and Legg (2010) found that male characters were seen with physical aggression, but female characters showed social aggression. Throughout children's television, commercials and advertising had more males (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995), and most leading roles are played by a male character (Aubrey & Harrison, 2004). Hentges and Case (2008) found that in television shows, male actors outnumber female actors. Cartoon Network mainly targeted male viewers (Larson, 2004), Nickelodeon targeted both male and female viewers (Kahlenberg & Hein, 2010), and Disney Channel focused on the female viewers (2014).

Disney has encountered the issue that shows with female leads are mainly watched by females, who will also watch a show with a male lead, but young males do

not watch shows with mainly female leads (Lemish, 2010). Children's media is attempting to target both male and females, but the issue is each sex identifies more with the character of their same sex (Hoffner, 1996).

Identification. Identification is a topic that has been analyzed by many theorists, such as Kenneth Burke and Sigmund Freud, and is now being used to analyze how people identify themselves with characters in the media (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005).

The term *identification* with a character has been used in many ways.... First, identification sometimes refers to the process by which an individual puts him- or herself in the place of a character and vicariously participates in the character's experiences during a program.... Second, many scholars have recognized that the process of identification can extend beyond the viewing situation. (pp. 326-327)

This means how one would like to be like a character, which according to Adams-Prince and Greene is also known as 'identification attachment,' and is the most common form of identification.

By identifying with a character in the media, individuals will want to start acting, dressing, and talking like the character (Murray, 1999). When wanting to be like the character they are identifying as, one might change aspirations, values, and attitudes to match the media character (Bandura, 2001). If children watch a Disney movie, and the character they most want to identify as is a stereotypical male, than they might aspire to be just like that character, even if the goal is unattainable.

Corporate Disney Influence

Disney media has been analyzed by scholars for decades. From gender to politics and from race to religion, Disney's stories and films have been a focal point of many researchers (Davis, 2005). A reason Disney has become such a popular research topic could be because the company has expanded to have its hands in many different types of entertainment. Another thought is due to how Disney's products are with an individual from birth to death (Coulter, 2012). Who would have guessed that all of this would have come from something as small as a mouse, Mickey Mouse to be exact.

The Birth of The Walt Disney Company

In the early 1900s Walt and Roy Disney created an animation studio called Disney Brothers studios. In 1923 the brothers signed a contract for one of their animation comics called *Alice Comedies*, which had many stories about Alice's Wonderland, now known as *Alice in Wonderland* (Thomas, 1976). A few years into the animation studios, Roy Disney married, and decided Walt should move to New York.

Walt Disney moved to New York City to pursue the animation life, and was turned down by many animation studios. Finally, a recording of *Steamboat Willie*, a mouse traveling on a steamboat, was picked up in 1928. Disney's cartoon was highly recognized by many media companies, and was an immediate hit. Walt Disney worked deals with many companies, and wanted to remain an independent studio plus keep all the rights to his cartoons. The only company that agreed to work with Disney was Universal. Walt Disney signed a contract with Universal, and this was the birth of the Walt Disney Company (Schickel, 1968).

The Wide Influence of Disney

Since the publication of Mickey Mouse, the Walt Disney Company has only grown. Soon after Mickey Mouse, Disney started creating animation movies in color with voice animation, such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Dumbo*. Once live action animation technology was created, Disney then branched into that field of entertainment with *Cinderella* and *Mary Poppins*. In 1955, Disneyland was opened. The funds from this amusement park went to creating television programs (Thomas, 1976). Since 1928, Disney has been adapting to the new form of entertainment, and is still one of the most common brand names today (Coulter, 2012).

Disney today owns many different forms of media. Within the film media platform, Disney creates many movies on their own, but they also own Pixar (Laura, 2006) as well as Marvel Studios (Chris, 2009), and the rights to *Star Wars*. (Star Wars, 2015). In 2017 Disney will have released Live Action: *Beauty and the Beast* (Disney), *Coco* (Disney), *Cruella* (Disney), *Cars 3* (Pixar), *Guardians of the Galaxy, Volume 2*, (Marvel), *Spiderman* (Marvel), *Thor 3* (Marvel), *Pirates of the Caribbean* (Disney), and *The Last Jedi* (Star Wars). This is nine movies being released in 2017 that millions of people will watch (Cosmo, 2017). After the movies, toys, shirts, and other forms of merchandise flood the store shelves.

Many of these movies owned by Disney will have soundtracks that go along with them. Children and adults around the world will be listening to the words created by Disney. Disney owns recording studios, as well as their own radio station. As Disney grew as a company, a television channel was created named Disney Channel. Currently

Disney owns Disney Channel, ESPN Inc., American Broadcasting Company (ABC), the History Channel, Lifetime Entertainment, and A&E Network (Walt Disney Company, 2015).

Disney is not just limited to the United States but has reached international media forms. Both Europe and Asia have Disney theme parks, as well as Disney Cruise Lines. Disney's *Frozen* was released in 127 countries, and 41 different languages (IMDB, 2013). *Moana*, Disney's 2016 animated film, was translated into multiple languages to be enjoyed around the globe, and is the first movie to be translated into Tahitian language (Walt Disney Company, 2016).

Disney "continue(s) to find new ways to capture the imagination of millions with entertainment experiences that exceed expectations" (Disney, 2012, p. 3). Across the world, little girls want to be just like the newest Disney princess (Bennett & Schweitzer, 2014). Disney's influence in a variety of media seems to influence cultural norms.

Disney is a wide spread company that is involved in many different forms of entertainment. Disney impacts millions of people worldwide, and it seems nearly impossible to avoid Disney products (Garofalo, 2013). How does Disney use their influence? Do parents feel Disney is setting good expectations and models for their kids? A question raised by many scholars is how does Disney use its influence?

Gender in Disney

Disney movies and stories have been questioned when it comes to religion, race, and gender equality (Davis, 2005). People have been criticizing Disney for the stereotypical female roles (Gillam & Wooden, 2008). When looking at sexual equality

and gender issues, many people have criticized Disney for having characters with typical gender roles (Moffitt & Harris, 2014), Disney not showing characters as true reflection on the culture (Spencer, 2014), or Disney not using one sex as frequently as another (Ebrahim, 2014). As Disney grew more and more in popularity, the company was criticized on the gender issue. It wasn't long before Disney attempted to stray away from their normal gender roles by placing more independent female leads within the story. (Hatfield & Dionne, 2014). Disney has been trying to create a new type of character that is along the lines of today's women (Sandilands, 1997). Stories about princesses from all around the world started to emerge, but scholars still saw typical gender roles, just written in a different storyline.

Children have Disney throughout every stage of their life, and the children become attached to the characters at an early age. The Disney princess or superhero soon becomes more than just the character within the movie, but instead a role model and friend for children to look up to (Wohlwend, 2012). Thus children look up to the character seen on the screen, just like they would look up to a firefighter down the street. When watching Disney movies, families are welcoming these characters (and now role models) into their homes, and at the time, the children want to be just like that character. Theories about how Disney affects gender development have been created, but only a handful amount of research has found significant information (Golden & Jacoby, 2017).

Disney was seen as using women in the typical female role for most of the company's early work. Rozario (2004) give the example in *Sleeping Beauty* choose housework over magic. Rozario (2004) goes on to write about how women are mainly the

leads in the early Disney stories, but these female characters are unable to be successful without the male character. Looking through the male perspective, men are rarely present, but are always the big heroes. Like any argument, there are two sides to the story, but when looking at Disney's stories, there are two different arguments.

The Disney Princess. Many researchers have studied Disney princesses, and found that little girls everywhere dream to be a Disney princess (Golden & Jacoby, 2017). Today, there are millions of products in stores that little girls can become a princess or go to one of Disney's many different resorts to have someone transform them into the princess they dream to be (Bennett & Schweitzer, 2014). Now, becoming a Disney princess is possible for girls worldwide.

Once these young females watch a Disney princess, they then play just as a princess would. Wohlwend (2009) defines princess play as "how children read and respond to gendered narratives as they play" (p. 60). When many scholars look at Disney's stories through a feminist lens, they have found that the stories

Engage with the production of girls' conscious and unconscious desires, prepare for a proper a 'happy every after' situation in which the finding of the prince (the knight in shining armor, "Mr. Right") comes to seem like a solution to a set of overwhelming desires and problems (Walkerdince, 1984, p. 163).

