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*“Happily Ever After? How Disney Princesses
Represent Gender Role Stereotypes in Animated and
Live Action Films.”*

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May 11, 2020

“Happily Ever After? How Disney Princesses Represent Gender Role Stereotypes in Animated and Live Action Films.”

ABSTRACT:

The Disney princess is one of the most important female characters many children and adults look up to, but what they don't see are the underlying messages about gender roles the films portray. Many scholars have touched upon the issue of diversity in the Disney Princess franchise, but few have ventured into studying gender role messages that are portrayed in films. This paper studied six films and recorded instances and representation of different aspects of gender role. The examples were separated into five different categories for both the animated and live action princesses. Each princess that was studied showed different characteristics of gender role stereotypes in both the animate and live-action version allowing for different interpretations of their stories.

Walt Disney Productions created a world where fantasy, magic and true love reign over all. In this world of Disney, they create timeless movies that children and adults watch over and over again. However, behind all this magic is a dark past that frighten many adults as they continue to re-watch these films. In many of their films they portray subliminal messages of gender role hidden behind a happily-ever-after. While to the common viewer, the Disney princess has the life every little girl wants, Disney does not give these women the credit they deserve as a strong, independent woman. Over about a six month time period this paper studied scholarly work and analyzed six films released by Disney. These films were both animated and live-action versions of *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*.

Created in 1923, Disney Studios intended to make short animated films that would entice both adults and children. Walt Disney always had a fascination with animation and in 1937 created the first princess of the Disney Princess franchise, Snow White. This full-length

animated film won him his first Oscar, with seven little Oscars to go with it to represent the seven dwarfs (Biography.com editors). As Disney Studios continued they created more princesses that had their own specific color scheme to emphasize their beauty and sometimes the evolution of their beauty as seen in *Cinderella*. When she begins her story, she is seen in darker, ripped rags that eventually turned into her famous blue gown and ended with a bright white wedding dress. Typically the princesses are shown in light, feminine color palates such as blue, pink, yellow or light purple, whereas the older villains were shown in dark colors such as black, red, or dark purple. The use of these color palates became central to separating each of the princesses from one another and added onto the ideal of a perfect woman. As the princess films continued to be produced the women all represented different elements of the time frame they were created in. This then allowed for the topic of gender role and diversity to become more prevalent in conversations about the princess films.

This topic was chosen after years of curiosity and a fascination for the Disney princess films. Disney has been producing princess films over 80 years and while many of them ended with a happily ever after, why did the prince need to rescue the princess from her everyday from her servant stricken life and it was rarely the princess herself making the change? As the perception of a woman have changed over the past 80 years, when Disney began making the princess films, it seemed evident that the perception of a young woman has remained the same.

Gender role is described as a set of specific behaviors and traditional social roles related to gender that can be portrayed stereotypically or counter-stereotypically (Loppreore 1). Ever since I was a little kid, my earliest memories were watching Disney movies, but my favorite always the Disney Princess movies. I wanted to be just like Cinderella when I grew up; beautiful, blonde, with a tiny waist and waited for my prince to come on his white horse. He never showed.

Research conducted was based upon the curiosity of how the Disney princess has evolved over the decades and how the films have portrayed the leading ladies. The research included three animated and three live-action versions of the same films and point out the most important aspects of gender role stereotypes that are represented in them films. One of the major concerns for leading this research is the fact that the leading ladies are being seen as prizes that men want to win and only a man can created a well-established life. As current society standards are changing, how has the Disney film franchised changed with it and how has the history of Disney princess films portrayed a different time from what the current younger generations are use to? This paper will answer, how are gender role stereotypes being portrayed in the Disney princess animated and live-action movies of *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*? Have the princesses' identities changed or stayed the same under the definition of gender role stereotypes?

Literature Review

The Three Categories of the Disney Princess

The Disney princess was first commercialized in 2000 when Disney employee and former Nike chief marketing officer, Andy Mooney, felt that younger girls needed a brand to follow when they were pretending to be a princess (Higgs 63). When Mooney approached Disney about this idea of commercialization they were hesitant to approve it because they didn't want the princess's individual stories to get mixed together and forgotten. Each princess was given a distinct color scheme and set of rules they needed to follow throughout the movie. Higgs looked at nine Disney princesses and compiled them into three categories: the classical, renaissance and revival princess.

The classical princess encompassed three original female princesses; Snow White from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, Cinderella from *Cinderella* and Aurora from *Sleeping Beauty*. These three films were created during 1937 to 1959, when men weren't around as much due to war and it was up to women to run the household. The idea of the American Housewife became more popular in American society and films (Higgs 64). Their names demonstrate how delicate they are. Snow White represents innocence and purity, Cinderella represents fragile ashes and how they could blow away at any moment, and finally Aurora is named after the dawn and the awakening of beauty (Higgs 64). This is to show that their beauty fades the same way a

flower does when it/they grow old. These princesses represent youth and innocence whereas the villains in their stories represent maturity and while they are not unpleasant to look at, men still fear them (Higgs 65). Gender role stereotypes are prevalent between the old and the young establishing separation between innocence and maturity especially during the classical princess era. Typically the young princess completes chores under the distinct direction of their predecessors, as seen in *Cinderella*. For these classic princesses, marriage seems to be the only release from their duty-stricken lives.

