

A Disney Romance for the Ages: Idealistic Beliefs of
Romantic Relationships Held by Youth

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ABSTRACT

The Disney Princess Brand includes 11 Disney Princess films from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) to *Brave* (2012). The goal of this campaign is for audiences to be entertained by the narratives while encouraging identification with the princesses in the films (Do Rozario, 2004; Orenstein, 2006). Scholars have suggested possible media effects of representations and messages depicted related to gender roles (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011) and romantic relationships (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). No studies to date have examined the potential correlation between media effects of all 11 Disney Princess films and viewers' expectations regarding romantic relationships with a theoretical background in cultivation theory, social cognitive theory, wishful identification, and uses and gratification theory. The purpose of this thesis was to explore the relationship between potential media effects due to watching Disney Princess films and expectations of romantic relationships. An online cross-sectional survey was administered to female undergraduate students enrolled at Virginia Tech ($N = 110$). Bivariate correlation analyses were computed to measure the data. Results did not support hypotheses related to motivations for watching Disney Princess films, cultivated ideologies due to exposure of all films, and perceived similarity to princesses in relation to idealistic beliefs of romantic relationships. Wishful identification with the princesses was significantly correlated with participants' idealistic beliefs of romantic relationships. Possible implications are that

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participants in late adolescence (18 – 23 years of age) wish to be like the Disney princesses and to have similar romantic relationships that are represented in the films.

Keywords: Disney Princesses, Cultivation Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, Wishful Identification, Uses and Gratification Theory

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A Disney romance for the ages: Idealistic beliefs of
romantic relationships held by youth

Walt Disney believed his work could have a lasting impact on children. He said in a New York Times article by Kalb (2000), “I think of a child’s mind as a blank book. During the first years of his life, much will be written on the pages. The quantity of that writing will affect his life profoundly” (Kalb, 2000). In other words, epistemological beliefs, including perceptions of romantic relationships, start to develop during childhood (Bachen & Illouz, 1996, p. 280). Past research suggests children and adolescents who are frequently exposed to content featuring romantic themes are more likely to grow up with idealistic views of long-term romantic relationships, leading to the desire to marry at an early age with the notion of remaining married to the same partner until death do them part (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Romantic themes such as finding love at first sight, experiencing true love’s kiss, and living happily ever after, are all prevalent within several Disney films, particularly the ones featuring princesses (Richardson, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Tanner et al., 2003). Thus, individuals’ idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships may be influenced as a result of exposure to depictions through the Disney Princess Brand, specifically all 11 Disney Princess films. The following will provide background information of the Disney Princess Brand, details related to the characteristics of romantic relationships depicted, and a preview of the current study starting with a review of past literature.

Literature Review

Disney Princess Brand

Disney executives, including chairman of consumer products, Andy Mooney, created the Disney Princess Brand in 2000 (Disney Princess, 2014; Whelan, 2012). It was franchised as an official marketing and advertising campaign specifically directed towards girls and women of all ages with the goal of being entertaining through the use of narratives while encouraging the audience to identify with the princesses in the films (Do Rozario, 2004; Orenstein, 2006). Originally, the brand featured eight princesses from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) to *Mulan* (1998). Furthermore, the line was comprised of over 25,000 products that were marketed in association to the films (England et al., 2011). The Disney Princess collection now includes 11 princesses from the following films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), *Mulan* (1998), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), *Tangled* (2010), and *Brave* (2012).

According to the Disney Consumer Product website for the Disney Princess Brand, “Disney Princess stories are timeless and classic and appeal to girls and women of all ages. As women grow up with the Disney Princess characters, they are inspired by their stories, personalities and inner qualities and pass along their love for these heroines to their own daughters” (Disney Princess, 2014). Several generations have and will continue to have access to these princesses through releases and rereleases of the feature films from The Walt Disney Company’s cartoon library, called the Disney Vault, as well as from cross merchandizing (Murray 2005; Weber, 2002; Wohlwend, 2009).

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By using the films to bring awareness of the brand, young customers are able to admire their favorite princesses by singing their songs from the films, wearing Disney Princess apparel to school, accessorizing and dressing up in costumes, as well as playing with dolls and dreaming of having a life like their favorite princess, thus cultivating certain values and ideas of not only what to buy and play with, but also who they should aspire to be through wishful identification (Wohlwend, 2009). Wishful identification, in this context, is a child or adolescent aspiring to be like the Disney princess as one grows up to be an adult (Lonial & Van Auken, 1986). A positive experience with the Disney Princess Brand during youth, is congruent with the goal of marketers striving to promote a positive brand experience in order to have lifelong loyal customers who later influence their children to continue the cycle; a Disney baby grows into a Disney adult who later produces another Disney baby (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2000; Disney Princess, 2014; Forgacs, 1992; Rosenberg & Henderson, 2001; Valkenburg & Canto, 2001).

For example, Sun and Scharrer (2004) prompted fifty college students to analyze Disney's version of *The Little Mermaid* (1989) for messages being conveyed from the film in comparison to the original tale by Hans Christian Anderson. Ninety percent of participants preferred the Disney version and provided comments such as the following:

“I love the movie. It is romantic, cute, and a true fairy tale. It is what every child wants to see...I have loved, loved this movie since it has come out...It's still my favorite . . .When I watch a movie I usually identify with certain characters and almost make it fit my life. With Disney movies if I love them, there is nothing you can do to sway me from that”
(Sun & Scharrer, 2004, p. 45).

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As noted in the comments of this study, loyalty to the messages and tales of Disney princesses and the overall brand extends past childhood and is even expressed during late adolescence (18 until the early twenties) (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006) including values regarding love and romantic relationships (Lockhart, 2000; Richardson, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Tanner, Haddock & Zimmerman, 2003; Tonn, 2008; Whelan, 2012). For instance, in 1995, Lifetime network (owned by Disney) premiered *Weddings of a Lifetime*, which featured a couple planning their Disney themed fantasy wedding as well as exchanging vows at Disney's Fairy Tale Wedding Pavilion (Levine, 2005). In relation to Disney Consumer Products, brides now have the opportunity to walk down the aisle in Disney Princess inspired wedding gowns by designers such as Alfred Angelo and Kirstie Kelly (Hunt, 2009).

Critics and researchers have noted the potential influence Disney ideologies may have on children, adolescents, and young adults through films (Sweeney, 2011, McAllister & Giglio, 2006; Müller-Hartmann, 2007), especially since the company capitalizes on the success of selling these values and beliefs through its films and cross-merchandizing of its Disney Princess Brand (Gigli, 2006; Sweeney, 2011; McAllister & Giglio, 2006). Beliefs about romantic relationships are deeply embedded in Disney Princess films and are the focus of the following section.

Characteristics of Romantic Relationships in TV and Film

Romantic relationships are defined as couples who interact affectionately by expressing mutual liking, longing, or love toward one another, which in some instances start as romantic experiences (i.e. crushes and fantasies of being in a relationship with the other partner) (Collins, Welsh & Furman, 2009). Portrayals of romantic relationships are found in print, television, and film, and are commonly described as having reoccurring themes such as finding love at first

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sight, experiencing true love's kiss, and living happily ever after (Richardson, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Tanner et al., 2003). According to Segrin and Nabi (2002), these examples exemplify depictions of the ideal romantic relationship conveyed through the media, mainly because attributes are heavily laden with romance and typically do not show couples arguing or doing ordinary, everyday activities. Past researchers have suggested that these representations are skewed because they show false models of how to think and behave in forming successful romantic relationships and the expectations of romantic partners (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Eggermont, 2004; England et al., 2011; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Lockhart, 2000; Richardson, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Tanner et al., 2003).

For example, in a study by Johnson and Holmes (2009), 40 romantic comedy films were coded for content pertaining to romance and relationships between the characters. Analysis included categories such as portrayals of affection (i.e. kissing, dancing, gazing at one another, and smiling), commitment (i.e. weddings), compassion (i.e. nursing and showing concern for the love interest), and significance of partner (i.e. missing partner and risking safety for love) (Johnson & Holmes, 2009, p. 358). Results indicated idealistic characteristics in the romantic relationships as being exciting and emotionally important for both new and lasting relationships. Also, conflict between couples did not prove to have any long-term consequences on the stability of the relationship (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). In another study, Richardson's (2012) unit of analysis consisted of five Disney Princess films: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), and *Mulan* (1998). Reoccurring concepts such as love at first sight, experiencing true love's kiss, and living happily ever after were found in all films. Additionally, Lockhart (2000) used Disney's *Cinderella* (1959) to explore potential effects on both men and women's beliefs about love, romantic

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relationships, and marriage. All participants reported having idealistic expectations regarding love that aligned with the messages from the film, in spite of personal experiences. Similarly, Eggermont (2004) determined adolescents watching romantically themed television expressed idealistic expectations about love relationships despite having limited to no experience themselves. Overall, these studies concluded television and Disney Princess films are portraying idealistic romantic themes within relationships.

Several categories that were used in the study by Johnson and Holmes (2009) to code romantic themes within romantic comedies are also applicable to Disney Princess films. For instance, affectionate, nurturing or caring, and helpful actions have also been coded in a study by England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek (2011). Affection (i.e. kissing, dancing, gazing at one another, and smiling) is shown when Ariel and Eric are gazing at each other during the scene with the song “Kiss the Girl” (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989). Commitment is apparent through the marriages and living happily ever after motif found in all but two films (*Pocahontas*, 1995; *Brave*, 2012), demonstration of caring actions (i.e. nursing and showing concern for the love interest) are evident when Belle tends to Beast’s wounds after he rescues her from wolves (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991), and the importance of partner (i.e. missing partner and risking safety for love) is recognized when Rapunzel sacrifices her safety and freedom in exchange for saving Eugene’s life (*Tangled*, 2010). Taking this into consideration, idealistic characteristics in Disney Princess films may also portray romantic relationships as being exciting and emotionally important for both new and lasting relationships through the following themes found within the narratives of the films: love at first sight, true love’s kiss, and living happily ever after.

Love at first sight is described as the moment when the characters see one another and start to develop feelings of liking, longing, or love for the other, thus indicating the start of a

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romantic relationship (Richardson, 2012; Whelan, 2012). For instance, the prince and Snow White (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937) experience this phenomenon after Snow White sings, “I’m wishing for the one I love to find me today.” Similarly, Cinderella and Prince Charming (*Cinderella*, 1950) instantly connect and fall in love after he sees Cinderella entering the ball. In *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), love at first sight is evident when Prince Philip notices Aurora dancing in the woods singing, “You’ll love me at once, the way you did once upon a dream.” Pocahontas and Captain John Smith (*Pocahontas*, 1995), on the other hand, both experience love at first sight despite a language barrier (Tanner et al., 2003), and *The Little Mermaid* (1989) is the first film to showcase love at first sight through a romantic experience, also known as a crush (Collins et al., 2009). Out of the six remaining films, five (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991; *Aladdin*, 1992; *Mulan*, 1998; *The Princess and the Frog*, 2009; *Tangled*, 2010) also demonstrate the love at first sight motif; however, these films focus on partners’ personality versus simply on physical appearance. Characters did not start to look at one another romantically until after a transformation occurred (i.e. Beast, *Beauty and the Beast*, 1991, starts to be kind towards Belle) or until after the couple spends time together, hence seeing the other person’s temperament for the first time.

Unlike the previous films, *Brave* (2012) does not feature any romantic themes, but rather showcases Princess Merida as the heroine of the narrative who does not have the desire to engage in a romantic experience or relationship. In fact, during one of the scenes of the movie, an archery competition is held between the first-born princes seeking Merida’s hand in marriage. Determined to prove her independence, Merida poses as one of the contestants claiming she will be “fighting for her own hand” (*Brave*, 2012) and ends up winning the competition. The film

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concludes with Merida happily single, and with no potential prospects to suggest a romantic relationship in the near future.

In addition to the love at first sight motif, nine Disney Princess films highlight the significance of true love's kiss (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937; *Cinderella*, 1950; *Sleeping Beauty*, 1959; *The Little Mermaid*, 1989; *Beauty and the Beast*; 1991; *Aladdin*, 1992; *Pocahontas*, 1995; *The Princess and the Frog*, 2009; *Tangled*, 2010). This concept is defined by Richardson (2012) as a means for couples to publicly express mutual feelings for another through their first kiss. Five Disney Princess films highlight the significance of true love's kiss in regard to having a long-term relationship (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1937; *Sleeping Beauty*, 1959; *The Little Mermaid*, 1989; *Beauty and the Beast*; 1991; *The Princess and the Frog*, 2009). All of these narratives include the prince or princess being placed under a spell, which can only be broken by true love's kiss.