Many feminist scholars see Disney as sexist, setting the female characters in traditional female roles, and needing a man to save them. Other scholars argue that the princesses do not need a man to help them complete their story goal (Higgs, 2016).

Today Disney has 14 official princesses who “have come to represent more than just animated film characters; they have become cultural icons of childhood and tokens of an idealized girlhood” (Golden & Jacoby, 2017, p. 1). Each Disney princess represents a different culture and time era, but each princess story has had the same traditional female roles.

According to Higgs (2016), Disney has evolved the role of the princess as society evolves gender roles, and breaks the Disney Princesses into three different groups. The first group is the classical princess (Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty’s Aurora). These stories were written and directed by men, and show more domesticated female roles. Higgs argues that men are not the saviors to the women but instead marriage. The young girls sing about marriage before the prince arrives. This meaning the only reason to have created a male character is for marriage. Other women that are written into the story are the villains. These women are older, independent, and more mature than the princess in the story. Again, no male character is needed.

The second princess group Higgs (2016) identifies is the renaissance princess (Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast*, Jasmin from *Aladdin*, and *Mulan*). These girls go against the social norms, and all start to think more independently. Belle loves to read, which gives her more independence, but the town can only see a strange girl whose *name means ‘beauty.’* Mulan protects her country from the Huns, but instead of taking a position in the Emperor’s council, she decides that home life is better off for her. These girls have independence and know what they want. They

all have a man by their sides, but they are the saviors of their story, the man is there in a supporting role.

The last and current princess group, the revival princess, Higgs (2016) says is due to the ideas of Pixar. These girls are strong, independent, and hardworking, but once they step out into the world, society looks at them differently, because the norm is not strong independent women. The new era of princess needs no man to be a hard working person. Unlike Pixar's male leads who are already seen as strong leaders, female leads have to earn respect.

Lighting McQueen (*Cars*) is already a champion at the start of his story; *Toy Story's* Woody is the bedroom's chief toy; Sulley is the top scarer of *Monster's Inc.*: but the revival princess' defining quality is that she butts against the system (Higgs, 2016, p. 69)

Disney princesses are not in need of a man. They don't need help from anyone to defeat the evil villain, save China, or start their own business. All of the Disney princesses are beautiful, and have many qualities that are seen in a typical man.

The Alpha Male. In 2006, Disney bought Pixar (Laura, 2006), and since then Disney's movies have been able to target young males (Higgs, 2016). Before the purchase of Pixar, Disney was known for the princesses. Since 1990, Pixar has released films that featured male leads, and Disney attempted to stay up with Pixar with *Hercules* and *Aladdin* (Gillam & Wooden, 2008). Some researchers argue that Pixar is doing the reverse of Disney, and only targeting young males (Ebrahim, 2014), but others argue that

the purchase of Pixar has helped resolve the gender issue Disney had (Gillam & Wooden, 2008).

With the purchase of Pixar, Disney has started focusing more on male leads. Looking at most of Disney-Pixar movies with lead males, the movie starts out with the alpha male. The men are already the leaders and on the top of their game (Higgs, 2016). The issue these alpha males come into is trying to hold onto their power as the leading male character. In *Cars*, Lightning McQueen is the fastest racecar, but gets lost on Route 66. *The Incredibles* shows how Mr. Incredible is still trying to relive the hero days with physical strength, but he struggles with family. *Toy Story* shows true leadership from Woody, but issues come in when someone else is threatening his leadership spot. In *Cars*, McQueen even has another alpha male, Doc Hudson, telling McQueen to stray away from the alpha road, because Hudson has already been down it. This is opposite for princesses. The princesses need family and friends to be stronger, but the males in Pixar are already strong, and their family seems to be holding them back. These alpha male characters are similar to the stereotypical male, holding feelings inside, not wanting to ask for help (Gillam & Wooden, 2008).

At the end of the alpha male Pixar movie, the lead male finds out that he can become stronger with help from his friends or family. "Pixar consistently promotes a new model of masculinity, one that matures into acceptance of its more traditionally 'feminine' aspects" (Gillam & Wooden, 2008, p. 4). By the end of a Pixar film, the alpha male becomes a new and stronger male hero, because he accepted the help from others and opened himself up to friendship and family.

This alpha male has been seen throughout many of Disney's movies. In 2009, Disney purchased Marvel (Chris, 2009), which means superheroes, fighting, and more aggressive action movies. "The postfeminist world is a different place for men, and the post-princess ... is a different place for male protagonists" (Gillam & Wooden, 2008, p. 7). Disney now has even produced its first rated R movie, with *Deadpool*. With this purchase, Disney is trying to expand its target audience to the teen and young adult generation. But the younger generation still wants to be like Captain America, even though most of the Avenger movies are rated PG-13 or higher (Chris, 2009).

With Disney now owning Pixar and Disney, the aggression level of Disney movies has increased (Padillo-Walker, Coyne, Fraser & Stockdale, 2013). If Disney is as influential as research has found, then these movies should have the same type of princess effect on young males. The aggression in Disney programs are normally represented by men. The attractive men are normally the hero, and are rewarded and justified for their aggression, whereas the villains are not as attractive, and punished for their aggression. (Coyne & Whitehead, 2008). As previously stated, in a princess movie the princess is normally young and beautiful, but the female villain is middle aged and not as attractive.

Theoretical Framework: Social Learning Theory

Introduced in the previous chapter, the theoretical framework for this study is social learning theory. This theory was created by Albert Bandura, and later adapted to social cognitive theory. Social learning theory attempts to explain "how social influences impact the beliefs and actions of individual member of society" (Kattari, 2015, p. 379).

Bandura (1977) created this theory to assist analyzing human behavior. He wanted to see behavior develop, find out how behavior is maintained, and then how behavior can be adapted or modified.

Looking at human behavior, Bandura (1977) did not conceptualize individuals as a free agent, but instead something that can be controlled by the environment around them. This theory is explained by using rewards and punishments to shape an individual's beliefs (Wulfert, 2016). Wulfert (2016) explains social learning theory in three parts, cognition, culture influence, and behavior, and that all three affects each other. People can be influenced to certain actions or thoughts by modeling and learning.

This theory was first developed by Bandura's (1971) aggression activity. Bandura had children watch adults play with a bobo doll, which is a big inflatable doll. With this activity, the adults would either play aggressively or play gently with the bobo doll. When it came time for the children to play, children who watched the adult act aggressively with the bobo doll, would also act aggressively, but the children who observed the adults act gently towards the doll, would also act gently to the doll.

This could be the same for watching a movie or television show. "Bandura believed that if a child watched a television character that was attractive and the character received a reward for acting aggressively, the viewer would most likely imitate the behavior" (Everhart & Aust, 2006, p. 106). Sparks (2004) found that if the child would then watch a character act aggressively and get punished for their actions, the child then would not act aggressively.

Children learn from many people through modeling and watching the environment around them (Wulfert, 2016). If the environment is changed, then according to social learning theory, the behavior can also be modified. When young males are watching Disney characters act aggressively, they then should also show more aggression. This theory was first created for quantitative research, but other studies, such as Campsey (2011), have used it for qualitative research. By using social learning theory, the current study can analysis the influence of Disney on young males through the parent as the observer.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Two discussed the conflation of the terms *gender and sex*, gender stereotyping, gender play, gender constancy/consistency, and gendered media. Additionally, the corporate influence of Disney media products and the evolution of both female and male characters in animated films was discussed. Finally, Social Learning Theory, as it applies to research about gendered media's possible influences was introduced.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III explains the method of gathering and analyzing the data and information. A qualitative method was used to help answer the three research questions. I interviewed parents of young males to gather information for this study. This chapter explains the qualitative method chosen, information about participants, and the interview questions used.

Qualitative Approach

I chose to gather data through interviews. By using a qualitative method, I was able to get more in-depth information regarding the interviewee's perceptions of Disney related media.

