

**Title page:** Your first and last name, and student number; title of your project; due date; course title; professor name

*Please remove everything in blue italics before submitting your assignment; these words are just here to give you guidance on what to include in each section. Each section heading should be bolded and underlined (**Introduction**, **Methodology**, etc.) while subheadings within each of those sections should be bolded and italicized (e.g. ***Participants and Recruitment*** is within **Methodology**). This will help make it clear that the subheadings are within each larger section. You can use sections from your past assignments just make sure your project is updated to describe what actually happened in practice (rather than what you planned to do), and make sure you are discussing the project in past tense (e.g. say “I used the focus group method...” rather than “I will use the focus group method”).*

### **Introduction**

*200-300 words. Please include a brief introduction, no longer than a paragraph, which introduces your research topic and why it is relevant to CCY (not why you ‘like it’, but why it is relevant to the program and is child-centred research), your child-centred research question (bolded), and ‘roadmap’ of your final report (e.g. “I begin my report with a brief discussion of theoretical underpinnings... I have a literature review on the topic of \_\_\_\_... Following the literature review, I describe my research methodology...”).*

### **Theoretical Framework**

*350-600 words. Explain how your child-centred study is underpinned by a children’s rights framework, the new sociology of childhood, and/or other theories you would like to use to explain what’s happening in your data (eg. critical race theory, queer theory, feminist theories, trans studies, gender theory etc). You may want to touch on childhood studies theory, but please do not focus on positivist or developmental theories (remember, this course is about taking a child-centred approach and focusing on children’s own perspectives, not about ‘fixing’ children or ‘measuring’ their development). Some things you might want to touch on to help you support your argument are your open-ended research question focused on young people’s own perspectives; your attempt at a participatory/child-centred methodology, etc.*

### **Brief Literature Review**

*750-2000 words. Insert a brief literature review about your own chosen research topic (you can use the same content from your proposal last year if the studies are still relevant). Make sure you include a minimum of six recent (post-2010) studies that are relevant to your research topic. These studies can examine similar questions in different contexts (studies can take place in other cities, with different age groups etc.). Discuss the studies, compare the studies, describe the research methods they used, describe what they what they examined, what the results were, and why the studies are relevant to your study.*

### **Methodology**

*500-2500 words (for the whole section). Include a brief introduction to your methodology (just a sentence or two reminding the reader of your research question and outlining the things you will*

cover in this section, eg. “I will begin by describing my participant sample and recruitment strategy. Next I will...”). Use the exact headings below.

### **Ethical Considerations**

100-250 words. Discuss the ethical considerations of your project in detail. How did you ensure your use of these methods is ethically sound? What process did you follow to obtain consent from your participants? What kinds of consent did you obtain? You can use your ethics application to discuss specific things (such as confidentiality etc.). You should back up your discussion with sources (you can also consult the ‘Ethics-focused Articles/Chapters’ on eClass).

### **Participants and Recruitment**

Who were your participants (not their names but their ages, gender, general location such as ‘GTA’)? How did you recruit them? If you are using public domain data (e.g. Youtube videos), explain where you found the data, and how you determined which data to include/exclude. If you do not have any human participants, this section can be called ‘Public Domain Data’ rather than ‘Participants and Recruitment’.

### **Research Setting**

Explain your research setting. Where did the research take place? (e.g. Zoom) Why did you select this research site?

### **Procedure**

Explain step-by-step the specific research methods and procedures you used, and how you used them (how many times did you meet, for how long, what happened in each session, what activities and data collection methods did you do with participants—describe these in detail etc.) You should draw on texts to back up your discussion (readings from CCY 3999, ‘Methods-Focused Articles/Chapters’ from eClass, or external sources focusing on the methods of your choice, if needed). What went well? How did you address any issues that came up? Make sure to back up your methods with scholarly books and articles about these methods.

### **Analytic Procedure/Thematic Analysis**

500-750 words. Here, insert the analytic procedure/thematic analysis you recently wrote. Make sure it’s in past tense and update it for your Final Report if anything changed between now and the due date for the Final Report at the end of the course.

### **Findings**

750-1500 words. This is the section where you will include coded excerpts from your data set and use theory to explain what is happening in these excerpts, while also connecting your data to the research included in your literature review. Depending on the length of each data excerpt you choose to discuss, include 1-3 data excerpts per theme to analyze. Your theoretical framework is what will guide and frame the discussion of your data, how you understand your data using the theories you chose, and how you explain what is happening in your data. This is where you bring the theories you wrote about in your Theoretical Framework into conversation with your data. That is, how would you use the theories you chose to understand your data?

Use the following guide to share and discuss your data:

**Title for Theme One:**

2-3 sentences to introduce theme/code 1.  
first data excerpt for theme 1  
interpretive analysis for theme 1  
theoretical analysis and connection to literature review for theme 1.  
Repeat this process using 1-2 more data excerpts for theme 1.

**Title for Theme Two:**

2-3 sentences to introduce theme/code 2.  
first data excerpt for theme 2.  
interpretive analysis for theme 2.  
theoretical analysis and connection to literature review for theme 2.  
Repeat this process using 1-2 more data excerpts for theme 2.

**Title for Theme Three:**

2-3 sentences to introduce theme/code 3.  
first data excerpt for theme 3.  
interpretive analysis for theme 3.  
theoretical analysis and connection to literature review for theme 3.  
Repeat this process using 1-2 more data excerpts for theme 3.

**Final Reflections on the Process**

250-350 words. Reflect on your research process. What worked? What didn't work? Were there any limitations to your study? How might this study change the way you undertake future research? How does this study contribute to the field of Children's Studies? What new ideas for research arose for you after conducting this study and discussing your findings? Do you have new questions about what research you might want to do in the future based on what you found in this study? Include any relevant final thoughts or reflections.

**References**

As per APA style, the reference list is on a separate page. Please compile all of your references from the entire proposal into one reference list in APA style. Please double check that everything you have cited as an in-text citation also appears on your reference list.

**Honours Research Project:**  
**“I’m never going to have a fairy tale ending:”**  
**Girls' Perspectives on Disney Films**

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CCY 4999: Research with Children and Young People: Honours Research Project

Dr. Kael Reid

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## Girls' Experiences with and Perspectives of Disney

### Introduction

This research study examines young girls' experiences with and perspectives of Disney films and characters in order to examine unique childhood experiences. This research topic is relevant to the field of Childhood Studies because it enables young people to have their perspectives and experiences with mainstream media documented and shared in academic contexts. This visibility can influence students and scholars in the field of Childhood Studies by improving our understanding of children and childhood perspectives in general and in connection to Disney. Exploring the connections and relationship between children and Disney is important, as various forms of Disney media impact many young people's childhood experiences.

Overall, the relevance of my research study within Childhood Studies seeks to have young girls' voices heard, and it is imperative to look at diverse childhood experiences rather than making assumptions or ignoring unique encounters in favour of common experiences. My study addresses the research question: **How do girls ages 15-17 in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) describe their perspectives on Disney films?** My intentions were not to base all childhood experiences on my findings nor negate their unique experiences based on previously done scholarly studies.

I will begin this report with a brief theoretical framework, followed by a literature review that analyzes studies conducted post-2010 related to children's interpretations of and experiences with Disney, specifically Disney's portrayal of prince and princess characters and its influences on young people. After the literature review, I describe my research methodology, ethical considerations, thematic analysis, an in-depth analysis of my research findings, and a final reflection on the research process.

## **Theoretical Framework**

To conduct this research, I took a constructivist approach rather than a positivist approach. The goal of my study was to address specific encounters with Disney in order to analyze unique childhood experiences. I also chose a qualitative approach that focused on how young girls interpret Disney characters while also seeking a better understanding of how they view themselves in relation to their engagement with Disney films. Another reason I chose a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach is that children's individual experiences, which includes their thoughts and actions "cannot be conveyed in an analogous way with numbers" (Greig et al., 2013, p. 65). A positivist approach assumes children's thoughts and actions can be measured and equates them to numbers. Yet, this negates the uniqueness of experiences and individuality while undermining children's agency and voice. Due to these reasons, data will be collected through non-statistical means through drawing as an art-based methodology and individual. This will be further discussed within the *Methodology* section. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of my study through the concepts of children's agency, the social construction of childhood and gender, and the new social studies of childhood framework.

### ***Agency***

The concept of 'agency' "underscores children's and young people's capacities to make choices about the things they do and to express their own ideas" (James & James, 2008, p. 4). Historically, children have been positioned as passive recipients of knowledge; their opinions are silenced, and their perspectives go unheard. Adults have long been under the impression that children are in the stage of 'becoming' adults. Thus, children are often expected to conform to cultural and societal standards and expectations laid out by adults and children socialized based on these ideas and norms.