After the classical princess era died down it gave way to the renaissance princess, which was popular during the 1980s through the 1990s. Higgs studied three princesses he categorized under this category; Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, Belle from *Beauty and the Beast* and Mulan from *Mulan*. The renaissance corresponded with the idea of third-wave feminism in films, which was centered on the idea of how women were portrayed in media and how they should truly be portrayed (Higgs 66). Ariel was the first princess to truly rebel through her collection of human items. However, it is noted that her friends are male and she looked for the protection of her love interest Prince Eric and her father. Only when she has her father's blessing could she marry and abandon her culture/identity (Higgs 66). Belle's name means beauty and with her appearance it's not hard to tell why. However she is different from other princesses because she loves to read, which in the eyes of the townspeople, is weird. Though Mulan ultimately saved China from the

Huns and is offered a job from the Emperor, she declines because she was away from her home for too long and falls in love with Li Shang, ultimately returning back to her family and seeking the approval of her father (Higgs 67). While these three princesses did begin to change the perception of the Disney princess, they seemed to still gather the approval of the leading man in their life but rebel throughout the entirety of their personal story.

After the renaissance princess, the revival princess became the new era many of the new princesses are categorized in. The revival princess focuses on equality and Higgs observed Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog*, Merida from *Brave* and Rapunzel from *Tangled*. Tiana shows her disapproval of classic romance stories that her friend seems to be so enthralled in, stating that she would never kiss a frog. Tiana is freethinking and self-assured (Higgs 68). Merida connected with the men in her tribe more than the women and made it known that she was unhappy with the law that she needed to be wed, leading her to fight for her own hand. Finally, Rapunzel appealed to both boys and girls because Disney wanted the movie to be loved and appreciated by everyone, a great tactic used by the president of Pixar (Higgs 69) Rapunzel fought for herself, and was often held back by her mother, yet was encouraged by Flynn, her love interest, to pursue her dreams.

Similar to Higgs, Garabedian put the 11 current princesses into three categories; pre-transition, transition and progression. Pre-transition categorizes, Snow White, Cinderella and

Aurora because they represent a time when women were expected to stay home, cook, clean and raise the children. From 1937 to 1959, about 39% of women were working by the end of the 20-year period and the movies represented the fact that not a lot of women worked (Garabedian 23).

The transition period represents Ariel, Belle, Jasmine from *Aladdin*, Pocahontas from *Pocahontas*, Mulan, Tiana and Rapunzel. This is a period when rebelling against what is expected of them and sticking up for themselves was more prominent, yet they still rely on a man to “set them free” from their life. The transition period included more princesses than Higgs categories, but also categorized Ariel, Belle, Mulan, Rapunzel and Tiana under this category where as Higgs categorized Ariel, Belle and Mulan as the renaissance princess and Tiana, Rapunzel and Merida as the revival princess. Garabedian has a wider category of princesses that seem to fit in better than the way Higgs categorized them. Garabedian also included some of the newer princesses whose stories seem to be forgotten because they aren’t as recognizable as the classic princess. Many of the movies created during the transition period center their princess’s stories around the desire for freedom from the ties to the world they already know while also getting their happy-ever-after and become subject to living a subservient life as often shown in many of the princess franchise films (Garabedian 23).

Finally, the progression era includes Merida from *Brave*, Elsa and Anna from *Frozen*.

These princesses break the typical Disney princess story and instead rely on themselves instead

of a man. The reason Disney is influential with gender roles is because their products are everywhere for children to want and parents to buy (Garabedian 24). Walt Disney has always included the American ideal in his films, but as time changed the princesses stories changed slightly with the times. According to Garabedian, the younger generations in the United States have been taught to think and act according to their favorite princesses/princes in order to learn the social cues that the movies portray (Garabedian 23).

Gender Role Stereotypes

As Garabedian mentioned, children begin to pretend they are a Disney prince or princess at a young age which Towbin emphasized the idea that the Disney Corporation seems to be a major contributor to children's media (Towbin 24). Disney has a tie into every aspect of children's lives from television shows, children's books, a radio station, toys, sports and much more. Towbin looked at a multitude of researchers work that are constantly examining the films that Disney produces and even further examines the gender messages they portray. Towbin et al conducted a study meant to identify prominent themes related to gender, race, age and sexual orientation in Disney films (Towbin 25). In a total of 16 films researchers watched, they found that gender image has not evolved the same way society has and film has remained stereotypic to gender portrayals since Snow White was first introduced (Towbin 24). One researcher Towbin looked at concluded that the males in Disney movies had a larger multitude of jobs than the

leading female did. However, four women were noted to have jobs outside of their homes including an actress, sheep tender, thief and fairy whereas women in other films performed domestic labor tasks around the house (Towbin 24). Towbin, then looked at another author who conducted research after that watching Pocahontas and how she represented a certain movement in the gender role archetype. While Pocahontas is a strong female leader, she can't help but follow the typical female stereotype portrayed in almost all Disney princess movies and stay at home where she says she is needed instead of following her dreams (Towbin 24). The researchers have also looked into how men continually tower over the women and leaving them with ultimate control over their fate. Not only are gender stereotypes portrayed in Disney movies, both animated and live action, the princesses often see "abuse" as romanticism. The word "abuse" has many forms under it whether it is the princess being called names, being seen as odd, or being belittled by an older (evil) character or a man pursuing the princess. This then gives women watching the movie the impression that even though their partner is authoritative over them, they are showing they care and love them.