Once participants were interviewed, their interviews were then transcribed. Since this research required interviewing participants, a proposal was sent to the West Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB committee approved this study to conduct interviews with participants over the age of 18. Each participant signed a consent form for his/her information to be used for this research project (See Appendix B for a copy of the consent form). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym for my study, which is used in my discussion of the data in Chapter IV.

Interviews

Recruitment

For this study, 11 participants were interviewed. I selected participants from my acquaintances through my church and campus activities who I knew had a son between the ages of 2 and 12. Once the first few interviews were finished, I then used the snowball effect; I asked participants if they knew of any other person to fit the selection criteria.

Interview Process

Before each interview, I contacted each participant to see if he or she fit the criteria, which was the participant had to be a parent over the age of 18 with at least one son between the ages of 2-12. Once each participant agreed to be interviewed, a time was set to meet. Interviews were conducted in many public locations, such as the West Texas A&M University Campus, an individual's work place, or churches.

Before the interview, each participant was given a consent form to sign, and a short survey to gain participants' knowledge on Disney (See Appendix C for questionnaire.). Once the consent form was signed and the survey completed, the interview process began. Each interview was recorded with approval from participants and then transcribed. All recordings and transcriptions were saved on a password-protected computer.

Interview Questions. The interview questions were open ended. The first question I asked solicited in-depth information about each participant's knowledge of Disney and Disney media. Once an understanding of the participants' knowledge about

Disney was established, the participants were then asked about what type of Disney products (movie, TV, merchandise) their son had been exposed to throughout their life, and what type (if any) of Disney product(s) their son is and has been most attracted to.

The next section of questions asked about how much Disney is in their son's life (from toys to movies), and the impact of the content on the child's play and day-to-day activities. These questions were asked to see the type of influence (if any) Disney might have on the child. Next, parents were asked how they, as a parent, felt about Disney's influence (or lack thereof) on their child.

Participants were then asked to describe a Disney female, male, princess, prince, sidekick, and villain. After each categorical description, the participant was asked a follow up question to see if he/she felt Disney is creating good or bad (or neither) models within that category for the child. For example, I asked if Disney creates women in a way that the parent hopes to see their son treat women. Once the participant described all categories, he/she then was asked which category their son(s) would fit best with, and with what Disney character(s) would their son identify.

Finally, the participants were asked if they could expand on if they believe that their son gets enough Disney content or does he crave more. The very last question asked the parent for any additional topics not already explored in the interview. A list of the interview questions is found in Appendix A.

Description of Participants

For this study, a total of 11 participants were interviewed (N=11). All 11 participants classify as white (n=11). Ninety-one percent of participants were female

(n=10), and 9% of participants were male (n=1). Ninety-one percent of participants were married (n=10), and 9% of participants were divorced (n=1). All participants had at least a four-year degree (n=11), 37% have education equal to a master's degree (n=4) and 18% of participants had their doctoral degree (n=2). The age of participants ranged from 31-54 with an average age of 40.

Each participant had at least one son between the required ages of 2-12, but 45% of participants had two sons within the required age (n=5). All of the participants had multiple children, 72% had both son(s) and daughter(s) (n=8), whereas 28% of participants only had sons (n=3). Eighteen percent of participants had children (both male and female) that did not fall in the 2-12 age range (n=2). Out of all of the 11 participants, only one participant currently had a son outside the study's age range of 2-12 (age 20), as well as a son within the study's age range (age 8). The age range for the sons which qualified the participant to be interviewed was ages 4 to 11.

Table 1

Knowledge about Disney Media and Products

Item	%	n
Owens Disney Channel	100	11
Owens Pixar	91	10
Owens Marvel	54	6
Owens ABC	27	3

Owns ESPN	17	2
Owns Hulu/History Channel	0	0
As a film company	100	11
As a television company	91	10
As a recording company	82	9
As a publishing/theatre company	72	8
As a video game company	54	6

Participants' Knowledge. Before each interview, participants were given a short survey to gain information about the knowledge they have regarding Disney media and products. Participants were asked if they knew what different type of companies Disney includes, as well as if they knew the different media platforms Disney owns (see Table 1). Most participants knew the different type of companies Disney includes, but participants did not know as much when asked if they knew Disney owned different media platforms (see Table 1).

Chapter Summary

This current chapter discusses the process of gathering information. This study gathered information through interviewing 11 different participants. The interview questions were created to help answer the three research questions for this study. Participants were all parents of at least one son between the ages of 2-12, and had differing knowledge about Disney media and products. Once participants were

interviewed, their interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis and results. In Chapter IV I discuss the results of the interviews.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

As explained in Chapter III, once data were gathered through interviews, the data were coded. Chapter IV states each research question, followed by information from interviews to help answer the research questions. Many themes emerged through the coding process.

The three research questions for this current study asked about Disney's influence on young boys, and how parents feel about Disney's trademark. The themes found while analyzing the interviews resulted in better understanding parents' views about Disney as well as what Disney products are most influential. Each theme is discussed as it relates to the three research questions.

RQ₁: What perceptions do parents of young sons have about Disney media, merchandise and the trademark?

To help answer the first RQ, participants spoke about how they did not fully know the extent of everything Disney owns. Common themes that were found were parents like Disney, and they use Disney as a teaching method. Parents do have a few issues with the absence of leading male roles and do not want Disney to get involved in real world events. This section describes in detail what views participants have about Disney. As stated in chapter III, pseudonyms are used for each participant.

Disney Control

As was stated in Chapter II, Disney is involved in many influential platforms. As discussed in Chapter III the participants did not know the extent of Disney involvement and ownership. Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) even stated

I don't know fully what they are, but I know that they're really big and they are in everything....Everybody knows Disney is one thing, but then again they have so much stuff that you don't even realize it is Disney.

This was a common theme within every interview. Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) just “assumes that anything that is animated is a Disney product at this point.” Parents did not know what their child was exposed to pertaining to Disney. Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) goes on to say that it is “hard to get through childhood without a Disney movie.” Other participants spoke similarly. Anna (personal communication, April 18, 2017) is impressed with the people who work for Disney. She said “I think that they (Disney) are smart marketing people in my opinion. Whoever is running their marketing side is intelligent to have diversified their holding [sic] as much as they have.” Most of the participants found it very impressive that Disney is so diversified, but a conglomerate with so much economic power may also be intimidating.

Ariel (personal communication, April 13, 2017) finds Disney's power “a little scary, just because as a parent, you want to think that you can control all their (children's) influences.” When looking at the companies Disney has purchased, and then looking at the entertainment parents introduce, it is hard for parents to fully understand the power and control Disney might have on their children. Jessie (personal communication, May

28, 2017) disclosed her kids “definitely recognize Disney products. We went to Walmart, we went down the toy aisle. *Star Wars* Legos and anything that is wrapped into it, but anything that’s branded with what they like, they’re all about it.” Most participants were shocked to see everything Disney controls. Because of the interview process, parents had to take a step back to look at everything their son has been introduced to, and many came to the same conclusion that Mickey (personal communication, April 13, 2017) did. Disney “has more control over our lives than we realize.” Once participants took a step back to realize the possible influence Disney has on their child, they were surprised, but yet they seemed to all be satisfied with their children’s involvement with Disney products.

The question of why was then raised. If a participant found Disney’s power intimidating, why do they still go back to it? Ella (personal communication, April 14, 2017) thinks that Disney “is a great influence. They are good role models,” whereas Nala (personal communication, April 11, 2017) just thinks “they (children) thinks it is just fun.” Participants all echoed the same thing as Belle (personal communication, April 13, 2017),

I think it (Disney’s power) could be a little crazy at times, but I think they (Disney) are doing a good job. I think Disney has good intentions, and they try to incorporate all sorts of cultures ... They are doing a good job with what power they have.

For the most part participants are okay with Disney because participants think that Disney is wholesome, and participants’ kids will not be introduced to products parents

are not fully ready for. One reason Ella (personal communication, April 14, 2017) is okay with Disney's power is because of its positive reputation and it is well known that "they are held accountable." Ella later on says

I hope that Disney continues to stay clean and producing good products because it's almost frightening what the monopoly they seem to have on entertainment for children. But I'm glad there's a Disney. I'm glad that they have options that are both the younger ones and moving forward into the older ones.

