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Julia C. Golden

May 2015
Playing Princess: Preschool Girls’ Interpretations of Gender Stereotypes in
Disney Princess Media

by

Julia C. Golden

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Department of Psychology and Education
Mount Holyoke College
South Hadley, Massachusetts
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ABSTRACT

Disney bombards young girls on a daily basis with powerful and consistent messages regarding gender norms and roles. Their princess brand, in particular, circulates rigid expectations for how girls should look and behave. Inspired by the ubiquity of these messages, the current study examined how gender-role stereotypes in Disney Princess media impacted 3- to 5-year-old girls at two different preschools, paying specific attention to the influence of these media images on girls’ pretend play behaviors. Furthermore, this study investigated the influence of socioeconomic status on girls’ interpretations of Disney Princesses, a component that researchers have not yet explored. Data collected from a variety of methods, including pretend play observations, semi-structured interviews, and parent questionnaires revealed significant changes in girls’ pretend play behaviors when they had access to Disney Princess media. When pretending to be princesses, girls’ play was more restricted as well as more gendered. Additionally, significant differences appeared between girls of different socioeconomic groups. The implications of these changes in pretend play are discussed in relation to theory regarding children’s formation of a self-concept and gender identity. Based on the outcomes of this study, parents and educators might reconsider the types of media they provide their children, acknowledging the effects of these images on their children’s behaviors and understandings of gender.
INTRODUCTION

The mass media consistently exposes girls to a limited and static image of girlhood. In children’s movies, television programs, and toys, girls are portrayed again and again with a narrow set of interests and characteristics (Lamb & Brown, 2006). This is particularly apparent when observing Disney Princess media. The eleven official princesses of the multi-billion dollar Disney Princess franchise have come to represent more than just animated film characters; they have become cultural icons of childhood and tokens of an idealized girlhood (Wohlwend, 2009). These princesses include Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora from Sleeping Beauty, Ariel from The Little Mermaid, Belle from Beauty and the Beast, Jasmine from Aladdin, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana from The Princess and the Frog, Rapunzel from Tangled, and Merida from Brave (Disney Princess, 2015a). Although marketed as distinct characters, the defining traits of the majority of these princesses remain constant: they are self-sacrificing and innocent ingénues whose happy ending depends on the discovery of their one true love (Wohlwend, 2009). Disney princesses, therefore, provide girls with a strictly one-dimensional vision of femininity and a rigidly defined set of gendered roles (Pollen, 2011).

Today, Disney Princesses remain ubiquitous in the lives of young children, especially for 3- to 5-year-old girls to whom Disney directly markets their princess brand (Wohlwend, 2009). From movies and video games to clothing and household products, Disney has monopolized the princess industry, allowing children not only to watch princesses on a screen, but also to experience
the princess lifestyle for themselves. As Wohlwend (2009) writes, “One can be Cinderella all day long, sleeping in pink princess sheets, eating from lavender Tupperware with Cinderella decals, and dressing head to toe in licensed apparel…” (p. 58). Due to the pervasiveness of Disney Princess media, it is essential that researchers explore the effects of these repetitious images on children’s development. Therefore, the current study sought to examine how preschool girls interpret these static Disney females through their pretend play, a topic that has received little attention considering the popularity of Disney Princess media.

**Gender Stereotypes in Disney Princess Media**

Through Disney Princess media, girls confront an abundance of powerful and consistent messages regarding gender norms and roles (Wohlwend, 2009). Mayes and Valentine (1979) defined gender-role stereotypes as collections of gender-specific attributes or “traditional norms that differentiate typical feminine behavior patterns from typical masculine behavior patterns in contemporary American society” (p. 41). Numerous researchers have documented gender-role stereotypes in Disney Princess media. For example, in their book, *Packaging Girlhood*, Lamb and Brown (2006) enumerated the trite themes that many Disney females share. These include their lovely singing voices, Barbie doll bodies, reliance on men to perfect their lives, and absence of support systems, as they often are portrayed without families or best friends of the same age (Lamb & Brown, 2006).
Consider, for example, this quote from the Disney Princess website:

“Snow White is a kind and gentle princess, with lips as red as a rose and skin as white as snow. After she’s forced to leave her castle, she befriends the lovable Seven Dwarfs and finds her one true love” (Disney Princess, 2015b). A picture of the flawless Snow White with her demure smile and shy, unassuming gaze, appears beside this introductory blurb, a vision of femininity perfected. This short introduction exposes viewers to an abundance of stereotypes and characteristics regarding the ideal girl. Snow White is only one of the eleven princesses presented on this website, and yet most all of the introductions follow this same pattern, focusing on similar stereotypical traits. These include the female’s pleasant disposition, her appearance, and her love interest, all of whom are male and reinforce a hetero-normative ideal. Disney repackages these stereotypes time and again in their female characters, differing only “colour variations in their hair and dress style” (Wohlwend, 2012, p. 593).

Although major progress has been made in society in terms gender equality since 1937 when the first Disney Princess film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, was released, the Disney Princesses continue to reflect many of the antiquated notions of femininity. For example, in a content analysis of 16 of the most popular Disney animated feature films between the years 1937 to 1995, Wiersma (2000) found that Disney females were more likely to do housework than their male counterparts. Disney females, from movies including *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella, The Little Mermaid, Aladdin, and Pocahontas*, performed a total of 39 household tasks. Disney males, on the other hand, were
only observed performing six total chores (Wiersma, 2000). Moreover, when Wiersma calculated the number of characters holding societal or familial power, the tables reversed. Thirty male characters were portrayed in positions of authority including princes, kings, captains, a colonel, and a policeman, while only five females, mainly princesses, held any position of power. Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog*, who by the end of the movie owns her own restaurant, is the only official Disney Princess employed as anything other than a princess (Del Vecho, 2009).

Still, in more recent years, Disney has made great strides to push past these gender stereotypes and produce characters that reflect a more advanced and equal society. Merida, the newest addition to the official Disney Princess group, from the 2012 Disney/Pixar film, *Brave*, combats many of the stereotypes that thwart the other princesses. Merida, the impetuous, bow-and-arrow wielding heroine, fights for control over her own destiny. She challenges the traditional princess image, refusing to depend on anyone, especially not a prince, to save the day herself (Sarafian, 2012). Even so, as Pols (2012) critiques, Merida’s concerns are still “limited to those of a princess, the biggest of which remains, as ever, marriage” (para. 2). One of the main conflicts of the film revolves around Merida’s parents’ desire to marry her off to a prince (Sarafian, 2012). Additionally, Merida’s appearance, her tiny waistline and big blue eyes, still hold strong to the typical princess physique. Therefore, although Merida represents progress in the Disney Princess brand, her character continues to uphold many of the traditional gender stereotypes common among the princesses.
Moreover, like the majority of her fellow Disney Princesses, Merida always wears a dress. Of the eleven princesses, only Princess Jasmine, who wears harem pants and a crop top, is portrayed in anything other than a dress in her official Disney Princess photo (Disney Princess, 2015a). Even Mulan, the warrior who disguises herself as a man in order to fight for her country, is most often pictured wearing a kimono-like hanfu instead of her warrior’s gear, even though the hanfu makes Mulan miserable in the movie (Orenstein, 2011). Furthermore, the merchandise depicting Mulan, including dolls and role-play costumes, nearly always portrays the character in a dress (Disney Princess, 2015a). In her book on preschool children and gender, Davies (2003) explains the impact of portraying females in only dresses. She asserts that certain articles of dress, including skirts and dresses, present a “symbolic means of maintaining the sexes as clearly distinct” (p. 16). By wearing dresses or skirts, young girls inscribe femininity on their bodies, learning that when they wear a dress or a skirt, they must assume “unnatural and submissive postures, with knees always together” (p. 16). In this way, the Disney Princesses, who nearly always wear dresses, reinforce the symbolic image of the dress as a female item and a required form of attire for women.

Despite these overt gender stereotypes, Disney Princesses remain popular among young girls as well as their caretakers. Many adults regard Disney as an honorable, child-friendly company that can be trusted to provide the most appropriate products for their children. Some may even consider Disney the ideal of wholesome family entertainment (Wiersma, 2000). The Walt Disney Company
has established itself as a cultural icon and a proponent of middle-class family values; however, beneath this façade of innocence and fun lies a corporate giant (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). In the end, The Walt Disney Company is not concerned with children’s health and mental well-being, nor do they fret about the impact of their images on the global society at large; instead, their key focus is to reap money and scale the corporate ladder (Giroux & Pollock, 2010).

Many of the stereotypes that Disney Princess perpetuates directly relate to their marketing interests. For example, Disney emphasizes the princesses’ appearances, focusing not only on their physical attractiveness but also on the clothing and accessories they wear. They circulate the message that princesses must be attractive to gain the attention of a man. For instance, in pursuit of attending the ball and reuniting with prince charming, Cinderella must exchange her rag dress for a luxurious, sparkling ball gown complete with long gloves and a matching headband (Walt Disney Productions, 1950). Disney disseminates the idea that material products matter, that they better one’s status and beauty. In doing so, Disney incites children to beg their parents for new clothing and accessories, specifically those marketed by Disney, which replicate the styles worn by their on-screen females (Orenstein, 2011). As Giroux and Pollock (2010) note:

Disney also has over forty thousand ready-made Princess items available for young girls, along with the optimistic message that faith in commodities will solve their problems and help define who they want to
be, namely, pretty enough to win a man on whom they can depend financially. (p. 123)

In recent years, Disney Princess products have been on the rise like never before. In 2000, to combat sagging sales in the consumer-products division of Disney, the company hired Andy Mooney, former Nike Executive, to implement a new marketing campaign (Orenstein, 2006). His idea: combine old and new Disney heroines under the umbrella term “Disney Princess” and design a line of merchandise depicting these characters, including costumes, clothing, household products and more, that allow girls to “live out the princess fantasy” (Orenstein, 2006, p. 3). His campaign proved tremendously successful; between the years 2001 and 2007, Disney Princess profits rose from $300 million all the way to $4 billion in global retail sales (Disney Consumer Products, 2007). Girls are surrounded by these princess images at startling rates, immersed in the world of Disney like never before.

The princesses, whom girls often see on a daily basis, are more than just movie characters; they are role models; and therefore, the gender stereotypes that the princesses promote and the messages that they circulate have an even greater influence. The princesses appear on posters in girls’ bedrooms, on backpacks and books in classrooms, and on clothing and toys in stores. As Wohlwend (2012) explains, this tangible and highly available Disney Princess brand offers young girls “a lovely loving friend and role model” that positions the girls as “adoring fans and wannabes” (p. 596).
Girls’ desire to emulate these characters proves troubling considering the stereotyped images of the princesses. Although no studies directly prove that playing princess damages girls’ self-esteem or weakens their future aspirations, evidence does suggest that exposure to gender stereotypes, like those present in Disney Princess media, does have a negative effect on girls’ and young women’s mental health (Orenstein, 2011). For example, a study by Marcotte, Fortin, Potvin, and Papillon (2002) found that girls who accepted gender-typed characteristics, who believed that women should avoid leadership roles and constantly be gentle and affectionate, were more likely to be depressed. Furthermore, a study by Girls Inc. (2006), which surveyed 1,059 girls between grades 3 and 12, discovered that, even in the twenty-first century, girls still accepted traditional concepts of females, and, moreover, they internalized these ideals. Girls reported feeling pressure to be thin, kind, caring, please everyone, speak softly, not cause trouble, and wear stylish clothes. In essence, they felt the need to be perfect, a problem Girls Inc. titled “The Supergirl Phenomenon.” Conforming to the unreasonable standards that girls are exposed to through the media generates excessive anxiety for girls (Lamb & Brown, 2006). Considering the multiplicity of gender stereotypes as well as the hyper-feminine, over-done personas in Disney Princess media, it is clear how exposure to these princesses might contribute to the escalating societal pressures that girls experience.