Diekman and Murnen (2004) consider placing significance in a kiss to be exceedingly romantic, because the meaning behind the public affection suggests the sentiment as being a precursor for the couple to maintain a romantic relationship. Richardson (2012) posits that a couple's first kiss is an unrealistic way to measure and expect true love resulting in marital satisfaction. Unlike the films mentioned, the characters in *Pocahontas* (1995) do share a first kiss; however, this is the only film to not suggest the couple living happily ever after. Instead of staying together, Captain John Smith returns to England and Pocahontas remains with her tribe in America, even though they still care for one another. This is apparent when they kiss and say goodbye. Captain John Smith says, "I can't leave you" and Pocahontas cries and replies, "You never will. No matter what happens, I'll always be with you, forever."

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The phrase “happily ever after” is traditionally used in Disney Princess films to denote the end of the movie by either explicitly displaying written text on the screen or showing the characters during the pinnacle of their idealistic relationship (i.e. getting married), which suggests the characters easily continuing to maintain this status (Richardson, 2012; Tanner et al., 2003). Occurring within a relatively short time frame, usually less than a year, nine of the 11 films contain similar narratives: love at first sight, the prince and princess meet, true love’s kiss, a brief period of separation due to conflict caused by the villain, coming back together, resuming the relationship, and living happily ever after (Richardson, 2012). For instance, Whelan (2012) states that romantic relationships within *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) follow this sequence of events. Generally, the narrative follows this pattern in this sequential order; however, there are some films that do not abide by this arrangement due to the prince and princess meeting prior to a transformation in one or both of the characters’ temperament, thus causing a delay in viewing one another romantically (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991; *Aladdin*, 1992; *Mulan*, 1998; *The Princess and the Frog*, 2009; *Tangled*, 2010). *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), for example, ends the film with Tiana opening her restaurant, kissing her husband, Prince Naveen, and then dancing on the rooftop under the stars, which then fades to black. Likewise, *Tangled* (2010) comes to a close by showing images of the couple kissing while a voiceover of Eugene reveals how he had asked Rapunzel for her hand in marriage, in which she then replies by saying they lived happily ever after.

As already indicated, past researchers have suggested that the media, including Disney Princess films, portray distorted representations of romantic relationships because they are highly idealistic and show the development of the relationships progressing quickly, thus disseminating

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false models of how to think and behave in forming successful romantic relationships along with encouraging unrealistic expectations of romantic partners (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Eggermont, 2004; England et al., 2009; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Lockhart, 2000; Richardson, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Tanner et al., 2003). In fact, “fairy tales offer not only dreams and hopes but also actual programs for behavior” (Stone, 1975), and animation can affect viewers subconsciously, especially since the narrative of animated films do not present an authentic truth of reality (Müller-Hartmann, 2007). Considering the Disney Princess Brand is specifically based off fairy tales produced as animated films (Orenstein, 2006), past researchers suggest these narratives are educating viewers, children and adolescents in particular, about ideologies regarding romantic relationships (Sweeney, 2011; McAllister & Giglio, 2006; Müller-Hartmann, 2007; Tanner, et al., 2003). Overall, this is concerning to researchers and parents alike because children and adolescents sometimes rely on the media (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Segrin & Nabi, 2002) as guides for topics related to romantic and sexual relationships (Arnett, 1995; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). Furthermore, since late adolescence extends from 18 years of age until the early twenties (Smetana et al., 2006), these messages may still affect perceptions regarding love and romantic relationships even in late adolescence and adulthood (Tonn, 2008). For instance, in an interview by Stone (1975), adult women confirmed admiring fairytale princesses and wished to be like them so they could have their own romantic relationship with their own ‘prince’ and live ‘happily ever after’ as well.

Past research has used various perspectives and theories to explore the romantic themes within Disney movies (Lockhart, 2000; Richardson, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Silverman, 2009; Tanner et al., 2003; Tonn, 2008). For example, specifically focusing on Disney’s *Cinderella* (1950), Lockhart (2000) examined beliefs about marriage and romantic love using the

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feminist poststructuralist theory. Similarly, Richardson (2012) analyzed five Disney movies (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, 1937; *Cinderella*, 1950; *The Little Mermaid*, 1989; *Beauty and the Beast*, 1991; and *Mulan*, 1998) to determine if the romantic portrayals disseminate unrealistic representations and therefore fosters false expectations in American women. She used triangular theory and cultivation theory as theoretical background while assessing these films. Also, from a theoretical background in cultivation, along with uses and gratifications perspective, Segrin and Nabi (2002) explored viewing television and its effects of marital expectations. They suggested, “audiences choose to expose themselves to particular mass media because they expect such exposure to satisfy or fulfill their various social or psychological needs or interests” (Segrin & Nabi, 2002, p. 260). Exposure to Disney Princess movies as a child may influence an adolescent to seek romantic relationships in which they can obtain a ‘happily ever after.’ If expectations are not met, then this could lead to distress and unhappiness because of unrealistic beliefs about what marriage should be. Movies with romantic themes are prevalent in genre related films (i.e. romance and romantic comedies), including children animated films (Lockhart, 2000; Richardson, 2012; Silverman, 2009). Based upon the research reviewed, there is limited research on all 11 Disney Princess films and none on the potential influence of all these films on the beliefs associated with expectations and perceptions concerning romantic relationships from a theoretical background in social cognitive theory, wishful identification, cultivation theory, and uses and gratification theory.

Theoretical Framework

Cultivation Theory

Several researchers have explored Cultivation Theory within various disciplines to explain how certain attitudes and values are developed (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2008; Gerbner,

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1969, 1970, 1998; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Hammermeister, Brock, Winterstein, & Page, 2005; Hawkins & Pingree, 1980; Hesse-Biber, 2006; Hestroni, 2012; Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Potter, 1993; Potts, Runyan, Zerger, & Marchetti, 1995; Shafer, 2012; Zhang & Tan, 2011). Originating with the Cultural Indicators project by George Gerbner in 1969, Cultivation Theory explains the potential effects of long-term exposure to media violence on viewers at the conscious and unconscious level. George Gerbner and others have suggested viewers cognitively process messages through television consumption, and may perceive the world and construct judgments of it based on the frequency of exposure to media messages being disseminated (Gerbner, 1969, 1970; Gerbner et al., 1980; Gerbner, 1998; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Hammermeister et al., 2005; Hernandez, 2012; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Potter, 1993). Furthermore, Gerbner (1969) proposed that individuals who frequently watch television programs, also known as heavy viewers, might have skewed perceptions of the world due to false representations being shown, hence indirectly and inaccurately shaping attitudes and beliefs (Gerbner, 1969; Osborn, 2012). This proposition was later criticized because it did not take into consideration the effects of genre specific content (i.e. comedy, horror, romance, etc.) from various media including television and film (Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Hefner 2011; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). For instance, heavy viewers of prime-time news broadcasts tend to have greater anxiety of the potential risk of crime, which indicates stronger cultivation effects, in comparison to consumption of non-genre specific television (Hefner, 2011; Romer, Jamieson, & Aday, 2003). As a result, research has extended past the concept of cultivating violence to include genre specific content, such as exploring Cultivation Theory and romantic themes found in television and film (Eggermont, 2004; England et al., 2011; Hefner,

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2011; Hernandez, 2012; Hetsroni, 2012; Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Osborn, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Zhou & Zhu, 2004).

Similar to the original premise of Cultivation Theory, individuals who are repeatedly exposed to romantically themed content over a long period of time will perceive social norms to be like what is shown via media, thus indirectly shaping how one views the world (Hammermeister et al., 2005; Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Osborn, 2012; Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999). This includes epistemological beliefs and attitudes about body image (Hefner, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2006), gender roles, (England et al., 2011; Ex, Janssens, & Korzilius, 2002), and the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships (Eggermont, 2004; England et al., 2011; Hefner, 2011; Hernandez, 2012; Hetsroni, 2012; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Osborn, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002). Typically, these topics are discussed in regard to any potential negative media effects being cultivated. This is measured according to two dependent variables: first order cultivation (perceptions and judgments) along with second order cultivation (attitudes and values) (Hetsroni, 2012; Potter, 1993). First order cultivation is reliant on memory, recency and saliency of messages from the media, whereas second order cultivation indicates if those messages were successfully persuasive.

Ex and colleagues (2002) discovered female adolescents and young adults who were exposed to soap operas and sitcoms held traditional views of motherhood, which tended to emphasize gendered stereotyped roles of women within the home. England and colleagues (2011) also looked at gender roles portrayals, specifically within the romantic relationships of the main characters from nine Disney Princess films. The researchers conducted a content analysis of the films. They chronologically analyzed the movies by separating them into three groups

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based off of the release date. Three Disney Princess films are categorized as early films because they were released from 1937 to 1959. These films include *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). Disney Princess films released from 1989 to 1998 are part of the group labeled middle films. This includes *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), *Pocahontas* (1995), and *Mulan* (1998). Lastly, the researchers explored *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) as being the most current film released. England and colleagues (2011) discovered representations of traditional gendered stereotyped roles of both male and female characters; however, the princesses and princes evolved to become more asexual since the first Disney Princess film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937). Findings suggest the possibility of children developing concepts and social scripts of gender norms as a result of exposure to these films (England et al., 2011).

In a separate study by Bilandzic and Busselle (2008), cultivation effects were measured using a questionnaire to determine participants' judgments as a result of frequent viewing of a specific genre, transporting oneself into the narratives, and overall enjoyment of that particular genre. The researchers argued that since genre specific content has similar themes rooted in the same values and morals, viewers who regularly tend to favor a particular genre, will not only be exposed to the same messages within the different narratives, but will also eventually accept those messages, morals and values as their own.

Due to the persuasive implications of cultivation effects, researchers have also noted concern of viewing genre specific media, romantically themed messages in particular, and the varying levels of influence the content may have on viewers with limited to no experience in romantic relationships (Hefner, 2011). For example, similar to the argument presented by Bilandzic and Busselle (2008), Hefner (2011) suggests heavy viewers of romantic comedies may

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eventually accept the values and ideals about love and romantic relationships that are recurrent in the narratives as normal and transferable to real-life situations. Hence, using film as a medium to perpetuate romantically themed narratives along with the lack of experience in romantic relationships allows viewers to be unconsciously taught what to think and how to behave according to the values communicated through the messages (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2008; Hernandez, 2012). Bachen and Illouz (1996) posit that frequent exposure increases the chance that adolescents will believe the messages because the depictions of these romantic relationships have elements that reflect actual relationships. Scholars have expressed concern about cultivation effects on children and adolescents, especially when considering films as a medium to communicate messages about love and romantic relationships, due to their susceptibility of believing messages (Zhou & Zhu, 2004) coupled with limited to no real-life experience (Gerbner et al., 1980, 1994; Hefner, 2011; Klein, Shiffman, & Welka, 2000). In fact, Hernandez (2012) analyzed cultivation effects on 248 participants consisting of both male and female college students by distributing questionnaires that focused on attitudes toward dating when watching romantically themed films. Overall, females were found to be more apt to express romantic beliefs than male students. Segrin and Nabi (2002) surveyed 285 college students to see if media consumption translated into holding idealistic perceptions regarding marriage and intentions of whether or not to get married. The researchers discovered that those who viewed more romantically themed programs in comparison to overall media consumption demonstrated more idealistic views about long-term romantic relationships, and wished to marry while young so as to enjoy their 'happily ever after.' This concept was confirmed in later studies as well (Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Segrin and Nabi (2002) suggest two possibilities to explain how these beliefs were cultivated: personal experience within one's family and

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exposure to media with romantically themed content, specifically fairy tales and Disney movies, as a child. The researchers state, “the presentation of marriage in children’s media (i.e. Disney movies, fairy tales) cultivates a ‘happily ever after’ schema that continues to grow and develop such that it then guides media exposure in later years” (Segrin & Nabi, 2002, p. 260).

Many children and adolescents have access to animated films, Disney Princess films included (Klein et al., 2000; Orenstein 2006). Considering animated films are recommended for the general audience (rated G) or with parental guidance (rated PG), parents typically perceive Disney as providing wholesome, quality entertainment for the entire family (Buckingham, 1997). The complex concepts of love and romantic relationships are simplified so both young children and adults can understand the overarching romantic themes (Silverman, 2009). Viewers (both children and adolescents) are more likely to casually watch these films and be absorbed in the narrative rather than to critically analyze the overall premise (Green & Brock, 2002; Slater, Rouner, & Long, 2006). As a result, they may be unaware of the messages being cultivated through the narratives and how they are cognitively being processed. According to England and colleagues (2011), characteristics of gender role portrayals within the Disney princesses and princes have evolved over time, including representations within romantic relationships.

For this reason, cultivation theory is appropriate for this thesis because it helps to explain how these repeated messages were internalized during socialization (Cohen & Weimann, 2000; England et al., 2011; Gerbner, 1998; Hernandez, 2012; Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Holmes, 2009), and how attitudes and beliefs are still relevant for college students in late adolescence (18 to early twenties) (Cohen & Weimann, 2000; Smetana et al. 2006). Also, considering Disney Princess films are accessible (Klein et al., 2000; Orenstein 2006), and contain portrayals of reoccurring themes such as finding love at first sight, experiencing true

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love's kiss, and living happily ever after (Richardson, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Tanner, Haddock & Zimmerman, 2003), it is appropriate to explore how the Disney Princess Brand, consisting of 11 films, affects perceptions of college students in late adolescence concerning formation and maintenance of romantic relationships. Therefore, I propose the following:

H1: Heavy viewers of Disney Princess films are more likely to express idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships in comparison to light viewers.