Disney princesses have often been criticized due to the stereotypes they portray but also for the lack of diversity. It wasn't until 1995, with the release of *Pocahontas*, that a woman of color was even represented. Following Pocahontas was Mulan in 1998 and Tiana in 2009. It is important to realize that merchandise plays a massive factor in how children receive messages of

how they are to act, think or dress (May 1). Due to this lack of diversity many children are left without a character to connect to the same way other children do (May 5). May looked at six Disney princess movies: *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Pocahontas*, *Mulan*, *The Princess and the Frog*, and *Tangled*. Each movie was released during the renaissance and revival time period, where protagonists had a more rebellious side than the classic princesses. May then broke the princess into four tables to describe the princesses' characteristics. Table one compared masculine and feminine behaviors the six princesses portrayed. Table two broke down the total masculine and feminine behavior between each of the princesses and discovered that Ariel had the most feminine traits, while there was a tie between Rapunzel and Pocahontas for having the most masculine traits (May 13). Table three divided feminine and masculine behaviors, by describing masculine traits and feminine traits. Finally, table four divided feminine and masculine behaviors for the time periods they represented. May stated that gender role interpretation is prevalent in each of the films directed by men leading them to have a male gaze, the notion of men over-sexualizing women in media, over the female characters they are trying to portray (May 18). May based her research on different codings through where she outlined the behavior, time of behavior and a brief description of the scene (May 11). After using these codings, she then broke the actions into whether they represented a more masculine or feminine behavior.

The princesses portray aspects of gender role through their words and action. This is sometimes seen as being masculine in some aspects or feminine in other as May described in her research. One of Disney's main intentions with the creation of princess movies and merchandise is to entice children to share an identity with them. The success of the movies is heavily dependent on the stereotype of femininity and the products that reflect the film's message (Lopreore 8). Disney movies emphasize the importance of physical attractiveness of the female protagonists, while the male and older characters do not have to necessarily have to have an attractiveness to them. Similar to May, Lopreore, also noted that many of the princesses displayed both feminine and masculine traits that were ultimately stereotypical in the way they portrayed the different characteristics. These masculine traits could end up being harmful for younger generations because they could portray selfish and aggressive behaviors based after the princesses, princes and villains they see (Lopreore 14).

Live-Action Cinderella and Beauty and the Beast

Live-action Disney movies are becoming more popular as more remakes are beginning to emerge. While the animated versions of the princess stories have remained widely popular through all generations, the live-action remakes tend to be more current with popular ideas and concerns that are happening in today's society. This leads to the question of whether live-action films carry the same story, meanings and ideologies as the animated version. Houwers conducted

a study between the animated and live-action version of *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*.

Cinderella tells the story of an abused woman who is reduced to a servant by her stepmother and stepsisters after the death of her father. It tells how a servant is released of her duties only through finding true love. In the animated film she has a cheerful personality and does not show resistance to the constant abuse her stepfamily shows her, making her a “good woman” (Houwens 20). She fantasizes on how her prince will come to save her while animals help her get ready and sew a dress. It is interesting to note that the film follows classical Hollywood style in that she is in love with a man and is obedient and patient with everyone. In comparison to *Cinderella*, her stepsisters, Drizella and Anastasia, are unfeminine and unpleasant to look at causing them to be ugly in personality as well. The live-action version is similar to the animated though there are some differences, such as dialogue, emotions, body etc. In the live-action version, *Cinderella* is more educated and more independent unlike the animated version (Houwens 24). Though she still performs the typical household chores, like many of the classical princesses, she is perceived as more independent through having more free time. Whenever she was recommended to stay on the typical stereotypical gender role path, she often stated throughout the movie that she is capable of completing tasks by herself (Houwens 25).

Beauty and the Beast tells the story of a girl who was pursued by a self-absorbed man, who was seen as weird in her town, was captured by a beast, and eventually falls in love with the

beast which releases the witches curse. Belle often shows resistance of social norms in her town and while she is seen as beautiful, the townspeople think she is odd because she loves to read. According to Houwers, her rebellion and curiosity display an increasingly stronger sense of self, of choice, and of voice (Houwers 34). In comparison to other women in the movie, Belle seems much more educated and strong-willed. After the beast took her father for trespassing in his castle, she offered herself as a prisoner in exchange for his freedom, something another Disney princess never would have done before her. Unlike the live-action *Cinderella*, the live-action *Beauty and the Beast* stayed pretty closed to the original story. She is still strong willed and rebellious, but instead of emphasizing this aspect, the live-action version emphasized more of the origin story on the prince. Houwers notes that it's interesting that they gave more of a backstory to the beast than they did in the animated version, which began to draw some of the attention away from Belle and towards the beast. He seemed to be more educated and acted less rashly than the animated beast did (Houwers 38).