The term 'socialization' encapsulates the formation of society as a whole. Cregan & Cuthbert (2014) explain that socialization is the process through which we learn about ourselves and our identities through interactions with others. In this view, socialization is relational. Yet, even through the process of socialization, individuals have some amount agency. That said, if adults and institutions are raising children to conform expectations related to, for example, gender expression and sexual orientation, while disregarding children's own voices and opinions, then we as a society have been historically and traditionally limiting children's ability to exercise their agency and share their knowledge on their own lived experiences.

Kehily (2013) asserts that child-centered research reflects a recognition that children possess agency "and that they could, and did, influence their own lives, the lives of their peers, and that of the wider community around them" (p. 182). Therefore, it is because of the misrepresentation of children as passive and the underrepresentation of children in active positions that my study focuses on centering children's agency. Disney is a massive, very popular, media and entertainment company that caters mainly to children and young people. Thus, it is ethical when discussing Disney and its impact on young people to include children's voices, opinions, perspectives, and experiences. By recognizing and exploring children's agency, my study demonstrates children's perspectives on how Disney impacts identity construction and how its subject matter is interpreted, understood, and sometimes, transformed by young people differently across childhoods.

### ***Social Construction of Childhood & Gender***

'Social construction' is "a theoretical perspective that explores the ways in which 'reality; is negotiated in everyday life through people's interactions and through a set of discourses" (James & James, 2008, p. 116). This logic understands that reality is not a static concept; instead, as a

dependent variable based on structural, institutional, geological, cultural, and social practices and norms. One's lived experiences are greatly shaped by the cumulative factors around us. Sociologist Nikolas Rose argues that "the emergence of the science of child development and developmental psychology as an academic discipline [enabled] the production of a set of standards and norms against which children could be measured and assessed in a whole range of contexts" (Kehily, 2013, p. 230). Childhood is a socially defined concept; which instead of biological facts, childhood is altered by external social forces. Therefore, Kehily (2013) expresses that "by asserting that childhood is a social construction, researchers are arguing that childhood cannot be seen as a straightforward description of a natural, and intrinsically biological, stage of the life course" (p. 228). Interestingly, my participants are from different ethnic backgrounds. Since culture plays a significant role in socialization, my study provides multiple perspectives outlining the nonuniversal experiences of children's consumption of Disney.

Related to this framework of social construction is the theoretical idea that gender is also being a socially constructed concept. Earlier, I mentioned 'socialization' as a process in which identity is formed and negotiated, which every individual experiences. Socialization, coupled with social construction, recognizes the external social factors that shape one's ability to form and understand their identity authentically. That said, the formation of gender identity is "a significant feature of the socialization process" (Kehily, 2013, p. 221). It is through the socialization of gender that "individuals observe, imitate, and eventually internalize the specific attitudes and behaviors that the culture defines as gender appropriate by using other males and females as role models" (Wells, 2015, p. 46). As Disney falls under mass media – and a primary agent of socialization of populations of children – children may attempt to emulate the behavioural and physical attributes of the male and female characters. This 'emulation' is an issue, as Disney, historically and



contemporarily, perpetuates, produces, and reinforces traditional standards and expectations of masculinity and femininity to their child audiences. Large, muscular, aggressive, and egotistical are some of the traits of most male Disney characters. In contrast, fragile, thin, fair-skinned, docile, and subordinate are a few of the traits expressed by most female characters.

The social construction of childhood and gender plays a vital role in exploring, analyzing, and understanding my participants' opinions and experiences. From how they viewed themselves and presented themselves to others to a sense of obligation to conform to and exercise Disney's singular version of femininity, too often did they voice concern over how Disney has negatively impacted their childhoods and formation of identity.

### *New Social Studies of Childhood*

Children were historically thought to be "immature, irrational, incompetent, asocial, and acultural, in contrast to adults who were mature, rational, competent, social, and cultural beings" (Kehily, 2013, p. 225). Because of this, children were viewed as incomplete, which produced the idea that 'childhood' is a stage of 'becoming.' During this stage, they would learn life skills and conform to the standards and expectations of adults in order for them to be valuable citizens in the future. These beliefs allowed researchers to disregard children's voices as, unlike adults, children were considered to "not have any intrinsic value in their own right" (Kehily, 2013, p. 225). However, when sociocultural researchers paid increasing attention to children and young people's perspectives and experiences, a new paradigm for children took form; the 'new social studies for childhood.' This new paradigm advocates for children and their voices, opinions, and experiences to be taken seriously. The 'new social studies of childhood' values children's contributions and celebrates their active participation. This shift contrasted the previous 'preferred' method of research, which situated children as passive and in favour of replacing children's accounts with

adult assumptions. James & James (2008) makes it a point to mention that "such a shift in perspective has enabled children's views and ideas to become the central focus of research, inspiring the description of such work as being 'child-centred'" (p. 10).

Specific to this research is the exploration of children's agency and active participation. Wells (2015) expresses that "one of the goals of the new paradigm of childhood has been to stress the agency of children and to incorporate the voice of children into childhood studies" (p. 3). Incorporating the 'new social studies of childhood' within my studies practice has allowed my participants to be valued and feel valued, to exercise agency, and express feeling empowered when voicing their stories knowing that others will hear them.

### **Brief Literature Review**

For this literature review, I analyzed six studies conducted post-2010 related to children's interpretation and experiences with Disney, specifically, Disney's portrayal of prince and princess characters and its influences on said children. These peer-reviewed articles have educated me on relevant research techniques and helped structure my research study involving my participants and Disney.

### ***Gender and Visual Stereotypes in Disney Characters***

When considering Disney films and characters, one must also understand the nature in which they portray femininity and masculinity and its potentially harmful influence on children. In one way or another, the following studies examine Disney's portrayal of princes and princesses and their connection to exhibiting typical gender stereotypes.

A study conducted in the United States by Golden & Jacoby (2018) aimed to look at girls' impressions of princesses, their knowledge of gender-role stereotypes in Disney media, and how

they reimagined or incorporated Disney's princess storylines and characters into their pretend play. This study included 31 preschool girls from 2 different schools, ranging from 3-5 years old of various racial/ethnic groups, and 30 of their parents. They used a multi-method approach which included: pretend play observation, semi-structured interviews, and parent questionnaires. After analyzing their findings from the three methods, Golden & Jacoby (2018) broke their data into four prominent and recurring themes; beauty, clothing & accessories, princess body movements, and exclusion of boys. This concluded that "the reappearance of these four themes across all classes, combined with the girls' near formulaic assessment of the princesses in their interviews, suggests that princess play confines girls to preset and gendered narratives in their play" (Golden & Jacoby, 2018, p. 309). Golden & Jacoby's study analyzes children's subconscious involvement with gendered stereotypes due to its portrayal in Disney princesses through multiple methodologies. Similarly, my study aimed to uncover children's thoughts and the involvement of Disney's subliminal messages of gender and femininity. Due to Golden & Jacoby's study, I have a deeper understanding of the impacts of gendered stereotypes and other forms of observational methodologies pertaining to research. I have previously stated that my study revolved around children's involvement; thus, it was conducted with children rather than on children. This opposes the methods of Golden & Jacoby, who did not take a child-centered approach, as children did not necessarily have an active voice in their research.

Similarly, a study by Uppal (2019) examined how "how princesses in animated Disney movies are perceived and understood by girls (8–15 years) in three different countries, over two time periods with a gap of nearly a decade (2009 and 2018)" (p. 1). The three countries of interest were India, and Fiji studied in 2009, and Sweden in 2018; they were chosen in order to analyze if there is a difference in Disney princess perceptions between girls growing up in nations with and

without royal families, as well as between girls raised in nonwestern and Western countries. Their research revolved around the question and examined: "How do race, culture, and presence of a royal family interact with transnational access to the same media content (Disney Princesses) to influence the perception of being a girl?" (Uppal, 2019, p. 7). This study utilized three participatory methodologies: drawing, individual interviews, and focus groups. Despite the increase of ethnic and multiracial princesses, the drawing results indicated that most participants from each country drew princesses with pale skin or no skin colour at all, leaving the skin as 'white,' with no discernible variation between the 2009 and 2018 data. In individual interviews and focus groups, participants identified that Disney's appeal, which includes certain assumptions and patterns congruent with the brand, centers around a close relationship equating being a princess to being a female. With the results of all three methodologies used, I concluded that although this study focused on comparing participants' perceptions between 3 countries nearly a decade apart, no fundamental differences were noted, as the main idea of these Disney princesses was still visually understood as 'white.' I found Uppal's study relevant to my study on children's experiences with Disney because it analyzes participants from different ethnicities and cultures worldwide. My study features three girls from different ethnicities: Valentine is Ashkenazi Jewish, Christmas is Korean-Canadian, and Rudolph is of Filipino descent. Including a broader range of ethnicities allowed me to explore their unique experiences and perspectives more in-depth.