RQ1: Are heavy viewers of both early and middle Disney Princess films more likely to hold idealistic beliefs as a result of watching early and middle Disney Princess films?

RQ2: Are heavy viewers of current Disney Princess films more likely to hold idealistic beliefs as a result of watching current Disney Princess films?

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory has been included in several studies as a theoretical framework (Bandura, 2001; Bissell, 2004; Bussey & Bandura 1999; de Souza & Sherry, 2006; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Hefner, 2011; Hoffner 1996; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, Stockdale, 2013; Shafer, 2012; Tian & Hoffner, 2010; Wilson, Smith, Potter, Kunkel, Linz, Colvin, Donnerstein, 2002; Zhang & Tan, 2011; Zwier, 2012). Derived from social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) was constructed to incorporate cognitive aspects such as attention, retention, production, and motivation in order to explain and explore how individuals learn social behavior through direct experiences as well as observations of others (Bandura, 2001; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Zhang & Tan, 2011). Unlike direct experiences, observational learning allows individuals to view a situation or message and then cognitively process what occurred and how respondents

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reacted in the situation (Bandura, 2001; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Holmes & Johnson, 2009). Depending on the observer's cognitive development, an individual's attention to an action or message will increase if there is a higher level of relevance or significance to the individual (Bandura, 2002). If perceived to be of importance, then the individual will likely retain, or remember, the model (Bandura, 2001), thus assisting to shape epistemological beliefs (Shafer, 2012). It can also be recalled as a reference, or blueprint, of how to behave, which can transfer to actual behavior if internally motivated (Bandura, 2001). Observers will perceive some actions or messages to be more favorable and have benefits that outweigh the costs, thus being motivated to enact the behavior themselves (Bandura, 2001; Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

As stated previously, epistemological values and behaviors can be learned through both direct experience and observation of others, especially if messages are simplistic, rewarding, and repeated (Bandura, 2001). This includes both positive and negative representations depicted in the media symbolically (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963; Hefner, 2011; Hoffner, 1996). For example, messages about gender role development and romantic relationships can influence perceptions regarding what is appropriate and socially acceptable depending on the saliency of the messages and the motivation to retain and integrate this as a learned behavior (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Holmes & Johnson, 2009). These representations can act as a model, or blueprint, of what is considered to be an ideal romantic relationship, how it is obtained, and what are characteristics to look for in a mate (Holmes & Johnson, 2009). Eyal and Rubin (2003) suggest selective exposure to particular content (i.e. romance or romantic genres) on television can impact individuals since the narratives repeat similar messages. Holmes and Johnson (2009) confirmed this notion by discovering that participants, who were not currently in a romantic relationship and were also considered to be heavy consumers of television, expressed higher

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expectations of qualities found in a romantic partner and in a romantic relationship. In a separate study by Johnson and Holmes (2009) the researchers also state, “individuals may actively observe media portrayals of behaviors in romantic relationships for insight into how they themselves could behave in their own relationships” (Johnson & Holmes, 2009, p. 353). This is especially true if observers perceive similarities between themselves and the characters within the media because it indicates the possibility of attaining similar rewards (i.e. behaving in a certain way to have an ideal romantic relationship like the media character), thus making it more desirable to attend, retain, and produce those messages (Bandura, 2001; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Tian & Hoffner, 2010).

Motivation to be more similar to media characters extends from childhood to adolescence as well, especially if similar demographics are shared (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Hefner, 2011; Padilla-Walker et al., 2013). For example, children are able to learn both aggressive and altruistic behavior if the media characters are attractive and similar (i.e. same sex) in addition to if the actions are repeatedly rewarded or at least not chastised (Bandura et al., 1963; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Bissell, 2004; Hefner, 2011; Hicks, 1965; Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Padilla-Walker et al., 2013; Shafer, 2012; Strasburger, Jordan, & Donnerstein, 2010; Wilson et al., 2002). Padilla-Walker and colleagues (2013) analyzed prosocial behaviors of Disney characters within the animated films and found that children are more likely to be motivated to act altruistically because the characters’ behaviors were not associated with punishment, even though the presence of rewards were missing as well (Padilla-Walker et al., 2013, p. 408). Similarly, adolescents are more likely to learn under the same conditions; however, they start to bring in preexisting values established during childhood (i.e. gender roles for males and females) that impact the motivation to enact on learned behaviors (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Moyer-Gusé,

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2008). As a result, if adolescents perceive observed behaviors modeled by media characters as being similar, attractive, and rewarded, then they are more likely to desire to be more like the media characters by participating in behavior that will offer similar results (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). This notion extends to individuals viewing idealistic romantic relationships that portray the couple as constantly being rewarded through motifs such as finding love at first sight, experiencing true love's kiss, and living happily ever after (Hefner, 2011). In fact, in a study by Hefner (2011), it was discovered that romantic comedies with motifs mentioned previously, showcased narratives with characters that were seldom punished, but rather rewarded, thus allowing viewers to accept and perform idealistic romantic behaviors similar to the ones portrayed by the characters observed. Themes such as love at first sight, experiencing true love's kiss, love finds a way, one and only or soul mate, idealization of partner, and living happily ever after are also present in Disney Princess films (Richardson, 2012; Whelan, 2012). If the viewer recognizes similarities between themselves and the media characters (i.e. Disney princesses), then the viewer may find it appropriate to relate to the character since the desired result is obtainable (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). For instance, a female viewer, who happens to be single, watching a Disney Princess film featuring one of the princesses, may consciously or unconsciously use the princess as a model of how to behave if the narrative later depicts the princess in a romantic relationship. This would occur because the viewer would initially perceive herself to be similar to the princess. Similarity can be associated with physical attributes as well as values and beliefs. To maintain this sense of similarity between the princess, the viewer may desire to have a romantic relationship that resembles the one depicted in the film, which is associated with wishful identification. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

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H2: Individuals expressing idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships are more likely to perceive themselves as similar to a Disney princess.

Wishful Identification

Identification studies, which were originally concerned with developmental stages of children forming self-identities, were later modified to include the influence of the media and its characters on individuals (Cohen, 2001). Past theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Erik Erikson, and Kenneth Burke have addressed the concept of identification from various perspectives (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Specifically focusing on communication, Kenneth Burke (1969) operationalized identification within the context of a narrative and its association to persuasion. Recently, the argument regarding identification pertains to the possibility of children and adolescents internalizing repetitive messages from exposure to media characters (Cohen, 2001). Essentially, identification involves viewers temporarily transporting themselves into the narrative and connecting with media characters on a cognitive and emotional level. Wishful identification, on the other hand is concerned with looking up to or desiring to be like a character, which includes imagining oneself as the character and trying to emulate certain behaviors demonstrated (Bandura, 2001; Giles, 2002; Hoffner, 1996; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Lonial & Van Auken, 1986; Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

For example, Hoffner (1996) found that young girls are more likely to identify with attractive characters they wish to be like, while young boys identify more with characters that are perceived to be strong, which confirmed the results from a previous study by Reeves and Greenberg (1977). Also, individuals are likely to identify with characters that have traits they wish to possess, such as being more outgoing. Overall, wishful identification increases if the characters represented through the media (i.e. television and film) model behavior that is

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considered to be attractive or similar to the observer (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Tian & Hoffner, 2010) and is expected to promise a reward versus a punishment (Padilla-Walker et al., 2013; Shafer, 2012). Similar to social cognitive theory, viewers rely on these requirements to deem whether the desire is appropriate and transferable into an obtainable goal (Tian & Hoffner, 2010).

Typically, long-term wishful identification to a media character occurs as a result of cultivation taking place first. This is measured using a Likert type scale, which allows participants to indicate how closely they agree with statements like, “I wish I could be more like the character...I would like to do the kinds of things the character or personality does on the program” (Eyal & Rubin, 2003, p. 98). Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) used statements such as these in questionnaires filled out by 208 young adults to indicate respondents’ perceptions and reactions toward favorite male and female fictional media characters shown on television. Results showed participants having higher levels of wishful identification with characters who were of the same sex and gender, as well as those who shared similar attitudes (Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005). Wishful identification is relevant for young adults, adolescents, and children due to possible media effects.

The Walt Disney Company has specifically been criticized for promoting its ideologies through films, particularly the Disney Princess films, and the potential negative media effects associated as a result (Sweeney, 2011). Most notably, Henry A. Giroux argues, “the dreams generated by Disney are not innocent and must be interrogated for the futures they envision, the values they promote, and the forms of identifications they offer” (Giroux, 2010, p. 7). By using the films to bring awareness of the brand, young viewers are able to admire their favorite princess by singing their songs from the films, wearing Disney Princess apparel to school,

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accessorizing and dressing up in costumes, as well as playing with dolls and dreaming of having a life like their favorite princess, thus cultivating certain values and ideas of not only what to buy and play with, but also who they should aspire to be through wishful identification (Wohlwend, 2009). However, this is not just limited to children. As noted previously, wishful identification is also pertinent to adolescents and young adults as well. For example, wishful identification as a child can transition from admiration as an adolescent or young adult into an obtainable goal by meeting their version of Prince Charming and having a fantasy wedding (Levine, 2005). With this being said, the following hypotheses is applied:

H3: Individuals expressing idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships are more likely to engage in wishful identification with Disney princesses.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

Past research has explored media effects on individuals with a focus specifically on uses and gratifications (Arnett, Lars, & Offer, 1995; Baruh, 2009; Fuller, 2012; Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973; McKenna & Bargh, 2000) or in combination with other theoretical backgrounds (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Hefner, 2011; Hernandez, 2012; Hesse-Biber, 2006; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010; Osborn, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2008). For instance, Hesse-Biber (2006) investigated the association between media effects and issues related to eating disorders and body image using social comparison theory, objectification theory, cultivation theory and uses and gratification. Wang, Fink, and Cai (2008) utilized uses and gratifications to explain parasocial interactions between individuals and media characters. Oliver and Bartsch (2010) also extended research of uses and gratifications and specified it to entertainment gratifications, which emphasizes consumer enjoyment and appreciation of film. Along the same lines of enjoying media, Fuller's (2012) findings suggest viewers desiring to

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fulfill a particular gratification are more likely to favor genre specific content. Amusement and appreciation typically increases when individuals view content that is within a genre one already enjoys. For instance, female media consumers who enjoy dramas and daytime soap operas tend to watch this genre for arousal, companionship, relaxation, or temporal escape from reality (Fuller, 2012; Rubin & Rubin, 1982). Specifically focusing on romantic relationships portrayed in media, Osborn (2012) implemented social exchange theory, cultivation theory, and uses and gratifications to explore the amount of exposure to romantically themed media and beliefs held of 392 married participants about portrayals of love relationships. The researchers discovered heavy viewers of romantically themed content not only held beliefs consistent with what was depicted, but also had “lower marital commitment, higher expected and perceived costs of marriage, and more favorable perceptions of alternatives to one’s current relationship” (Osborn, 2012, p. 739). Gratification of cultivated idealistic love relationships stimulated by romantically themed media is not limited to married females. Researchers such as Segrin and Nabi (2002) used cultivation theory and uses and gratifications to evaluate survey responses from college students about their perceptions on dating after being exposed to romantic films. Similarly, Hefner (2011) used social cognitive theory, cultivation theory, and uses and gratifications to explore representations of ideal romantic relationships within romantic comedies and the epistemological beliefs adolescents held as a result of viewing these kinds of films. It is important to explore not only what epistemological beliefs and values are being cultivated, but also how consumers are satisfying a particular need. The study by Hefner (2011) serves as a model for the current thesis.

Similar to wishful identification, uses and gratification is not a passive process like cultivation theory (Arnett et al., 1995; Rubin, 1994), but instead requires active engagement on

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behalf of the viewer selecting the media programs (Katz et al., 1973). This is dependent on the viewer's preferences, personality, and self-socialization (Arnett et al., 1995). Developed by sociologists Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch, uses and gratifications is concerned with explaining why people use the media and what needs are being met by using it (Katz et al., 1973). Originally, this was limited to traditional media such as print, radio, television and film; however, recent studies have expanded the research to include the Internet, social media, and instant messaging (McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). Essentially, by using media, the users are expecting some sort of benefit in exchange for time spent (Fuller, 2012; Katz et al., 1973). Various motivations of why individuals use media including the following: educational purposes, exploration of personal identity, stimulation, escapism, entertainment, or habit (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Fuller, 2012; Hefner, 2011; Rubin, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1982). This can be based on an individual's social cognitive development and emotive feelings, thus shaping one's disposition toward certain media depending on how effective the individual thinks the content will satisfy desires (Hefner, 2011; Rubin, 2002). Social cognitive development, emotive feelings, and personal utility can explain why individuals consume romantic media content (Barton, 2009; Fuller, 2012; Hefner, 2011; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006).