Knowing what we know now, this question remains, how is gender role being portrayed in the Disney princess animated and live-action movies of *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*? Have the princesses' identities changed or stayed the same by continuing to follow gender role stereotypes? It is important to recognize the separation between truth and exaggeration when it comes to how children and adults should act.

Method

To begin research it was important to begin with the actual definition of what gender role is. Gender role is described as a set of specific behaviors and traditional social roles related to gender that can be portrayed stereotypically or counter-stereotypically (Lopreore 1). The most important aspect to answering my research question is to watch and analyze both animated and live-action Disney princess movies. I will focus specifically on *Cinderella* (1950 and 2015), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991 and 2017) and *Aladdin* (1992 and 2019). According to Higgs, there are three categories of the Disney Princess; the classical, renaissance and revival princess. Cinderella is classified as a classical princess, a time where women were expected to stay at home to clean and cook. Both Belle and Jasmine are part of the renaissance era where a new wave of feminism became more apparent in the Disney films during the 1990's.

In order to recognize how gender role is apparent throughout the Disney princess movies based on its definition, I specifically chose three animated films that also have live-action movies that were filmed in 2015, 2017 and 2019. As I watched the films, I recorded different characteristics of gender role that are presented in the features into five categories; submissive, belittled, womanly/princess-like, true love/saved by the man, and stuck up for herself/took control. For the womanly/princess-like category I looked for common themes the Disney princesses shared, such as appearance, actions, and what Disney expected them to be like as

royalty. I decided upon these five categories based on the definition of what gender role stereotypes encompass and looked common stereotypes that occurred throughout the films. Garabedian found that many of the pre-transition princesses portrayed submissive or belittled behavior whereas the transition princess stood up for themselves more. This study included a classical princess, Cinderella, and two renaissance princesses, Belle and Jasmine. As I watched the movies I listened and looked for what was being said and how the princess reacted in different situations. I then debated which category would be the best fit for the word or action and recorded important quotes that were being said. These categories remained the same for the animated and live-action versions to allow for comparisons between the two. To begin research, I first watched the original films, which were the animated versions and then watched the newer, live-action versions.

Research Analysis

Cinderella tells the story of a beautiful little girl who adored her father with all of her heart. When she was young, Cinderella lost her mother and as she grew older, her father felt she needed a mother's guiding hand and married Lady Tremaine, an evil stepmother who had two stepdaughters, Drizella and Anastasia. After the untimely passing of her father, Cinderella was forced to become a servant to her stepfamily because her stepmother was jealous of her kindness and beauty. After living many years as a servant for her stepfamily, Cinderella finally meets Prince

Charming who saves her from her servant-stricken life after she fits the glass slipper she lost at the ball.

Beauty and the Beast follows the story of Belle after she grew up in a town where everyone thinks she is weird. She loves to read which makes the townspeople call her names because they believe that a woman should not read. Though they think she is strange, they also think she is the most beautiful girl in town, which leads Gaston, a self-absorbed man who wants to marry Belle because she is the most beautiful in town, to believe that only she can be his wife because they are both good looking people. After her father gets lost and is held captive in the beast's tower, Belle offers for the Beast to take her prisoner instead. She then lives in an enchanted castle that only someone who loves the Beast by his 21 birthday, can break the curse. At first the beast scares her due to his harsh tone and manners, but she later falls in love with him, not because of his beauty on the outside but on the inside.

Aladdin is based on a poor man who is trying to fit in but finds himself in a life of squatting and stealing. He then meets Princess Jasmine in the marketplace after she runs away from the palace. Jasmine is set to be married to a prince by the time of her next birthday, but believes that she should marry for love, not titles. The movie follows the relationship that is formed between Aladdin, Genie and Jasmine and how they break the law that has been in place for so long.

The animated versions of the princess stories focused on the princess herself and how she overcame the hardships she was facing, while the live-action versions gave more background to the relationship of the princess to her mother. Though the animated and live-action versions told two different stories, they both displayed gender role characteristics that can be characterized into the five categories proposed in the methods section. The animated versions also represent the fantasy Disney creates through their films and theme parks, whereas the live-action represent the reality these three women go through.

Claim 1: Submissive Behavior

Cinderella

Though Cinderella does portray some characteristics of being submissive towards her stepmother and stepsister's rules and chores, she does them in a respectful manner. When her stepmother is scolding her in the animated version, Cinderella stands there emotionless as she is blamed for hiding a mouse under the teacup. Her stepmother then gives her a list of chores to complete after her "inconsiderate" practical prank, which included cleaning the tapestries and draperies. Cinderella's eyes grow large as she states she already cleaned the tapestries and draperies, but her stepmother yells at her to do them again and she instantly goes back to her standing position with little emotion, falling back on her submissive nature.

A common theme throughout the live-action version is a saying Cinderella's mother told her, "have courage and always be kind." Cinderella did display submissive characteristics and always wanted to do the things she thought would make her mother and father happy. Though she has the opportunity to leave the house her stepmother has taken over, she says she stays because she made a promise to her mother and father that she would stay in the place that made them all so happy. Similar to the animated version, Cinderella follows the orders her stepmother gives her no matter how humiliating it is. After Cinderella made breakfast for her stepfamily and served them, she began to put her food down at the fourth seat but her stepmother forced her to remove her place and said she should eat where the other servants eat. With tears beginning in her eyes and a half smile on her face, she removed her place setting and walked to the kitchen. When she reached the kitchen she dropped her plates and began to sob, not showing any emotion in front of her stepfamily. Unlike the animated version, Cinderella makes many promises to her mother and father throughout the beginning of the film. These promises add to her submissive behavior because she followed what her parents told her to do.