A study was conducted by Bazzini et al. (2010), a group of highly educated researchers in the United States, to analyze if there was a connection between children's judgment & association of others and beauty & goodness stereotypes portrayed in Disney films. The study consisted of 42 children, 21 male and 21 female, whose ages ranged from 6 to 12. The method of choice was associated with movies and photographs. The study was split into two groups to watch a Disney

movie: The first was *Cinderella*, which had a high rating of physical attractiveness among its characters, and the second was *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, which had a low rating of physical attractiveness. After watching the movie, each child was given two photos, one of which showcased someone attractive, the other unattractive, and was asked to rate their assumed behaviour and whom they would prefer as a friend. Results found no significant influence from the Disney film the child watched; however, the more attractive photograph won for both ratings of behaviour and friendship. Similarly to Bazzini et al. (2010), I also included film-watching within my study; the nature of this activity will be further discussed in my *Procedure* component of the *Methodology* section. Initially, after discussing the films my participants watched, I could not distinguish any correlation between this study and the one I conducted; however, when revisiting my data set, I found my participants collaborating with the idea of beauty and morality. Through this, I created a sub-theme that incorporated my participant's observation of *what is beauty, what is ugly, what is good, and what is evil* that stem from stereotypes in Disney films.

A study conducted by England et al. (2011) "utilized a coded content analysis approach to examine these primary characters' gender portrayals to reveal the roles present in this popular genre of films, and assess change over time" (p. 556). Traditional masculine and feminine features portrayed by the prince and princess characters through their behaviour and actions were characteristics of interest in this study. Three hypotheses were noted, [1] gender of the characteristics would differ between princes and princesses, assuming that princes would show more masculine characteristics and princesses would have more feminine characteristics, [2] princes would perform more rescues than princesses, while princesses would need to be rescued more, and [3] that over time the gender portrayal (characteristics, behaviour, and actions) would become more equal. The third hypothesis was examined by looking at all the Disney princess

movies throughout history; the timeline started from the earliest princess, Snow White, to the latest, Tiana, from *The Princess and the Frog*. Using the coding method, the researchers gathered quantitative information by categorizing and cataloging each portrayal of the princes and princesses in connection to their hypotheses. The results for the first hypothesis indicated that princes exhibited a significant amount of masculine than feminine characteristics and vice versa for princesses. For the second hypothesis, they found that princes and princesses needed roughly the same amount of rescuing; however, princesses would only do the final rescue scene with the prince's help. Finally, their third hypothesis showed that as Disney princess movies progressed into the 21st century, the level of feminine characteristics increased with the princes and decreased within the princesses, while they also increased masculine behaviour. Similar to Golden & Jacoby's study (2018), England et al. (2011) unraveled important information about Disney's portrayal of masculine and feminine behaviour and the lack of it among members of the opposite sex. Thus, England et al's study is relevant to my research because my study also aimed to uncover children's thoughts and the involvement of Disney's subliminal messages of gender and femininity. However, this study was conducted without the involvement of children, strictly revolving around statistics which is a quantitative approach. Although England et al's study has proven value in knowledge to my study, I took a qualitative, children-centered approach instead.

A connecting factor within the previous studies would be its analysis of Disney's portrayal of gender and gender stereotypes, which used multiple methodologies to gather quantitative data. Golden & Jacoby's (2018) and Uppal's (2019) study explicitly used groups of children from different ethnicities to examine Disney's influence on children from other races that were not dominantly depicted within their films. In contrast, Bazzini et al's (2010) and England et al's (2011) data consisted of primary film-related data to analyze visual and gender stereotypes.

### ***Gender Marketing within Disney Toys***

To examine Disney's depiction of gender and its affiliation with gender stereotypes, I found two articles that analyze these themes within their toys and marketing strategies.

A study conducted in the United States by Auster & Mansbach (2012) aimed to examine toys featured on the online Disney store concerning how toys are marketed depending on the child's gender (boy or girl); this also included looking at toys existing in both categories. They explained that "the characteristics of such toys may reveal the extent to which gender expectations for girls and boys overlap and the degree of flexibility of gender expectations for girls and boys" (Auster & Mansbach, 2012, p. 376). Through this, they drew a hypothesis that proved toys market gender expectations. This solidified the idea of gender being a navigator and determined the 'likes and dislikes' of children; specific colours (predominantly pink and blue) and typical toys like dolls/ domestic toys vs. weapons/ building sets. The study had a sample size of 618 toys; 410 were marketed for boys, 208 for girls, and 91 appeared under both genders. To understand gender marketing schemes, Auster & Mansbach (2012) used pictures of the toys, which were divided and critically analyzed into three categories of interest, [1] whether the toy colour was considered bold or pastel, [2] what colour was predominantly featured on the toy, and [3] what type of toy it was. After analyzing and dividing the data into categories, the researchers used tabular analysis and chi-squares to chart their findings mathematically. The study results supported their hypothesis of specific gender marketing tactics and stereotypes associated with boy and girl toys featured on the Disney store website. Despite this study not including children's active thoughts or interactions with Disney toys, it still holds relevance to my study as it discusses the potential influences Disney marketing has with assuming what toys girls or boys would be interested in playing with. With

this knowledge of the existing adult influence used to cater to children's consumption of stereotypes, I used this to further study and understand my collected data from my participant's experiences with Disney films and characters.

A study created by Coyne et al. (2016) aimed to examine the amount of interaction with Disney princess media and products attributed to gender stereotyping, body esteem, and prosocial behaviour in early childhood. It was a longitudinal study sectioned into two stages, first consisting of 198 children from different race groups, either preschoolers or kindergarteners; then, a year later, it featured the children's parents. Participants were recruited from four schools; two were in a midsize city in the midwestern United States, while the other two were from a smaller city in the Pacific Northwestern United States. Multiple methodologies were used in this study: observing children's preferences in a toy task and parents' and teachers' reports. During the first stage, children were observed engaging with toys and were measured by their gender toy preferences. Children were given a variety of toys and then asked to categorize them into boxes based on the likelihood of them playing with them; the boxes were: how much, how little, or not at all. Parents participated in a customized version of the stage one activity during stage two, which assesses preschoolers' gender-stereotyped behaviour. As rated by parents, teachers, and observers in the child observation task, results found that girls had significantly higher levels of princess identification, playing with princess toys, and viewing more princess media than boys. The girls also had significantly higher levels of female gender-stereotypical and prosocial behaviours than boys. On the other hand, boys "exhibited more male gender-stereotypical behaviours than girls, according to all three informants" (Coyne et al. 2016, p. 1917). However, the "examination found no gender differences on body esteem, overall media time, and active mediation" (Coyne et al. 2016, p. 1917). In contrast, stage two with parents found no differing patterns of gender



differences. This study is particularly relevant to my research as it is directly associated with children's relations and interactions with gender stereotypes connecting to Disney princesses. However, their choice of including teacher and parent voices differs from my study as I only included participant's voices in my research and the findings.

Auster & Mansbach (2019) and Coyne et al's (2016) studies aimed to use Disney toys and their marketing scheme to examine their portrayal of genderized characteristics. However, Auster & Mansbach's study did not include children within their analysis and only looked at Disney's perception of gender traits related to how they design and market their toys to show what gender their intended audience is. In contrast, Coyne et al. included children in their data to analyze how children perceive toys as gendered and how Disney catering to specific genders emits gender stereotypes.

### ***Relevance to My Own Research***

All the studies discussed are relevant to my own research study. Although some did not directly correlate with what I ended up studying, and some did not include children within their analysis, they all involved Disney's portrayals of gender stereotypes and possible impacts on children who engage with the world of Disney. Nevertheless, I did use the collective knowledge I gathered through analyzing these studies in my study on young girls' perspectives and their experiences with Disney films and characters. In addition, although most of these studies took place in the United States with American participants, my study stemmed from more local perspectives by involving young girls in the GTA. A limitation I found was that many of the studies I analyzed took a positivist approach where their findings replaced children's individual voices with statistics, thus conveying children's thoughts as measurable. Due to this, the studies lacked

understanding and acknowledgment of child agency. This is evident through the involvement of parents and authoritative figures, where their understanding of children's experiences with Disney outshined the participants' voices. It is through recognizing that children's voices are often rendered invisible that I chose to conduct a child-centered, constructivist, and qualitative study. As expressed in the *Theoretical Framework* section, my study explored and examined children's studies concepts such as agency, social construction, and the new social studies of childhood.