Moreover, the standards of beauty presented by Disney Princesses and other females in the media produce major stresses and have significant consequences on young girls. A study by the APA Task Force (2007) concluded
that girls and young women with greater exposure to mainstream media content placed appearance and physical attractiveness at the center of women’s value. Furthermore, when exposed to sexualized images of women in the media, girls developed self-objectification, the process by which they “internalize an observer’s perspective of their physical selves” (p. 17). Girls who self-objectify come to view themselves as objects, which exist to be looked at and appraised for appearance. Such perceptions often lead to shame, anxiety, and disgust towards one’s body. Additionally, the APA Task Force (2007) revealed a link between girls’ and women’s exposure to narrow representations of female beauty and disordered eating attitudes and symptoms. This finding goes hand in hand with other research that relates more concretely to princess media. An investigation revealed that 5- and 6-year-olds, as compared with their 3- and 4-year-old counterparts, identified significantly thinner adult figures as the “real” princess when asked to choose between 6 images of females dressed as princesses (Hayes & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010). The authors theorized that the differences between the age groups emerged because 5- and 6-year-olds would have had greater exposure to idealized princess images than the younger girls. Therefore, Disney Princess images have the potential to negatively skew girls’ body image ideals.

Gender stereotypes in Disney media are as pervasive as the Disney brand itself. Although Disney has attempted to be more progressive recently, the underlying gendered themes persist. Considering the prevalence of Disney Princess media and the growth of the Disney Princess brand in recent years, more studies need to address the direct effect of these images on girls’ self-concepts.
and gender identities. Therefore, two key goals of this project are to examine how preschool girls interpret these gender stereotypes and to identify the extent to which they internalize the messages presented.

**Children’s Constructions of Gender**

Gender is not an innate characteristic, but instead a social construct that must be learned (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). From the moment of birth, infants begin receiving messages from their parents regarding their gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). These messages arrive in the form of gender-specific toys, bedroom decorations, clothing, names, and most strikingly colors, since boys are adorned and surrounded by blue and girls pink (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Rheingold & Cook, 1975). Moreover, parents may harbor strong gendered beliefs about their babies even when no objective evidence exists (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). For instance, a study revealed that parents of infant girls rated their babies as finer featured, weaker, softer and more delicate than parents of infant boys (Karraker, Vogel, & Lake, 1995). Such differences in gender perceptions might lead parents to react differently to male and female children, coddling and protecting their daughters while encouraging their sons to be physically active (Karraker et al., 1995).

From an early age, children learn that they must correctly perform their gender, positioning themselves as a boy or a girl and identifiably not the other, so as to be accepted and recognized by society (Davies, 2003). Once children develop the ability to differentiate between the sexes, a skill that develops before age 2, they seek out activities that are consistent with the gender-linked
stereotypes they have learned (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). For instance, based on what they have observed, girls may show a preference for products such as dolls and cuddly toys while boys may favor action figures and toy cars (Ramsey, 1998). Furthermore, when children begin preschool, they demonstrate a clear inclination to play with same-sex peers, a preference that continues to intensify throughout the early childhood years (Ramsey, 1998). Gender differences thus provide children with important categories for making sense of the world (Bussey & Bandura, 1999); labeling oneself as a boy or a girl offers an initial organizer of children’s self-perceptions, which may influence their early identification with other people (Calver, Strong, Jacobs, & Conger, 2007; Maccoby, 1998). In this way, learning gender contributes to a child’s development of a self-concept, defined by Garcia (1991) as a perception of oneself in relation to others.

However, the rigid differentiation between the sexes, reinforced by dominating gender stereotypes, poses great concerns for children’s gender construction. These unyielding gender expectations confine girls and boys to a narrow set of appropriate behaviors (Davies, 2003). For example, Davies (2003) recounts an instance in which a preschool boy wore a long, black velvet skirt to school. A second boy at the preschool complained that the boy in the skirt was “yucky” because he was wearing an article of female clothing (p. 16). At this, the first boy took the skirt off angrily and threw it to the ground, reacting to the verbal punishment of his peer and denouncing his own other-gendered behavior. As a result of these restraining gender-role messages, children are restricted to certain forms of dress, games, toys, and friends (Davies, 2003; Ramsey, 1998).
Although a person’s concept of gender may change with maturation, the preschool years represent an important period for children’s gender development (Maccoby, 1998). Between the ages of 3 and 5, children, in many societies, have increasing opportunities to interact with other children their own age (Maccoby, 1998). Through these progressively more sophisticated encounters with their peers, children begin to display gender differentiation (Maccoby, 1998). Furthermore, until age 6 or 7, children often do not achieve stable gender constancy, the belief that their own gender is fixed and irreversible (Kohlberg, 1966). Therefore, ages 3 to 5 present an important period for children as they construct their concept of gender and come to understand themselves in relation to others. The messages that 3- to 5-year-olds gather regarding gender, then, are of great importance to their future development and self-concepts (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Garcia, 1991). Thus, the influx of restrictive gender-stereotyped ideas would appear to constrict children’s budding understandings of their own gender.

The messages children receive from their families and peers as well as from the mass media contribute significantly to their concepts of gender (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The mass media, specifically, present highly salient gender-role stereotypes, which are accessible to children through commercials, television shows, videogames and more (Lamb & Brown, 2006). As the social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation proposes, once children are able to differentiate between sexes, they are more inclined to attend to and model same-sex media characters, than characters of the opposite sex (Bussey &
Bandura, 1984; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Therefore, media characters act as important role models of gendered conduct for children.

Children learn these gendered behaviors through the process of modeling, reenacting admired characters’ actions in the real world, taking up their expressions, gestures, and attitudes (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The social cognitive theory of gender development explains that modeling is one of the most powerful and prevalent ways in which to transmit values, attitudes, and patterns of thought (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Furthermore, social cognitive theory suggests that when people model behaviors of an admired persona in the mass media, the learned behavior could be even stronger (Bandura, 2009). Thus, the Disney Princesses, which represent some of the most prominent female media characters aimed at preschool females, provide a salient set of models for these young girls.

Modeling, however, is not a form of direct imitation; but rather, from models, one can “generate new patterns of behavior” that surpass the behaviors and actions of the model (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 686). In other words, from the models they encounter, children may develop new interpretations and behaviors based on what they have seen. Therefore, although girls might not precisely emulate the Disney Princesses they encounter, social cognitive theory suggests that they still use these characters as a template on which to develop modeled behaviors. This could have potential consequences considering the limited nature of Disney Princess roles and the gender stereotypes that they maintain. Girls might begin to construct their own conceptions of gender from a narrow starting base when exposed to Disney Princess media.
The significance of the mass media and its impact on children’s gender construction is amplified by the substantial amount of time that children spend consuming media on a daily basis. According to a census of children’s media use in the United States, during 2013, children between the ages of 2 and 8 spent approximately 2 hours and 9 minutes with media during a typical day (Common Sense, 2014). As a result of this extensive exposure, the messages from the mass media tend to “overshadow and crowd out” other influences in a child’s life (Linn, 2009, p. 34). Studies have documented the potency of media messages on children’s gender-role constructs. For example, Freuh and McGhee (1975) found that children who had the greatest exposure to television reported stronger traditional sex role development. Furthermore, Halim, Ruble, and Tamis-LeMonda (2013) discovered that 4-year-old girls who had greater television exposure more readily adopted the belief that others thought boys were better, that they held a greater status in society. The mass media, therefore, disseminates powerful messages that have the potential to negatively affect girls’ conceptions of femininity during an important period of gender development.

For these reasons, it is vital that research examine the influence of Disney Princess media, which presents myriad gender-role stereotypes through multiple media formats, on young girls’ gender identities. Due to their popularity and ubiquity, the Disney Princesses present important role models in the lives of preschool girls. Understanding how girls interpret the gender stereotypes in Disney Princess media provides insight into girls’ conceptions of gender in contemporary American society.
Intersections Between Pretend Play, Gender, and the Mass Media

Play serves an important and beneficial role in the life of the child (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Pretend play facilitates a variety of cognitive, affective, and social processes including divergent thinking, insight ability, empathy, interpersonal schema, expression of emotion, and communication (Russ, 2004). Moreover, play contributes to a child’s development of his or her self-concept, a perception of oneself in relation to others (Garcia, 1991). By playing, children experiment with different roles, trying out new behaviors based on what they have observed from the role models in their own lives. As children accumulate more experiences and opportunities to try out new roles, they expand their self-concepts, forming a mental picture of themselves and their potential selves within society (Garcia, 1991). Therefore, the roles that children enact during their pretend play directly influence the expansion and development of their self-concepts.

Children’s formation of a self-concept depends in large part on the development of their gender identity. To understand who they are and how they fit into society, children must master their gender (Davies, 2003). Pretend play, thus, provides a medium through which children can elaborate upon and further their awareness of gendered roles (Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson & Collier, 2014). As they play, children reinforce and practice the gendered behaviors that they have observed from admired adult figures, including those in the media (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). When gendered play is coupled with positive responses from adults and peers, children develop higher levels of self-efficacy.
for repeating those behaviors in the future (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Hence, pretend play serves an important role in children’s gender construction.

For this reason, research must examine the influence of gender-stereotyped media messages, like those present in Disney Princess media, on girls’ pretend play behaviors. Through their play, girls may reinforce the gender stereotypes that they have observed and, as a result, they may develop a restricted conception of femininity, based on rigid gendered roles. Numerous theorists support this speculation, proposing that young girls are unable to break from the well-defined gendered roles that dominate Disney Princess media in their play (Levin & Kilbourne, 2009; Linn, 2009; Pollen, 2011). As Levin and Kilbourne (2009) explain:

…very young girls take on the roles of Disney Princesses in their play – imitating the scripts and images they see in movies, DVDs, and videogames and on TV and computer screens… Through acting out stories like this over and over again, girls are primed from very young ages to focus more and more on prettiness, sexiness, and being desirable to boys. And they use these experiences to build their identities as females. (p. 49 - 50)

Pervasive media images reduce girls’ play to a standard, commercially driven script, limiting their creative play rather than encouraging it (Linn, 2008). Instead of negotiating gender on their own terms through their own creative processes, girls become entrapped in an “intensifying loop of commercially constructed fantasies” that steer them toward “a view of femininity based on stereotypes of
beauty, race, class, and behavior” (Linn, 2009, p. 40). Exposure to pervasive Disney Princess media, therefore, has the potential to restrict girls’ pretend play behaviors and reduce their burgeoning understanding of femininity to a set of gender stereotypes.

To further this point, experimental research suggests that media-based play does influence children’s gender-role conduct. A study by Coyne et al. (2014), for example, examined the influence of superhero television programs on boys’ male-stereotyped play. Since male characters, especially superheroes, are often portrayed in aggressive and violent roles, the researchers hypothesized that viewing high levels of superhero programs would be associated with high levels of male-stereotyped play among preschool boys. Their results confirmed this hypothesis; boys who watched more superhero programs displayed greater aggression and violence in their play. Conversely, they found no evidence to suggest that male-stereotyped play led to more superhero media exposure. Thus, this study demonstrates that gender stereotypes in the media can influence real life gendered behaviors (Coyne et al., 2014).

Few research investigations, however, have directly examined the effects of gender stereotypes in Disney Princess media on young girls’ pretend play behaviors. One of the only studies to explore this topic, conducted by Wohlwend (2009), investigated the influence of Disney Princesses on the stories that kindergarteners chose to write and act out in class. Through an ethnographic approach, Wohlwend (2009) discovered that girls reenacted the stereotypical roles from Disney Princess media in their free play; however, they often improvised
new plots and positions for the characters to overcome gendered obstacles that blocked more “satisfying identity performances” (p. 77). For example, one of the girls in the study transformed her Mulan princess doll into a superhero to give the character a stronger and more active identity (Wohlwend). In this way, girls in the study were able to imagine beyond the gendered roles of princesses in their play, producing their own narratives on gender. Wohlwend’s (2009) finding is consistent with theory that postulates that children make refinements to the problematic and constraining gendered roles that they learn (Corsaro, 2006). In this context, then, pretend play may facilitate children’s awareness of restrictive gender stereotypes and allow them to improvise more satisfying gendered roles.

Therefore, two contrasting lines of evidence emerge from the past literature regarding the effect of Disney Princess media on girls’ gendered play behaviors. While numerous theorists propose that exposure to Disney Princess media restricts girls’ creative play and reinforces negative female gender-role stereotypes, Wohlwend’s study (2009) suggests that girls rewrite media narratives in their play, thus overcoming the static, gendered roles they have viewed. Due to the discrepancies in past literature and the importance of pretend play on children’s self-concept and gender construction, the current study sought to resolve these inconsistencies and add to the limited base of research that addresses these issues.