Some scholars suggest films with romantic themes are viewed only because it offers a form of escape from reality (Fuller, 2012; Greenwood, 2008; Rubin, 1981; Rubin & Rubin, 1982); however, research also suggests romantic films offer an example of a future that viewers not only aspire for, but also perceive as obtainable (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009). For example, participants, who indicated as being either single or in a relationship, were evaluated on topic preferences based on what they read via online magazines in a study by Knobloch-

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Westerwick and colleagues (2009). Results indicated those within an unhappy romantic relationship spent less time reading articles with romantically themed content that had headlines like “Relationship & Marriage” in comparison to participants who reported being single and unhappy. Consumption of romantically themed content was determined upon two different motivations: escapism from those who expressed unhappiness within current relationship and hope for a similar future, or exploration of personal identity, by those who were single and unhappy (Knobloch-Westerwick et al., 2009). Viewing romantically themed content through narratives in films can also gratify the need to see examples of obtainable futures, exploration of personal identity, by indulging in fantasies and nostalgia (Hoffman, 2006), which Smith (1981) notes as being particularly motivating for children and adolescents. Findings from these studies highlight not only the importance of cultivated values shared in program specific content, but also individual’s social cognitive processes involved and personal utility based on how one interprets content. Segrin and Nabi (2002) suggest individuals may have idealistic beliefs regarding romantic relationships due to exposure to romantically themed content, specifically fairy tales and Disney movies, as a child. Consequently, consumer enjoyment and appreciation of these films during childhood may cause individuals to be predisposed toward romantic themes via Disney movies, particularly Disney Princess films. Furthermore, motivations to watch Disney Princess films as a college student may be for educational purposes, exploration of personal identity, stimulation, escapism, entertainment, or habit depending on the viewer’s social cognitive development, cultivated ideals, and intentions for personal utility to gratify a need. With this in mind, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H4: Idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships will be held among viewers who indicate entertainment as a primary motivation for watching Disney Princess films.

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H5: Idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships will be held among viewers who indicate exploration of personal identity as a primary motivation for watching Disney Princess films.

Current Study

The current study explored the relationship between potential media effects as a result of watching Disney Princess films and expectations of romantic relationships. Findings are discussed in terms of cultivation theory, social cognitive theory, wishful identification, and uses and gratification theory. Five hypotheses and two research questions were constructed and used to assist with guiding analyses:

H1: Heavy viewers of Disney Princess films are more likely to express idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships in comparison to light viewers.

H2: Individuals expressing idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships are more likely to perceive themselves as similar to a Disney princess.

H3: Individuals expressing idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships are more likely to engage in wishful identification with Disney princesses.

H4: Idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships will be held among viewers who indicate entertainment as a primary motivation for watching Disney Princess films.

H5: Idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships will be held among viewers who indicate exploration of personal identity as a primary motivation for watching Disney Princess films.

RQ1: Are heavy viewers of both early and middle Disney Princess films more likely to hold idealistic beliefs as a result of watching early and middle Disney Princess films?

RQ2: Are heavy viewers of current Disney Princess films more likely to hold idealistic beliefs as a result of watching current Disney Princess films?

Method

Participants

Participants consisted of female undergraduate students enrolled at Virginia Tech who are in late adolescence (18 – 23 years of age) ($N = 110$). This age range was selected because research has found that loyalty to the messages and tales of Disney princesses and the overall brand extends past childhood and into late adolescence (Smetana et al., 2006). Furthermore, subjects within this age group are still susceptible to being influenced by media messages regarding love and romantic relationships (Zhou & Zhu, 2004), especially if they have limited to no real-life experience (Gerbner et al., 1980, 1994; Hefner, 2011; Klein et. al, 2000). Participants' mean age was 19.73 years ($SD = 1.13$). The majority of the sample included White/Caucasian females (73.6% of participants, $n = 81$). (See Table 1 and Table 2 for a full list of descriptive statics). Of the sample size, 44.5% ($n = 49$) participants indicated that they were currently in a romantic relationship, 54.4% ($n = 60$) were currently not in a relationship and .9% ($n = 1$) did not indicate if she was currently in a romantic relationship or not. Of the sample, 13.6% ($n = 15$) had never been in a romantic relationship.

Questionnaire Instrument

A modified version of the questionnaire used in the study by Hefner (2011) was utilized for this thesis. Originally the questionnaire was used to examine the possibility of romantic comedies promoting idealistic romantic beliefs to youth. Instead of romantic comedies, the current study used the questionnaire to explore whether Disney Princess films encourage romantic ideals amongst youth. There are three sections to the questionnaire. Measures

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pertaining to opinions regarding romantic relationships are included in the first section. The second section has measures related to media exposure, specifically viewing Disney Princess films. Also, filler items with questions from the Adolescent Leisure Time Activity Scale (Yin, Katims, & Zapata, 1999) are included to control for any demand characteristics. For example, participants indicated how frequently they engage in leisure activities such as hanging out with friends along a 5-point semantic scale consisting of the following options: “never,” “yearly,” “monthly,” “weekly,” and daily. The third section has demographic questions to address control variables.

Reliability

Internal consistency of scale items that assess the same concept is measured using Cronbach’s alpha (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011, p. 53). The purpose of determining internal consistency is to ensure stability of inter-related items within the measurement. Acceptable values of reliability include .70 and above (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Romantic Beliefs

The Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS), originally created by Sprecher and Metts (1989), was implemented in the questionnaire to assess participants’ idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships. The original scale has an established Cronbach’s alpha (α) of .88 (Sprecher & Metts, 1999). Reliability in the current study was acceptable for the Romantic Beliefs Scale (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .79$). Perceptions based off four idealistic standards: “love finds a way, one and only or soul mate, idealization of partner, and love at first sight” (Sprecher & Metts, 1989, p. 387) are evaluated using the Romantic Beliefs Scale. Sample items for love finds a way include “If a relationship I have was meant to be, any obstacle (i.e., lack of money, physical distance, career conflicts) can be overcome” and “If I love someone, I know I can make the relationship

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work, despite any obstacles.” Standards about one and only or soul mate consist of sample items like “I believe that to be truly in love is to be in love forever” and “I expect that in my relationship, romantic love will really last; It won’t fade with time.” Idealization of partner consists of sample items including “The relationship I will have with my ‘true love’ will be nearly perfect” and “The person I love will make a perfect romantic partner; for example, he/she will be completely accepting, loving, and understanding.” Standards about love at first sight contain sample items such as “I need to know someone for a period of time before I fall in love with him or her” and “When I find my ‘true love’ I will probably know it soon after we meet.” Participants indicated how closely they agreed with each sample item along a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Responses were summed to form a combined score of romantic beliefs.

Measures for Media Exposure

The second section has measures related to overall movie exposure, movie genre preference, exposure to media with romantically themed content, media exposure specifically focusing on Disney Princess films, motives for watching movies, perceived similarities between viewers and characters, and wishful identification with characters.

Overall movie exposure. To control for frequency, participants marked how often they watch movies per week within four categories (movies on Ipod/Phone, movies on DVD/VHS/On Demand, movies on Television, and movies showing at the theater). Participants had the option to specify frequency along a range starting with “once a week” to “seven or more times a week” within each of the categories mentioned.

Movie genre preference. A hypothetical scenario was presented in the questionnaire with directions for participants to choose which type of genre they would watch if given two hours of

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free time. Participants had the option of ranking eight movie genres according to individual preferences, with (1) representing the genre they would choose first in comparison to (8), which is the genre they probably would not choose. Genres included science fiction, documentary, action, non-action drama, foreign, horror, romantic comedy, and Disney animation. Participants' indication of Disney animation was used to determine how appealing Disney Princess films are in relation to other genres.

Exposure to media with romantically themed content. Items regarding exposure to media with romantically themed content were included in the questionnaire as filler items. These were originally used in two separate studies (Aloni & Bernieri, 2004; Segrin & Nabi, 2002) to explore the relationship between media use and participants' beliefs regarding romantic relationships. Aloni and Bernieri (2004) used three items: reading romance novels or relationship self-help books, viewing television programs that focus specifically on dating and watching romantically themed films (Aloni & Bernieri, 2004, p. 289). Segrin and Nabi (2002) used soap operas and romantic comedies as examples in their study for media content with romantic themes. The current study includes these items from Aloni and Bernieri (2004) and Segrin and Nabi (2002) in the questionnaire as filler items to represent exposure to romantically themed media. Participants indicated how closely they agreed with each sample item along a 7-point Likert scale from "strongly dislike" to "strongly like."

Exposure to Disney Princess films. Exposure to Disney Princess films was measured by participants' indication of viewing films from various genres. As noted by Hefner (2011) the list of films enabled respondents to determine if they had seen the movie prior to partaking in the study, along with whether the genre is of interest to them. This list consists of all 11 Disney Princess films and 28 top-grossing movies from 2009 to 2013 representing various genres, such

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as horror, Disney animation, romantic comedy, and action (Box Office Mojo, 2014). Films were randomly selected within the criteria and are used as filler items within the questionnaire.

Participants specified how frequently they have seen a particular film along a 4-point semantic scale consisting of the following options: “never,” “once,” “a few times,” and “many times.”

Participants’ responses to seeing the 11 Disney Princess films were summed to form a combined score of overall viewing of Disney Princess films. Individuals were considered as a heavy viewer of Disney Princess films if the score was greater than the mean ($M = 21.43$). This procedure to determine who is considered a heavy viewer is consistent with the study by Hefner (2011).

Motives for watching movies. Participants’ motives for viewing movies, particularly Disney Princess films was measured by using a revised scale constructed by Rubin (1983), which sought to describe why individuals watch television. The original scale has an established Cronbach’s alpha (α) of .84 (Rubin, 1983). Reliability in the current study was acceptable for assessing motives for watching films (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$). Statements regarding motives for watching Disney Princess films contain sample items such as “I watch Disney Princess movies because they entertain me” and “I watch Disney Princess movies so I can learn about what could happen to me.” Participants indicated how closely they agree with each sample item along a 7-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Responses were summed to form a combined score of entertainment and exploration of personal identity as motives for watching Disney Princess films. Questions were repeated for other genres, including horror, action, and romantic comedies that are included as filler items so participants would not discover the intent of the study.

Perceived similarities between viewers and characters. Perceived similarity between participants and the Disney princesses was evaluated using the Perceived Homophily Measure

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developed by McCroskey, Richmond and Daly (1975), which examined “attitude, morality, appearance, and background” (McCroskey et al., 1975, p. 323). The original scale has an established Cronbach’s alpha (α) of .95 (McCroskey et al., 1975). Reliability in the current study was acceptable for assessing perceived similarity (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .87$). In the current study, participants who distinguish similarities between themselves and media characters may believe similar rewards (i.e. behaving in a certain way to have an ideal romantic relationship like the media character) are attainable thus making it more desirable to be more attentive to the films, which can lead to retention and production of those messages as well as contribute to an increase in wishful identification (Bandura, 2001; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Moyer-Gusé; Tian & Hoffner, 2010).

The questionnaire included directions for participants to consider which Disney princess is their favorite and then rate how similar they consider themselves to be to that princess. For instance, if a female participant specified that her favorite Disney Princess movie is *Tangled* (2010), then she would rate how similar she is to Princess Rapunzel along a 7-point semantic differential scale. Items ranging from “behaves like me” to “doesn’t behave like me” and “romantic relationship is different from mine” to “romantic relationship is similar to mine” are examples of phrases participants rated in regard to perceived similarities. Participants indicated how closely they agree with adjectives along a 7-Point Likert scale. Responses were summed to form a combined score of perceived similarity to a Disney princess.

Wishful identification with characters. Statements adapted from a scale by Eyal and Rubin (2003) were used in the questionnaire to examine if participants desired to be more like the characters. The original scale has an established Cronbach’s alpha (α) of .93 (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Reliability in the current study was acceptable for assessing wishful identification

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(Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$). Originally, statements pertained to characters on television programs. The current study has modified these phrases to be specific to princesses from Disney Princess films. For instance, "I would like to do the kinds of things the Princess does in the movie" and "I wish I could be more like the Princess" are items used. Participants indicated how closely they agree with each sample item along a 7-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Responses were summed to form a combined score of wishful identification with Disney princesses.

Data Collection

Online surveys were administered through the Virginia Tech Communication Research Participation System using Qualtrics to measure the relationship between female undergraduate students' exposure to the 11 Disney Princess films and their beliefs about romantic relationships. The order of the questions presented within each scale was randomized to control for selection bias. Completion of the online survey took no longer than one hour. Subjects received course credit in exchange for voluntary participation. All participants were required to electronically sign a consent form prior to taking the online survey.

Results

The following section reports findings regarding descriptive variables, the five hypotheses and two research questions.

Analysis of descriptive variables.