The live-action and animated versions differ in many ways. The animated version shows a more proper Cinderella who is submissive to her stepfamily, whereas the live-action version shows more emotion when she is being submissive to her stepmother's orders. This is important because the animated version was created during an era where the stay-at-home wife was the

ideal life to have, whereas the live-action version was created during a wave of feminism that centers on the humiliation of submission and the raw emotion that ensues after.

Belle

In the animated version, Belle has a strong love for her father and would do anything to help him and return to him when he needed her. She often shows submissive characteristics in regards to helping her father and when the beast yells viciously at her. After her father was captured, Belle instantly left to go find him in order to make sure he was safe and healthy. When she finally reached the beast's castle, she pleaded to take her father's place saying, "I'll do anything" (23:32). This can be seen as submissive because she does everything her father tells her to do while putting him before herself.

In the live-action version, Belle continues to show her strong love for her father but also shows a strong love for her mother who she never met. She never knew what happened to her mother because she said that she knew better than to ask her father what happened to her. She was loyal to her father and loyal to the beast and though she was not overly submissive, she showed where her loyalties were. One thing that remained similar in both the animated and live-action version was how quickly she always went to help her father ensuring that he was always safe and healthy and that she went back to help her father when he was being taken away to the asylum.

Belle began to break away from the typical stereotypes her fellow princesses before her showed. The animated version was created in an era where the housewife was not the desired life like it once was. Women were joining the movement to end the stereotypes that the media was showing and Belle refused to be someone's housewife. Emma Watson, a profound leader in the feminism movement, appropriately played the live-action version of Belle and she would not allow Belle to follow a lot of the submissive behavior the animated version portrayed. Though submissive behavior wasn't as prominent in both versions, Disney did not directly move away from the constricting stereotypes yet.

Jasmine

Jasmine was not extremely submissive throughout the animated film, although she has a strong love and respect for her father and what he says to her. Her father never allowed her out of the palace to walk around the streets, so she stayed primarily in the palace grounds on his orders, except for when she ran away to experience life outside the grounds. When she did portray submissive behaviors, she would constantly roll her eyes to show she was not happy about it in any way.

One of the major reoccurring themes throughout the live-action version of *Aladdin* was the fact that Jasmine can't cry and won't be silenced. Jasmine refrains from going against her command and does show a lot of emotion when horrible things happen to her. She agrees to meet

the princes that come to try to marry her but is not happy about it in any way. When one of the princes, Prince Anders comes to the palace to woo her, she is immediately hostile to him, but when her father coughs and looks at her, Jasmine stops being hostile to him. After Jafar, the sultan's royal vizier, become sultan and a powerful sorcerer, he begins to try to kill Jasmine's father unless she agrees to marry him. In order to save her father she agrees but her eyes become full of tears and the anger is present on her face.

Similar to Belle, the animated version of *Aladdin*, was created when the housewife was not extremely common. Jasmine wants to see Agrabah and connect with her people, but consistently follows what her father asks of her. In the animated version, Jasmine meets the princes' because she knows it is the rule of Agrabah royalty, and even though she's not happy about it, she is not as outspoken as the live-action Jasmine. Live-Action Jasmine is the least submissive out of the three princesses because she does things her way or the way her mother would have wanted it. When Jafar silences her through the film, she eventually speaks her mind at the end and overcomes every evil. Live-action Jasmine is the best example of the feminism movement and set the stage for other live-action princesses, such as Mulan, to follow.

Claim 2: Belittled

Cinderella

Throughout the animated film, Cinderella is constantly belittled from her stepmother and stepsisters who call her names, expect her to complete service instantly, blame her for everything that goes wrong, and destroy one of the most important things she has from her mother in order to keep her away from the royal ball, where she will eventually fall in love with Prince Charming. After her stepsisters rip her dress apart, she runs off crying and throws herself down on a rock. She feels so belittled at this point that she states, “there nothing left to believe in” (42:55).

In the live-action version, Cinderella was called names by her stepfamily, forced to become a servant, and forced to hide her mother’s belongings in the attic with her. Lady Tremaine only cares about herself and her daughters and treated Cinderella as nothing more than a low-life peasant. After Cinderella’s father died, her stepmother “convinced” her to trade rooms with Drizzella and Anastasia and instead forces her live in the attic. Cinderella was actually born with the name Ella, but after sleeping next to the fire one night to keep warm from the crosswinds in the attic, her stepfamily began to call her Cinderella because of the ash that was on her face from the burnt out fire.

Cinderella is belittled in both versions of her story, but it seems to be more prevalent in the live-action version. The emotion that Cinderella shows is more relatable than the animated version because it allows for the audience to show the same emotion she is feeling. This is important because it allows the audience to connect with Cinderella more than the animated version, who shows little emotion. The belittling Cinderella endured made her stepfamily feel better because they felt threatened by her beauty, but it was ultimately Cinderella who came out victorious in both versions.