Participants enjoy Disney for the most part, mainly because Disney has earned their trust.

When first starting the interviews with participants, not one participant knew fully the vast range of Disney. Once they started to look at everything to which their children have been introduced, and that many of those topics, toys, and stories were introduced by Disney, participants found it a little frightening to consider the power and control Disney might have on their children. When asked why they still go back to Disney, parents found it clean and wholesome fun, and they trust Disney.

Parents Like Disney vs Other Companies

Parents find Disney to be a safe choice for their children, but the issue is that their sons are inclined to watch other companies' products, such as Cartoon Network. Parents seemed to be positive about the power Disney has, because participants think Disney uses their power for good. Anna (personal communication, April 18, 2017) said "They have always had this entrenched something for kids that's safe for your kids to watch."

Rapunzel (personal communication, April 12, 2017) loves Disney and "everything about it ... they are family friendly, and they go above and beyond what most companies do."

She goes on to say that she thinks that compared to other companies Disney does “the best job of catering to all ages and making sure that everyone’s accommodated and having a good time and enjoying it.” Rapunzel disclosed that they have been to Disney World a few times, and that once a Disney movie comes out she and her daughters have to go see it, but her son is not as into Disney as her daughters are. He is more of a ‘youtuber’ type of kid.

Sally (personal communication, April 7, 2017) said that her son “really likes Cartoon Network,” but her daughter is a Disney fanatic. This was found within many participants’ interviews. The son would prefer to watch something else, but Mickey (personal communication, April 13, 2017) said

I like Disney more than I like SpongeBob or some of those other ridiculous cartoons ... I think if when he’s watching those shows they’re not as bad as some of the other out there that are for his age.

Many participants said that “Disney does a good job of keeping that stuff out” (Gus, personal communication, April 7, 2017). In today’s world, it is hard to know what your child is fully being introduced to, and it is scary for the participants to not know. Ella (personal communication, April 14, 2017) chose Disney over other products because

I think it’s clean, and I think it usually has a good moral story for the most part. I’m kind of glad that they’ve kept the thread going throughout because I’m afraid of things that are uncensored like YouTube and all of the things that are in handheld devices. I would rather he sit down and watch a Disney product.

Choosing a Disney product over other products was a common practice of these parents.

Participants know that in today's world there are so many different influential platforms, but "in order for me to make sure he is not watching garbage, I would pick Disney, just because I feel safer with it than anything else" (Belle, personal communication, April 13, 2017). Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) enjoys Disney because they are consistent with her family values.

There's something that we can go to and feel safe. I know that if I take my kids to see a Disney movie at the theater, more than likely, I'm not going to have to worry about what's said, or what's done, or a confusing message to something that's too hard for my kids to comprehend. So Disney has, for the most part, good, clean entertainment that we enjoy as a family.

The issue that comes into play is that their sons prefer to watch something else that is more interesting to them. Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) later said that her "kids enjoy cartoons, but not really Disney stuff" (this is discussed in detail under RQ₂). Parents also said that Disney brings up some interesting topics, and it opens the door for them to talk about something new.

Teaching Opportunity

In Chapters I and II, I discussed how Disney could be used as a teaching tool. This was found true for about half of participants. Ariel (personal communication, April 13, 2017) discusses how she thinks *Star Wars* opens up great conversations for her son. She talks with her 11-year-old son about how there is a light and dark side, and the ideology in the movies. She tells him that the dark side feels good and overall it is easy to do, but the good side you have to resist temptation. She talks to him about how being

good is a lot harder than being bad, but why being good is better in the end. She says that Disney movies “open up a nice dialogue.” She goes onto say that if there is something bad, “we’d rather it be brought up in our home, and just talk about it there, than them go to school and it be brought up with a bunch of kids and a lot of cost and promotion.”

Rapunzel (personal communication, April 12, 2017) finds Disney movies as a great talking point on how to view women. “It helps them see a woman as somebody who’s independent and intelligent and equal.” Ella (personal communication, April 14, 2017) hopes that it is showing her son how to act as he grows into a man.

I think that it sets a moral groundwork for him that men are supposed to treat women with respect and protectiveness. I think he kind of needs to understand that there isn’t always a happy ending, but that we have to make the best of things.

Using Disney as an opportunity to open up new dialogue in their homes, was very common among participants. When Sally’s (personal communication, April 7, 2017) son watches the Disney Channel she tries “to constantly point out to him when they’re (Disney characters) back talking, when they’re being sassy, and how those sort of things are not appropriate.” She says that when the actors backtalk, it is nothing horribly bad like some shows have, and at the end, normally the parent actor was right. Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) discusses how she likes Disney stories to teach life lessons to her kids using *Toy Story* as an example.

I like *Toy Story* because it’s a good lesson because he [Woody] is challenged by Buzz coming into the picture, and he is no longer the top dog. And then through

that evolution he makes mistakes and then his mistakes has [sic] consequences.

Then when he learns that he needs teamwork and to work together, they all pull together and it shows, by the end, if you work together as a family then you can get past a crisis.

Participants enjoy the story line that Disney has for their children, and like how they are able to use Disney stories to teach their kids important lessons.

One of the most common findings stated throughout the interviews is that parents talk to their kids about how the stories are fictional. Cindi (personal communication, April 12, 2017) says that she tries to teach her kids a “healthy separation of real life and pretend.” Participants want their kids to know that in real life, things are different, but Disney sets a good groundwork for the participants to educate their children on how to act.

Disney’s Incorporation of Controversial Event (or the Lack of)

Many participants talked about how they like Disney because they do not worry about controversial events, but they worry that might change. The issue with Disney adding controversial issues is that parents are not as likely to allow their children to watch it. Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) thinks that “Disney has become less reliable is that I think they’ve kind of given into some of the pop culture issues.” Parents enjoy the fact that Disney opens up good dialogue for them to talk to their children about, but the type of dialogue is how to treat other people and the difference between good and evil.

Currently Disney is not giving into as much controversial events, but as Gus (personal communication, April, 2017) stated, he thinks that they are giving in more and more, as do other participants. Participants feel that Disney is here for entertainment and fun. “I don’t expect my entertainment to give them (children) a sense of what’s in the world” (Anna, personal communication, April 18, 2017). Most participants just want their children to watch fun, entertaining, and wholesome movies or television.

Most participants think that Disney needs to stay on the course they are on. Ella (personal communication, April 14, 2017) thinks that Disney does not need “to get too heavy with world events or politics ever. In fact, it makes me upset when we have to bring serious stuff into entertainment for children.” Other participants echoed Ella’s (personal communication, April 14, 2017) thought. Participants go on to talk about how they think Disney does a good job of separating real world events and children’s movies. Ariel (personal communication, April 13, 2017) said, “we (she and her husband) just feel like that’s putting adult ideas into a cartoon. So overall we like it, because we don’t feel like they’re trying to shove that down your child’s throat.”

The thought of politics and real world events placed inside a child’s show upsets and angers participants. Many people understand that as children get older, that will be in the movies, but those movies are at least PG-13, which is above the 2-12 age range researched. Parents said that they want their children one day to learn about real world events, but not at the current young age. Many participants think that Disney does a good job versus other companies when it comes to real life events and politics being left out of Disney products, which is one reason why parents keep coming back to Disney.

Leading Roles

One theme that emerged in the majority of interviews is that parents feel like Disney movies have no leading male roles. “A lot of the animated movies do not have the stronger male characters” (Rapunzel, personal communication, April 12, 2017). When participants were asked to describe a male character, participants easily described secondary roles or a prince that had a limited role, but it was difficult for them to talk about lead male roles. Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) felt like “the male characters are a little downplayed. They’re not nearly as prominent in any of the movies.” One of the most known male roles is the sidekick. All participants felt that the sidekick added humor and comedy, but was still not a strong character. When asked why they thought the sidekick was not a strong and prominent role, Anna (personal communication, April 18, 2017) responded that “he’s (the sidekick) centered on the male character,” who is not a lead like the females, and “the guys are portrayed as just not as great as the girls” (Belle, personal communication, April 13, 2017).