Overall movie exposure. To control for frequent exposure to Disney Princess films, participants ($N=110$) marked how often they watch movies per week within four categories (movies on Ipod/Phone, movies on DVD/VHS/On Demand, movies on television, and movies showing at the theater). Results indicated participants on average watched 1.23 movies on their

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iPod/Phone per week ($SD = .65$). They viewed on average 2.54 films on DVD/VHS/On Demand per week ($SD = 1.37$). Respondents watched on average 2.17 movies on television per week ($SD = 1.23$). Participants on average viewed 1.4 movies at the theater per week ($SD = 1.04$).

Movie genre preference. A hypothetical scenario was presented in the questionnaire with directions for participants to choose which type of genre they would watch if given two hours of free time. Participants had the option of ranking eight movie genres according to individual preferences, with (1) representing the genre they would choose first in comparison to (8), which is the genre they probably would not choose. Of the subjects, 17.30% of participants ($n = 19$) indicated Disney Princess films as being their first genre of choice if given two hours of free time to watch a movie. Of the respondents, 33.64% ($n = 37$) marked Disney Princess films as being their second genre of choice. Of the participants, 13.64% ($n = 15$) marked Disney Princess films as being their third genre of choice, fourth (17.3%, $n = 19$), fifth (3.63%, $n = 4$), sixth (6.4%, $n = 7$), seventh (.90%, $n = 1$), and eighth (6.4%, $n = 7$). Of the participants, .9% ($n = 1$) did not rank the movie genres.

Exposure to media with romantically themed content. Items regarding exposure to media with romantically themed content were included in the questionnaire as filler items. Results indicated 20% of participants ($n = 22$) “strongly liked” to read romance novels ($M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.89$). Of the subjects, 1.82% ($n = 2$) reported “strongly liking” relationship/self-help books ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.56$). Of the respondents, 37.27% of participants ($n = 41$) were found to “strongly like” watching romantic movies ($M = 5.86$, $SD = 1.32$). Of the subjects, 10.91% of participants ($n = 12$) indicated that they “strongly like” watching reality-based TV shows about relationships ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.82$). No respondents indicated that they “strongly like” watching afternoon soap operas ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 1.35$).

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Exposure to Disney Princess films. Exposure to Disney Princess films was measured by participants' indication of viewing all 11 Disney Princess films. Participants were asked to indicate how often they had seen each film from "never" to "many times" if they had watched the film on numerous occasions (4 or more times). The findings revealed 32.73% of participants ($n = 36$) indicated having seen *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) many times ($M = 3.15$, $SD = .72$). Of the subjects, 49.09% of respondents ($n = 54$) indicated having seen *Cinderella* (1950) many times ($M = 3.40$, $SD = .67$). *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) was marked as being viewed many times by 39.09% of participants ($n = 43$, $M = 3.05$, $SD = .92$). Of the participants, 60% ($n = 66$) reported watching *The Little Mermaid* (1989) many times ($M = 3.49$, $SD = .71$). *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) was marked as being viewed many times by 54.55% of participants ($n = 60$, $M = 3.37$, $SD = .81$). Of the respondents, 51.82% ($n = 57$) of participants indicated seeing *Aladdin* (1992) many times ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .783$). Results indicated 44.5% of respondents ($n = 49$) marked having seen *Pocahontas* (1995) many times ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .85$). *Mulan* (1998) was indicated as being viewed many times by 60.91% of participants ($n = 67$, $M = 3.44$, $SD = .81$). Of the subjects, 25.5% ($n = 28$) of participants noted watching *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) many times ($M = 1.86$, $SD = .94$). Findings show 25.5% of participants ($n = 28$) have seen *Tangled* (2010) many times ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.12$). Of the participants, 1.8% ($n = 2$) indicated seeing *Brave* (2012) many times ($M = 1.61$, $SD = .77$).

Hypothesis 1: Analysis of heavy viewers and idealistic beliefs. The first hypothesis predicted heavy viewers of Disney Princess films would be more likely to express idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships in comparison to light viewers. Individuals were considered as a heavy viewer of Disney Princess films if the score was greater than the mean ($M = 21.43$, $SD = 5.68$). A Pearson point-biserial correlation coefficient was computed to assess the

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relationship between participants who were heavy viewers of Disney Princess films and participants' idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships. There was no significant correlation between the two variables, $r(60) = .05, p = .69$. Overall, H1 was not supported since there was no significant correlation between heavy viewers and idealistic beliefs.

Hypothesis 2: Analysis of perceived similarity and idealistic beliefs. The second hypothesis posited individuals expressing idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships are more likely to perceive themselves as similar to a Disney princess. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to measure the relationship between participants' perceived similarity and participants' idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships. There was no significant correlation between the two variables, $r(108) = .15, p = .11$. Overall, H2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3: Analysis of wishful identification and idealistic beliefs. The third hypothesis predicted individuals expressing idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships are more likely to engage in wishful identification with Disney princesses. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to measure the relationship between wishful identification and participants' idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships. There was a significant correlation between the two variables, $r(108) = .26, p = .01$. Overall, H3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4: Analysis of entertainment as motivation and idealistic beliefs. The fourth hypothesis posited idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships would be held among viewers who indicate entertainment as a primary motivation for watching Disney Princess films. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between

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entertainment and idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships. There was no significant correlation between the two variables, $r(108) = .07, p = .45$. Overall, H4 was not supported.

Hypothesis 5: Analysis of exploration of personal identity as motivation and idealistic beliefs. The fifth hypothesis predicted idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships would be held among viewers who indicate exploration of personal identity as a primary motivation for watching Disney Princess films. A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between exploration of personal identity and idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships. There was no significant correlation between the two variables, $r(108) = .14, p = .13$. Overall, H5 was not supported.

Research Question 1: Heavy viewers of early and middle films and idealistic beliefs. RQ1 asked if heavy viewers of both early and middle Disney Princess films are more likely to hold idealistic beliefs as a result of watching early and middle Disney Princess films. Individuals were considered as a heavy viewer of early and middle Disney Princess films if the score was greater than the mean ($M = 18.48, SD = 4.73$). A Pearson point-biserial correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between participants who were heavy viewers of early and middle Disney Princess films and participants' idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships. There was no significant correlation between the two variables, $r(29) = -0.13, p = .49$. Overall, RQ1 was not supported.

Research Question 2: Heavy viewers of current films and idealistic beliefs. RQ2 asked if heavy viewers of current Disney Princess films are more likely to hold idealistic beliefs as a result of watching current Disney Princess films. Individuals were considered as a heavy viewer of current Disney Princess films if the score was greater than the mean ($M = 2.95, SD = 2.24$). A Pearson point-biserial correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between

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participants who were heavy viewers of current Disney Princess films and participants' idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships. There was no significant correlation between the two variables, $r(57) = -0.15, p = .27$. Overall, RQ2 was not supported.

Discussion

This thesis sought to explore the relationship between potential media effects of watching Disney Princess films and participants' expectations of romantic relationships. Prior research has explored similar concepts pertaining to media effects and Disney Princess films. However, no studies to date have examined the potential correlation between media effects of all 11 Disney Princess films and viewers' expectations regarding romantic relationships with a theoretical background in cultivation theory, social cognitive theory, wishful identification, and uses and gratification theory. Five hypotheses and two research questions were constructed and used to assist with guiding analyses. This study lays the foundation for future research to explore possible relationships between media effects and idealistic beliefs using different methodological designs.

Past researchers have suggested that the media, including Disney Princess films, portray distorted representations of romantic relationships because they are highly idealistic and show the development of the relationships progressing quickly, thus disseminating false models of how to think and behave in forming successful romantic relationships along with encouraging unrealistic expectations of romantic partners (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Eggermont, 2004; England et al., 2009; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Lockhart, 2000; Richardson, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Tanner et al., 2003). Idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships center around reoccurring concepts such as love at first sight, experiencing true love's kiss, and living happily ever after. Love at first sight is described as the moment when the characters see one another and start to

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develop feelings of liking, longing, or love for the other, thus indicating the start of a romantic relationship (Richardson, 2012; Whelan, 2012). True love's kiss is when couples publicly express mutual feelings for another through their first kiss. Living happily ever after denotes the climax of a romantic relationship as the couple is presumed to live in marital bliss. In addition to these themes, romantic beliefs are also associated with idealization of partner, having a soul mate, and overcoming any obstacle (Sprecher & Metts, 1989, p. 387). These concepts are not only featured in Disney Princess films, but are also prevalent in media content with romantic themes such as novels, television, and films. Participants for the current study indicated "strongly liking" romance novels ($n = 22$), relationship/self-help books ($n = 2$), reality-based television shows about relationships ($n = 12$), and romantic movies ($n = 41$). Subjects' responses can possibly be an indication of the various channels disseminating romantic ideals as well as which medium is most popular for individuals seeking to gratify the desire for a narrative with romantic themes. Of these descriptive statistics, participants ($N = 110$) favored romantic movies more than the other channels, which are reflected in the number of hours spent watching films per week ($M = 3.66$, $SD = 1.99$). Keeping this in mind, this study attempted to find potential correlations between participants' idealist beliefs and various media effects.

The first hypothesis (H1) and the research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) were concerned with frequent viewership of all Disney Princess films and participants holding stronger idealistic beliefs in comparison to individuals who have not seen the films several times. Overall, there was no significant correlation between heavy viewers and idealistic beliefs, resulting in H1, RQ1 and RQ2 as not being supported.

These findings are inconsistent with the premise of cultivation theory. Essentially cultivation theory suggests individuals who are repeatedly exposed to media content over long

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periods of time should start to accept epistemological values and beliefs that are similar to the ones being portrayed through the narratives (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980). For instance, the Cultural Indicators project by George Gerbner in 1969 focused on negative beliefs being nurtured as a result of individuals frequently watching news programs that were biased in featuring high crime rates that were not representative of society. This is called the mean world syndrome. Expanding beyond its origins, cultivation theory is applicable to concepts outside of the mean world syndrome. The principle of the theory is that viewers cognitively process messages through media consumption, so based on the frequency of exposure to media messages being disseminated, individuals may perceive the world and construct judgments of it based on what they watch, including media with romantic content (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Gerbner, 1969, 1970; Gerbner et al., 1980; Gerbner, 1998; Shanahan & Morgan, 1999; Hammermeister et al., 2005; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010; Potter, 1993). Considering Disney Princess films perpetuate romantically themed ideals (Segrin & Nabi, 2002), and that several children and adolescents have access to these animated films (Klein et al., 2000; Orenstein 2006), it is possible that repeated exposure during youth could lead to viewers adopting these ideals (Bachen & Illouz, 1996). For example, participants in the current study indicated watching on average 2.32 films via DVD/VHS/On Demand per week ($SD = 1.16$) and 2.27 movies on television per week ($SD = .99$). Disney Princess films are available due to rerelease from The Walt Disney Company's cartoon library, called the Disney Vault (Murray 2005; Weber, 2002; Wohlwend, 2009) in addition to being shown on television networks owned by The Walt Disney Company such as ABC and ABC Family. These films are still available for individuals to watch, so idealistic beliefs from the films are still being shown, which is why H1 and RQ1 and RQ2 focused on

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frequent viewership of all Disney Princess films and participants holding stronger idealistic beliefs. Despite exposure, H1 was not supported.

There are several reasons of why this may be the case. To start, it is possible that there is an error in the design of the study. An online cross-sectional survey was administered to female undergraduate students ($N = 110$). Participants completing the survey could have had trouble recalling their viewership of Disney Princess films during childhood due to reading a list of films that included 11 Disney Princess films and 28 top-grossing movies from 2009 to 2013 representing various genres, such as horror, Disney animation, romantic comedy, and action (Box Office Mojo, 2014). Future research should consider including pictures of the princesses from each movie along with the movie title so participants could have a better chance of recognizing and recalling the films.

Another possibility for this hypothesis not being supported could be related to first order and second order cultivation. First order cultivation is reliant on memory, recency and saliency of messages from the media, whereas second order cultivation indicates if those messages were successfully persuasive. Considering all participants were in late adolescence (18 – 23 years of age), it could be that participants are less motivated to frequently watch these films for romantically themed content when other genres, like romantic comedies, offer similar idealistic values with characters that are not animated and therefore more realistic. Motives are associated with uses and gratifications theory, which is concerned with explaining why people use the media and what needs are being met by using it (Katz et al., 1973). By choosing to watch a Disney Princess film, individuals are actively seeking ways to satisfy specific needs. Various motivations of why individuals would watch Disney Princess films include the following: educational purposes, exploration of personal identity, stimulation, escapism, entertainment, or

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habit (Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Fuller, 2012; Hefner, 2011; Rubin, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1982). This can be based on an individual's social cognitive development and emotive feelings, thus shaping one's disposition toward certain media depending on how effective the individual thinks the content will satisfy desires (Hefner, 2011; Rubin, 2002). Subsequently, social cognitive development, emotive feelings, and personal utility can explain why individuals consume media content, including Disney Princess movies (Barton, 2009; Fuller, 2012; Hefner, 2011; Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006).