Belle

Belle is often belittled by the townspeople who call her strange, dazed, distracted, odd, the animated version. Belle is seen as different because she loves to read and is ahead of her time. Gaston stated, "it's not right for a woman to read," (8:46) hinting at the fact that women begin to get ideas and can't be more intelligent than men. When she becomes the beast's prisoner, she is often ordered around and yelled at by him and throws herself on the bed to sob after her father was released from the cell. As the beast yells her at, she often places her hand over heart and her eyes grow large, but when she retaliates against him, she throws her arms to her side with fists and speaks up to voice her opinion.

In the live-action version, Belle is still called names by the townspeople, but they treat her worse when they find out she was teaching a little girl to read. One of the townspeople came

over and stated, “teaching another girl to read? Isn’t one enough?” They clearly don’t approve of Belle’s intelligence and found it atrocious she was trying to educate another girl. After she meets the Beast, he calls her a bigger fool than her father and she was only the daughter of a common thief, belittling her to nothing more than a common folk.

In both the animated and live-action version, Belle never let any of the names or cruelty the beast showed to her, affect her. She always knew her worth and this was becoming a common theme throughout media during the 90s and 2019. Belle grew from the belittling that happened to her and never cared what anyone said.

Jasmine

In the animated version Jasmine was primarily belittled by Jafar who forced her to bow to him, become his servant when he becomes a powerful sorcerer and become submissive to him. When he wished for Jasmine to fall madly in love with him, he called her pussycat, a common derogatory term used towards women, which made Jasmine roll her eyes and show utter disgust when he put his face on hers.

Similar to the animated version, it was primarily Jafar who belittled Jasmine during the live-action version. After Jafar hypnotized the sultan to invade one of their allies land, Jasmine tried to convince her father not to and that she should become the next sultan. Her father then breaks the trance and Jafar tells her that she will learn sooner or later that “it is better for her to been

seen and not heard.” Jafar was constantly trying to silence her when she spoke out and only saw her as an attractive woman and nothing more. This was also how many of the princes who came to the palace saw her as well. Genie also called her “hot” and she was disgusted by it.

Throughout the movie Jasmine was constantly rolling her eyes, hiding back tears and showing anger on her face.

In both versions, Jasmine never let the belittling bother her. She instead used it to get what she truly wanted, which was to make her own decisions. However, in the live-action version it seemed she was trying to create the kingdom her mother wanted. This is important because Jasmine used all the nasty comments to shape her into the princess she wanted to be and not just eye candy for the palace and the princes.

Claim 3: Womanly/Princess-Like

Cinderella

In the animated version, Cinderella most notably portrayed many characteristics in the womanly/princess like category throughout the film. Her beauty is beyond compare and her smile has a calming effect to others, especially when she first meets Gus Gus, one of her mouse friends, in the mousetrap. Throughout all the abuse Cinderella endured as a child and young woman, she stayed ever gentle and kind (3:05). She has a tiny waist, perfect hair, perfect makeup, and the most perfect dress to go to the ball in.

The live-action version also emphasizes Cinderella's beauty as both a child and adult. She is kind to animals and was always turning negative situations and comments into positive ones. Live-action Cinderella also had one of the tiniest waists out of all three of the live-action films viewed. This is especially accentuated when she is at the ball in her big blue dress. When she enters the ball, the whole crowd stopped to watch her walk in and admire her beauty.

Cinderella's beauty is a common theme through both the live-action and animated version. It made her stepfamily jealous and was forced to conceal herself. The animated version focuses on beauty so much because it was a social norm during the classical princess era. Women were expected to act and dress a certain way and if they didn't they were different. This notion is represented throughout both versions.

Belle

Belle's name translates to "beauty" and it's not hard to tell why. Her hair falls perfectly around her face, her tiny waist accentuates her petite body and her makeup is always perfectly done in the animated version. When she is placed in a field of weeds with the sunset behind her, she is the most beautiful thing there. Though she is so beautiful, her personality is even more beautiful because she uses it to speak up when something is wrong.

Similar to the animated version, the live-action Belle also has perfect hair, makeup, and a petite body with a tiny waist. When she meets the furniture in the enchanted castle, they

described her as a girl with pretty eyes, proud face and a perfect canvas to makeover for dinner.

Belle was also portrayed as a more motherly figure in the live-action version when she tries to teach the young girl to read and constantly helps her father and knows just what he needs. She is also gentle with animals, which makes her more appealing to the beast.

Jasmine

In the animated version, Jasmine is a beautiful girl, whose large brown eyes call attention to her perfect face, her crop top shows how skinny her petite frame is, and many comments are made to tell her she's pretty. While walking through the marketplace one salesman said "a pretty necklace for a pretty lady" (17:50). She often uses her body to flirt with Aladdin and also with Jafar when she is pretending to be in love with him. She moves her hips in a provocative way that entrances the men. Jasmine also runs away crying and throws herself onto the fountain outside, a common trait amongst Disney, after hearing that Jafar has ordered Aladdin to be beheaded.