### **Methodologies**

As discussed in my *Literature Review*, many extensive studies have been done with children regarding Disney films, toys, and characters. The six studies I previously analyzed were all quantitative studies from post-2010, where most featured larger groups of children from multiple geographical locations and different racial groups, with ages ranging from 3-15. Using the information I gathered from the six studies, my research included a much smaller group of girls exploring Disney films in relation to their personal experiences. As previously stated, I addressed the research question: **How do girls ages 15-17 in the GTA describe their perspectives on Disney films?** I will begin by discussing my study's ethical considerations. Next, I will describe my participant sample and recruitment strategy and discuss my research setting and procedure.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

My study was child-centered and staged as research *with* children rather than *on* them. I aimed to treat each participant's ideas, experiences, and opinions with the utmost respect. Many ethical issues threaten child-centered research; these include generational order, child privacy, and payments, which I will now discuss.

“Generational order” is a concept discussed by Mayall (2000). Mayall outlines how adult rights and power relations between child-to-parent and child-to-researcher create certain dynamics in research with young people. Mayall has noted, "parents sometimes overrode children's contributions, or diverted the conversation if children made contributions that exposed aspects of family life which adults preferred to keep hidden" (p. 131). In addition, Mayall explains that researchers have also been found to silence children's voices by supporting the adults and dismissing the children's accounts. I was continuously mindful of this issue in my research. Thus, to eliminate potential obstructions, I established boundaries between the parents and myself to eradicate silencing or deluding the importance of a child's active voice. I achieved this by informing my participants that parents were not to be present at any point while my study was taking place; this will be further discussed in the *Research Settings* section of this report.

Another point of concern was the topic of ethics and children's privacy. During both the drawing and one-on-one sessions, I used an audio recording device to collect conversations and data. This decision was made so that in the future, I could analyze my findings to reflect precisely what my participants said, which is something I could not have done if I solely relied on my memory. However, even though my participants referred to each other by name, I did not include names or distinguishable attributes at any point; this way, my participants remained completely anonymous. Additionally, I kept all collected data locked within my phone and computer to guarantee the child's rights to privacy.

Berman & MacNevin's (2017) expressed that a situation arose in their study where one of the mothers of a potential candidate for their Ireland project requested access to all the interview audio tapes. Their choice to remain faithful to their participant's rights to privacy influenced my approach to privacy and anonymity. Although I understand why a parent would want access to any

research files that include their child, I believe parents should not be entitled to those files. I hold children's trust and privacy higher than the desires of parents. If the child is in no danger to themselves or is not being harmed by another, they are entitled to confidentiality and can choose who has access to their information; thus, betraying their trust also undermines a child's agency. Therefore, if parents became unwilling to let their child participate after learning this, I understood their child's departure from the study and would have found a new participant to fill their spot. Luckily this did not happen, and the participants I initially recruited stuck with me till the end.

In Alderson & Morrow's (2011) text, *The Ethics of Research: Money Matters*, they discuss the four types of payment; reimbursement, compensation, appreciation, and incentive. The reading outlined the risk of perceived coercion and bribery that might be evident when providing forms of payment, along with pressures to overshare or sway participant answers in a direction that would benefit that researcher's findings. Therefore, to ensure proper ethics are executed, I made it known at every level of my project that no payment would be admitted to any participants or their families to eradicate any risks.

Based on my ethics application with York University's Research Ethics Board, proper informed consent was obtained from each participant. Informed consent letters were used as a tool to gain consent and to specifically articulate what my study would require from participants and their parents, as discussed by Morrow (2005). I created two separate forms, one for the child under the age of 16 in the form of an assent form (see Appendix E) and one for their parents in the form of a substitute consent form (see Appendix D) so that the parents do not sign for both parties. This decision was made to let the child decide whether or not they wanted to participate, rather than potentially having their parents' pressure or decide for them. For participants over sixteen, I created

an informed consent form (see Appendix C). Within these consent forms, I listed the requirements for each session; highlighted that at any point, children and parents are allowed and encouraged to vocalize any issues and feelings that may arise; and provided them with additional information about the protocols and objective of my study. I also created an ongoing consent script (see Appendix F), reiterating everything outlined in the informed consent and assent form; I recited this script at the beginning of both sessions. Afterward, I had my participants state their names and verbally consent to participate; this was audio recorded and kept for record. For these reasons, it is evident that children's safety and well-being were my top priority.

### ***Participants and Recruitment***

Drawing on Alderson and Morrow (2011), I chose to incorporate the 'opt-in' recruitment method. The 'opt-in' method relates to sending out an invitation for the research project to the public, which allows people who are interested or want to learn more about that project to reach out to the researcher for further information; this is the only way that the researcher gets to know any information about the possible participant. Using this method, I networked through personal connections; however, I sent out invitations to families with a child from my desired age group and waited for responses. This ensured a less invasive, more ethical, and respectful recruitment method than actions seen from an 'opt-out' approach. My recruitment process concluded once I received word that three girls were interested in participating in my study.

My study was conducted with three girls aged 15-17 in the GTA. My participants created the following descriptions and consented for them to be included in this report. We agreed that they would use pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. This study is not meant to represent all childhood experiences but rather to share the perspectives and stories of the three young people who participated in this project.

My first participant was Valentine. Valentine was seventeen, used she/her pronouns, identified as queer, and was Ashkenazi Jewish. My second participant was Christmas. Christmas was sixteen, used she/her pronouns, is Korean-Canadian and Pentecostal Christian, and was born in Toronto, Ontario. My third participant was Rudolph. Rudolph was seventeen, used she/her pronouns, identifies as heterosexual, and was of Filipino descent. Valentine and Rudolph are Christmas's friends, and Christmas is the sister of one of my brother's friends.

### ***Research Setting***

Both sessions – the drawing activity and one-on-one interviews – took place at Christmas' house. Christmas' family gave me permission to use their house. Initially, I planned on conducting my study at a public library, but this caused scheduling and transit issues; thus, Christmas' house was provided as an alternative setting. Ultimately, this setting was optimal, considering the participants live relatively near each other. With the use of a participant's home, additional protocols were executed to ensure the safety of everyone involved. Firstly, my study was conducted in an open space. Secondly, there was an adult present in the house at all times; however, there were no adults present close enough to hear what my participants were saying. In doing so, my participant's information, opinions, and experiences were kept private. All these choices were made to ensure my study maintained ethically sound while also being mindful of my participant's rights to privacy and anonymity.

### ***Procedure***

Since I had not watched Disney films in a couple of years, I was unsure if my participants – who are only a couple of years younger than me – remembered anything about Disney films or characters. Because of this, prior to meeting with the participants, I asked them to prepare by

watching one Disney movie to help facilitate ideas and fuel future conversations. Valentine watched *Pocahontas*, Christmas watched *Brave*, and Rudolph watched *Beauty & the Beast*.

My first session occurred on November 24, 2022 and was approximately three hours long. Here, my participants drew two drawings: [1] their perspective on how Disney depicts princesses and heroes, and [2] created their own princess and hero (see Appendix A for the drawing activity instructions and see Appendix G for the participant's drawings). The use of drawing as an arts-based methodology within my study was chosen to "[encourage] collaborative meaning-making that allows the drawer to give voice to what the drawing was intended to convey" (Mitchell et al., 2011, p. 20). Mitchell et al's (2011) statement supports the fact that the artist – child – is able to further convey what they are saying through illustrations. Additionally, arts-based methodology in research has proved to be beneficial, as Blaisdell et al. (2019) explain that "children 'speaking' through photography or drawing, for example, does offer the potential to expand the representation of voice beyond the common practice of incorporating direct quotations from children" (p. 27). I incorporated drawing as an arts-based methodology in my study to strengthen my understanding of what my participants said through visual elements. In doing so, conversations that stemmed directly from talking about their drawings and exploring why they drew such things allowed my participants to discuss their different perspectives on what character archetypes Disney already produces and what they hope Disney would incorporate in future projects (see Appendix G). Through this, new ideas for future projects were constructed and discussed; interestingly, they all created different ideas from each other. By using an arts-based methodology, my data and findings reflect a deeper understanding of my participant's experiences and perspectives of Disney than one developed solely from quotes. Furthermore, I chose to use drawing as methodology and these two subjects – princess and hero – to open conversation to what images children absorb from watching

Disney films and see the visual messages it creates that translate from children's creativity through drawing.

I recognize that a potential risk of using drawing as a methodology could stem from the child's confidence in their artistic ability. Thus, to mitigate this risk, I made it clear from the start that the emphasis was on the substance of their artwork rather than the drawing's quality. This was to eradicate any insecurities participants had about their artistic ability.