The fourth (H4) and fifth hypotheses (H5) were specifically concerned with idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships and motivations to watch Disney Princess films. The fourth hypothesis (H4) predicted idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships would be held among viewers who indicate entertainment as a primary motivation for watching Disney Princess films. The fifth hypothesis (H5) posited idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships would be held among viewers who indicate exploration of personal identity as a primary motivation for watching Disney Princess films. Both H4 and H5 were not supported, which is particularly interesting. Possible explanations for H4 not being supported is that participants watch these films because they are entertaining, but do not actively seek to watch Disney Princess films specifically for romantically themed content, which is consistent with uses and gratifications theory. This theory is concerned with explaining why people use the media and what needs are being met by using it (Katz et al., 1973). Furthermore, it is not a passive process (Arnett et al., 1995; Rubin, 1994), but instead requires active engagement on behalf of the viewer selecting the media programs (Katz et al., 1973). If participants choose to watch these films to be entertained, then it could be unrelated to the romantic themes depicted. It could be that one person's perception of what is considered to be entertaining is not the same for all participants. For

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example, *Mulan* (1998) was indicated as being viewed many times by 60.91% of participants ($n = 67$, $M = 3.44$, $SD = .81$). Comments of why this film and the princess (Mulan) are participants' favorite include:

“I really like the music and I always laugh really hard. Mulan is a strong woman, and I thought it was cool that she was a warrior and also beautiful.”

These comments can possibly be explained as an alternative motive of what is considered to be entertaining. In this case, entertainment is unrelated to romantic relationships and idealistic beliefs, but rather related to music and laughter. Future research should consider providing concrete definitions of adjectives and statements on questionnaires to alleviate potential miscommunication. The fifth hypothesis (H5) identifies exploration of personal identity, or hope for obtaining a similar future, as being a motivating factor for watching the Disney Princess films. Possible explanations for H5 not being supported are that participants consider idealistic standards as being unrealistic and unobtainable. Potential theoretical implications of this hypothesis not being supported are that it also negates cultivation theory and wishful identification in relation to uses and gratifications theory. Essentially if idealistic standards are perceived as unrealistic and unobtainable, then participants were probably not influenced by these idealistic standards prior to completing the survey. Furthermore, since beliefs are potentially not cultivated, then participants may not want to be similar to the Disney princess and have a romantic relationship. As a result, gratification is not necessary.

The second hypothesis (H2) states individuals expressing idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships are more likely to perceive themselves as similar to a Disney princess. Specifically related to social cognitive theory and wishful identification, H2 predicted that if participants perceived observed behaviors modeled by the Disney princesses as being similar, attractive, and

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rewarded, then the desire to be more like the princesses would increase (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). Also, if participants recognized similarities between themselves and the princesses, then they may find it appropriate to relate to the character since the desired result of having a similar romantic relationship is obtainable (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Results indicated, however, that H2 was not supported. Potential reasons of why perceived similarity and idealistic beliefs were not related is because participants do not believe the romantic relationships portrayed in the films are realistic or obtainable. Similar to possible implications of why H5 may have not been supported, H2 may not have had any significant implications if participants were not influenced to believe idealistic standards prior to completing the survey. This is inconsistent with social cognitive theory, which posits that epistemological values and behaviors can be learned through both direct experience and observation of others, especially if messages are simplistic, rewarding, and repeated (Bandura, 2001). If idealistic beliefs are not cultivated, then desiring to be like a Disney princess and having a similar romantic relationship would not be rewarding, thus not worth modeling.

The third hypothesis (H3) predicted individuals expressing idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships are more likely to engage in wishful identification with Disney princesses. Wishful identification is when a child or adolescent aspires to be like the Disney princess. Results indicated a significant correlation between the two variables. For instance, one participant's response to describing her favorite Disney Princess can serve as an example of wishful identification with the princesses:

“My favorite Disney Princess film from my childhood would have to be Cinderella. I like this film because as a little girl I dreamed of being like Cinderella; beautiful and happy

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with the man of my dreams. This movie always would make me smile and give me hope that my prince charming was out there waiting for me.”

Wishful identification was assessed by participants' responses to how closely they agree with adjectives along a 7-Point Likert scale. Four items were included: “I wish I could be more like the Princess;” “I would like to do the kinds of things the Princess does in the movie;” “I wish I had a prince similar to the one (Princess's Name) has;” “I wish I could be in a romantic relationship like the Princess.” Of the 11 Disney Princess films, over 50% of participants noted having seen four of the films several times (four or more times). (See Table 3). *The Little Mermaid* (1989) was one of the four films participants had seen several times. This is interesting because of the 11 Disney Princess films, Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) was noted as being the princess the majority of participants wishfully identified with the most (16.51% of participants, $n = 18$), which is concerning because this film has been heavily scrutinized by researchers, parents, and critics. The proposed argument is that the narrative perpetuates gendered power relations through the damsel in distress motif (Downey, 1996; Tonn, 2008). Within the film, Ariel literally gives up her voice and changes her appearance in hopes that Prince Eric will rescue her by breaking a curse through ‘true love’s kiss.’ This reinforces the stereotypical concept of the woman’s role within a romantic relationship of being silent and valued only for her beauty (Tonn, 2008). Downey (1996) describes common themes found in the majority of Disney Princess films, including *The Little Mermaid* (1989). First, the Disney princesses seek to find love and eventually get married as a primary goal. Second, beauty is the essential quality associated with being a female. Third, all Disney princesses represent youth, which is equivalent with being ideal. Fourth, the princesses are not valued for voicing their

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opinion. Fifth, females are dependent upon the assistance of men by being saved. Lastly, patriarchy is valued in these films.

Possible implications of the messages being depicted from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) could be that females who desire to be like and have a romantic relationship similar to Ariel's, may have cultivated beliefs that females must change something about themselves and possibly lose their voice in the romantic relationship in order for it to be successful. This also offers false representations to males of how females should look and behave in regard to stereotypical gender roles within love relationships. Thus, it is possible that females who wishfully identify with Ariel may have cultivated beliefs of traditional gender roles within a romantic relationship. If females are exposed to this film as a child during socialization, then it is possible for the concept of stereotypical gender roles to be established at a young age through dramatic play (Rubin, 1982). According to Rubin (1982), dramatic play involves a child imagining a situation to satisfy personal needs and wishes. If preschool children engage in dramatic play by wearing Disney Princess apparel, accessorizing and dressing up in costumes, and playing with dolls, then they are acting out a situation they wish they had (Rubin, 1982; Wohlwend, 2009). According to social cognitive theory, observational learning would allow children to view a situation or message from *The Little Mermaid* (1989), cognitively process what occurred and then see how Ariel reacted in the situation (Bandura, 2001; Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005; Holmes & Johnson, 2009). Depending on cognitive development, the child's attention to an action or message will increase if the film is perceived to have higher level of relevance or significance (Bandura, 2002). If considered to be of importance, then the child will likely retain, or remember, the model (Bandura, 2001), thus assisting to shape epistemological beliefs (Shafer, 2012). These values and beliefs of gender roles and romantic relationships can then be recalled as a reference,

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or blueprint, of how to behave, which can transfer to actual behavior if internally motivated (Bandura, 2001). Potential societal implications are that females in late adolescence who wishfully identify with Ariel may have based their values of gender roles and romantic relationships upon personal physical beauty as result of viewing this film and engaging in dramatic play as a child. This may have negative consequences on formation and maintenance of romantic relationships because it is fundamentally based on skewed representations of how to think and behave (Bachen & Illouz, 1996; Eggermont, 2004; England et al., 2011; Johnson & Holmes, 2009; Lockhart, 2000; Richardson, 2012; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Tanner et al., 2003).

Considering the majority of participants noted having seen *The Little Mermaid* (1989) several times and that Ariel is their favorite princess, it could be that heavy exposure to this film is more salient to participants in comparison to viewing all Disney Princess films. Negative effects of wishfully identifying with the princess may include unrealistic expectations of female body images, idealistic qualities found in a romantic partner, and power structures of gender roles for both males and females. If this film is more salient with viewers, then values and beliefs of romantic relationships from watching *The Little Mermaid* (1989) could have more of an impact on the viewers' worldview in comparison to the other films, including *Brave* (2012), which does not feature a romantic relationship.

Possible negative effects are not limited to just viewing Disney Princess films. Cross mechanizing of products, such as Disney Princess dolls and costumes from the Disney Princess Brand may cultivate certain values and ideas of not only what to buy and play with, but also who they should aspire to be through wishful identification (Wohlwend, 2009). Exposure to images of Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* (1989) may also have a negative impact on youth, especially during different stages of cognitive development, including socialization (Cohen & Weimann,

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2000; England et al., 2011; Gerbner, 1998; Holmes & Johnson, 2009; Johnson & Holmes, 2009).

Several products with images of Ariel feature her as a human instead of a mermaid, which reinforces the notion that females have to look a certain way and are valued for their beauty.

Similarly, there has been recent criticism of The Walt Disney Company's decision to alter the portrayal of Merida from *Brave* (2012) as part of its marketing tactics for cross merchandizing of products. Some points of interest that differentiates this story from past fairytales, like *The Little Mermaid* (1989), are related to romanticism and gender roles. *Brave* (2012), although it does feature a princess, does not focus on the theme of love romantic relationships. Within the movie, Princess Merida is noticeably different from past Disney princesses, like Ariel, because of her appearance. In fact, she is described as having "messy hair and wearing a loose-fitting dress" (Ellis, 2013), which was applauded by opinion leaders and parents alike. However, Disney has recently been receiving negative criticism for Merida's appearance because of alterations made as part of the Company's marketing technique in May 2013. Cross merchandizing of products showcased Merida as wearing makeup, having long flowing curls, and wearing a form fitting dress that revealed larger breasts, a thinner waist, and a sash instead of her bow and arrow (Advertising Age, 2013). A petition was started on change.org, which currently has 262,195 signatures (Disney: Say no to the merida makeover, keep our hero brave, 2013). Opinion leaders, including the writer and co-director of the film, Brenda Chapman, have voiced their concern (Stand up for yourself, and mentor others, 2012). Chapman was originally quoted as saying "Because of marketing, little girls gravitate toward princess products, so my goal was to offer up a different kind of princess — a stronger princess that both mothers and daughters could relate to, so mothers wouldn't be pulling their hair out when their little girls were trying to dress or act like this princess. Instead they'd be like, 'Yeah, you go girl!'" (Samakow, 2013). After the

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change to Merida's appearance, she signed the petition and replied by saying "she found Merida's makeover irresponsible, atrocious, blatantly sexist, and mercenary" (Brenda chapman, 'brave' creator, calls merida's makeover 'atrocious' (update), 2013). Overall, several people from the general public were disgruntled with the decision of The Walt Disney Company to change the princess's appearance because these alterations made Princess Merida's appearance to be more 'feminine.' This is concerning because if stereotypical portrayals of gender roles and norms are maintained, especially within films that include romantic relationships, then future generations may wishfully identify with representations of the princesses based upon exposure to the movie and cross merchandizing of products from films.

Another possible implication of the significant correlation between wishful identification and idealistic beliefs are that participants desire to be more like the Disney princesses instead of already perceiving themselves as being similar to them. One possible explanation of why females would wishfully identify with princesses could be that they are not completely satisfied in the romantic relationship they have experienced so far. Of the subjects, 44.54% of participants ($n = 49$) indicated they were currently in a romantic relationship. From this population, only 16.4% of participants ($n = 18$) indicated being completely satisfied within their current relationship. It could be that females who are not completely satisfied may watch Disney Princess films and come to the conclusion that the princesses appear to be completely satisfied within the romantic relationship portrayed. If this is the case, then females could admire or wish to have a similar relationship as the princesses if they are not completely satisfied in their own personal love relationship. Similarly, of the participants, 13.6% specified as never having been in a romantic relationship ($n = 15$). It is possible that these individuals may also view the princesses within the films and conclude that they are completely satisfied within the romantic relationship being

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portrayed. If participants are unsatisfied with never being in a romantic relationship, then they may long for a similar and fully satisfying relationship as well.

Another probability is that females are dissatisfied because they hold idealistic beliefs of romantic relationships. Females who already have idealistic beliefs of love and romantic relationships could admire the princesses who exhibit attitudes and beliefs about love and romantic relationships that are similar to their personal values. If participants grew up watching Disney Princess films, then it is possible that their values and beliefs regarding love and romantic relationships may have been influenced as a result of watching these romantically themed narratives. If this is the case, then participants could probably recall the events that occurred within these narratives and romantic motifs portrayed (i.e. love at first sight, experiencing true love's kiss, love finds a way, one and only or soul mate, idealization of partner, and living happily ever after). If these motifs are salient with the viewer, then they may watch these films and wish to have similar romantic relationships as well. This notion is consistent with cultivation theory and social cognitive theory. Past research has confirmed adolescents start to bring in preexisting values as a result of ideals being cultivated during childhood (i.e. gender roles for males and females within romantic relationships) (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Moyer-Gusé, 2008). This will potentially impact motivation to enact on learned behaviors, especially if it is attractive and promises a similar reward. This could possibly lead to individuals desiring to be more like the princesses by participating in behavior that will offer similar results (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). This notion extends to individuals viewing idealistic romantic relationships that portray the couple as constantly being rewarded through motifs such as finding love at first sight, experiencing true love's kiss, and living happily ever after.