Jasmine wears extremely beautiful clothing in the live-action version and they were often so vibrantly colored. The attention was always on her and it seemed that characters were mainly obsessed with her looks and title and not with her ideas. She often thought of her mother and wants to rule Agrabah the way her mother wanted to. Unlike the animated version, Jasmine did

not use her body in a provocative way because her beauty was in the way her face and clothing looked.

Claim 4: True Love/Saved By the Man

Cinderella

During the animated version, Cinderella wakes up from a dream about true love when the animated feature begins, and when she finally makes it to the ball; she instantly falls in love with the prince even though she doesn't know that it is him. Cinderella embodies the definition of love at first sight when she leaves the prince head over heels in love with her when she leaves the ball. The prince saves her from her servant-stricken life and they lived happily ever after.

In the live-action version, after Cinderella takes off crying on her horse she runs into the prince who introduced himself as Mr. Kit who was on a hunt. Mr. Kit stopped her runaway horse that Cinderella could not control and saved her life. She immediately falls in love with him after they began talking. Similar to the animated version, Prince Charming saves her from her servant-stricken life with true loves kiss. Unlike the animated version, Cinderella did not fall in love with him in their initial meeting but still falls in love at the royal ball.

Cinderella was saved from her servant-stricken life in both versions of the story. She got the happily-ever-after she deserved but she had to wait until Prince Charming came to rescue her.

The animated version, which was made after the end of World War II, followed the theme that

the housewife would wait for their husband to return and rescue them from all the work they had been doing all day. The life-action version also saved her from her servant life after he disguised himself as one of the guardsmen and ordered she be set free from the tower she was locked in. If he had not disguised himself as a royal guardsman, then Cinderella would never have been set free from her life.

Belle

Belle does not necessarily follow the traditional aspects of falling in love at first sight in the animated version. However, after she tells the beast that she loves him she is able to break the curse and live happily ever after with him in his perfect castle. The beast also saved her from the wolves in the forest after she ran away from the castle.

During the live-action version there was more of a blooming love story that was prevalent. After the beast saves her from the wolves, she helps him back to the castle and tends to his wounds. Belle learned more about his past and begins to fall in love with him slowly. She cared for his wounds day after day and began to form a relationship with him.

Belle is a different type of ending because she never really needed to be rescued other than when the wolves attacked her in both versions. Disney instead made Belle rescue the beast from his ugly life in order for him to be happy again. This is important because it was the first time

Disney had a woman rescue a man from his chained life as a beast. In both versions, Belle's love for the beast develops over time and it wasn't love at first sight unlike other princesses.

Jasmine

In the animated film, Jasmine believes that she should marry for love and not be forced to marry for law. When she meets Aladdin she immediately takes a strong liking to him and shows it through her flirty eyes, body language, and instant fascination with him and it wasn't until he asked if she trusted him that she begins to love him. After going on a magical carpet ride date around the world with him, she falls madly in love with him and changes her personality when talking to her father about Prince Ali (Aladdin). After they fall in love, Aladdin helped change the law because they exemplify the true meaning of true love thus allowing the two to live happily ever after with one another. Jasmine took a lot of initiative into her own hands and made her own decisions. When her father, Aladdin and Jafar were trying to decide her future, Jasmine overheard them arguing over her and stated "I am not a prize to be won" (53:32). She is angered by everyone trying to decide her future for her as well as all the potential suitors trying to marry her only because she is young and beautiful princess.

The live-action version began with Jasmine getting in trouble from giving bread to a hungry child. When she is unable to pay, Aladdin steps in and helps her escape. She begins to fall in love with him when he takes her to his shelter and they share their backstories. After Aladdin sneaks

into the palace to return the bracelet that belonged to her mother, he then takes the hair piece from her hair and promises to return to her tomorrow night and Jasmine waited for him to come to her the next night. Her father makes her sultan and she immediately goes to find Aladdin who left the palace to have true loves kiss.

Claim 5: Sticks Up for Herself

Cinderella

In the animated version, Cinderella does very little to stick up for herself and consistently does every chore she is ordered to do while always putting her stepfamily's needs before her own. She only really stuck up for herself when she was able to get out of the locked tower and goes against her stepmother's order of not trying on the slipper because she knows the prince will marry Cinderella.

In the live-action version, Cinderella she stands up for herself more. When she first met Mr. Kit, she yells at him for frightening the elk and tells him to promise not to hurt it. After her stepmother told her she was not ordering a dress for her, Cinderella reused one of her mother's in order to attend the ball against her stepmother's orders. The biggest way she stuck up for herself was when she told her stepmother that she has never been her mother and never will be.

Cinderella never truly stuck up for herself in either versions, however in the live-action version she tells her stepmother that she forgives her. She was never truly given a voice in either version and was not able to stick up for herself as much as other princesses.

Belle

Belle consistently stuck up for herself when she was made fun of, Gaston tries to make her his bride, or when the beast yells at her and can't control his temper in the animated version. When Gaston approaches her in her own house, she holds her nose as he talks about their future and how they will have seven children together. She often used sarcasm when talking to Gaston because he always thinks he knows what's best for her and she manages to trick him out of her house to end the retched conversation they were having.