While drawing, my participants discussed the films they watched before the meeting and recalled some childhood memories of Disney. Much of the data I analyzed in the *Finding* section included conversations and comments that occurred during this group discussion. My participants collaborated very well; they rallied off of each other and found new ideas and arguments at each turn. Topics stemming from character archetypes, storylines, stereotypes, and alternative ideas arose during this time. It was these topics and conversations that later structured my themes and sub-themes.

The next part of my study occurred on December 1, 2022, and consisted of one-on-one interviews with me as the researcher and a single participant. During these interviews, my participants discussed what they drew in the first session. Each interview lasted an hour to an hour-and-a-half, and an in-depth discussion revolving around older and modern films constructed the content of these interviews. I chose to incorporate group discussions and one-on-one interviews in order to garner more diverse conversations. Horgan (2017) recalled a time during their Ireland project when a young boy's credibility was undermined when he expressed actions that did not fit the norm, leading to the boy withdrawing himself from the group and study. Because of this, I recognized that including a collaborative method that included all participants in the same room may have created issues surrounding peer pressure, silencing voices and insecurities that come



with talking with others of different ages. Thus, I chose to use two approaches; one where my participants could collaborate and another approach where they could discuss things with me they may not have felt comfortable disclosing to the group. I acknowledge that a potential risk with one-on-one interviews is that a child could feel pressured to speak or be uncomfortable with an adult researcher. With that in mind, I aimed to create a welcoming space during the first session and engaged with each participant equally in order for them to feel the most comfortable when conversing with me one-on-one.

Ultimately, having separate and unique conversations with each participant eliminated my worries about unequal voices in conversations. Additionally, through one-on-one interviews, I was able to compare my participant's perspectives and experiences, bringing notice to the idea that "the diversities that distinguish one child from another are as important and as significant as the commonalities they might share" (James & James, 2004, as cited in James, 2007, p. 266). However, as stated before, the content of my report did not erase certain voices or opinions through the comparison between participants.

### **Thematic Analysis**

My research study examines young girls' experiences with and perspectives of Disney films and characters in order to examine unique childhood experiences. The research question guiding my project is: **How do girls ages 15-17 in the GTA describe their perspectives on Disney films?** As my goal was to address specific encounters with Disney, I chose to undertake a qualitative approach that objectively looks at how young girls interpret Disney characters while also seeking a better understanding of how they view themselves regarding their exposure to Disney. As suggested by the new social studies of childhood approach (Kehily, 2013), my study was entirely child-centered as participants play a central role as active agents (James & James, 2008; Cregan

& Cuthbert, 2014) within their own research. By doing so, the data I collected across two sessions – group discussions during a drawing activity and one-on-one interviews – showcase children's competence and ability to critically analyze their own experiences and opinions. These conversations allowed participants to create and discuss alternative topics and themes they wished Disney would address or incorporate into future projects.

After completing my research and collecting data, I had several 40-minute audio recordings. I did not transcribe everything said in each recording. Instead, I took an alternative approach. Braun & Clarke (2006) notes that the process of thematic analysis "starts when the analyst begins to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data – this may be during data collection" (p. 86). I found the latter end of their statement to perfectly fit my situation as I began mentally keeping track of recurring topics and subjects my participants spoke passionately about. Those mental notes later became the themes I chose to categorize my data.

The three themes that surfaced in my data were: [1] Disney's problematic and harmful physical and behavioural portrayals of princesses and princes, [2] stereotypes, and [3] what is missing from Disney. I listened to each audio recording multiple times and began pulling out comments and conversations that correlated to and complimented my themes. During the early stages of transcribing, I realized my themes were quite broad, so I created multiple sub-themes for each theme in order to be more precise with organizing my data. Kiger & Varpio (2020) suggest that "when creating and organizing themes, thematic maps are useful for visually demonstrating cross-connections between concepts and among main themes and sub-themes" (p. 5). As a visual learner, I created my own version of a thematic map, with my research question at the top, followed

by three separate bubbles representing my themes. Then, I branched each theme into sub-themes (see Figure 1).

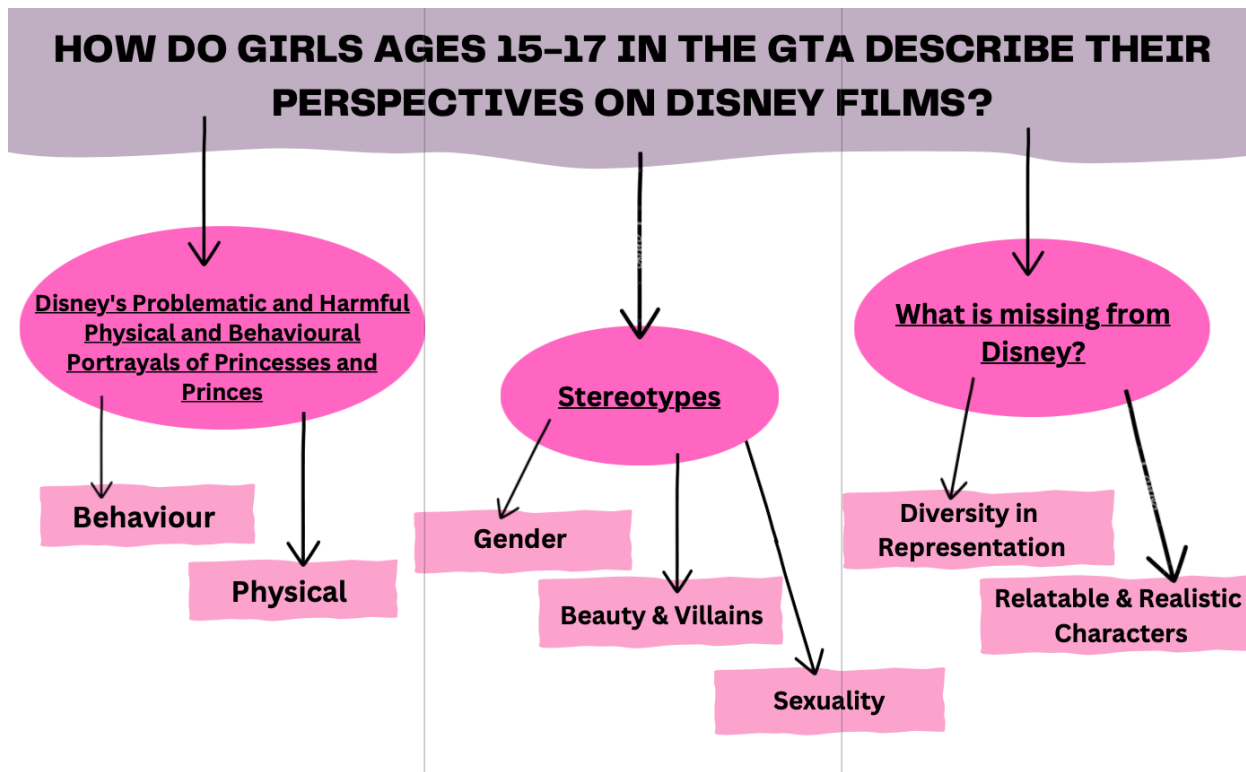


Figure 1. Thematic Map

By creating this thematic map, an analytic storyboard started to form and I began to understand and make sense of my data. This map assisted me in correctly categorizing where each conversation and comment belonged. Each theme directly correlated to my participant's journey of understanding Disney, and I broke this down into three steps. First, we deconstructed Disney films and characters through their harmful physical and behaviour traits as these are aspects of Disney that appear on the surface. For example, Rudolph explored how male characters like Gaston and Phoebus exhibit toxic masculine traits to their audiences; this will be further discussed in the *Findings* section. Second, we deconstructed Disney films and characters through stereotypes. This step required a more critical analysis of characters and story plots, and thus

participants explored more hidden aspects of Disney in theme two. Lastly, my participants created alternative and new ideas for topics, character archetypes, and storylines that they wished Disney would incorporate. In doing so, my participants exercised agency through critical analysis and the construction of new ideas to further diversify aspects of Disney for future generations.

It is explained that "thematic analysis refers to the process of analyzing data according to commonalities, relationships, and differences across a data set" (Gibson & Brown, 2011, p. 2). Braun & Clarke (2006) assert that "through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data" (p. 78). Since thematic analysis is not confined to rigid rules, I created themes and sub-themes that I could analyze using theories and concepts from the field of Childhood Studies in this final research report. For my study, I chose theories and concepts such as agency (James & James, 2008; Cregan & Cuthbert, 2014; Jerome & Starkey, 2022), social construction (Kehily, 2013; Wells, 2015), and new social studies of childhood (Kehily, 2013). These theories and concepts will be further discussed in the *Findings* section of this report. I used these concepts as a lens to understand what my participants said and drew in response to the Disney films they watched. My data exemplifies these concepts in Childhood Studies as each conversation and comment provides evidence of children's critical analysis. These Childhood Studies concepts worked with my themes and allowed me to explore and understand how my participants construct their identities and make sense of their experiences with Disney films. My participants exercised agency through critically analyzing Disney films, voicing their perspectives and experiences, and making sense of what they observed from Disney.