Rapunzel (personal communication, April 12, 2017) told a story about how her son was in a concert this past year. The theme of the concert was Disney. All children were encouraged to dress as a Disney character, but it could not be *Star Wars* or Marvel. She discussed that it was harder than she first thought. After looking around at the Disney movies, Rapunzel said “all had a strong female lead, which is good for little girls, but there’s nothing for little boys.” She and her son decided to dress him up as a Pixar character, because in her opinion, there is no good traditional male character. At the concert she noticed that many girls dressed up like a princess, but most of the boys just

had on a t-shirt. Rapunzel goes on to say that “they (males) are not one of the main characters in the movies, so they’re not as well-defined sometimes as the princess.” Rapunzel and other participants think that Pixar has done a good job on filling that gap for the boys.

After the purchase of Pixar, Marvel, and *Star Wars*, participants see Disney coming up with merchandise for their boys. “I think they’ve done a good job recently of pulling a little bit away from princess, but still missing leading men” (Ariel, personal communication, April 13, 2017). According to participants, one of the most influential products Disney has created is with Pixar, Marvel, and *Star Wars*, but the solo Disney movies still need work on strong male lead roles. Participants with daughters said that Disney has been “focused so much on the strong leading princess, that they left out something for the boys” (Ella, personal communication, April 14, 2017).

RQ₁ sought out to look at parents’ perception on Disney trademark. Participants found that Disney being so big can be scary, but overall they trust Disney. Parents find that Disney is family fun, and many products coming from Disney, they find it appropriate for their children to have, but some Disney products are more influential than others.

RQ₂: According to parents, what type of Disney products are most impactful on their sons?

Throughout interviews, participants discussed the different Disney products that are most impactful on their sons, and throughout each interview the same type of products were discussed. Themes which emerged regarding the most impactful Disney

products included newer franchises, live action, age differences, and reading books versus watching action movies.

Newer Franchises

The most common word throughout all the participants' interviews is *Cars* followed by *Star Wars*. As stated in Chapter II, Disney now owns Pixar, Marvel, and the *Star Wars* franchise. According to participants, these purchases and now ownerships have increased Disney's success-

Pixar. Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) stated that both of his "boys have had the *Cars* stage." Throughout the interview process, findings revealed that the 'Cars stage' is very common amongst young boys. The 'Cars stage' is when children are basically obsessed with everything *Cars*. "He loves *Cars*. He just loves anything *Cars*" (Cindi, personal communication, April 12, 2017). Participants found that these talking cars have captured their kids' imagination, as well as their own. Ariel (personal communication, April 13, 2017) talks about how much her family loves the movie.

Cars. They're brilliant. I mean, it's brilliant, because you could do planes, trains, boats. And Lightning McQueen and Mater are two great characters, plus it's a great story ... You can accumulate more stuff with *Cars* than you can with Disney princesses.

All participants talked about how each of their boys had the 'Cars stage,' and how the boys wanted to do anything with it. Nala (personal communication, April 11, 2017) talks about how her boys love *Cars*, and all they can talk about now is *Cars*, because the new

movie is about to come out. Participants talked about how if boys did not go through the same ‘*Cars* phase,’ then they would have been in some other Pixar phase.

Pixar has released many movies that participants found their son(s) always watching. “I remember watching *Cars* at home over and over and over. *Finding Nemo* when my oldest one was little – I mean, three times a day” (Nala, personal communication, April 11, 2017). Previously participants spoke of how Disney was lacking lead male roles, but with Pixar, that is slowly fading away. Both Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) and Ella (personal communication, April 14, 2017) talk about how their boys love *Toy Story*. Ella says she thinks that he loves *Toy Story* because “*Toy Story* was funny. Anything with humor was great. *Cars* had a lot of humor. *Toy Story* had a lot of humor.” Ella goes on to say how much her son identifies with *Toy Story*.

I think he identified with the boy because he really loves stuffed animals ... I know he imagines that when he puts them away in the closet, at night, they come alive and play. He will go in his closet and he’ll look and he’ll say, ‘I haven’t slept with this one in a while.’ I think he gives them animation. He’s empathetic to them, and that was the whole premise of that movie.

Pixar has created entertainment for young boys, and participants all noted that.

Marvel. With the purchase of Marvel, participants found that Disney has acquired another franchise that targets boys. The issue participants have found with this franchise is that the movies are too mature for their young sons. Rapunzel (personal communication, April 12, 2017) talks about how her youngest son loves superheroes, but

does not watch the movie. She then goes on to talk about how her oldest son is now an adult, and loves Marvel movies. Other participants spoke about how their son(s) love(s) superhero cartoons, or *The Batman Lego Movie* (not owned by Disney), but Marvel movies are too mature for their son to watch. Even though the movies are not age appropriate, Disney is still able to have the young boys playing with Marvel toys. When Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) was asked about her sons' superhero passion, she said, "those are typical things that are fun and they're classics. We have the Spiderman and the Captain Americas. However, they have not seen those movies. They just know they're superheroes, and they look cool." Participants think that once their son is old enough to understand the content of Marvel movies, they will love them, but for now, they stick to animation and cartoons.

Star Wars. *Star Wars* is the most recent purchase by Disney, "Anybody could have bought *Star Wars* and could have hired J.J. Abrams to make those movies, but Disney was the smart ones to do so" (Anna, personal communication, April 18, 2017). Participants discussed how *Star Wars* really targeted boys play, and how their play before *Star Wars* was to sword fight, but now everything has to be a light saber fight. "My boys like to swordfight, so you see them fighting the bad guys and being the hero. This has always been the way they played, but after *Star Wars* they now play with light sabers and *Star Wars*" (Ariel, personal communication, April 13, 2017).

Playing is not the only time parents see *Star Wars* influencing their son's life. Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) says that both of her sons love *Star Wars*.

My seven-year-old just had his birthday this last weekend and it was a *Star Wars* themed party so, of course, everything we did was a Disney product ... There's not a day that I don't trip over a light saber in the hallway.

Before Disney purchased *Star Wars*, the franchise was already successful, and most participants or their spouses loved them when they first watched them. After Disney purchased *Star Wars*, participants felt a sense of nostalgia. Disney has brought the excitement participants felt, when they were younger, to a new generation.

Participants all echoed that their sons do not enjoy the traditional Disney (not including Mickey Mouse), but with Pixar, Marvel, and *Star Wars*, Disney now captures their sons' imagination. These three franchises are the most common Disney products participants see their sons drawn to. Parents noted that merchandise associated with Pixar, Marvel and *Star Wars* seem to captivate their sons.

Live Action

When Walt Disney founded the company, the sole focus was animation. Now Disney has movies that are animated, but has added live action. From the newest live action *Beauty and the Beast* to *Star Wars* or a Marvel movie to *High School Musical*, Disney has grown in numbers with movies and television shows starring real live actors on the screen. Participants found that their son(s) are more interested in live action compared to animation.

Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) talks about his oldest son saying, "he loves action movies. That kind of stuff is very attractive to him. He is much more into real-life. He wants a lot of action over animation without a doubt." Parents find that

if a movie or a show is “action packed or it’s real, he likes that better” (Nala, personal communication, April 11, 2017). This was found to be the same in most of the participants’ experience.

When asked why they think their son likes more live action, Rapunzel (personal communication, April 12, 2017) is not certain what part of the movie her son likes the best. “I don’t know if it’s the live actors versus the animated actors or the action that’s in the movie.” Cindi (personal communication, April 12, 2017) and Ariel (personal communication, April 13, 2017) both think that it is in line with the way their boys play. They talk about how their play has not changed, other than characters and what weapons to choose, but instead they are now watching something that reflects what is going on in their sons’ imaginations. Ella (personal communication, April 14, 2017) finds that her son is also “big time action. Big time throwing people around, and the more bim, bam, pow type stuff.” All participants talk about how even at an early age, the boys love action.

Parents revealed that their sons prefer real actors at a later age, but even with animated movies boys still pinpoint the action scenes. Anna discussed how she took both her son and daughter to see *Frozen*, and her daughter was all about the music, the princess, and the storyline. She saw a different reaction with her son.