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Also, despite participants not believing the romantic relationships portrayed in the films are realistic or obtainable, they still wish for a similar experience. This concept is consistent with two previous studies. First, Segrin and Nabi (2002) proposed that idealistic beliefs are cultivated due to exposure to romantically themed content, specifically from fairy tales and Disney movies during childhood. Second, in an interview by Stone (1975), adult women expressed admiration of fairytale princesses and wished to be like them by having a similar romantic relationship that included having a prince and living happily ever.

From a public relations and marketing perspective, possible implications of individuals being able to wishfully identify with the princesses could benefit the Disney Princess Brand. Results from H3 indicate a significant correlation between idealistic beliefs and wishful identification with Disney princesses, which align with the goal of the official marketing and advertising campaign of the Disney Princess Brand. By using the films and cross merchandizing of the Disney princesses to bring awareness of the Disney Princess Brand, young customers are able to admire their favorite princess through purchasing products, thus cultivating certain values and ideas of not only what to buy and play with, but also who they should aspire to be through wishful identification (Wohlwend, 2009). Cultivated values may potentially translate from buying products to wear and play with as a child to being an adult desiring to have a romantic relationship similar to what is depicted in the films. Establishing a positive experience with the Disney Princess Brand through wishful identification during youth is likely to continue into adulthood, creating lifelong loyal customers who later influence their children to continue the cycle (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009; Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2000; Disney Princess, 2014; Forgacs, 1992; Rosenberg & Henderson, 2001; Valkenburg & Canto, 2001).

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This significant finding may also have practical implications regarding females wishfully identifying with Disney Princesses in terms of potential negative media effects. Past research has suggested the romantic motifs found in these movies cultivate idealistic beliefs that could negatively influence perceptions of love and romantic relationships. Researchers and the general public (i.e. viewers of Disney princess films, parents, and consumers of media) have expressed concerns of idealistic representations of romantic relationships. The primary argument supporting these concerns is summarized in a study by Müller-Hartmann (2007). Essentially, because the narratives of these animated films do not present an authentic view of reality, images can subconsciously impose ideas and values, which in turn can negatively affect viewers, children and adolescents, cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally. If females subconsciously rely on portrayals of love and romantic relationships represented in the films, then they could potentially form romantic relationships based off of desiring to have a relationship that reflects romantic motifs and idealistic beliefs perpetuated from the films. As a result, those who wishfully identify with the princesses may have unrealistic expectations of qualities found in a romantic partner and in a romantic relationship, which can potentially lead to not being completely satisfied in a romantic relationship.

Considering there are possible harmful effects of wishfully identifying with the princesses from the Disney Princess films, the following are some practical suggestions for parents, educators, or practitioners concerned about potential negative effects of Disney Princess films and other media on youth. First, since films are accessible via television, on the Internet, and rereleases, parents should watch these movies with their children and discuss the romantic themes represented. They should also ask their children questions about what they have learned from watching these films to assess media literacy. The goal of media literacy is for individuals

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to develop “media logic,” which means individuals are able to critically analyze the meaning of images and messages being endorsed as well as the various advertising techniques that are used to communicate these messages with the public (Hesse-Biber et al., 2006). Media literacy programs should also be included in the education system at all levels (preschool, elementary, middle, high school, and college) to make students aware of the effects of cultivation, wishful identification, and other media effects. Overall, these suggestions would educate females of potential media effects during different stages of cognitive development so as to eliminate or minimize harmful effects.

Limitations

The current study had several limitations. First, although possible explanations are suggested, causality cannot be determined since this thesis implemented correlation analysis to assess participants’ responses. This means that analysis cannot assume why and how Disney Princess films influence and reinforce idealistic beliefs about romantic relationships. Second, participants’ interpretation of how or why these messages are salient cannot be determined either, especially via a closed-ended online questionnaire with Likert scale items. A qualitative study with open-ended questions would be beneficial to determine the reasons why subjects wishfully identify with the princesses and idealistic beliefs.

Also, some limitations pertain to the design of the questionnaire. Participants completing the survey could have had trouble recalling their viewership of Disney Princess films during childhood. Movies were listed in the questionnaire; however, there was no visual image to accompany the title of the film. This may have hindered participants identifying the correct film, especially if subjects have selective memory of only the films they have seen “many times” (four or more times) instead of all 11 Disney Princess films. Additionally, some participants did not

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seem to understand which movies were part of the Disney Princess collection. Some subjects indicated *The Lion King* (1994) as being one of their favorite Disney Princess films. Although this movie is a Walt Disney Feature Animation released by Walt Disney Pictures, it is not a Disney Princess film.

Another limitation is sampling bias and size. This study was entirely online so it may have omitted qualified students who could have participated in the study, but did not have access to the Internet. Also, the sample size consisted of 110 female undergraduate students from a large university in Southwest Virginia. Females in late adolescence that did not go to college may have different life experiences, thus may hold more or less idealistic beliefs and may not indicate the desire to have a romantic relationship similar to the ones depicted in the Disney Princess films. Also, the majority of these females were White/Caucasian (73.6%), which does not include a robust representation of ethnic and cultural diversity. Generalizability of results may be limited due to sample size and lack of diversity since subjects are not representative of society. Theoretical implications may also be constrained due to limitations with generalizability.

Future Research

Future research would benefit from having a larger sample size that included more participants with diverse backgrounds. Participants from the sample size for this study represent a Westernized worldview of romantic relationships. It would be interesting to extend this research to include more diversity. Various backgrounds may influence how individuals perceive romantic ideals.

Also, future research should consider using different methodological designs, particularly longitudinal designs, to better assess long-term effects. Correlational analysis does not confirm if viewing Disney Princess films encourages romantic ideals or if individuals who already hold

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strong idealistic beliefs are more likely to view these films. A qualitative study with interviews and focus groups would be beneficial to determine the reasons why females hold idealistic beliefs and wishfully identify with the princesses. It would be interesting to conduct a qualitative study with participants representing different stages of cognitive development since past research has revealed adult women as having idealistic beliefs and wishfully identifying with the princesses (Stone, 1975). By including interviews and focus groups through media literacy programs in the school system at all levels (preschool, elementary, middle, high school, and college) and at home, future research can explore the possibility of parental influence on idealistic beliefs and wishful identification with princesses as well. According to the Disney Consumer Product website for the Disney Princess Brand, these stories are for girls and women, so mothers can “pass along their love for these heroines to their own daughters” (Disney Princess, 2014). If mothers indicate wanting to be more like the princesses in the Disney Princess films by having a similar romantic relationship, then they may also communicate the same values and beliefs to their children, thus encouraging idealistic beliefs and gender norms within romantic relationships.

Future studies should also consider including visual images of the characters from each film along with the movie title so participants could have a better chance of recognizing and recalling the films. Lastly, future researchers should consider providing concrete definitions of adjectives and statements on questionnaires to alleviate potential miscommunication.

Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the relationship between potential media effects of watching Disney Princess films and expectations of romantic relationships. The findings suggest idealistic beliefs held by viewers predict wishful identification with the princesses from

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the Disney Princess films. This is inconsistent with the premise of cultivation theory, which suggests frequent viewership of these films would have a greater impact on individuals accepting and adopting beliefs. Results did not indicate a significant correlation between participants' perceiving themselves to be similar to the Disney princesses and idealistic beliefs. Rather, wishful identification with the Disney princesses was significantly correlated with idealistic beliefs of romantic relationships. Possible implications of the significant correlation between wishful identification and idealistic beliefs are that participants desire to be more like the Disney princesses instead of already perceiving themselves as being similar to them. This desire could potentially be related to existing beliefs about romantic relationships that were cultivated during childhood. Also, despite participants not believing the romantic relationships portrayed in the films are realistic or obtainable, they still wish for a similar experience. In conclusion, this thesis extends previous research and offers evidence to support media effects of Disney Princess films and idealistic expectations of romantic relationships as a result of exposure to the films. Future research should continue to explore how Disney Princess films influence romantic ideals and how they might affect the formation and maintenance of romantic relationships.

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Appendix A

DIRECTIONS: Please think about your personal opinions and beliefs about love and romance. On the following scale, please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

This section will assess romantic beliefs using The Romantic Beliefs Scale (RBS) (Sprecher & Metts, 1989)

1. I need to know someone for a period of time before I fall in love with him or her.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. If I were in love with someone, I would commit myself to him or her even if my parents and friends disapproved of the relationship.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. Once I experience 'true love', I could never experience it again, to the same degree, with another person.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

4. I believe that to be truly in love is to be in love forever.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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5. If I love someone, I know I can make the relationship work, despite any obstacles.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

6. When I find my 'true love' I will probably know it soon after we meet.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

7. I'm sure that every new thing I learn about the person I choose for a long-term commitment will please me.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

8. The relationship I will have with my 'true love' will be nearly perfect.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

9. If I love someone, I will find a way for us to be together regardless of the opposition of the relationship, physical distance between us or any other barrier.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

A Disney romance for the ages

10. There will be only one real love for me.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

11. If a relationship I have was meant to be, any obstacle (i.e., lack of money, physical distance, career conflicts) can be overcome.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

12. I am likely to fall in love almost immediately if I meet the right person.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

13. I expect that in my relationship, romantic love will really last; It won't fade with time.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

14. The person I love will make a perfect romantic partner; for example, he/she will be completely accepting, loving, and understanding.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

A Disney romance for the ages

15. I believe if another person and I love each other we can overcome any differences and problems that may arise.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

DIRECTIONS: Now, please think about romantic relationships in general. For the following statements, please indicate how strongly you disagree or agree with each one.

1. The ideal relationship develops gradually over time.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

2. Potential relationship partners are either compatible or they are not.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

3. Arguments often enable a relationship to improve.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

A Disney romance for the ages

4. A successful relationship is mostly a matter of finding a compatible partner right from the start.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

5. Unsuccessful relationships were never meant to be.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

6. Successful relationships require regular maintenance.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

7. Early troubles in a relationship signify a poor match between partners.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

8. A relationship that does not get off to a perfect start will never work.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

9. Struggles at the beginning of a relationship are a sure sign that the relationship will fail.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

A Disney romance for the ages

10. Without conflict from time to time, relationships cannot improve.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

11. To last, a relationship must seem right from the start.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

12. A successful relationship evolves through hard work and resolution of incompatibilities.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

13. The success of a potential relationship is destined from the very beginning.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

14. With enough effort, almost any relationship can work.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

15. It takes a lot of time and effort to cultivate a good relationship.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

A Disney romance for the ages

16. Relationships often fail because people do not try hard enough.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

17. Challenges and obstacles in a relationship can make love even stronger.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

18. Relationships that do not start off well inevitably fail.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

19. A successful relationship is mostly a matter of learning to resolve conflicts with a partner.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

20. If a potential relationship is not meant to be, it will become apparent very soon.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

21. Potential relationship partners are either destined to get along or they are not.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

22. Problems in a relationship can bring partners closer together.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

DIRECTIONS: Below are five statements about your life in general with which you may agree or disagree. Please be as honest as possible when responding to each statement.

1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

2. The conditions of my life are excellent.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

3. I am satisfied with life.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6		7

A Disney romance for the ages

4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

Strongly Agree							Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Your Current Relationship

DIRECTIONS: If you are not in a romantic relationship at this time, please skip to the next section of the questionnaire. If you are currently involved in a romantic relationship, please think about that relationship when responding to the following list of adjectives. Please circle the number that most closely describes your feelings toward this relationship recently.

Miserable							Enjoyable
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Hopeful							Discouraging
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Empty							Full
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Interesting							Boring
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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DIRECTIONS: Please indicate on the following list how often you routinely participate in each leisure activity.

This section will assess leisure activities to control for any demand characteristics using the Adolescent Leisure Time Activity Scale (Yin, Katims, & Zapata, 1999)

Reading novels

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Riding a bike

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Fishing or hunting

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Hanging out with friends

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Watching television

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Playing sports

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Playing video games

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Playing a musical instrument

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

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Going to malls

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Watching movies

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Going to local parks with friends

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Doing activities with a church group

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Working at a part-time job

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

Doing volunteer work

Never Yearly Monthly Weekly Daily

DIRECTIONS: Think about your movie viewing during a typical week. Please indicate how many movies you usually watch during the week.

Movies at the Theater

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

Movies airing on Television

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

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Movies on DVD/VHS/On Demand

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

Movies on iPod/Phone

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

DIRECTIONS: For the list below, please indicate how often you have seen each film. Circle “never” if you’ve never seen the movie, “once” if you’ve seen the movie once, “a few times” if you’ve seen the movie 2 or 3 times, or “many times” if you have watched the film on numerous occasions (4+).