Additionally, Disney is a mass media company, and mass media is a key agent of socialization. With this in mind, while understanding childhood as a social construct, I examined

Disney's impact on one's socialization process as my data showcase participants reflecting and revisiting their early childhood memories watching Disney films. As mentioned previously, my study undertook a 'new social studies of childhood' approach; therefore, my data exclusively reflects my participant's opinions, experiences, and analysis of Disney.

While many of the scholarly works I included in my *Literature Review* either used a quantitative or observational approach, my study was active and done in collaboration with children. By doing so, it moved away from other research about children and research that involved children as passive participants. Thus, my project directly amplified young people's experiences and reflected their perspectives.

## **Findings**

### **Theme One: Disney's Problematic Portrayals of Princesses and Princes**

After observing my participants discuss their experiences with Disney movies and characters, the most frequently made comments were about the problematic representation of princess and prince characters. Adults can not assume the harmful impacts of Disney's choices. Instead, it is essential for children – Disney's primary audience – to express to what degree it is harmful. The explicit visual illustration of the 'preferred' body type and the intentional behavioural choices highlights the key focus of the following analysis derived solely from my participant's perspectives and experiences.

#### **Sub-Theme One: Behaviour Data Set**

**Valentine:** "I mean I have always been loud and kind of outspoken, and I would always be like 'yeah I am not like a Disney princess.' I feel like I had the opposite experience where I rejected the idea of Disney princesses and tried to push it away or if I did say I want to be a Disney princess it was always like Mulan or like Merida. But I feel like I was lying in some way, cause I feel like I did take a lot of what Disney said and showed to heart, or even I didn't, I remember when I was younger I would always be called 'bossy'

or that I was too overwhelming, a lot of people thought that of me. But let's just say I knew a guy, and like whenever he tried to take the lead everyone would always be like 'oh my god he's such a great leader,' bluh bluh bluh, but whenever I did that I was labeled 'bossy or mean.' So I definitely feel that when I was younger, especially watching Disney films and also with other kids saying mean things to me, I feel like I purposely tried to be more quiet. And this all stems from Disney princesses being 'the perfect girls' and because I wasn't fitting into that 'quiet, docile' box, like I was actually speaking my mind and trying to be more of a leader- which as we know is more of a 'man's role' I was bossy." (00:22:45)

In this excerpt, Valentine reflects on and expresses her complex relationship with Disney princesses during her childhood. Valentine explains the different behavioural expectations of boys and girls, noting that Disney directly influenced her choice to shift her 'normal' behaviour and desire of assertion and leadership to conform to the Disney standard of expected and accepted female behaviour. Valentine voices that although initially, she tried to ignore Disney and did not want to participate in reproducing female behavioural traits, after receiving frequent criticism from her peers, she felt the obligation to conform regardless of her desire to be her true outspoken self. She also asserts that her preferred Disney princesses were Mulan and Merida. These two Disney female characters are known to behave differently than characters like Cinderella, Aurora, or Snow White. These are not just random characters Valentine chose when asked, 'which Disney princess would she want to be?' Instead, these choices represent her familiarity with characters that are 'like her' and symbolize Valentine's adoration for females who exhibit traits that are not the 'norm.' Considering my study is completely child-centered, Valentine's comment is significant because it provides a detailed account of her experience renegotiating her identity to fit Disney's terms. My research question centers on children describing their perspectives, and this excerpt showcases that Valentine's perspective supports the idea that Disney can contribute harmful portrayals of behavioural expectations on children.

The following will analyze this data set through the lens of agency and the new social studies of childhood framework. Children's agency may be characterized as their ability to act intentionally, speak for themselves, and actively reflect on their social environments. Through this logic, it is evident that Valentine is exercising agency. She is reflecting on her past choices to change and her complex relationship with Disney female characters while critically questioning why she made those choices in the first place. Valentine also expresses that Disney was not the sole contributor to her struggle with confidence; her peers also massively impacted her decisions to hide her true self. Within this context, Valentine uses her voice and experiences with Disney to make sense of her childhood and peers. Valentine's ability to open up and divulge her feelings proves that "children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives" (Kehily, 2013, p. 227).

James & James (2008) assert that "the idea that children can be seen as independent social actors is core to the development of the new paradigm for the study of children and young people" (p. 3). Similarly to recognizing children's agency, researchers, scholars, adults, and institutions alike must recognize the value of children's voices. In my *Literature Review*, I included six scholarly research studies, 4 of which – Golden & Jacoby (2018), England et al. (2011), Auster & Mansbach (2012), and Cayne et al. (2016) – either did not include children or were not child-centered. Thus, from a 'new social studies of childhood' standpoint, Valentine's comments demonstrate and exemplify why "children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right" (Kehily, 2013, p. 227). Considering that children's experiences are not universal, it is important not to generalize or assume each girl has the same experiences as Valentine; this is why researchers need to include children's individual opinions and experiences explicitly instead of replacing them with adult assumptions.

Sub-Theme Two: Physical and Behaviour Data Set

**Rudolph:** "So I was thinking that it really showed the audience two types of guys. Like we have Gaston, who is the epitome of masculinity. Like even though he doesn't get Belle, all the girls in their village fall to his feet because they think he's so handsome, and masculine, and cool. And then there's his sidekick, who is really short, and not the male beauty standard. Compared to Gaston he is supposed to be ugly. And he doesn't have any confidence, and he doesn't have any girls- or love interests. And this is what young boys see when they look at these kinds of Disney films. Like yes, for girls too- it's everywhere. But guys in Disney films face their own expectations they have to live up to- or they have a criteria they have to fill to either be a hero or like a side character or like a villain. Same with Hunchback of Notre Dame. Like we talked about this earlier. There's the side character who is ugly, and shorter, and doesn't get the girl, but he is at the side of the hero: the Blonde handsome guy who gets Esmarelda at the end. And when young boys see this, they think like 'oh I don't want to be the ugly guy' or like what if they think they are ugly and equate themselves to Gaston's sidekick or the hunchback. Or they feel like they have to act like Gaston or treat people like how Gaston treats people. Like that's a horrible representation of male characters, like how they act- their behaviour and their bodies....Gaston was really confident, and like cocky as well. Gaston was the villain in their own world, but his friend just followed him away and worshiped him. And you know that's also a really bad thing, cause you have young people who think they should act like Gaston, so they do. But then you have people who are more like Gaston's friend who always is in his shadow, and who worships him. It's telling young boys- or people that there is only one standard for males. Like either be Gaston or be his friend who wants to be Gaston." (first recording: 4min)

In this excerpt, Rudolph explains the harmful representation of male characters, their bodies, and behaviours, produced by Disney. She analyzes Gaston and Lefou from *Beauty & the Beast* and Phoebus and Quasimodo from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. Rudolph observes two main archetypes male characters fall into: [1] the handsome one and [2] his sidekick. In that order, the examples she provided above perfectly illustrate the lifestyle that aligns with both archetypes. She explains that the handsome one is the male character that women desire; he is assertive, respected, and larger in muscles and size. In contrast, the sidekick character has no love interest, is a follower, is not respected, and is much smaller in size and uglier. Rudolph continues by saying these are negative portrayals that young boys should not be exposed to. Creating a character that



seemingly 'has it all' and a companion character 'who has nothing and instead worships the first for having everything' informs children that they should strive to be the 'handsome one' while refusing any connection to the 'sidekick.' Thus, Rudolph's examination of male characters is vital when addressing Disney in order to acknowledge the implications these characters have on young boys. Although Rudolph is not a boy, she does explain in her interview that she has a younger brother who has been affected by these rigid standards for males. Thus, her statements are still relevant to my research question as Rudolph provides reflection based on her perspective observing her brother's childhood.

The following will analyze the data set through the social construction of gender. Gender is recognized as an unavoidable social practice; West & Zimmerman (1987) express, "little boys appropriate the gender ideal of 'efficaciousness,' that is, being able to affect the physical and social environment through the exercise of physical strength or appropriate skills" (p. 141, as cited in Wells, 2015, p. 48). West & Zimmerman's statement resonates with Rudolph's observation of male character behavioural and physical traits as boys typically desire to be like Gaston and Phoebus while steering away from being associated with traits exhibited by Lefou and Quasimodo. The key idea of the social constructions of gender is that it acknowledges that social factors influence the formation of gender identity. James & James (2008) express that the "social constructionist model, have argued that children take on gender roles by observing and then imitating the behavior of adults" (p. 60). That said, Disney as a media distributor, is at fault for producing and disseminating standards that boys feel obligated to mirror. However, this does not undermine children's agency; instead, it factors in the influence and pressure from society to exhibit 'preferred' male character traits. Interestingly, Disney has positioned audiences to be like Lefou and Quasimodo, in which children are told to always strive to be the 'ideal.' Thus, James & James' (2008) point of children

imitating adults, coupled with Rudolph's statement, sees that Disney allows audiences to embark on a never-ending journey of aspiring to be and achieve the unrealistic and problematic 'Gaston and Phoebus' character.