When I took him to see it, the wolf scene in *Frozen*, he reenacted it all the way home from the movies. He’s less interested in animated movies. He did like *Frozen* but not to the degree of my daughter.

Participants said how excited their son gets when an action scene comes on, and they can just watch how excited their son gets throughout the whole scene. Cindi (personal communication, April 12, 2017) believes that “Disney has cultivated a generation of boys that crave the action packed stuff, and so they’re constantly asking for more.”

Age Difference

When watching a movie, one can tell the recommended age looking at the movie’s rating. As stated in Chapter II, Disney has movies rated from G to R, and a wide range of ages watch Disney movies. Disney is “just geared for all ages. Geared for little kids to elderly to everything” (Rapunzel personal communication, April 12, 2017). Mickey (personal communication, April 13, 2017) finds that “in some way it is kind of neat that it (Disney) is kind of universal across ages and across so much.” Analyzing each interview, a common theme was found when it came to what movies interested what ages.

Many participants talked about how they introduced Mickey Mouse to their sons at a very young age. Mickey (personal communication, April 13, 2017) talks about how the day her son was born, Mickey Mouse was there on blankets, television show, toys, and so many items within their home. Ariel (personal communication, April 13, 2017) talks about how “the amount of Mickey Mouse stuff, just Mickey Mouse, is overwhelming.” goes on to say how her youngest son just loves Mickey Mouse, and many participants identified this same trend.

Around age three to four is when Mickey Mouse is dropped and Pixar begins to dominate. Participants with two sons found that their older son dropped Mickey Mouse at

a later age than their youngest. Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) says “everything brother does, he does. That’s a pretty natural response of ‘I want to do what brother’s doing.’” Participants say that once the Pixar phase starts, their child becomes obsessed.

While still in the Pixar phase, the influence of *Star Wars* begins. This stage starts between ages six to eight. A common theme within each interview was if someone in the family loves *Star Wars* (parent, grandparent, older sibling), the *Star Wars* movies were introduced to the child around age five, but their son did not fully grasp them until they were six (Anna, personal communication, April 18, 2017), Ariel (personal communication, April 13, 2017), Cindi (personal communication, April 12, 2017), Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017, and Rapunzel (personal communication, April 12, 2017)). If the child does not have a huge *Star Wars* fan in the family, they started wanting *Star Wars* around age eight (Belle, personal communication, April 13, 2017), Ella (personal communication, April 14, 2017), and Nala (personal communication, April 11, 2017).

Similar to *Star Wars*, children slowly start to like live action shows more than cartoon or animated shows, as discussed previously. This begins around age seven to eight (Gus, personal communication, April 7, 2017), Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017), and Nala (personal communication, April 11, 2017). “He’s less interested in animated movies now than he was” (Anna personal communication, April 18, 2017)). When participants asked their sons if they would want to go see *Moana*, children who were under six were okay with going to see it, but the boys above age seven did not want

to go see it. Participants said that their older sons were more inclined to see the new live action *Beauty and the Beast*.

As stated earlier, the themes of the Marvel movies are more mature and complicated. There is more topical humor that young children would not understand. Anna (personal communication, April 18, 2017) says that “all the add-ons adults are laughing about, the kids don’t pick up on, there were too many of those for my kids to enjoy it.” Similar to Anna, participants guess that Marvel will start engaging their son around his teenage years. Rapunzel (personal communication, April 12, 2017) has an adult son; she remembers that her oldest son started watching those movies when he was a teenager, and thinks her youngest will start watching those type of movies around the same time.

As stated in Chapter II, Disney is a lifetime brand. According to participants Disney products are present from the moment their son is born with Mickey Mouse, then moves on to Pixar around age three. By age five, most participants’ sons were introduced to Marvel characters, but not Marvel movies. When boys are around age seven, they are introduced to *Star Wars*. Parents believe that these Disney products will remain with their son(s) for years to come.

Books, Movies, and Music

Young males seem to prefer action packed movies. Participants were asked about if their child enjoys reading, and the answers varied. Some participants said that their son likes to read, and others stated that they almost have to force their child to read. Either loving to read or being forced to read, most participants said that their daughters read

books about Disney princesses, but they could not think of Disney-themed books that their son reads. Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) discussed how her oldest son reads *Star Wars* books, but that is the only Disney product she can think of. Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) said that his boys “don’t intentionally look for Disney books or seek out Disney material to read.” Gus later goes on to say “I think for the boys, movies would be their preference. The girls are more interested in reading.” Other participants said that their son does not enjoy reading Disney produced books, but instead books like *Harry Potter* or *The Magic Tree House*.

This was a common theme when it came to Disney music as well. Girls are more interested than the boys are. Rapunzel (personal communication, April 12, 2017) told a story about car rides she used to take with her girls when they were younger. “When it is just me and the girls, that was a four-hour trip of singing Disney songs, but with the boys, not as much impact. They just sit and listen.” Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) also found this to be true with his kids. He told a story about when they first got their new car and it had Sirius Radio. “For a time we had Sirius Radio, and the girls always had to have it on, but my boys were indifferent. Excited, but not like the girls.” Ariel (personal communication, April 13, 2017) did not find this strange, because when looking at what movies have the popular soundtrack, most of the movies are a Disney traditional type movie. The movies boys are into are Pixar, Marvel, and *Star Wars*, which do not have as many vocal soundtracks.

When looking at what Disney products participants thought were most influential on their sons, books and music were not high ranking. The products that participants

found to be the most impactful were movies from Pixar, Marvel, and *Star Wars*.

Additionally branded products seemed to be preferred by sons. “Anything that’s branded with what they like, such as *Toy Story* or *Star Wars*, they’re all about” (Jessie, personal communication, May 28, 2017).

RQ₂ asked about what Disney products are most impactful on young boys. Many participants have echoed that Pixar, Marvel, and *Star Wars* are almost additive to their children, and participants have said that they have *Star Wars* and *Cars* all over their house when their child is going through a certain Disney phase. If the child plays with Disney products, watches Disney products, and so much around them is from Disney, than what type of influence does these impactful Disney products have on the young males?

RQ₃: What type of social influence does Disney have on young males?

I identified the following themes which help with understanding the social influence of Disney media and merchandise on young boys: obsession, limiting, and stereotyping. I also discuss the difference in Disney’s influence participants found between girls and boys.

Obsession/Limiting

Many other studies discussed in Chapter II have found that Disney products can become very addictive to young children, mainly focusing on young girls (Golden & Jacoby, 2017). According to many of the participants, this is true for their sons as well. Anna (personal communication, April 18, 2017) talks about how when her son was first introduced to *Star Wars* that “it was 24 hours a day. Will not sleep because I’m playing

with my action figures kind of situation.” Participants with sons and daughters found that their son(s) are “not as obsessed with them (Disney products) like my girls were” (Rapunzel, personal communication, April 12, 2017)). Even the fact that their boys were not as involved with Disney products as girls were, it still makes the parents watch and limit what they are doing.

Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) talks about how when *Frozen* came out for his daughters and *Cars* for his sons. He says that they were constantly wanting more, and “when I start seeing kids get just obsessed with something, I’m going to pull back, and limit that.” Participants talked about how limiting is a must or “they (kids) would just sit and watch TV all day” (Nala, personal communication, April 11, 2017). Cindi (personal communication, April 12, 2017) talked about how they love a good Disney story, but “parents should be careful, because it can be addictive.” Participants found that Disney can become very addicting for kids to watch, both boys and girls. Today, with Netflix, movies on demand, and multiple ways to get access to Disney products, Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) finds she has to set technology limits.

Things are changing in our world. We’re pushing to be more electronic, more social media, more engaged in that. And so we have to set limits at our house ... you definitely have to limit and structure it or I think they would just sit in front of the TV all day.

Participants discussed how they keep going back to Disney, but they want their children to have Disney in a wide spectrum, different toys, movies, television, play. Boys do

obsess about Disney products, but according to participants with both sons and daughters, not to the same extent as girls.