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

Avatar

Never Once A few times Many times

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire

Never Once A few times Many times

Cinderella (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

The Proposal

Never Once A few times Many times

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Twilight Saga: Eclipse

Never Once A few times Many times

Marvel's The Avengers

Never Once A few times Many times

Sleeping Beauty (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2

Never Once A few times Many times

Iron Man 3

Never Once A few times Many times

Silver Linings Playbook

Never Once A few times Many times

The Great Gatsby

Never Once A few times Many times

The Little Mermaid (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

Just Go With It

Never Once A few times Many times

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Sex and the City 2

Never Once A few times Many times

Beauty and the Beast (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

Man of Steel

Never Once A few times Many times

The Dark Knight Rises

Never Once A few times Many times

Skyfall

Never Once A few times Many times

Aladdin (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

The Hangover

Never Once A few times Many times

Gravity

Never Once A few times Many times

Pocahontas (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

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Inception

Never Once A few times Many times

The Help

Never Once A few times Many times

Bridesmaids

Never Once A few times Many times

Mulan (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

Think Like a Man

Never Once A few times Many times

The Vow

Never Once A few times Many times

The Princess and the Frog (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

Shutter Island

Never Once A few times Many times

The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug

Never Once A few times Many times

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Fast & Furious 6

Never Once A few times Many times

Tangled (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

The Conjuring

Never Once A few times Many times

Star Trek Into Darkness

Never Once A few times Many times

Brave (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

Thor: The Dark World

Never Once A few times Many times

Frozen (Disney)

Never Once A few times Many times

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DIRECTIONS: Please think about various ways to spend time with different media that you enjoy on a regular basis. For the items below, please rate how much you enjoy/like each activity.

This section will assess overall exposure to romantically themed media using measures from (Aloni & Bernieri, 2004; Segrin & Nabi, 2002)

1. Read Romance Novels

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. Read Mystery Novels

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. Read Relationship/Self-Help Books

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

4. Watch Action Movies

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Watch Romantic

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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5. Watch Horror Movies

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

6. Watch Suspense and Mystery TV Dramas

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

7. Watch TV Situation Comedies

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

8. Watch Afternoon Soap Operas

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

9. Watch Sports Programs

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

10. Watch Quiz Shows

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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11. Watch Local and National Newscasts

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

12. Watch Talk Shows

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

14. Watch Reality-based TV shows about relationships

Strongly Dislike							Strongly Like
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

DIRECTIONS: Suppose you had two hours of free time and you want to watch a movie. Please rank order the following genres from 1 to 8 in terms of which ones you would most prefer to watch, with 1 being most likely to choose and 8 being least likely to choose to watch.

- _____ Action
- _____ Disney Animation
- _____ Documentary
- _____ Foreign
- _____ Horror
- _____ Non-action Drama
- _____ Romantic Comedy
- _____ Sci-Fi

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DIRECTIONS: Please think about your reasons for watching different types of movies. The next set of questions will ask why you watch particular genres of movies: horror, romantic comedy, and action. If you intentionally avoid these movies, please skip these questions. However, if you occasionally view them, please answer.

Please think about your reason for watching horror movies (e.g., *The Conjuring*). Using the scale below, indicate how much you agree with each reason for watching films.

This section will assess motives for watching movies according to the scale by Rubin (1983).

1. I watch horror movies because they entertain me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

2. I watch horror movies because they help me learn about myself and others.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

3. I watch horror movies so I can forget about school and other things.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

4. I watch horror movies because they are enjoyable.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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5. I watch horror movies so I can learn how to do things I haven't done before.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

6. I watch horror movies so I can get away from the rest of the family or others.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

7. I watch horror movies because they amuse me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

8. I watch horror movies so I can learn about what could happen to me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

9. I watch horror movies so I can get away from what I'm doing.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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Please think about your reason for watching romantic comedy movies (e.g., *The Proposal*). Using the scale below, indicate how much you agree with each reason for watching films.

10. I watch romantic comedy movies because they entertain me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

11. I watch romantic comedy movies because they help me learn about myself and others.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

12. I watch romantic comedy movies so I can forget about school and other things.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

13. I watch romantic comedy movies because they are enjoyable.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

14. I watch romantic comedy movies so I can learn how to do things I haven't done before.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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15. I watch romantic comedy movies so I can get away from the rest of the family or others.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

16. I watch romantic comedy movies because they amuse me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

17. I watch romantic comedy movies so I can learn about what could happen to me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

18. I watch romantic comedy movies so I can get away from what I'm doing.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Please think about your reason for watching Disney Princess movies (e.g., *The Little Mermaid*). Using the scale below, indicate how much you agree with each reason for watching films.

19. I watch Disney Princess movies because they entertain me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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20. I watch Disney Princess movies because they help me learn about myself and others.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

21. I watch Disney Princess movies so I can forget about school and other things.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

22. I watch Disney Princess movies because they are enjoyable.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

23. I watch Disney Princess movies so I can learn how to do things I haven't done before.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

24. I watch Disney Princess movies so I can get away from the rest of the family or others.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

25. I watch Disney Princess movies because they amuse me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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26. I watch Disney Princess movies so I can learn about what could happen to me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

27. I watch Disney Princess movies so I can get away from what I'm doing.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

Please think about your reason for watching action movies (e.g., *Marvel's The Avengers*). Using the scale below, indicate how much you agree with each reason for watching films.

28. I watch action movies because they entertain me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

29. I watch action movies because they help me learn about myself and others.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

30. I watch action movies so I can forget about school and other things.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

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31. I watch action movies because they are enjoyable.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

32. I watch action movies so I can learn how to do things I haven't done before.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

33. I watch action movies so I can get away from the rest of the family or others.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

34. I watch action movies because they amuse me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

35. I watch action movies so I can learn about what could happen to me.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

36. I watch action movies so I can get away from what I'm doing.

Strongly Disagree							Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

A Disney romance for the ages

DIRECTIONS: Please answer the following questions with as much detail as possible.

1. **Please describe your favorite Disney Princess film from your childhood (This may or may not be your favorite Disney Princess film currently).**
2. **Do you currently have a favorite Disney Princess film? If so, can you please describe why this film is your favorite?**

DIRECTIONS: Please think about Disney Princess films (e.g., *The Little Mermaid*). Now consider which Disney princess is your favorite from one of the Disney Princess films (e.g., Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*). When responding to the following items, please rate how similar you consider yourself to be to the Disney princess from that film. For example, if your favorite Disney Princess movie is *Tangled*, you should compare yourself with Rapunzel for each of the following items.

This section will assess perceived similarities between viewers and characters according to the scale by McCroskey, Richmond, and Daly (1975).

Name of Movie: _____.

Doesn't think like me

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Thinks like me

Behaves like me

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Doesn't behave like me

Similar to me

Different from me

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1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Like me

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Unlike me

7

Perceives things like me

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Doesn't perceive things like me

7

Personality similar to mine

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Personality different from mine

7

Does things unlike I do

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Does things like I do

7

Shares my beliefs

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Doesn't share my beliefs

7

Shares my attitudes

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Doesn't share my attitudes

7

Dislikes

Likes things

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things I dislike

1 2 3 4 5 6

I dislike

7

Morals unlike mine

1 2 3 4 5 6

Morals like mine

7

Sexual attitudes different from mine

1 2 3 4 5 6

Sexual attitudes like mine

7

Doesn't share my values

1 2 3 4 5 6

Shares my values

7

Treats people like I do

1 2 3 4 5 6

Doesn't treat people like I do

7

Doesn't share my emotions

1 2 3 4 5 6

Shares my emotions

7

Looks different from me

1 2 3 4 5 6

Looks like me

7

Wears hair like I do

Wears hair different

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						than I do
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Does things unlike I do						Does things like I do
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Culturally different						Culturally similar
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Family like mine						Family different from mine
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Background different from mine						Background similar to mine
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Romantic relationship different from mine						Romantic relationship similar to mine
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

This section will assess wishful identification of viewers with characters according to the scale by Eyal and Rubin (2003).

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I wish I could be more like the Princess.

Strongly

Agree

1

2

3

4

5

6

Strongly

Disagree

7

I would like to do the kinds of things the Princess does in the movie.

Strongly

Agree

1

2

3

4

5

6

Strongly

Disagree

7

I wish I could be in a romantic relationship like the Princess.

Strongly

Agree

1

2

3

4

5

6

Strongly

Disagree

7

I wish I had a prince similar to the one (Princess's Name) has.

Strongly

Agree

1

2

3

4

5

6

Strongly

Disagree

7

DIRECTIONS: Below is a list of the ways you might have felt. Please tell me how often you have felt this way during the past week.

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- 0 = Rarely or none of the time (less than 1 day)
- 1 = Some or a little of the time (1-2 days)
- 2 = Occasionally or a moderate amount of time (3-4 days)
- 3 = Most or all of the time (5-7 days)

- 1. I was bothered by things that usually don't bother me. _____
- 2. I did not feel like eating; my appetite was poor. _____
- 3. I felt that I could not shake off the blues even with help from my family or friends.

- 4. I felt I was just as good as other people. _____
- 5. I had trouble keeping my mind on what I was doing. _____
- 6. I felt depressed. _____
- 7. I felt that everything I did was an effort. _____
- 8. I felt hopeful about the future. _____
- 9. I thought my life had been a failure. _____
- 10. I felt fearful. _____
- 11. My sleep was restless. _____
- 12. I was happy. _____
- 13. I talked less than usual. _____
- 14. I felt lonely. _____
- 15. People were unfriendly. _____
- 16. I enjoyed life. _____
- 17. I had crying spells. _____
- 18. I felt sad. _____
- 19. I felt that people dislike me. _____
- 20. I could not get "going." _____

A Disney romance for the ages

DIRECTIONS: The next set of questions focus on relationships. If you are not currently in a romantic relationship, please skip to question 4.

Please fill in the following information about your current romantic relationship:

1. Are you currently in a romantic relationship that has lasted at least one month (please select)?

YES NO

2. How long have you been together? _____

3. What is the sexual orientation of this relationship (please select)?

Homosexual Heterosexual

DIRECTIONS: Please fill in the following information about all of your previous romantic relationships (i.e., any romantic relationship that lasted at least one month):

4. How many romantic relationships have you had, that have lasted at least one month?

5. What was the length of your longest relationship? _____

6. Who ended your longest relationship?

_____ Relationship still active

_____ You

_____ Your partner

_____ Mutual

_____ Other (e.g., death)

A Disney romance for the ages

DIRECTIONS: Please answer the following questions about you.

Please indicate your parents' marital status (please select)?

Never married Married Divorced Widowed/Deceased

If relevant, how long have your parents been/were married? _____ years.

How many hours per week do you spend reading magazines?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

How many hours per week do you spend watching TV?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

How many hours per week do you spend watching movies?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

How many hours per week do you spend using social media?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 or more

What is your sex (please select)?

Male Female

What is your age? _____

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Which of the following best describes your ethnic background (please select)?

White/Caucasian

African American

Asian

Hispanic/Latino(a)

Other (please describe): _____

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation (please select)?

Heterosexual/Straight

Gay Male

Lesbian

Bisexual

Transgender

Transsexual

Questioning Queer

Do you go to church or other place of worship (please select)?

Nearly every week

At least once a month

Sometimes

Once or twice a year

Never

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE. YOU ARE FINISHED!

A Disney romance for the ages

Table 1. Descriptive statistics ($n = 110$)

Ethnic Background	Frequency	Percentage
White/Caucasian	81	73.6
Asian	11	10
African American	6	5.5
Hispanic/Latino(a)	5	4.5
Other	5	4.5
Unknown	2	1.8

Table 2. Descriptive statistics ($n = 110$)


Relationship Status	Frequency	Percentage
Currently in Romantic Relationship	49	44.5
Currently Not in Romantic Relationship	60	54.4
Unknown	1	.9
Never Been in Romantic Relationship	15	13.6
Completely Satisfied Within Current Romantic Relationship	18	16.4

Table 3. Films Seen Several Times (Four or more times)

Film	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>The Little Mermaid</i> (1989)	66	.6	3.49	.71
<i>Beauty and the Beast</i> (1991)	60	.5455	3.37	.81
<i>Aladdin</i> (1992)	57	.5182	3.35	.78
<i>Mulan</i> (1998)	67	.6091	3.44	.81

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

 VirginiaTech	Office of Research Compliance Institutional Review Board North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech 300 Turner Street NW Blacksburg, Virginia 24061 540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959 email irb@vt.edu website http://www.irb.vt.edu
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: April 15, 2014

TO: Adrienne Holz Ivory, Raven Nichole Griffin

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)

PROTOCOL TITLE: A Disney Romance for the Ages: Idealistic Beliefs of Romantic Relationships Held By Youth

IRB NUMBER: 14-389

Effective April 14, 2014, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As:	Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 2
Protocol Approval Date:	April 14, 2014
Protocol Expiration Date:	N/A
Continuing Review Due Date*:	N/A

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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