## **Theme Two: Stereotypes in Disney Films**

This section explores my participant's experiences consuming Disney's representation of stereotypes. Gender, Beauty & Villains, and Sexuality are the three subcodes that outline common stereotypes my participants talked about during both sessions: drawing/focus group and one-on-one interviews. For gender stereotypes, we discussed Disney's engagement with gendered expectations. More specifically, my participant's observations of the 'damsel in distress' (princesses) and the 'hero' (princes) archetypes. Secondly, for villain stereotypes, my participants mainly focused on Disney's negative portrayals of specific body types and behavioural traits concerning children's consumption of such traits. Finally, for stereotypes relating to sexuality, the conversation aimed to point out characters 'assumed heterosexuality' and the lack of representation of lesbian-gay-bisexual-transgender-queer (LGBTQ+) characters. All the data categorized into the subcodes above showcase my participant's reflections, opinions, and experiences with Disney's stereotypes and expectations.

### **Sub-Theme One: Gender Data Set**

**Christmas:** "Um, like definitely it's hard to like point out the stuff for the newer movies cause they've gotten more diverse and everything. But, definitely for the older ones, like as we said, the girls we see are always delicate, very like sensitive, introverted, all of that stuff, very like- seen as weak, you know? Like they have to have someone and that's sort of where the male characters come in and that's the someone that she 'needs.' She's more dependant, or co-dependant on other people, rather than being more independent"

**Valentine:** "I think more current movies also have a bad rep for doing stuff like that. Like even Encantos for example. Mirabel was kinda 'stumped' until Bruno came along. Even though that's not a love interest or anything. Or Tangled really played on that trope. Like

Flynn, like this um random guy broke into her house and that's the reason that she just ran away, like I would have rather her gain the courage to leave from the inside rather than an outside force. I think that's a big thing in Disney movies, it's that women are always pushed by outside forces, where men can self-motivate and women cannot."

**Christmas:** "They are not actually seen as humans, like it's more that women are 'something' for a man to save, or as a trophy or reward for saving the day or killing the villain. It blows my mind, like it's actually crazy that these are called 'Disney Princess films' but at the end of the day women are secondary characters in their own film while men and princes shine in the stories. Like *Sleeping Beauty*, what's her name- Aurora! Like she was only awake, saying something or doing something for like 7 minutes of the whole movie that was named after her! While prince charming um...I don't even know his name, but I can remember exactly what he was doing cause he was actually in the movie, doing something meaningful and interesting while the main female character was sleeping?!?"

This short excerpt is a conversation between participants Christmas and Valentine after I asked, "what are some gender stereotypes you notice in Disney movies?" It was observed that although modern Disney movies have become more diverse in representing race and body types, Disney still incorporates gendered stereotypes between male and female characters. Most commonly, gendered stereotypes support the 'damsel in distress' and 'hero' archetypes. The 'damsel in distress' is always a female character in trouble and is positioned in the narrative as 'hopeless, weak and in need of saving.' While the 'hero' character is always a male who, without a doubt, saves the female character. These archetypes are usually romantic in older movies like *Sleeping Beauty* and *Tangled*. In contrast, in modern movies like *Encantos*, these two archetypes stem from a familial relationship. However, *Encantos* is still based on the premise that a female character needs help from a male character, thus, satisfying the 'damsel' and the 'hero' archetypes. The participants also express frustrations towards Disney's positioning of female characters as dependent and without willpower, while male characters can overcome hardships and act freely and independently. Through these observations, my participants concluded that princesses are not treated as people but as prizes or plot points to progress the male (hero) storyline. It is recognized

that every child has different experiences with Disney; however, Christmas and Valentine's perspectives showcase that these stereotypes are visible. Because my study centers on 'girls' perspectives,' it is essential to acknowledge the gendered stereotypes they consume produced by Disney.

The following will analyze the data set through the social construction of gender. I previously mentioned that gender is a social construction; the formation of gender identity is not a 'natural' process; social factors influence it. To add to this, William Corsaro's (2005) concept of 'interpretive reproduction' asserts that "socialization is not a transmission from adults to child but that the child is involved in an active process of interpretation and reworking of gender" (as cited in Wells, 2015, p. 48). Corsaro's concept is relevant to my study because it is during children's active process of negotiating, navigating, and constructing their gender identity that they are consuming and engaging with Disney. Christmas and Valentine's conversation reflects that Disney's primary representation of gender is that females are not and can not be independent, self-motivating, or have intrinsic value in their own right. At the same time, males must be the hero, dependable, and should not seek help from others. These rigid characterizations of females and males negatively affect one's gender constructions.

It is evident from my data set that these archetypes are not uncommon or appear in only one or two Disney films; they are recurring stereotypes; almost all Disney films we discussed in both sessions have a rendition of these tropes. The characteristics of female and male characters are kept separate; there is minimal overlap; females have ascribed 'feminine' stereotypes and males' masculine' stereotypes. Interestingly, England et al's (2011) study from my *Literature Review* mirrors my participant's observation, as their findings support that throughout Disney film history, princes exhibited a significant amount of masculine than feminine characteristics and vice versa

for princesses, despite slight progression. Thus, young girls and boys across multiple generations constantly consume the same gendered stereotypes, just in different animation styles. To reiterate, social factors and such representations influence gender identity. Furthermore, it is through social practices that Wells (2015) asserts that children "desire to be not just a particular kind of person or child but as a particular kind of girl or boy" (p. 49). The 'desire' to exercise and embody the female and male traits that children see in Disney films circles back to James & James' (2008) argument that "children take on gender roles by observing and then imitating the behavior of adults" (p. 60). Because of this, stereotypes should not be idealized or expected; children should not be constantly exposed to these representations as they might develop an unhealthy relationship with their gender identity.

*Sub-Theme Two: Beauty & Villains Data Set*

**Valentine:** "I mean like also, it's not just that being skinny is being pretty, but you can say that that's bad enough in itself. But it's also the fact that the villains are always bigger"

**Rudolph:** "Like Ursula"

**Valentine:** "Yeah, like Ursula. Yeah so it's not just the positive associations with being skinny but the negative associations with being like ugly, or bigger, in any way. Which can be especially harmful, cause like as a child just like children in general, are chubbier cause they're growing and like- children should not be worried about being a bit more chubbier, even if it's just baby fat that they are going to grow out of, or maybe they don't but that is something they need to deal with their own way."

**Rudolph:** "And it doesn't help that Disney always makes the bigger characters villains or ugly. Like no child wants to watch a Disney film and think they can't be a princess or like have a happily ever after or find someone who would like them just because they are bigger. Which is exactly what Disney does because the villains always lose in the end while the pretty ones win."

This excerpt showcases a conversation between Valentine and Rudolph. When asked about Disney's representations of body types, the participants note that all main characters are 'skinny

and beautiful,' while the villain characters are typically 'larger and ugly.' Disney distinguishes between 'good' and 'evil' through character body types and physical features. My participants observed that this distinction correlates to the character's story ends. For example, the 'skinny and beautiful,' therefore inherently 'good' characters have a 'happily ever after' while the 'larger, ugly evil' characters are either killed or face some form of punishment. Their point was not to argue that 'evil' characters should not face repercussions for their crimes but that there is an issue that lies in the biases and assumptions that stem from the relationship between beauty levels and morality.

Interestingly, my *Literature Review* included a study by Bazzini et al. (2010) that showcases a connection between the association of 'beauty & goodness' stereotypes portrayed in Disney films and children's judgment. Valentine and Rudolph express the harmful repercussions of children who consume such stereotypes as they will likely compare their physical selves and livelihood to Disney characters most similar to them. Their observation is significant as it outlines possible perceptions children may develop of themselves derived from Disney's expectations of beauty.

The following will explore the social construction of childhood by examining Valentine and Rudolph's conversation. It has been recognized that childhood is not a natural process; it is heavily impacted by children's lived experiences and, by extension, influenced by what they consume in their social worlds. Through this logic, one can understand that while Disney participates in disseminating stereotypes, children are the ones who consume and make sense of themselves through these same stereotypes. Kehily (2013) asserts that "children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. They can no longer be regarded as simply the passive subjects

of structural determinations" (p. 234). Children are not in a state of becoming adults; instead, they are children being children and consequently actively negotiating and navigating their identities. Therefore, during this development, everything they consume and experience affects them: who they are, who they will be, and how they see themselves in the present. Valentine and Rudolph exemplify Kehily's argument by understanding that children make decisions and exercise agency when constructing their identity. Not only does their observation point out that children are active rather than passive, but Valentine and Rudolph also exercise that they are active agents.