Boy's Stereotyping as Girly

It was discussed that parents found that Disney did not have many male lead roles, and this results in the perception that Disney movies are “girly”. When talking to the participants, every single one of them stated that when they think of Disney, they think that most movies are targeted to girls. “I think girls are just more geared towards it (Disney movies)” (Belle, personal communication, April 13, 2017). Participants with both girls and boys found that their daughter is more geared to Disney, and Disney is not as much of a boy thing. Ariel (personal communication, April 13, 2017) finds that her daughter “is constantly dressed up as a princess, but never the boys with Disney. They do fight with light sabers, but not to the extent as she does.” Sally (personal communication, April 7, 2017) has seen the same concept between her two kids. “My daughter is very into Disney. When she was growing up she loved all the princess movies, had all the dresses. My son, however, has never really been into the Disney thing.” Parents found that when it comes to a Disney princess, their girls could not get enough.

Participants went on to explain why they find Disney as a “girly” thing. Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) thinks “that Disney has market [sic] more to females.” Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) discusses how society reflects the Disney stereotype.

When you look at our society, little boys do not grow up dressing up as princesses. Where I have nieces, they like to dress up as princesses. My boys play

war. They play hide and go seek. They play that adventuresome. That is what they gravitate towards.

Participants found that there has been a gap of movies that peaked their son's interest, and that their son(s) is not as interested in Disney movies. "We've probably seen the majority of Disney movies, but it's just not his thing. He would watch it, and then he'd move on" (Sally, personal communication, April 7, 2017). Many participants repeated Sally's thought. Their son(s) would watch the movie, but "see it once, now he is good" (Rapunzel, personal communication, April 12, 2017). When explaining why they thought their son(s) would react differently than their daughter(s), Anna (personal communication, April 18, 2017) found that "he watches it, but he knows what they're about the girls." Participants soon started talking about how once Pixar created, *Toy Story* and *Cars* their son then started to get interested, but even the newest Disney movies, the boys are not wanting to watch.

Participants were asked if they have watched or planned to go to see the newest *Beauty and the Beast* and *Moana*, and then how their sons reacted. Nala (personal communication, April 11, 2017) found that her five year old was excited to see the movie, but her older son did not want to go see it. Sally (personal communication, April 7, 2017) found that when the movies were coming out, her daughter was overly excited to see both movies, but her son refused to go, and wanted to stay at home. "So grandma, my daughter, and I went to *Beauty and the Beast*, and grandpa and my son stayed at home. He did not want to see it." When asked why they thought their son would not want to see the movie, Anna (personal communication, April 18, 2017) said "I think from the

name, he'll probably think it's another girly thing." She goes on to say when she asked her son about *Frozen* he told her "that's a girl movie. It was a good movie, but it was a girl movie." Gus (personal communication, April 7, 2017) found that his son "thinks Disney is a girl's thing. When *Moana* came out, 'I don't want to see that. I'm not interested.'" Many participants said similar things about their son.

A few participants talked about how their son(s) loved the idea of going to the movies. The participants talked about how they felt it was more the experience than the movie itself. Rapunzel (personal communication, April 12, 2017) talks about how her son is not that into Disney movies, but when they watched the newest *Beauty and the Beast* she did know what he was more excited about "because we (all the family) were all going together or, he likes to go to the movie theater, so he liked this experience." Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) talks about how her boys just love going to the movies. "It's a special treat for us to go to the movies, and we do it up big. We do the popcorn and the candy. It's a good time... but it just is hit and miss whether it's Disney or not."

Disney Without New Franchises

When many participants think of Disney, they think of the typical Disney princess movies. When looking at those movies, participants found that Disney really was not targeted to boys. As previously discussed Pixar, Marvel, and *Star Wars* is now owned by Disney, and targets young males. RQ₃ asked what type of influence does Disney have on young males, and according to participants, without the purchase of their newest franchises, Disney would have little to no influence on their son(s). Rapunzel (personal

communication, April 12, 2017) stated “Before Marvel, Pixar, and *Star Wars*, it (Disney) still had a big impact on them (my girls), but on my son, probably not.” Nala (personal communication, April 11, 2017) said a similar statement. “Aside from *Cars*, we don’t really do Disney.” This was a common theme throughout each interview. Ella’s daughter grew up before the purchase of Pixar, but her son grew up with Pixar.

I think Disney did a very good job, thinking back you had all the princesses over here that filled my daughter’s niche. And then those (Pixar movies) were not out until my son was born. Now Disney impacts him, but if he was my daughter’s age, I think not as much impact as she had. (Ella, personal communication, April 14, 2017)

When asked why they think their sons are not that influenced by a traditional Disney movie Jessie (personal communication, May 28, 2017) responded by saying her boys “typically like the Marvel, the *Star Wars*, and Pixar. It’s a little bit more capturing for a boy child. They certainly don’t mind watching Princess movies, but they get excited about the typical guy stuff.”

Participants all said the same thought. “I don’t think without those franchises, he would really care that much about Disney” (Rapunzel, personal communication, April 12, 2017).

Chapter Summary

Chapter IV discussed the recurring themes found in the 11 participants’ interviews. As stated in Chapter III, each participant’s interview was recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed. Themes that emerged regarding Disney media and

merchandise included: Disney control, preference for Disney over other companies, teaching opportunities, avoidance of controversial cultural issues, and absence of male role models. Themes which emerged regarding the most impactful Disney products included newer franchises, live action, age differences, and reading books versus watching action movies. Finally, themes that were identified regarding the social influence of Disney media and products were obsession, limiting, gender stereotyping, and not targeted for boys. Chapter 5 discusses the results, the implications for future research and the limitations of this study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter V discusses the results of my research, how these findings support or challenge previous research, the limitations of my study and directions for future research. This study focused on the following research questions:

RQ₁: What perceptions do parents of young sons have about Disney media, merchandise and the trademark?

RQ₂: According to parents, what type of Disney products are most impactful on their sons?

RQ₃: What type of social influence does Disney have on young males?

Discussion

Based on the data collected in interviews of 11 participants, I offer the following answers for each research question.

RQ₁: What perceptions do parents of young sons have about Disney media, merchandise and the trademark?

RQ₁ asked about parents' perception of Disney's trademark. By interviewing participants it was found that parents do not fully know the extent of what Disney owns. Once educated about Disney's holdings, parents think that the vast number of what Disney owns is a little scary, but they continue to allow their sons to view Disney media and to purchase a variety of Disney-themed merchandise for their sons.

Participants keep going back to Disney because they prefer Disney over other companies. They find that Disney is clean family fun that they trust for their sons to watch. An issue is that young males tend to like Cartoon Network and other companies. Hentges and Case (2008) found that other companies target more to boys, and Schmuckler (2006) found that Disney Channel focuses more on girls.

Parents use Disney sometimes to teach their children different lessons. Parents find that their son(s) learns how to act and behave through the modeling provided by Disney. Bandura (1971) finds that “most of the behaviors that people display are learned, either deliberately or inadvertently, through the influence of example,” and parents approve of their son(s) learning from Disney media and merchandise which supports the explanation provided by social learning theory (p.5).

Participants said that they enjoy Disney, but they feel like they are missing strong leading men for their sons to watch, which supports an observation made by Rozario (2004) about how the purchase of Pixar in 2006 by Disney altered the presence of male characters in Disney films. Overall participants enjoy Disney’s trademark and trust the company’s products.

RQ₂: According to parents, what type of Disney products are most impactful on their sons?

RQ₂ sought to understand what type of Disney products participants find to be most influential on their son(s). All participants commented about how much their child loves Pixar, Marvel, and *Star Wars*. Ebrahim (2014) discussed how Pixar is targeted to

boys, which is also supported by the results of this study because the participants' son(s) enjoy watching Pixar over traditional Disney movies.

Depending on their age, when given the opportunity to pick an animated movie or a live action movie, most boys would rather watch a movie with action or real actors. Luther and Legg (2010) found that most men in Disney movies are seen as aggressive, which supports the findings in this study, because participants found that their son(s) like the action and aggressiveness in Disney products. These types of movies (and products spun off from the movies) have been found to be more influential on participants' son(s) than other Disney products like books or music.

Wohlwend's (2012) research found that girls are connected with Disney soon after birth. This study found that to be true with boys as well. With the purchase of newer franchises such as Pixar, Disney targets boys at a very young age, and stays with them as they get older.