**Socioeconomic Status and Disney Princess Media**

Researchers have not yet examined girls’ Disney Princess play across socioeconomic status (SES) groups. However, related research suggests that
differences may appear between girls of lower SES and middle SES regarding their princess play and understandings of gender-role stereotypes in Disney Princess media. Three strands of evidence support this speculation.

First, a 2011 national report on children’s media access revealed a contrast in daily media exposure for children of low and middle-income families. According to the report, children of families that earned less than $30,000 per year spent about 47 minutes more per day using media than children of families that earned $75,000 or more (Common Sense Media, 2011). Since children who have the greatest exposure to television report stronger traditional sex role development (Freuh & McGhee, 1975), these SES differences regarding media access might imply that lower SES girls maintain stronger gender stereotypes than higher SES girls.

Second, research suggests that SES differences may exist in terms of how children negotiate gender differences in the classroom. Corsaro (2006) found that gender segregation and different activity preferences by gender were greater for upper-middle class children than for lower-class children. For example, upper-middle class preschoolers engaged in less cross-gender play than Head Start preschoolers. Due to these differences in children’s play and their development of gender identity, Corsaro (2006) explained that children’s gender development and relations are best studied comparatively and within cultural context. Such differences might influence girls’ princess play behaviors and the ways in which they interact with opposite-sex peers during free playtime.
Finally, past studies that have examined the impact of Disney Princesses on young girls encouraged future studies to explore class differences (Hayes & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010). One study, which investigated the influence of Disney Princess exposure on young girls’ body image, claimed that a “cross-cultural study on the impact of children’s media is warranted,” suggesting that differences may appear as a result of a broader sample (Hayes & Tantleff-Dunn, 2010, p. 423). Instead of drawing participants from middle-class, highly educated families, as did Hayes and Tantleff-Dunn (2010), the current study involved a more heterogeneous sample that was more reflective of the general, United States population. Unfortunately, because class and race are often confounded in US society (LaVeist, 2005), it is challenging to disentangle the effects of race and those of SES in research studies. Thus, the lack of research across SES boundaries regarding girls’ perceptions of Disney Princesses also signifies a lack of research across racial boundaries. Therefore, this study draws participants from a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds and SES groups to provide, in effect, a cross-cultural study. Insight into SES differences provides a more nuanced understanding of the effects that Disney Princesses have on girls from various backgrounds.

**Purpose of the Current Study**

The increasing prevalence of Disney Princesses in the media and the gender stereotypes that they maintain raises the question as to what effect these images have on young girls’ conceptions of femininity. The current study, therefore, investigated how 3- to 5-year-old girls interpret Disney Princess media,
how they make sense of the gendered princess images and incorporate Disney stories into their pretend play.

Few studies until now have directly examined the influence of Disney Princess media on preschool girls’ play behaviors. However, considering the importance of pretend play on children’s gender development, researchers must direct greater attention to this issue. Among the theorists and researchers who have addressed this topic, inconsistencies have emerged in their conclusions. Although some suggest that Disney Princesses negatively affect girls’ creative play and their conceptions of femininity, others report that girls transform Disney Princess gender stereotypes through their play, breaking from the prepackaged scripts. The current study sought to address these discrepancies as well as to further the limited base of knowledge that exists on the subject. Only Wohlwend’s ethnographic study (2009) directly addressed the impact of Disney Princess media on girls’ pretend play behaviors, and even her study was severely limited. She based her results on three kindergarten girls, all in the same class and all from a university community. To provide results that more accurately reflect the population at large, this study involved a larger sample size, including girls of various racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Furthermore, in addition to investigating the questions other researchers have already examined, the current study will also explore the influence of SES on Disney Princess interpretations. Although researchers have not yet examined this topic, related research suggests that differences may appear. Interpreting
differences across SES groups allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the princesses’ effects on girls from different backgrounds.

This study, therefore, has two objectives: first, to examine the influence of Disney Princess media on girls’ perceptions of the princesses and their play behaviors, and second, to investigate the influence of socioeconomic status on girls’ interpretations of Disney Princesses. Based on these objectives, I examined four research questions:

RQ1: Does princess play restrict preschool girls’ dramatic play behaviors?

RQ2: How does increased exposure to Disney Princess screen and product media affect preschool girls’ reports of the princesses and their princess play?

RQ3: Is SES related to Disney Princess screen and product exposure for preschool girls?

RQ4: Are there differences between preschool girls of different SES groups in regard to their princess play and reports of the princesses?

To answer these research questions, I employed a mixed-method study, which involved three primary methods of data collection, including in-class observations of pretend play behaviors, interviews with each child participant, and parent questionnaires. Information regarding this topic is crucial to understanding girls’ constructions of gender and the ways in which Disney Princess media exposure affect girls’ self-concepts.
METHOD

Participants

Participants included 31 preschool girls as well as 30 of their parents. The girls were between ages 3 (36 months) and 5.3 (64 months) ($M = 53.48$ months, $SD = 7.13$ months). Girls, rather than boys, from this age range were selected because Disney targets their princess brand specifically at 3 to 5-year-old girls (Wohlwend, 2012). Furthermore, pretend play is expressive and important at this age, and because of this, numerous researchers have focused on this age group when studying pretend play (Weinberger & Starkey, 1994; Wohlwend, 2012). The child participants also represented a variety of racial/ethnic backgrounds. Table 1 provides a complete breakdown of the participants’ reported races/ethnicities.

Participants were drawn from four classes at two preschools. Of the four classes, one came from Campus Children’s Center,¹ a member of the organization, Bright Horizons Family Solutions. Campus Children’s Center is located in a suburban neighborhood in western Massachusetts and is the lab school for a well-known college. Due to its association with the college, a large handful of its students are the children of local professors. Families pay a monthly tuition for their children to attend. Tuition rates for participants involved in this study ranged between $495 and $1,139 per month as specified by the preschool’s monthly tuition schedule. Of the 31 children involved in this study, 13 of the child participants and 13 of their parents came from Campus Children’s Center.

¹ For confidentiality purposes, the real name of the preschool center has been substituted with a pseudonym
Table 1

*Number (and percentage within site sample) of children in each reported racial/ethnic category*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Head Start (n = 18)</th>
<th>Campus Children’s Center (n = 13)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td></td>
<td>10 (76.92%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (7.69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13 (72.22%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Races/Ethnicities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/PI and Caucasian</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (7.69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian and Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td>1 (7.69%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic and White</td>
<td>2 (11.11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic and Black</td>
<td>1 (5.56%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>2 (11.11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. I acknowledge that I am combining race and ethnicity in a single table. I asked the preschools to report about their students’ races and ethnicities. In some cases the preschools gave race and in other cases the preschools gave ethnicity. Although I would have preferred to report race and ethnicity separately, I chose to preserve the preschools’ responses. I recognize that “Hispanic” is an ethnic category – I did not want to make assumptions about race.
The remaining three classes came from Head Start Holyoke Chicopee Springfield. Head Start is a government-funded organization, which provides preschool programs for children whose families live below the poverty line. For a family of four, the U.S. department of Health and Human Services recognizes the poverty line as less than $23,850 per year (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2014). The Head Start, in which I observed, is located in an urban area and the majority of the students come from Spanish-speaking homes (Jacoby & Lesaux, 2014). Eighteen of the child participants were drawn from the Head Start center along with 17 of their parents.

These two preschools were selected due to the convenience of their locations, but also because they provided a range of socioeconomic and racial/ethnic backgrounds. While students at Campus Children’s Center tended to come from families with higher, more middle-class incomes, the students at Head Start came from lower-income families. Similarly, while the majority of students at the Campus Children’s Center (76.92% of them) identified as Caucasian, non-Hispanic, the majority of students at Head Start (72.22% of them) identified as Hispanic.

**Materials and Measures**

To answer my research questions, I used a mixed methods design, collecting both qualitative and quantitative data. In the following paragraphs I detail the materials and measures I used to collect this data.

During the observation period, each of the four classrooms received a box with 12 mass-produced dressing-up costumes for children. Six of these costumes
were Disney Princess themed and served as prompts to Disney media for the girls. These costumes included a Cinderella, Rapunzel, Tiana, Merida, Jasmine, and Mulan outfit. The selected princesses represent a variety of ethnicities/races and their stories were released both in present day and in past decades. I specifically selected these six princesses out of the eleven because I wanted to allow for variation in children’s play, based on the princesses’ ethnic/racial differences and the novelty of their movies (i.e., Disney released Cinderella in 1950 while they released Brave in 2012). The box also contained six non-princess costumes, which their marketers advertised as “girl” costumes. These non-princess costumes included Wonder Woman, a pink Power Ranger, Transformers: Optimus Prime for girls, Violet from The Incredibles, a bumblebee, and a ladybug.

All 12 of the costumes cost similar amounts and were of the same quality. To maintain the excellent condition of the costumes for all of the classes, I spot cleaned and repaired the costumes following each observation period. Of the 12 costumes, only one had to be replaced during the course of the experiment. On the second day of observations, the Brave costume acquired a large, irreparable rip. The replacement costume was similar to the original, though it contained more glitter. Additionally, several articles that came packaged with the costumes were omitted from the costume box. For instance, I excluded the mask that came with the Power Ranger outfit because it was deemed unsanitary for all of the children to wear the mask on their faces during flu season. I also omitted several other objects, including two princess petticoats and Wonder Woman shoe covers,
because they detracted from the actual costumes, they were difficult to put on, and, moreover, they were superfluous items.

To collect quantitative data during the observations, my research assistant and I used a snapshot observation form (Appendix A). This form tracked the students’ locations within the classroom as well as their usage of the costumes. The snapshot observation technique serves to capture the classroom as it appears at a certain point in time. Just as a camera captures a specific moment, a snapshot observation does the same, although with quantitative information. For example, the snapshot observation could report that at 9:25am on January 20, 2015, 4 girls were playing in the dramatic play section of the room. Snapshot observations have been used frequently in other studies to collect quantitative data within the classroom (e.g., Jacoby & Lesaux, 2014).

Twenty-eight of the participants also completed a semi-structured interview (Appendix B). The interviews included approximately 40 questions from a list of pre-prepared questions. I pilot tested this list of questions with two 4-year-old girls who were not part of the sample. The pilot test determined that the interview questions were easily comprehensible for preschoolers. During the course of the participant interviews, I presented the girls with pictures of the 11 official Disney Princesses, as they appeared on the Disney website (Appendix C). Although Disney does portray other princesses, such as Ana and Elsa from Frozen, I elected to include only the official 11 princesses as recognized by Disney (Disney Princess, 2015a). Other studies, as well, have directed attention to these officially recognized princesses (e.g., England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek,
2011; Wohlwend, 2009). The princess pictures served as a guide for the interview and as a way to solidify the questions for the girls. A digital audio recorder documented each interview.

To conclude the study, the parents of the child participants received questionnaires regarding their child’s media use and, specifically, her access to Disney Princess media. This questionnaire (Appendix D) included five questions and provided baseline data about each child’s exposure to Disney Princess media and other related topics. I pilot tested this questionnaire with two parents of preschool children to determine if the questions were appropriately worded. Parents in the study indicated their responses using a seven-point Likert type scale for one question and open-ended responses for the others. The parent questionnaire has been used by other studies as well (e.g., Coyne et. al., 2014) to collect data on children’s media use. Indeed, the question about Disney Princess media exposure (see question 2 in Appendix D) was adapted from a question in a parent survey used by Coyne et al. (2014), which also examined the influence of the mass media on children’s play behaviors. Parents at Head Start received both an English and Spanish copy of the questionnaire (Appendix E) to accommodate Head Start’s large Spanish-speaking community.

Procedure

The procedure of this investigation included three primary methods of data collection: qualitative and quantitative observations of children’s pretend play, semi-structured interviews with each child participant, and parent questionnaires. Throughout this process, my research assistant and I tracked each individual
child, assigning every participant an identification code and keeping her data separate from the others. To acquaint ourselves with all of the participants, we referenced classroom photo rosters supplied by the teachers.

**Pretend play observation.** The pretend play observations involved three, hour-long observation periods of each class’s free playtime on three separate days. I conducted these observations along with another trained observer who remained blind to the hypotheses of the experiment. For all of the classes, we practiced direct observation since we did not intrude on the participants’ activity but instead passively monitored the participants. While observing the class at Campus Children’s Center, we recorded notes from behind a one-way mirror where we had access to headsets connected to microphones within the class. This audio system allowed us to listen to the children’s speech. In Head Start, we positioned ourselves near the dramatic play section of the classroom and had minimal interactions with the children.