During the live-action version Belle always grabbed an object to defend herself when she felt threatened. She always did the things she was told not to do. Belle took her fathers place in the castle, explored the west wing, and refused to join the beast for dinner. Belle stuck up for what she knew was right and when the village people turned against the Beast after Gaston said he was a monster and a threat to the town, she went back to help him and broke the spell.

Belle was extremely strong-willed in both versions. This strong-will was only seen in Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*, but Belle never wanted anyone to decide her fate for her. This is an important part to Belles story because she used her voice to stand up for what she believed in.

She specifically stuck for herself against Gaston who always tried to make her his bride and stuck up against the beast when he yelled at her.

Jasmine

During the animated version, Jasmine consistently made comments about how the law should change on when a young princess should be married. She stuck up for what she believed in and believed that the law was wrong by stating, “I hate being forced into this” (13:26).

Jasmine tries to do things on her own and doesn’t ask for help but accepts when offered by Aladdin. When Aladdin jumps from one rooftop to another, he turns around to lay a plank down for her to walk across, but instead she also jumps over to the other rooftop to show she is capable of doing things on her own. She constantly voices her own opinion and was a strong advocate for sticking up for herself.

During the live-action version, Jasmine constantly said that she won’t be silenced and she indeed was not. She believed she could be sultan and tried convincing her father that she was capable but he was too consumed by the laws. Jasmine began to see through Aladdin’s façade of being Prince Ali and demanded he show her where Agrabah was on her maps she was studying. After the death of her mother, she lived in her mother’s shadow and wanted to rule the kingdom the way her mother would’ve wanted and she made that known. Jasmine believed that she was

“born to marry more than some useless prince” and she was constantly trying to show her father she could rule as sultan.

The live-action Jasmine is an important aspect to the feminism movement for the portrayal of women in media because she had the biggest voice out of the three princesses studied. She never remained silent against what she believed in and this was seen in both versions. Jasmine knew exactly what she wanted and always made sure she got it. She did not want to be married off because it was a rule, but instead stuck up for her wanting to marry for love. This is especially emphasized in the live-action version every time a prince came to woo her because she was not a prize to be won.

Conclusion

While it seems that many instances of the representation of gender role are subtle and can be hidden to a common viewer, Disney princesses are often expected to act, speak and look a certain way. Both the animated and live action princesses displayed characteristics that were seen as submissive, belittled, womanly/princess-like, true love/saved by the man, or stuck up for herself/took control. These categories all represent different subcategories for the definition of gender role and allow for a better understanding of how these characteristics play a major role in today’s society. As Disney has continued to produce more films in the princess category, the newer princesses seem to have more of a personal identity than the older princesses. This also

includes a princess not necessarily needing a man to save them from the horrid life they are living, as seen in *Frozen*, *Brave* or *Moana*. The live action versions of the Princess franchise have also given the princesses a bigger voice and they do not have all the same characteristics as the animated versions.

The animated and live-action version told two different versions of the same story. Disney's live-action version discussed more backstories for the princesses family, as well as the beast from *Beauty and the Beast*. Both the animated and live-actions films were made during different time frames, and it seems the live-action movies gave the princesses a more feminist role than the animated version did.

This paper studied three princesses from three different eras that Higgs and Garabedian described in their scholarly work. While the study that was conducted assessed information differently from the scholarly readings that were utilized, it did not reflect any conclusive data the scholars wrote about. The scholarly work studied different categories of princesses diversity, how the messages of the films affect the younger generation and the possibility of psychological twists some viewers might receive the overall message from the film as. This topic of gender role affects media culture because the feminism movement has become more prevalent over the past few years and media has begun to shift to include feminist values in radio, film, tv, and other forms of media.

Ultimately, the scholarly work used helped to guide research, but most research the scholars wrote about was conducted on the animated versions of the princesses. The live-action versions don't seem to follow the same concepts as the animated versions but follows the same story line. The live-action films try to make the stories more relatable to the audience by incorporating their backstories and responding in a way the audience would. They also use raw-emotion for the princesses more than the animated version. The animated version tells a snippet of the princesses' backstory but focuses on how they are rescued from their lives. The animated versions also reflected the eras in which they were created, whereas the live-action version reflect ideals of the feminism movement against the portrayal of women in the media.

If given the opportunity to extend research at a further time, it would be beneficial to look at a larger collection of the Disney princess franchise. It would be useful to look at one movie from each era described by Higgs and Garabedian and compare how they have evolved over an 80-year time span. The method used to study the films seemed most adequate, however, it would be useful to create subcategories for looking at a larger selection of films in order to compare and contrast princesses from each era. While princesses play a major part in children's lives, there is also a large population of adults that fantasize about the Disney princess life. The information gathered from my research has allowed me to answer my thesis question; how are gender role stereotypes being portrayed in the Disney princess animated and live-action movies of

Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast and *Aladdin*? Have the princesses' identities changed or stayed the same under the definition of gender role stereotypes?

Disney will always play a major role in both children's and adult's lives, but the hidden gender role messages play a bigger role in the development of children than Disney thinks. It is important to distinguish fantasy from reality and began to show that women are more than just lonely maids waiting to be rescued by a man. Though the Disney princes began to have a bigger voice during the Renaissance era, the newer princesses take a bigger role in fighting about misogynistic values the films can sometimes portray.

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