RQ₃: What type of social influence does Disney have on young males?

Lastly, RQ₃ asked what type of social influence Disney has on young males. It was found that Disney has a strong influence when it comes to young males, but not to the same extent as the company has on young females. Golden and Jacoby (2017) found that little girls want to be a Disney princess, but the current data does not find that to be the same with little boys. This meaning that girls play like a little princess, and say that they want to be a princess when they grow up. When participants watch their sons play, the boys play *Star Wars*, but if a participant would ask their son what they want to be when they grow up, the answer would be similar to a doctor or a scientist. Participants

found that for their daughters, the influence last a very long time, but for their son, it is just phases, such as the *Cars* phase, that boys go through.

According to participants, their sons think the traditional Disney movie is girly, but their daughters enjoy almost any type of Disney products. Parents find that Disney has many addicting products, and feel the need to limit their children's access. Participants found that Disney has a strong social influence on their son(s), but not as much as they find on young girls.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory was the theoretical framework applied for analysis. Social learning theory examines social influences, and how they control or impact actions and beliefs (Kattari, 2015). Bandura (1977) suggests people that can be influenced by the environment surrounding them. This theory uses reward and punishments, and can be broken into three parts, culture influence, cognition, and behavior. These are the three parts used during analysis of interview.

So far as children's cognition is concerned, the results of my study indicate that how boys and girls think and play regarding Disney media seems to be different. While young girls' interest in being a Disney princess seems to be constant, young boys have a weaker attachment to Disney media and merchandize which parents described as "phases." Culturally, the behavior described by parents in this study also seems to indicate that their sons' awareness of stereotypical portrayals of gender caused them to see Disney movies as "girly." Finally, regarding behavior of their sons, parents noted that movies, such as the *Star Wars* franchise, provided examples of sword play that were

readily re-enacted by their sons with their light sabers. The difference noted by parents also applied to the clothing that children selected, as was the case when one participant's son needed to come up with a Disney themed costume for a school program. Girls had many princess options for their costumes but boys were limited in their selection of what to wear.

Limitations

This study had many limitations. First, this study sought to find information about parents' view of Disney's influence on their son(s). Each participant had more than one child, and only two participants had only children within the criteria set for the study, which was a son between the ages of two to twelve. The other nine participants had at least one child that did not fit the study's requirement. When interviewing, participants often commented on their other children as well as their son within the age range. Participants were unable to focus solely on the son who fell within the study's age range.

This study was limited by the lack of diversity in those who participated. Out of the 11 participants, only one was a male, and all 11 participants classify as white. This study's participants also all had a four-year degree or higher. Lastly, this study interviewed 10 married participants, and only one single parent. This study would have benefited from interviewing people representing other races/ethnicities, genders, educational backgrounds, and marital status. By interviewing a more diverse group of people, different themes might have been found. Lastly, as is typical of most qualitative research, the results are based on a limited number of interviews and therefore may not be generalizable to other populations.

Conclusion

This current study researched the influence Disney has on young boys, using a qualitative approach by interviewing 11 participants. Each participant interviewed currently had at least one son between the ages of 2-12. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed. The purpose of this study was to find what are parents' general view of Disney's trademark, and what Disney products are most influential on young males.

The results of this study support previous research about the dominant influence Disney media and merchandise has on young children. Products that are most influential for young boys are products from Pixar, Marvel, and *Star Wars*. Before the purchase of these franchises, participants indicated they seldom purchased Disney products for their sons. What is also interesting about the attitudes parents have about Disney media and merchandise is that while they feel a need to control the amount of media or merchandise used by their sons, yet they trust the Disney brand so much that they continue to consume Disney products.

Future Research

As with all research projects, my study suggests areas for further research. First, many participants spoke about how their daughter is more into Disney than their son. Future research could examine the difference between male and female perceptions of Disney. Second, a study can focus on the impact of each Disney franchise (Pixar, Marvel, *Star Wars*, etc.), and the influential impact each franchise has on children.

Within the interview process of this study, multiple themes kept coming up for studies in the future. The term ‘Youtuber’ was said in multiple interviews. A future study can investigate how young boys are using Youtube, and explain what the term ‘Youtuber’ means.

Another theme that was found was parents found Marvel to be too mature for their child. A study could be created to look at young men to find the influence of Marvel and when Marvel starts to impact males. Another age related topic that participants talked about is what their child wants to be when they grow up, and I asked many participants if their child would like to be like a Disney character when they grow up. Parents said that their daughter wants to be a princess, but their son(s) want to be a doctor, researcher, or scientist. A future research study can analyze why girls want to be a princesses growing up, but boys want to be something that is a real occupation, or one that does not require family lineage.

Other studies could use this current study as a guide. This current study looked at parents of boys between the ages of 2-12. Instead of interviewing parents, an ethnographic study could be created to observe young boys or interviewing the boys themselves about Disney. Likewise a case study of a certain Disney product could yield interesting results. For example, to look at one certain Pixar-Disney movie to see the impact of the movie on society, and possibly make a social comparison between a Pixar on males compared to a Disney princess movie on males (or females).

Chapter Summary

Chapter V compared the results of my study with the existing literature and offered an explanation of my findings through the lens of Social Learning Theory. Additionally, I discussed the limitations of this study and offered areas for further research. While “a wish is a dream your heart makes when you’re fast asleep,”(according to Disney) focusing on the impact of Disney media and merchandise on young boys helps us to understand the role this media conglomerate has on what children do and what they think about.

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Appendices A

Tell me what you know about Disney.

Tell me about the Disney merchandise, publications, or media to which your child has been introduced.

When it comes to Disney media what has been your child's preference?

How have those movies helped shaped your child's play?

How often does your child watch a Disney movie or Disney TV shows?

How often does your child read (or listen to you read) a book published by Disney?

How often does your child play with a Disney merchandise product?

What are your perceptions about how your son reacts to the Disney trademark?

When I say Disney Character, what character comes to mind?

Describe a typical Disney female.

Describe a typical Disney prince or hero.

Describe a typical Disney male sidekick.

Describe a typical Disney male villain.

As you think about Disney characters, with which one does your son most closely identify? Explain.

Does your son crave more Disney?

Appendices B

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled, and the participant may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which the participant is otherwise entitled. In participating you will be assisting us in our research about the demographics of the Disney. Your responses herein will remain completely confidential, and will only be analyzed in the aggregate for academic research purposes. In continuing this survey, you acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age and wish to participate in this study conducted by Caleb Hubbard.

The information collected will be stored on a secure server and will be downloaded and removed shortly after data collection ends. There is no right or wrong answer and we have no interest in how a particular individual responds to these questions.

In this study you will be asked a series of questions about general demographic information, and your background with Disney. There is no more risk to you than expressing your opinions in everyday conversation. There is no direct benefit to you, but your participation will benefit the fields of communication and marketing. This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at West Texas A&M University. If you have any concerns about this study or your rights, you can contact the dean of the graduate school and research at 806.651.2730. Thank you again for your participation. Should you have any questions and/or wish to review summary findings, please contact the faculty advisor Dr. Trudy Hanson at 806-651-2800.

I have read the above statement and agree with the terms listed herein.

- YES, I agree to participate in this study.
- NO, I do not wish to participate in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendices C – Participant Survey (Exported from Qualtrics)

First and Last Name: _____

Gender

- Male
- Female
- I identify as: _____

Ethnicity

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/Mexican
- I identify as: _____

Marital Status

- Married
- Widowed
- Divorced
- Separated
- Never married

Age _____

Education

- Less than high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- 2 year degree
- 4 year degree
- Professional degree
- Doctorate

Please select the age of your children:

	Male	Female
1	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18+

Did you know Disney is a ...	Yes	No	Maybe
Film Company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Animation Studio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Publishing Company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Recording Company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Theater Company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Resort/Amusement Park	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television Company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Toy and Clothing Company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Video Game Company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio Company	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cruise Ship	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Did you know Disney owns ...	Yes	No	Maybe	I do not know what that is.
Disney Chanel Stations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ABC Television Stations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
ESPN Inc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hulu	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Pixar	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Marvel Studios	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
History Network	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lifetime	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>