The pretend play observations included two different types of observations: preliminary and experimental. During our first day in each class, we conducted a preliminary hour of observations, during which time we recorded notes about “business as usual,” how the class functioned on a normal basis without the introduction of external stimuli (i.e., costumes). Of the 31 child participants, 23 attended school on the day of their class’s preliminary observation ($n$ of preliminary observations = 23). The following two days involved experimental observations, during which time we presented the class with the costumes. Before the start of the class free play period, the classroom teacher or
myself would place the opened box of dress-up costumes in the dramatic play section of the room where the participants would have the opportunity to play with them. Twenty-seven of the participants were present for at least one of the two days of the experimental observations (n of experimental observations = 27). In total, for the combined group of four classes, my research assistant and I performed 12 hours of play observations, four of which were preliminary observations and eight of which were experimental observations.

All observations, regardless of whether or not they were preliminary or experimental, involved both quantitative and qualitative collection methods. For the quantitative notes, my research assistant and I followed a time sample protocol by filling out a snapshot observation form (Appendix A) approximately every 7 minutes. Using this form, we reported on each participant’s location within the class as well as her activity choices at that moment. For example, we noted how many participants were playing with each type of costume when costumes were available. As part of the quantitative observations, my research assistant and I divided the participants between us, each recording data for half of the child participants so as to more accurately account for each participant’s behavior in the given moment. These snapshot forms took approximately 3 to 4 minutes to complete.

During the remaining 3 to 4 minutes, in between completing the snapshot forms, my research assistant and I recorded thick qualitative descriptions about what the children in the dramatic play area said and did. These notes addressed the types of roles that the participants chose to enact as well as their behaviors
while dressing in the costumes, when costumes were available. To further guide our qualitative observations, I devised a list of guiding questions, which we referenced to better inform the direction of our notes (Appendix F).

**Semi-structured interviews.** Between 3 and 14 days following each class’s final experimental observation, I returned to the classrooms to conduct individual, semi-structured interviews with 28 of the child participants. Due to class absences and unwillingness to participate, 3 participants did not partake in the interviews. Two of the interviews were conducted primarily in Spanish to accommodate Spanish-speaking participants. The interviews lasted between 5 and 15 minutes and took place in a corner of the classroom, separated from the other students. During the interviews, I asked all of the participants the same questions in the same order as seen in Appendix B; however, occasionally I included other, relevant questions that deviated from the pre-prepared list. Standard questions, for example, included, “Do you like to pretend to be a princess?” and, “Do you like to watch princess shows and movies?” In addition, I presented the girls with pictures of the 11 official Disney Princesses (Appendix C) as they appeared on the Disney website. These pictures provided a concrete focus for my questions and served to hold the participants’ attention. Using the pictures, I asked questions such as “Who is your favorite princess?” and, “Would you want to be (fill in princess name)?” During the interviews, I also asked girls yes or no questions regarding gender stereotypes, on which they had the opportunity to elaborate. For example, I asked, “Are princesses strong?” and, “Do girls have to be pretty to be
princesses?” The interview concluded following this line of questioning and the participants received a sticker for their participation.

**Parent questionnaire.** Classroom teachers provided parents with a questionnaire when they picked their child up from preschool. The parents were asked to fill out the questionnaires and to return them to the teacher within a week. The questionnaire included questions such as, “How many Disney Princess items (clothing, toys, … or any other product with the Disney Princess image on it) does your child have?” and, “During an average week, how many total hours does your child spend playing video games and/or watching TV, DVDs, and/or videos?”

**Analysis Plan**

To answer the first question, “Does princess play restrict preschool girls’ dramatic play behaviors?” I employed a thematic analysis of both the qualitative observations and participant interviews. Princess play was operationally defined as any time a girl played with a princess costume or verbalized that she was playing princess, as when girls announced that they were specific princesses. To facilitate the coding process, I uploaded the typed observations and interview transcripts into QSR International’s NVivo 10 software program. Coding in the NVivo program, which organized and separated the codes, facilitated my ability to discover patterns in the data. To analyze the typed qualitative observations and interview transcripts, I followed the phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). These steps included familiarization with the data through numerous read-throughs, generation of initial codes, a search for themes among
the emerging codes, reviewing potential themes, and finally, definition and naming of the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through this reiterative, open-coding process, I was able to distill prominent themes from the qualitative observations and interviews. Furthermore, the NVivo software aided in providing quantitative counts of repeated occurrences within the themes. Thus, from the qualitative data I was also able to generate quantitative data.

I answered the second question, “How does increased exposure to Disney Princess screen and product media effect preschool girls’ reports of the princesses and their princess play?” by performing a series of independent samples t-tests comparing greater and lesser Disney Princess exposure groups across multiple categories. Data for these categories were collected from the parent surveys, observations, and interviews. I accepted mean differences as significant if they met my alpha level of .05 (2-tailed significance). Additionally, I computed descriptive statistics, including percentages and ranges, of the interview responses and parent survey data.

To answer the third research question, “Is SES related to Disney Princess screen and product exposure for preschool girls?” I divided the participants into a higher SES group (n=13) and a lower SES group (n=18) based on their preschools. Thus, children from Campus Children’s Center were assigned to the higher SES group while children from Head Start were assigned to the lower SES group. Using the data collected from question two, three, and four of the parent survey, I conducted several independent samples t-tests to compare the mean
amounts of general and Disney Princess screen and product media consumption between the two groups.

Finally, I answered my fourth research question, “Are there differences between preschool girls of different SES groups in regard to their princess play and reports of the princesses?” by performing a series of independent samples t-tests comparing higher and lower SES groups across multiple categories. Data for these categories were collected from the observations and interviews. Additionally, I included qualitative themes that emerged from my thematic analysis to provide confirmatory evidence for my quantitative findings.

Validity and researcher stance. To improve the validity of my coding system and to minimize any potential experimenter bias, a team of four outside coders performed a validity check of several of my most prominent codes. The validity check produced a 93.3% exact agreement. Moreover, to further reduce bias, a second trained observer, who was blind to the investigation’s hypotheses, accompanied me in conducting 2/3 of the qualitative observations. Additionally, teachers remained blind to the hypotheses of the study.
RESULTS

Research Context

In this section I present contextual data to describe the popularity of Disney Princess media among the participants in this study. Data in this section were collected from parent surveys as well as from the quantitative observations. These findings provide an important contextual understanding of the specific group of preschool girls involved in the study.

First, in regard to the question on the parent questionnaire (Appendix D), which asked parents to report how often their child accessed Disney Princess screen media using a 7-point Likert-type scale, parents mean response was 4.1 (SD=1.69). A response of four signified “once per week,” so these results suggest that child participants, on average, were exposed to Disney Princess screen media about once per week. The range of responses to this question spanned from zero, which signified that the child had never watched Disney Princesses on a screen in her life, to six, meaning that she watched them daily.

Second, participants in the sample owned an average of 17 (SD=22.06, range = 0-100) Disney Princess products each. These products included Disney Princess dolls, costumes, clothing, art supplies, sports equipment, movies, figurines, bedding, puzzles, books, and jewelry. Several parents could not even quantify the total number of Disney Princess items that their child owned; nonetheless, their responses imply a substantial amount. For example, four parents responded with answers such as “A LOT!!” and “Many (too many).” These responses, due to their qualitative nature, were omitted from the final
average of Disney Princess products. However, they suggest that participants might own more than an average of 17 Disney Princess products each.

Finally, data collected from the quantitative observations revealed that girls elected to play with the Disney Princess costumes more than half of the time when they had access to the dress-up box. These results are summarized in Table 2. Girls in the dramatic play section were observed dressing up in the Disney Princess costumes more often than in the non-princess costumes, preexisting classroom costumes, or no costume at all.

Table 2

*Percentage of Pretend Playtime Spent in Different Types of Costumes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Costume Choice</th>
<th>Percentage of Playtime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disney Princess</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Princess Costume</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preexisting Classroom Costume</td>
<td>.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Costume</td>
<td>8.63%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RQ1: Does princess play restrict preschool girls’ dramatic play behaviors?**

When participants pretended to be princesses using the Disney Princess costumes, their play behaviors changed in several notable ways. Comparisons between girls’ princess and non-princess play revealed four significant differences. These differences included the use of beauty remarks, increased focus on clothing and accessories, changes in body movements, and the exclusion of
boys. In the following sections, I summarize the details of these four emerging themes.

**Beauty remarks.** Girls frequently made beauty remarks, defined as positive references to one’s physical appearance or to another’s physical appearance, when dressed up in the Disney Princess costumes. Remarks included, “Look at my beautiful dress,” “I’m so pretty,” and “Isn’t my ball dress cute?” My research assistant and I only observed beauty remarks among girls dressed as Disney Princesses; girls pretending to be non-princess characters never made any observed beauty remarks. In one instance, Mariah, a 4-year-old participant, put on the Cinderella costume and said to no one in particular, “I look pretty as Cinderella.” She then walked out of the dramatic play section, and, standing in the aisle of the classroom, yelled to a boy about 8 feet away, “I look pretty with this on.” She smiled, twirled, and walked back to the dramatic play section. Thus, princess play was defined in large part by an overt demonstration of physical attractiveness. Girls associated being a princess with being physically beautiful and admirable. By making beauty remarks they called attention to their appearances and invited others to behold them for their beauty.

In focusing more on their own looks, girls pretending to be princesses also began to compare their appearances with those of other children. In one observed instance, two girls, one dressed as Rapunzel and the other dressed as Cinderella, contended about who was prettier. “I look more beautiful,” the girl dressed as Cinderella declared to the girl dressed as Rapunzel. At this, the girl dressed as Rapunzel removed her dress and begged the other girl to give her the Cinderella
dress. In this way, girls competed with each other to be the “fairest of them all.” Princess play encouraged them to concentrate on physical beauty above all else, including friendship.

The attention to beauty and physical attributes continued during the interviews as well. When discussing the Disney Princesses, participants frequently referenced the princesses’ physical qualities, including their hair, clothing, accessories, and overall appearance. Of the 28 respondents, 13 replied to the question “Why is she your favorite princess?” with an answer that referenced the princesses’ physical attributes. Responses to this question included, “…because she has long hair,” “because her pink dress,” and “because… she’s pretty.” Six of the 22 girls who reported that they would want to be a princess explained their response with references to the princesses’ physical features. They answered the question, “Why would you want to be (name of the participant’s favorite princess)?” with responses such as, “because she’s beautiful,” “because she’s pretty,” and “Her pretty. I want to be so like her.” Similarly, when asked why princesses are nice, three of the 13 participants who provided responses to this question attributed a princess’s kindness to her physical appearance. Answers to the question “Why are they nice?” yielded responses such as, “because I like their hairs,” and, “because they’re pretty,” a response that appeared twice.

Twenty-one of the 28 participants made at least one reference to the princesses’ physical appearances during the interview, with one participant making up to five beauty references.
Focus on clothing and accessories. The process of getting dressed up, of selecting the favorite dress and searching for the right accessories, consumed a large portion of the participants’ playtime. Fourteen of the 27 participants made at least one costume change during their playtime from one princess costume to another. Participants were observed searching through the box of costumes, pulling out dresses, holding them up with arms outstretched in front of their faces, and assessing them. Jenna, a 5-year-old, epitomized this behavior. Over the course of the hour-long observation period, she tried on six different costumes, four of which were princess dresses. She changed from one dress to another and back to the original dress multiple times. At one point, wearing the Mulan dress, Jenna fished through the box of costumes, ostensibly searching for a new outfit. As she pulled out dresses, she held them up to her body, looking down at them and evaluating their appearance on her. Eventually she settled on Merida’s dress along with a blue headband. Princess play thus seemed to encourage girls to focus on material items and on assembling the most stylish outfit. In doing so, they appraised their own bodies, evaluating their appearance in each dress.

The search for the favorite dress often involved a second search for matching accessories. Miranda, a 5-year-old who wore the Mulan dress, wandered silently around the dramatic play section, her head down, eyes peering around. She approached her teacher and asked, “Is there a tiara that goes with this outfit?” When the teacher responded that she was not sure, Miranda asked if she could wear her own tiara, the glittery fuchsia one that she had arrived at school donning that morning. Other girls requested “princess hats,” and “slippers,” and one
explained that she was “looking for a necklace and a crown” to go with her costume. In this way, the act of assembling an outfit consumed much of the participants’ time and attention. Instead of interacting with their peers or developing play narratives, girls concentrated on their style and on how to improve their appearances with material possessions.

Playing princess was defined by the act of dressing up and looking like a princess. Participants confirmed this idea through their responses to the interview questions, “How did you pretend to be a princess? What did you do?” Ten girls responded that, when they pretended to be a princess, they dressed up like one. “I weared the dress,” one responded. “We pretended that we had dresses on,” another said. Some girls could not even consider what else they did when they pretended to be a princess, other than wear a dress. This is demonstrated by Carissa’s response:

I: And how did you pretend to be Belle?

P: Well I had on my dress

I: And what did you do?

P: I… (5 second pause)

I: When you put on your dress what did you do?

P: I… (10 second pause)

Although Carissa readily responded to other interview questions, she could not formulate a response to these particular follow-up questions. Wearing a dress had characterized her princess experience entirely. Another participant, a 3-
year-old, responded similarly, acknowledging that to be a princess she often switched costumes:

   I: And how did you pretend to be Cinderella? What did you do?
   P: I put the dress. In housekeeping yesterday.
   I: And what did you do when you put on the dress?
   P: I take it off. And then I put another one.

Pretending to be a princess revolved around the costume and the child’s appearance, not the actual behaviors or story lines while in that dress.

   **Body movements.** When pretending to be princesses, participants displayed unique body movements that differed from how they performed while pretending to be non-princess characters. These princess body movements included twirling, ballroom dancing, and hand posing. In addition to the three unique body movements, other observed actions, including jumping and skipping, occurred among participants regardless of their current costume.

   Of the three unique princess body movements, twirling was the most pervasive category. A twirl is defined as a quick spin in a complete circle. Twirling was observed in both preschools among 11 of the 27 participants. In one observed instance, a participant held the Cinderella costume to her chest and twirled around. Another girl, after putting on the Rapunzel costume, exclaimed to no one in particular “Look, I’m Rapunzel” and proceeded to twirl around.

   Additionally, the display of twirling did not depend entirely on the presence of costumes. During the preliminary observations, three girls acted out a scene from the Disney Princess movie, *Frozen*. One of the girls, after being assigned the role
of Elsa, one of the princesses from the film, picked up a block and placed it on her head, calling it a crown. She then twirled. A third girl, observing their princess play as she walked around them picking up blocks, stopped cleaning and twirled as well. Thus, girls directly associated twirling with the Disney Princesses and considered it a specific princess movement.

Although less prevalent than twirling, girls also ballroom danced while in the princess costumes. For example, two girls dressed as princesses, exclaimed that they were sisters and then proceeded to dance. They held each other’s hands and shoulders and rocked back and forth, swaying their bodies. In their interview responses, girls reinforced the concept of dancing as a princess movement. “Why would you want to be Brave?” I asked one participant. “Because she dances,” she responded. Another girl, when asked “Why is she smart?” answered, “Cause she dances all the time.” Many girls related dancing to the princesses, and accordingly, they performed this movement when enacting the princesses. In this way, their perceptions of the princesses translated to their performances of them.

Finally, the third unique body movement consisted of hand posing. This action was observed among two girls, one dressed as Cinderella and the other as Rapunzel. The girls walked around the dramatic play section talking to themselves with their hands held to their chests as though in a prayer-like formation. Two boys, dressed as superheroes, began to fight in the middle of the dramatic play section, punching their arms towards each other and kicking their legs, punctuating their movements with sound effects. The girls stood to the side of the dramatic play section, standing still with their hands positioned in the same
prayer-like pose. “Back up for the princess,” announced one of the superheroes. “Back off my princess,” another exclaimed, as the fighting boys neared the posed girls. The two princesses giggled and maintained their postures. In this scene, the girls acknowledged that they were princesses, and, as such, they displayed what they believed to be appropriate physical mannerisms for their characters.

With these three princess body movements, girls enacted the princess role through the use of their own bodies. In this way, they not only verbally emphasized their princess personas, but they also physically practiced and reinforced the princess movements.

**Exclusion of Boys.** The contrast between boys’ and girls’ roles became more distinct with the introduction of the princess costumes in the classrooms. During the preliminary observations, boys and girls took on similar roles while playing in the dramatic play section. For example, in one class, two boys and two girls sat at a table, each holding a stuffed animal dog and making barking sounds as though the animals were in conversation. Later, the children walked the dogs along the furniture and played “fetch,” throwing other small toys across the dramatic play section and running to retrieve the objects with their dogs. All four of the children participated in these activities. Although boys and girls often were observed playing in same-sex groups, their pretend play behaviors still mirrored each other. Both boys and girls pretended to cook and eat meals assembled from plastic play foods, they engaged in story lines related to home-life and family, and they both fiddled with pretend gadgets, such as the cash register or keyboard while in the dramatic play section.
The introduction of the princess costumes limited the similarities in boys’ and girls’ play, producing a clear divide between the children and solidifying princess costumes as a purely female-gendered play option. Although girls readily took on the role of princess and spent the majority (59%) of the time in princess costumes (see Table 2), none of the boys in any of the classes ever tried on a Disney Princess costume. When boys did try on costumes, they displayed a preference for the non-princess, superhero costumes. Even then, wearing costumes such as the Transformers dress and Wonder Woman outfit, boys exposed themselves to the criticisms of their classmates. “You’re a girl!” one 5-year-old girl said, mocking a boy who wore the pink Power Ranger costume. She pointed her finger at him and laughed, then ran to the teacher to complain that he was wearing a “girl costume.” Possibly fearing even greater disparagement for wearing a princess dress, boys avoided the princess costumes entirely. Several of the female participants ensured the exclusion of boys from princess play by forbidding their male classmates from playing with the princess costumes. For example, one 3-year-old girl told a boy who had recently entered the dramatic play section that he could not play with the princess costumes. Another girl, from a different class, explained to a boy, “There are no boy costumes in here.” At this, the boy exited the dramatic play section. Thus, the appearance of princess costumes reinforced the differentiation between boys and girls as two distinct and unrelated groups.

The conviction that boys could not pretend to be princesses appeared again during the interviews. When asked the question, “Can boys pretend to be
princesses?” 13 of the 27 female participants answered no, boys could not pretend to be princesses. When asked, “Why not?” girls responded with answers such as, “because they don’t like girl clothes,” “because they’re boys,” and “cause the boys don’t want the princesses… No, I like the princesses. They’re for me.” One girl began to giggle at the question:

I: Can boys pretend to be princesses?

P: (laughing and shaking her head no) that’s funny!

I: Why not?

P: Cause, that’s funny. Because I laugh and laugh and laugh and I can’t stop laughing.

Many of the girls maintained the notion that boys and princesses were incompatible and that Disney Princesses were intended only for girls.

Conversely, though, 12 of the 27 female participants reported in their interviews that boys could pretend to be princesses. They supported their views with responses such as, “Because if they like them they can,” “Because they could dress up in princess costumes,” and “Because they get to.” Their answers display a more progressive mindset than their peers who responded “no” to this question. However, in practice, only one boy, across all four classes, was ever invited to participate in the princess play, and even then, he had to be coerced by teachers to join. The girls in the class accepted the boy, who wore the bumblebee costume, as their “bee princess” and told him that he had the ability to sting people, a power he readily used. In this way, the girls transformed the boy’s princess role into a more active and masculine position, while they, the girls, continued to try on new
dresses, displaying no overt powers themselves. Therefore, while the girls permitted the existence of a male princess, they still improvised ways to differentiate his princess actions from their own princess play behaviors.

Aside from excluding boys from their princess play, girls also responded differently to their male classmates while wearing the princess costumes. Although girls often engaged in similar activities with the boys during the preliminary observations, when dressed as princesses, they treated the boys as others, separate from themselves. Bianca, a 5-year-old girl, dressed as Mulan, demonstrated this phenomenon. Two boys, dressed in non-princess superhero costumes, approached Bianca while she was looking through the play refrigerator and pulling out a box of plastic play food. The boys began to kick and punch the air in front of her, actions that they had been performing for the last several minutes to engage other boys in their superhero play. As the boys kicked their legs and jabbed their arms towards her, Bianca silently backed into a corner of the dramatic play section. When she could no longer move backwards, she stopped and glared at the boys with a blank expression. “You’re not a princess,” she suddenly announced to them. At that, the boys put down their arms and stopped kicking. One boy rushed to Bianca’s side and placed his hand on the middle of her back. He then guided her back to the play kitchen table. Bianca, still silent, picked up a pink stuffed animal dog and, cradling it, began to pet the dog’s head.

Bianca’s interaction with the boys while dressed as Mulan radically differed from her behavior the day before when no costumes were present. The previous day, Bianca had howled like a dog along with the same boy who had
pretended to fight her. The two had barked so loudly and had played such a rambunctious round of “fetch” with the stuffed animal dogs, that a teacher had reprimanded them. Dressed as a princess, Bianca refused to engage in superhero play with the boys and solidified the distinction between her and them by declaring that they were not princesses.

**RQ2: How does increased exposure to Disney Princess screen and product media affect preschool girls’ reports of the princesses and their princess play?**

Greater exposure to Disney Princess media did effect girls’ reports of the princesses and their princess play. This section addresses both the influence of Disney Princess screen media and Disney Princess product media on girls’ behaviors. I analyzed the impact of screen and product media separately from each other since the two categories were not significantly correlated in this sample (r = .371, p = .097). The absence of a correlation between these two variables suggests that girls who owned more Disney Princess products did not necessarily watch more Disney Princess screen media or vice versa.

**Disney Princess screen media exposure.** For the purposes of this section, participants were separated into two groups based on parental responses regarding participant access to Disney Princess screen media. I used the mean (M = 4.1) to divide the participants into low and high exposure groups. The first group (n= 17), referred to as the greater screen exposure group, viewed on-screen representations of the princesses more than twice per week. The second group (n=13), referred to
as the lesser screen exposure group, viewed on-screen representations of the
princesses once per week or less. However, participants from both groups had the
same weekly exposure to general screen media, such as television, movies, and
videogames. Parents of children in the greater screen exposure group reported that
their child accessed general screen media 7.92 (SD = 4.16) hours per week while
parents of children in the lesser screen exposure group reported an average of 7.88
(SD = 4.74) hours of general screen media per week. Therefore, participants in the
greater screen exposure group had greater access to Disney Princess media than
the lesser screen exposure group, but they had the same amount of general media
access. As a result, general screen media was controlled across groups.
Furthermore, a correlational analysis revealed no significant correlation between
screen media exposure and SES (r = .321, p = .083), signifying that SES and
screen media exposure were not confounded in this model.
Overall, participants in both exposure groups reported similar conceptions
of the princesses in regard to their personality attributes. The two groups’
responses to a series of yes or no questions regarding princess attributes are
summarized in Table 3. Girls across both groups, for the most part, described the
princesses as nice and smart, and all participants unanimously agreed that
princesses were pretty. Furthermore, most girls argued that princesses were not
mean. Girls in both categories were also split as to whether or not princesses were
strong or powerful. Thus, regardless of their exposure to Disney Princess screen
media, all participants appeared to possess similar views of princesses and their
various personality traits.
Differences appeared between the two screen exposure groups regarding two questions more closely associated with princess gender stereotypes. I discovered these differences by running a series of independent samples t-tests, which compared interview responses regarding princess attributes in both groups. First, participants in the greater screen exposure group ($M = 1.00, SD = .000$) were more likely to agree that girls have to be pretty to be princesses than participants from the lesser screen exposure group ($M = .73, SD = .467$); $t(24) = 2.279, p = .032$. Second, all of the participants in the greater screen exposure group ($M=1.00, SD = .000$) agreed that princesses always need a prince while far fewer participants in the lesser screen exposure group ($M = .64, SD = .505$) answered yes to this question; $t(24) = 2.813, p = .010$.

While participants’ reports of the princesses varied based on their exposure to Disney Princess screen media, differences did not appear in regard to their princess play behaviors. For instance, girls in both the greater and lesser exposure groups displayed a similar number of twirls and beauty remarks while pretending to be princesses. Thus, greater exposure to Disney Princess screen media did not appear to influence their princess pretend play behaviors.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Total (n=27)</th>
<th>Greater Screen Exposure (n=16)</th>
<th>Lesser Screen Exposure (n=11)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are princesses always pretty?</td>
<td>0.99 (0.00)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.85 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are princesses mean?</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.99 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are princesses nice?</td>
<td>0.96 (0.00)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.64 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are princesses strong?</td>
<td>0.90 (0.07)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.90 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are princesses powerful?</td>
<td>0.56 (0.20)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.73 (0.67)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are princesses smart?</td>
<td>0.59 (0.20)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.40 (0.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are princesses have to be pretty?</td>
<td>0.88 (0.07)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.88 (0.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do princesses always be pretty?</td>
<td>0.96 (0.01)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.98 (0.01)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need a prince?</td>
<td>0.85 (0.00)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.85 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total for each question varies</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>1.00 (0.00)</td>
<td>0.99 (0.00)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Disney Princess product media exposure. In this section, participants were separated into two groups based on parental responses regarding the number of Disney Princess products owned by the participant. I developed these groups by splitting them at the median ($Mdn = 10$). Due to one extreme outlier, it seemed more logical to divide the groups on the median and not the mean. The first group ($n=10$), referred to as the greater product group, owned 12 or more Disney Princess products each ($M=29.1$, $SD=27.420$, range= 12-100). The second group ($n=11$), referred to as the lesser product group, owned 10 or less Disney Princess products each ($M=5.727$, $SD=3.173$, range= 0-10).

Differences appeared between the groups in the number of beauty remarks they made during their princess pretend play. An independent samples t-test, which compared the number of beauty remarks made by the two groups, revealed a marginally significant difference in the amount of beauty remarks made by participants in the greater product group ($M=1.714$, $SD= 2.215$) and participants in the lesser product group ($M=.222$, $SD=.441$); $t(14)=1.990$, $p = .066$. These findings suggest that greater product participants made about one to two beauty remarks while playing princess as compared with lesser product participants who rarely or never made beauty remarks during their princess play.

The greater product exposure group’s greater fixation on beauty and appearance, revealed itself further during the interviews. Participants in the greater product exposure group commented more frequently about the princesses’ physical attributes, including their hair, clothing, accessories, and overall appearance than did lesser product exposure participants. An independent samples
t-test, which compared the number of comments regarding princess physical traits made by the two groups during the interviews, revealed that participants in the greater product exposure group ($M=2.125, SD=1.553$) made more appearance-related comments than lesser product exposure participants ($M=.800, SD=.632$); $t(16)=2.469, p = .025$.

Furthermore, girls in the greater product exposure group made more comments specifically in regard to the princesses’ clothing or accessories during their interviews than lower product exposure participants. An independent samples t-test revealed that greater product exposure participants ($M=1.25, SD=.886$) made more clothing and accessory-related comments overall than lower product exposure participants ($M=.300, SD=.483$); $t(16)=2.906, p = .010$.

**RQ3: Is SES related to Disney Princess screen and product exposure for preschool girls?**

The data revealed one significant difference in terms of Disney Princess media exposure across SES groups. The difference appeared in regard to Disney Princess screen media access. Lower SES participants had greater exposure to Disney Princess screen media than higher SES participants as indicated by parent responses to the survey question that asked about children’s access to Disney Princess screen media using a 7-point Likert-type scale (Appendix D). An independent samples t-test revealed significant differences in screen exposure for lower SES participants ($M=4.82, SD=1.015$) as compared with higher SES participants ($M=3.15, SD=1.951$); $t(28)=3.041, p = .005$. These results suggest
that, on average, lower SES participants viewed on-screen representations of the Disney Princesses once per week or more as compared with higher SES participants who viewed Disney Princesses about once per month.

However, no significant differences appeared between the groups regarding the number of Disney Princess products that participants owned. Parents in the lower SES group reported that, on average, their child owned 14 ($SD=14.68$) products while parents in the higher SES category reported that their child owned an average of 19 ($SD=26.75$) Disney Princess products. Furthermore, no significant differences emerged between the groups regarding screen media access in general. Both groups were exposed to screen medias, including video games, television, and movies, about seven to nine hours per week.

**RQ4: Are there differences between preschool girls of different SES groups in regard to their princess play and reports of the princesses?**

Significant differences appeared between the two SES groups regarding their reports of princesses and their princess play. The first difference appeared in regard to the frequency of beauty remarks made by participants during the observations when they were dressed as princesses. An independent samples t-test, which compared the number of beauty remarks made by the two groups, revealed a significant difference in the amount of beauty remarks made by higher SES participants ($M=1.375$, $SD=.219$) and lower SES participants ($M=.177$, $SD=.393$); $t(23)=-2.224$, $p = .036$. These findings suggest that higher SES participants made about one to two beauty remarks while playing princess as
compared with lower SES participants who rarely or never made beauty remarks. Moreover, a multiple linear regression revealed that SES remained a predictor of child beauty remarks even when Disney Princess screen media was introduced as another variable in the model ($R^2 = .257$). While SES significantly predicted the frequency of participants’ beauty remarks ($\beta = -.521$, $p = .014$), Disney Princess screen exposure did not significantly predict beauty remarks ($\beta = .300$, $p = .138$). Thus, the outcomes of the regression indicate that SES and Disney Princess screen exposure were not confounded for this variable.

The second difference concerned participant focus on princess clothing and accessories. In their interviews, girls in the higher SES group made significantly more references to the Disney Princesses’ clothing and accessories than lower SES participants. I discovered this finding by tallying the number of references to princess clothing and accessories that participants in both groups made during their interviews. References such as “Cinderella’s blue dress” and “Snow White’s red headband,” each received a point. An independent samples t-test revealed significant differences between the number of references to princess clothing and accessories that higher SES participants mentioned ($M=1.100$, $SD=.994$) and the number that lower SES participants mentioned ($M=.389$, $SD=.502$); $t(26)=-2.533$, $p = .018$. Furthermore, a multiple linear regression revealed that SES remained a predictor of clothing and accessory references even when Disney Princess screen media exposure was introduced as another variable in the model. The regression found that SES and Disney Princess screen exposure explained 32.6% of the variance ($R^2 = .326$). SES significantly predicted the
frequency of girls’ clothing and accessory references ($\beta = -.648, p = .002$), and screen media exposure also modestly contributed to the model ($\beta = .380, p = .059$).

The fixation on princess clothing and accessories, as displayed by the higher SES group, appeared during the experimental observations as well. One distinct behavior, which related to princess clothing and accessories, emerged in the higher SES classroom but never in the lower SES classes, providing confirmatory evidence for the quantitative findings. This behavior consisted of costume hoarding and was performed by three of the nine participants in the higher SES classroom. One 4-year-old, Sarah, exemplified this behavior. While wearing a Cinderella costume, Sarah began to collect a wardrobe comprised of several princess costumes. The wardrobe consisted of an outfit for “home,” “sleep clothes,” and a ball gown, all of which were Disney Princess costumes. Pulling out the Tiana costume from the dress-up box, Sarah announced, “I picked out my outfit for the ball.” Then, moving to the back of the dramatic play section, Sarah tucked the Tiana costume behind the class dollhouse inconspicuously. In this manner, she claimed the costume as her own possession. When Sarah switched from the Cinderella dress to her “sleep clothes,” the Jasmine costume, another girl snatched the Cinderella dress. The two girls began to argue about who could wear the dress with Sarah insisting that it was hers. Eventually, alerted by the sound of the girls’ whining and screaming across the room, a teacher intervened, settling the altercation by explaining to Sarah that she could not keep all of the dresses for herself.
DISCUSSION

The central objective of this study was to investigate how girls interpret gender-role stereotypes in Disney Princess media and how they incorporate these interpretations into their pretend play behaviors. Consistent with past theory, preschool girls in this study exhibited restrictive and highly gendered patterns of play when pretending to be princesses. Thus, this study provides concrete evidence to substantiate theory on this topic. Furthermore, the current study examined the impact of increased exposure to Disney Princess screen and product media as well as SES on participants’ reports of the princesses and their princess play. Significant differences were found across all of these categories. The importance of these findings is discussed in the following sections.

Changes to Pretend Play Behavior

When pretending to be princesses, participants exhibited four distinct play patterns that differed from their non-princess play behaviors. These four patterns included use of beauty remarks, increased focus on clothing and accessories, changes in body movements, and the exclusion of boys. Instead of transforming the gendered roles that they observed through Disney Princess media into more satisfying and realistic characters during playtime, princess play appeared to restrict the depth of girls’ pretend play, narrowing their play to a set of prescribed and gendered behaviors that were repeated across the four observed classes.

Due to these findings, the current study provides evidence against previous research regarding this topic. Wohlwend (2009), in her ethnographic study of Kindergarten girls, found that students improvised new plots and
positions for their princess play characters as a way to overcome the gendered obstacles presented by Disney Princesses. Through the process of writing stories and reenacting pretend play scenes, girls made subtle changes to the passive princess personas, providing Mulan with the power to fly and improvising a chase scene for Sleeping Beauty along with other modifications (Wohlwend, 2009). Preschool girls in this study, however, did not make such empowered amendments to their princess characters. For example, Bianca, the girl dressed as Mulan who rejected the superhero boys’ invitation to join their fighting play, exemplified this point. Instead of altering her role as a passive princess and fending off the punching and kicking superhero boys with powers of her own, Bianca remained motionless, trapped in the corner. Eventually she had to remind the boys of her princess character by saying, “You’re not a princess,” thus prompting the boys to stop their fighting and come to her rescue. Even though Bianca dressed in and recognized herself as Mulan, one of the more active princesses, she still maintained a passive role, demonstrating that an overarching, stereotypical concept of the princesses might prevail among young girls despite alternative representations of the princesses. Unlike the participants in Wohlwend’s study (2009), Bianca and the other participants could not envision a more active role for their princess characters.

Numerous factors might account for the opposing findings between the current investigation and Wohlwend’s study (2009). For example, Wohlwend used a slightly older sample, including girls ages 5 and 6, while the current study involved girls ages 3 to 5. Since children’s pretend play matures as they grow,
containing more imaginary situations and multiple roles (Bodrova & Long, 2003),
the students in Wohlwend’s study might have been better equipped
developmentally to transform the princess roles. Furthermore, this study involved
a broader and more diverse sample (Table 1) than that of Wohlwend’s study.
Seeing as cultural factors shape children’s play (Corsaro, 2006), these
demographic differences might also have contributed to the contrasting findings
between the two studies. Finally, unlike the participants in the current study,
Wohlwend’s participants were encouraged to engage in writing workshops and
discussions about their pretend play stories. As a result, her participants had the
chance to develop their play decisions, a factor that has been shown to produce
more mature and sustained play (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Girls in the current
study were simply put on the spot to construct their pretend princess play.

Although the outcomes from the current study do not align with
Wohlwend’s findings (2009), the results from this study do correspond with past
theory on the topic. Theorists, including Linn (2009), Pollen (2011), and Levin
and Kilbourne (2009), among others, proposed that young girls are unable to
break from the gendered roles that dominate Disney Princess media when playing
princess. Instead, the theorists argued that girls enact highly feminized,
commercially driven roles in their play, which restrict their creativity and
negatively impact their perceptions of femininity (Levin & Kilbourne, 2009; Linn,
2009). Evidence from this investigation substantiates these conjectures, providing
research to corroborate past theory.
The first of the four distinct patterns of princess play identified by this study, use of beauty remarks, provides such evidence to support past theory. In making beauty remarks, girls displayed a shift in their attention from their play stories and surroundings to their physical appearances. As displayed by their interview responses, girls considered beauty to be one of the princesses’ most dominant and important traits. All of the girls (100%) reported that princesses were pretty and many explained that they liked a princess or would want to be a princess because of her physical appearance. The girls’ idealization of the princesses’ beauty relates to the findings of the APA Task Force (2007). The Task Force reported that girls and young women with greater exposure to mainstream media content placed appearance and physical attractiveness at the center of women’s value (APA Task Force, 2007). Accordingly, many of the girls in this study placed beauty at the center of a princess’s value, equating her appearance with her other attributes such as niceness.

When pretending to be princesses themselves, the girls consequently became the objects of beauty whose most important characteristic was her appearance. Girls made exclamations about how beautiful they were and how pretty they looked; they implored other students in the class to look at them and to admire their beauty; and, they appraised their appearances and compared them with those of other students. Through these activities, they laid the groundwork for self-objectification, the process of viewing themselves as objects that exist for the sake of appearance. Considering the findings of the APA Task Force (2007), self-objectifying behavior could have serious future ramifications for girls (p. 22).
Thus, by pretending to be princesses, girls reinforced their preconceived notions of princesses as primarily images of beauty and imposed these beauty ideals on their own bodies.

Similarly, girls’ focus on princess clothing and accessories further narrowed their play to beauty-related behaviors. In concentrating on the princesses’ dresses and accessories, girls again assessed their own bodies and their appearances in the dresses. To attain the princess beauty ideal, they consumed a significant portion of their pretend playtime assembling the best outfit and searching for accessories to complete their looks. In this way, they displayed the “faith in commodities” about which Giroux and Pollock (2010, p. 123) warned. Disney sells the princess images to girls along with the message that they need to buy Disney’s ready-made princess items if they want to be pretty like the princesses (Giroux & Pollock, 2010). Through this process, in trying to emulate the Disney females they observed, girls’ sense of beauty was reduced to the attainment of material possessions.

Moreover, girls emphasized femininity through their body movements while dressed as princesses. The three unique princess body movements that they displayed, twirling, ballroom dancing, and hand posing, all reinforced their femininity and “girly girl” roles. Blaise (2005) identified twirling, in particular, as a highly gendered body movement, one through which girls actively took part in “constructing and reconstructing heterosexual gender norms” (p. 66). Often she found that girls exaggerated their twirls to capture the attention of others, most often boys. Girls in this study demonstrated similar displays, as when Mariah
yelled to a boy across the room to tell him that she looked pretty and then twirled. Her bodily display was meant to reinforce her role as a princess as well as her beauty. Girls made clear associations between the Disney Princesses and the body movements they chose to enact. For example, prior to twirling, many referenced a particular character. “Look, I’m Rapunzel,” one girl announced before she twirled. In this way, they demonstrated that they intended to emulate the princesses by performing movements that they associated with them.

Often these prescribed body movements restricted girls from assuming more satisfying positions. For instance, the girls who displayed hand posing reduced themselves to idle viewers instead of active participants as the superhero boys fought for their protection. Unwilling to break from their preconceived ideas of a princess as a poised, though passive observer, the girls maintained their stiff positions. Since learning gender is a physical process, by which “each child’s body takes on the knowledge of maleness or femaleness through its practices,” enacting the princesses served to reinforce strict feminine physicality (Davies, 2003, p. 15). Girls practiced the gendered movements that they observed from the princesses, negotiating the presentation of their bodies to fit a specific role.

Finally, the fourth unique behavior, exclusion of boys from princess play, solidified the distinction between boys and girls, promoting what Ramsey (1998) referred to as gender cleavage. Girls, through their play behaviors and interview responses, affirmed that princesses were intended for girls and not for boys. One girls’ response, “No, I like the princesses. They’re for me,” emphasized the possessiveness this girl felt towards the princesses, that the princesses were
strictly for her consumption and not to be shared with boys. Furthermore, while dressed as princesses, girls behaved in more feminized ways, and accordingly, they interacted differently with their male peers. While the girls considered each other “sisters,” as demonstrated by the ballroom dancing pair, they reacted to the boys as non-princess others, entirely separate from themselves. During the preliminary observations, without the imposition of the princess props, the children behaved in ways that overcame strict gendered roles. For example, boys pretended to cook in the kitchen and girls handled money at the cash register. Although the children remained divided by gender for the most part during the preliminary observations, girls’ and boys’ behaviors still mirrored each other, reflecting some semblance of equality between the sexes. Girls’ rigid understandings of the princesses as female-only prevented them from creating new, more inclusive roles that would involve boys as equals. Instead, by positioning themselves as girls through princess play and identifiably not boys, they learned to distinguish their gender as one and not the other without any overlap (Davies, 2003).

The reappearance of these four unique princess behaviors combined with the girls’ near formulaic assessment of the princesses in their interviews, suggests that princess play does restrict girls to preset and gendered narratives in their play. In their interviews, almost all of the girls responded with similar answers to a number of yes or no questions regarding the princesses’ personality traits. They systematically responded that princesses were nice, smart, pretty, and never mean (Table 3). Their uniform understanding of the princesses indicates that they have
all been exposed to similar princess images over the course of their lives. Based on this sample’s immense exposure to Disney Princess media – on average, they watched Disney Princess screen media once per week and owned about 17 Disney Princess products each – participants likely developed their uniform concept of a princess through access to Disney Princesses. Their preconceived notions of the princesses translated to their enactments of the Disney females during pretend play, when the girls again displayed distinct patterns of positioning themselves as princesses. As theorized by Linn (2009), girls became locked into a set script for how to play princess, from which it was hard to deviate.

The implications of the girls’ gendered and restrictive princess play behaviors are manifold. First, the replaying of predetermined, commercially driven roles appeared to reduce the girls’ ability to play creatively, to design new and inventive personas (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Instead of experimenting with a broader set of roles, situations, and emotions, girls enacted a specific set of characters. Such limited behaviors could lead to significant consequences in terms of the development of their self-concepts. The development of a self-concept, the understanding of oneself in relation to others, depends on the accumulation of different experiences and the opportunity to try out new roles (Garcia, 1991). Therefore, during princess play, when girls played out specific princess fantasies from which they barely deviated, they reduced the complexity and variety of their pretend play experiences, preventing the expansion of their self-concepts.

Furthermore, the girls’ gendered enactments of the Disney females presented serious concerns in regard to their gender development. Based on the
social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation (Bussey & Bandura, 1999), girls incorporated the behaviors they modeled from princesses into their gender constructs. By adhering to their predetermined concepts of the princesses and performing the four unique princess behaviors, girls reinforced a narrow set of gendered roles and behaviors. For instance, by practicing the four princess behaviors, they learned that one of their greatest assets was their beauty, that attaining material possessions could improve their appearances, that, as princesses, they could only perform a certain set of body movements, and that boys were entirely different from themselves. In this way, princess play steered girls towards a view of femininity based on stereotypes and behavior as theorized by Linn (2009). Thus, if girls always play princess during pretend playtime instead of taking on different roles, they might attain a limited conception of femininity in which females are passive beauty objects. Considering findings from past studies (APA Task Force, 2007; Girls Inc., 2006; Marcotte et al., 2002), developing a limited conception of femininity that is constrained by stereotypical gendered roles puts girls at risk for developing depression, anxiety, and disordered eating attitudes and symptoms. Therefore, since the results of this investigation suggest that princess play elicits stereotypically gendered behavior from girls, it is essential that girls be encouraged to take on a multiplicity of roles during pretend playtime and not only princess roles. Furthermore, the girls’ admiration for the princesses suggests that these media characters do represent important role models in young girls’ lives; as such, media executives and
producers need to promote more female characters that break from traditional
gendered roles and promote a broader female identity.

**Exposure to Disney Princess Screen and Product Media**

The results revealed significant differences between children who had varying amounts of exposure to both Disney Princess screen and product media. First, children who had greater exposure to Disney Princess screen media, such as films, television shows, and video games, maintained a more stereotypical concept of the princesses. Girls who watched on-screen representations of the princesses twice or more per week unanimously reported that girls needed to be pretty to be princesses and that princesses always needed a prince. Girls who had less access to Disney Princess screen media agreed to these statements with less frequency. By answering yes to these two statements, girls affirmed that beauty is one of a princess’s most important characteristics and that princesses are dependent on men. Such ideas about the princesses uphold traditional gender-role stereotypes, maintaining the image of the Disney female as a passive beauty object (Lamb & Brown, 2006).

These results suggest that greater exposure to Disney Princess media is related to a more gender-stereotyped conception of the princesses. Past studies have not directly examined the relationship between Disney Princess exposure and acceptance of gender stereotypes. However, past research investigating similar themes yielded results that are consistent with the current study. For example, Freuh and McGhee (1975) found that children who had the greatest exposure to television reported stronger traditional sex role development. These
past findings coupled with the results of the current study suggest that increased media exposure is associated with acceptance of gender stereotypes. This investigation demonstrated that Disney Princess screen media, in particular, might contribute to this relationship.

However, while girls in the greater screen exposure group accepted more gender stereotypes about the princesses, these stereotyped notions did not reveal themselves in the girls’ princess play behaviors. Girls in both greater and lesser exposure groups displayed similar play behaviors. For instance, although girls in the greater exposure group unanimously agreed that girls had to be pretty to be princesses, the girls themselves did not make more beauty remarks during their princess play than lesser exposure girls. The results of this study thus suggest that increased exposure to the Disney Princesses might result in more stereotypical attitudes about the princesses, but it does not necessarily affect children’s own behaviors. Still, other researchers have found that acceptance of gender stereotypes might negatively affect girls in other ways. For example, Marcotte, Fortin, Potvin, and Papillon (2002) found that girls who accepted gender-typed characteristics were more likely to be depressed. Therefore, while greater exposure to Disney Princess screen media did not result in more gendered play behaviors, the greater exposure participants’ acceptance of princess gender stereotypes might influence the girls in less overt, more psychological ways.

Although Disney has tried, in the past years, to promote more progressive princesses, such as Merida and Mulan, who break from traditional norms, the stereotypical image of the Disney Princesses still prevails. As a result of these
findings, parents and educators might question the amount of Disney Princess media they provide their children, understanding that greater exposure might be associated with acceptance of a more passive, traditional image of femininity. Future research must investigate why girls with greater exposure to Disney Princess screen media accepted gender stereotyped notions of the princesses, determining the cause of this possible relationship. While this study controlled for participants’ exposure to general screen media, numerous other factors could have contributed to this relationship, including cultural or familial influences. For instance, research suggests that Latino/a families socialize their daughters in ways that are marked by more traditional gender-related expectations and messages (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004); thus, the effects of culture and family might also contribute to girls’ gender stereotyped views of the princesses.

In addition to investigating the effects of screen media on girls’ conceptions of the princesses, this study also determined the influence of Disney Princess product media on the participants’ play behaviors and perceptions of the princesses. Results of this study revealed that girls who owned 12 or more Disney Princess products made slightly more beauty remarks during their princess play than girls who owned ten or fewer products. Furthermore, girls in the greater product group commented more frequently about the princesses’ appearances and their outfits than lesser product participants. These results imply that an association exists between owning more Disney Princess products and focusing more on the princesses’ beauty. The findings are consistent with theory that postulates that as a result of seeing the specific princess images repeatedly, on
costumes, jewelry, and other products, children become locked into a set script for playing (Linn, 2009). Results from the current study suggest that girls who viewed the princesses more frequently were not only more likely to be locked into a set script for playing but also for understanding the princesses, since girls with greater product exposure focused mainly on the princesses’ appearance-related qualities.

Research investigations have not yet examined the relationship between Disney Princess product exposure and girls’ increased attention to the princesses’ physical features. However, due to the results of this study, which suggest that a relationship exists, future research should investigate this potential correlation. Such research might also investigate how increased exposure to product media influences girls’ sense of their own bodies and physical features. Additionally, future research should seek to determine the causality of this relationship between increased attention to princess features and product exposure.

**SES Differences**

The results revealed that lower SES participants had greater access to Disney Princess screen media than higher SES participants. However, both groups watched approximately the same amount of general screen media each week. Therefore, results from the currently study contradict past findings, which reported that children of lower SES families spend more time using media than children of higher SES families (Common Sense Media, 2011). Still, although both groups had the same amount of general screen media exposure, the lower SES group did have more Disney Princess screen exposure, suggesting that
differences in media exposure do exist between SES groups for certain types of media.

Furthermore, girls of medium and lower SES groups in this sample responded differently to the Disney Princesses in terms of their princess play and reports of the princesses. Notable differences appeared specifically in terms of the girls’ concentration on princess clothing and accessories. Although participants from both categories displayed an interest in the princess costumes and accessories, and they defined their play by the act of dressing up, girls of the higher SES group focused significantly more on the princesses’ clothing and accessories than lower SES participants. This contrast became apparent during their interviews, when higher SES participants made more references to princess items such as “Cinderella’s blue dress” and “Snow White’s red headband.” In their play observations, the higher SES group’s concentration on princess apparel again manifested itself in their behaviors when several of them displayed costume hoarding. Thus, the girls’ differing focuses on the princess clothes and accessories could be a manifestation of their cultural values and upbringings. These results insinuate that girls from different backgrounds may interpret the messages in Disney Princess media differently based on their previous experiences.

These conclusions validate Hayes and Tantleff-Dunn’s (2010) argument that investigations on the impact of children’s media must involve cross-cultural studies. The current study provides evidence to substantiate their theory that cultural differences influence the way children interact with the mass media. Therefore, it is integral that future research, examining children’s interpretations
of the media, involve broader, more heterogeneous samples, considering that potential differences between children of various backgrounds are likely to appear.

**Implications for Parents and Educators**

While many parents and educators may consider Disney the ideal of wholesome family entertainment (Wiersma, 2000), conclusions drawn from this investigation suggest that Disney media is not entirely trustworthy or honorable. Through their screen and product media, Disney Princess presents highly gendered messages that girls do recognize, and they absorb these messages into their own behaviors. As demonstrated by the current study, repeated exposure to such messages could negatively affect children’s self-concepts and gender identities (Garcia, 1991; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Parents and educators need to be more skeptical of Disney products, to look past their veneer of family-friendly wholesomeness, and to see Disney for what it really is: a multibillion-dollar corporation intent on earning money and turning “every child into a lifetime consumer of Disney products and ideas” (Giroux & Pollock, 2010, p. 76). As a result, parents and educators should examine the number of Disney Princess products and screen media available to their children and consider the potential implications of excessive Disney Princess exposure.

Moreover, parents and educators must be aware of how they respond to their children’s princess play or to Disney Princess media in front of their children. The social cognitive theory of gender development proposes that the extent to which children learn and become proficient at modeling behaviors
depends on the social reactions that their behaviors produce (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Consequently, when parents provide positive feedback regarding their daughters’ gendered princess play, the parents’ affirmative reactions have the potential to reinforce and strengthen the girls’ behaviors. The influence of adult reactions on children’s play became apparent during this investigation. Although my research assistant and I directed our attention to the child participants during the qualitative observations, while in the classrooms, we did discover that teachers responded differently to the girls who played princess versus boys who played superhero. For instance, one teacher said to a girl who wore the Mulan dress, “You’re beautiful.” She then turned to two boys dressed as superheroes and implored them to go “save people.” Based on the framework outlined by the social cognitive theory, these disparate reactions would serve to reinforce girls’ focus on beauty during princess play while reaffirming boys’ need to invent active superhero adventures. Thus, interventions might serve to educate parents and teachers about how to constructively respond to their children’s pretend play and to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes popularized by the media.

However, none of this is to say that parents and educators should entirely ban Disney Princess media from their children’s lives, eradicating princess images from their homes and classrooms. Doing so would not only be nearly impossible considering the ubiquity of the princesses, but it would also be counterproductive. By forbidding Disney Princesses, caretakers preclude discussions with their children about the wrongful messages in the media and prevent children from confronting these issues. As Wohlwend (2009) explains, by
banning children’s exposure to mass media images “we take ourselves out of the conversation, ceding our influence to corporations and missing opportunities for critique and engaged learning” (p. 80). Parents and educators have the opportunity to shape girls’ understandings of gender-stereotyped messages in Disney Princess media and to foster healthier, more realistic ideas about femininity.

Several researchers present techniques for caretakers to assist them in helping their children productively engage with gendered media messages. For example, Blaise (2009), while researching in a kindergarten class, used the class meeting time to involve children in conversation regarding sexualized media representations of females. She provoked the boys and girls to raise new questions about gender and sexuality issues. In producing these conversations, she encouraged the children to open up debate with each other and to develop informed understandings of the messages (Blaise, 2009). Additionally, Wohlwend (2009) found that opportunities to exercise power and transform gendered media messages increased when play combined with literacy. When children had the chance to plan out and reflect on their pretend play stories through writing, they were better equipped to confront the limitations of stereotypical gendered roles in Disney media and to improvise more progressive characters. Therefore, parents and educators should not ban Disney Princess media, but instead they should moderate their children’s media exposure and support their children in making sense of the gendered media messages.

Limitations and Future Directions
The current study presents a solid foundation for future research, expanding knowledge on a topic that has received little attention. As insightful as the results are, though, this study presents methodological characteristics that must be addressed. Due to accessibility, the sample was drawn from two preschools, which represented a variety of races, ethnicities, and SES groups. Unfortunately, though, in our sample SES was confounded with both school site and race/ethnicity. All of the participants at Campus Children’s Center pertained to the higher SES group while all of the participants at Head Start pertained to the lower SES group. Similarly, the majority (76.92%) of the participants in the higher SES group were Caucasian while the majority (72.22%) of the participants in the lower SES group were Hispanic. Therefore, differences in SES groups might be due to these confounding factors that involve location and culture and not necessarily SES. As a result, replications of this study should involve participants whose demographic characteristics are not confounded with other variables.

In addition, future studies that seek to replicate the quantitative aspects of this study might consider involving a larger sample size. This study’s relatively small sample size ($n=31$) prevented me from producing more advanced statistical models that would have controlled for the effects of extraneous variables on mean differences. Although I was able to conduct multiple linear regressions and correlations to control for the effects of SES and screen media exposure on certain variables, I believe that these outcomes would have been even stronger and more significant with a larger sample. Results from this study provide key insight into
possible correlations and offer a foundation for future research; however, future investigations would certainly benefit from a larger sample size.

Moreover, classroom differences at the two preschools might have presented further limitations. At Campus Children’s Center my research assistant and I observed from behind a one-way mirror, while at Head Start we observed within the classrooms, visible to the child participants. Although we interacted minimally with the participants at Head Start and kept a low profile in the class, our presence in the room still might have affected the children’s play behaviors. With the knowledge that they were being observed, the children might have acted out more, putting on a show for us guests. By sitting within the classroom for three hours on separate days, the children also had the opportunity to become comfortable with my presence. As a result, the participants may have been more relaxed speaking with me during the subsequent interviews and may have responded more honestly and fully than participants at Campus Children’s Center. Although minor, these variations in experimentation may have contributed to the observed differences between SES groups. If this study is repeated, observation protocol should remain consistent across all observations. Replications of this investigation might also consider observing the children’s interactions with the costumes for more than one or two consecutive days. After habituating to the presence of the novel stimuli, the participants might respond differently to the costumes, either losing interest in them or acting out different stories.

Since few research studies until now have examined the impact of Disney Princess media on girls’ pretend play behaviors, the current study, which revealed
significant findings, provides a foundation for future research. Future investigations should examine the sources of the differences between the higher and lower exposure groups as well as the differences between the higher and lower SES groups. Given that numerous factors could account for these differences, aside from simply the influence of Disney Princess media, researchers need to determine the true causes. To investigate the underlying causes, future research might replicate this investigation but control for cultural, familial, geographic, and economic conditions. Such a study would involve a large sample size and a range of different exposure levels to Disney Princess media.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies of girls who frequently played princess as preschoolers could provide insight regarding the long-term effects of Disney Princesses on gender. Although this study concluded, based on past research, that Disney Princesses affect girls’ self-concept and gender development, a longitudinal study would determine the actual lasting influence of these princess images on girls’ lives.
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# Appendix A

## Snapshot Observation Form

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### Location in Classroom:
- Blocks
- Dramatic Play
- Quiet Area/ Books
- Sensory Play
- Table Activities

### Costumes:
- Disney Princess
- Gender Neutral
- Preexisting classroom costumes
- No costume

### Media:
- Is she referencing the media?
- Is she referencing Disney Princess media?
Appendix B

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Do you like to play pretend? Who do you like to pretend to be?

What are your favorite TV shows? What are your favorite movies?

Have you ever pretended to be a princess? Which princess? How did you pretend to be a princess? What did you do?

Is there anything you can do that a princess can’t do?

Do you like to watch princess shows and movies? Which ones?

Using pictures of the Disney princesses:

I have some pictures to show you. Do you know who these are? Can you tell me their names?

Who is your favorite princess? Why is she your favorite? What’s her story? Tell me about her – what does she do? Does she live happily ever after? Why or why not? Would you want to be __________? Is there anything you can do that __________ can’t do?

Are princesses strong? Which princess is strong? Why is she strong?

Are princesses mean? Which princess? Why is she mean?

Are princesses powerful? Which princess is powerful? Why is she powerful?

Are princesses nice? Which princess is nice? Why?

Are princesses smart? Which princess is smart? Why is she smart?

Are princesses pretty? Which princess do you think is pretty? Why?

Do girls have to be pretty to be princesses?

Do princesses always need a prince?

Can boys like princesses? Do you know any boys who like princesses?
Can boys pretend to be princesses? Why or why not? What can boys do that princesses can’t do?
Appendix C

Princess Pictures for Interviews
(These photos were retrieved from http://princess.disney.com)
Appendix D

Parent Questionnaire

Daughter’s name _______________ Daughter’s birthdate _______________

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey – your help is much appreciated!

1. Which TV shows does your child watch most frequently? List three to six specific shows:

2. How often does your child play video games and/or watch movies and/or television shows that portray Disney Princesses (e.g. Brave, The Little Mermaid, Frozen, Cinderella, Tangled, Mulan, Pocahontas, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, The Princess and the Frog, Beauty and the Beast, or Aladdin)? Please circle one of the options below:
   0 – my child has never watched or played a Disney Princess movie, TV show, or video game
   1 – only once or twice in her life
   2 – A few times per year
   3 – About once a month
   4 – once a week
   5 – 2 to 3 times per week
   6 – daily

3. How many Disney Princess items (clothing, toys, … or any other product with the Disney Princess image on it) does your child have? ____________

   Can you give specific examples of some of these items? (List 3 to 6)

4. During an average week, how many total hours does your child spend playing video games and/or watching TV, DVDs, and/or videos?
   ________________

5. Does your daughter have any siblings? If so what are their ages and genders?
Appendix E

Parent Questionnaire – Spanish

Nombre de su hija ______________ Fecha de nacimiento de su hija ______________

¡Gracias por su ayuda en esta encuesta! Por favor, conteste las siguientes preguntas de los medios de comunicación de su hija:

1. ¿Cuáles son los programas de televisión que su hija mira con mayor frecuencia? Haga una lista de 3 a 6 programas específicos:

2. ¿Con qué frecuencia juega su hija videojuegos y/o ve películas o programas de televisión que retratan a las Princesas de Disney (por ejemplo, Brave, The Little Mermaid, Frozen, Cinderella, Tangled, Mulan, Pocahontas, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, The Princess and the Frog, Beauty and the Beast, o Aladdin)?
   Por favor, elija una de las siguientes opciones:
   0 – Mi hija nunca ha visto ni jugado una película, un programa de televisión ni un videojuego que retrata las Princesas de Disney
   1 – Sólo un par de veces en su vida
   2 – Un par de veces al año
   3 – Aproximadamente una vez al mes
   4 – Una vez a la semana
   5 – 2 a 3 veces por semana
   6 – A diario

3. ¿Cuántos artículos de las princesas de Disney (como de ropa, juguetes, … o cualquier otro producto con la imagen de una Princesa de Disney en él) tiene su hija? (ponga un número) ______________
   ¿Puede dar ejemplos específicos de algunos de estos artículos?
   (Escriba 3 a 6)

4. Durante una semana típica, ¿cuántas horas en total pasa su hija jugando videojuegos y/o viendo televisión, DVDs, y/o vídeos? ______________

5. ¿Su hija tiene hermanos o hermanas? Si es así ¿cuáles son sus edades y géneros?
Appendix F

Guiding Questions for Qualitative Observations

• Are they acting out specific characters? (eg. Acting just like Mulan or just like Cinderella) Are they following the story lines from the movie?

• Or, are they making up their own stories? What are these new stories?

• What kinds of things do they say when they’re dressed up?

• How do the kids interact with each other when dressed up? What do they tell each other?

• What kinds of body movements are they making? (eg. Twirling, jumping, posing…)

• Do the kids who wear princess costumes act differently from those who choose to wear the other costumes?

• Are the costumes popular? Do lots of kids want to play with them?

• Do any of the girls seem uninterested in the costumes?

• Is there any fighting over a specific costume?