*Sub-Theme Three: Sexuality Data Set*

**Valentine:** "Oh yeah! Another thing I was thinking about, like right after we left last time- that I didn't talk about before, was like I'm a lesbian..... and after I found out I was a lesbian I was really disappointed that I was never gonna have like 'a fairy tale life.' And I was thinking about how Disney- in like the idea- like women's sexuality as all about men. Right, and like that kinda thing. So I was thinking about how I- my first thing when I figured out I was a lesbian wasn't the thought of 'oh okay I figured it out' it was that 'I never was gonna have a true happy ending- I'm never gonna have a fairy tale ending. Or I'll always be a disappointment because I'll never marry a man, I'll never have a full life'. But that's just because like Disney movies they make it seem like a woman needs a man. But I don't, obviously. And so like the idea of a 'fairy tale ending' with like a man and a woman is very- it pushes like a lot of comphet [compulsory heterosexuality] stuff like that which is what pressures society and I think that's hard for like a lot of queer people because there are alot of strict rules and a Disney movie about 'whos the girl' and 'whos the guy' are their roles. And so if you're queer, and you don't fit into that um- it's kind of harder to watch because especially when you realize you're queer, you'd think 'oh I'll never be a Disney movie" (00:06:40)

This excerpt is derived from Valentine's one-on-one interview. Valentine reflects that early on in childhood, she realized she was a lesbian; however, this revelation was not one of happiness; instead, it was a 'disappointment.' Valentine's reaction stems from Disney perpetuating that happiness is only achievable through heterosexual relationships. She expresses that Disney produces stereotypes that associate heterosexuality with 'happily ever after.' Valentine recognizes

that because of these stereotypes, young audiences are pressured to conform and solely engage in heterosexual relationships.

Additionally, it is through the normalization of heterosexuality that Disney participants in distributing and producing ideas promoting that women need a man to be happy, and vice versa for males. Valentine's observation proves that the explicit exclusion of the LGBTQ+ community and the overwhelming amount of 'pro straight' imagery from Disney directly impacts children's reaction to their sexuality. Valentine not only recounts and reflects on her own struggles with accepting her sexuality but connects them to the possible experiences of other LGBTQ+ audience members. Since my research project centers on girls' perspectives and Disney is notorious for promoting unrealistic and harmful ideas, Valentine's experience of comparing her sexual orientation with the representation she sees on the screen is significantly valuable.

The following analyzes Valentine's experiences of Disney's representation of sexuality with the social construction of gender. Gender theorist Judith Butler contributes that "gender identification is inseparable from the normalization of heterosexual desire" (as cited in Wells, 2015, p. 48). Valentine has taught me that 'compulsory heterosexuality' is the notion that heterosexuality is produced and enforced by society as innate, and members of society are coerced and forced to conform to strictly heterosexual relationships. Compulsory heterosexuality aims to convince males and females to only engage in romantic and sexual relationships with members of the opposite sex. Adrianna Rich (2003) asserts that it is through compulsory heterosexuality, where "lesbian experience is perceived on a scale ranging from deviant to abhorrent or simply rendered invisible" (p. 13). As mentioned, Disney solely portrays heterosexual relationships; any inkling of romantic desire is represented between male and female characters. Because of this, there is no representation of the LGBTQ+ community for Disney's audiences. The social construction of



gender indicates that these external social factors influence one's gender identity. Furthermore, this is exemplified by Valentine's experiences with Disney influencing her feeling of belonging due to her sexual identity being invisible in relationship archetypes. It is through Disney's normalization of heterosexuality as the 'default' sexual orientation of all their characters that audiences, unfortunately, develop the assumption that if they identify with the LGBTQ+ community, then they are 'not normal.' By doing so, Disney relays a particular message to their audiences that a 'normal' and desired lifestyle is available to heterosexual people but is foreign and unachievable for LGBTQ+ people.

### **Theme Three: What is Missing from Disney Films?**

The previous two themes centered on the character and story archetypes that Disney has already produced over decades. However, the following theme, 'what is missing from Disney,' showcases a few things my participants wish Disney would incorporate in future projects. The theme is divided into two sub-themes: diversity in representation and relatable & realistic characters.

#### *Sub-Theme One: Diversity in Representation Data Set*

**Christmas:** "And also another thing that I wouldn't really see a lot of is Disney princesses or characters with like disabilities for example. Like, them having depression or like they don't have a leg. You know, like mental or physical disabilities- like more things like that. It's not really shown in Disney films. Like they would try to show them with kind of inner struggles, like with Encantos, like, she would never be as pretty as her older sister, you know. But I would definitely want to see things that are more heavy, like knowing in this day and age, I could definitely see in my generation most of us are suffering through some kind of mental illness, or insecurities and stuff like that. And then maybe for the next generation growing up seeing- like if they are exposed to that it's more educational, for them to have more knowledge about this stuff."

When asked 'what would you like to see Disney incorporate in future projects?' Christmas

expressed a desire for broader representation and inclusion of disabilities and mental illnesses in Disney's characters. She recognizes that Disney attempts to showcase characters struggling with issues revolving around confidence and self-worth; however, that is the extent. Disney lacks storylines of characters overcoming or dealing with more complex issues like disabilities or mental illnesses. Christmas explains that in her generation, she notices many of her peers struggling with these issues and, thus, wants mainstream media and films to incorporate these themes in their narratives. Christmas's desire for Disney to include more diverse representation is significant to my study as it showcases how narrow Disney's past characters and storylines have been. Through this logic, Christmas shares that those limitations have impacted her perspective of Disney. In addition, she voices the advantages of such visibility as it exposes young audiences to these complex issues in reality but through fantasy. Whether audiences can relate to such subject matters themselves or knows of someone who does, it is crucial to incorporate these themes. Doing so allows the dissemination of information and encourages audiences to become more mindful and knowledgeable about disabilities and mental illnesses.

The following will examine Christmas's comment through the lens of children's agency. James & James (2008) asserts that "children [often are] positioned as passive receivers of society's messages" (p. 5). Their statement aligns with the belief that children are not active agents in constructing their own understanding of the world around them; instead, it situates them as passive and solely shaped by external factors. This idea is incorrect as children are agentic humans; they have their own opinions and form their own beliefs by learning and navigating their social worlds. Through this logic, it is evident that Christmas is exercising her agency by critically analyzing what Disney has included and excluded from their narratives; simultaneously, she is constructing alternative ideas that Disney should incorporate. James & James (2005) also mention that "for

some researchers, children's agency is seen as a function of their role as social actors" (p. 5). Their statement is relevant to my study, as I found Christmas's ideas draw attention to children's ability to act independently as social actors. It is through Christmas voicing different and foreign ideas than those produced by Disney that she demonstrates that children have the ability to form their own opinions and desires.

*Sub-Theme Two: Relatable & Realist Characters Data Set*

**Valentine:** "Um, I tried to make them more like- more gender neutral. In this one- still like I made this one a girl, and this one like a guy but rather it being very obvious or like part of their identity. I also made them around the same size uh- cause with this one, I wanted to say it was more of an equal partnership instead of a hero and a princess. So like instead of it being like 'one needs help, and one does the helping' they both need help and they both are doing the helping. So it's more of a partnership, rather than uh- a power dynamic relationship and I actually tried to write like the same thing for each of them. So for like the princess one I decided to write more about how she was confident, fleshed out, competent, assertive, unique personality, irreplaceable, like a normal healthy body, strong, smart, a leader- not bossy like an actual leader, sensitive"

**Valentine:** "And for like the guy I wrote, confident, fleshed out, sensitive, strong, smart, competent, assertive, emotional, and like insecure, so it's not just that um, the girl is insecure and the guy is secure, and he's fine helping her find her security but that like the hero can also be insecure" (00:04:20)

**Valentine:** "Cause what we see from Disney is that the girl is just a plot point, whereas in this one I wanted her to be more of a fully fleshed out character... like an actual person. I think with girls- like how women are portrayed in Disney, there's stuff that needs to be taken away, and there's stuff that needs to be added. And I think with men, it's mostly stuff that needs to be added, rather than being taken away."

During the first meeting, my participants drew two drawings; the second drawing illustrated what they wanted to see Disney incorporate into future projects. The following conversation is derived from Valentine's one-on-one interview in which she describes what she drew and why: here is the photo to illustrate the following points (figure 1).

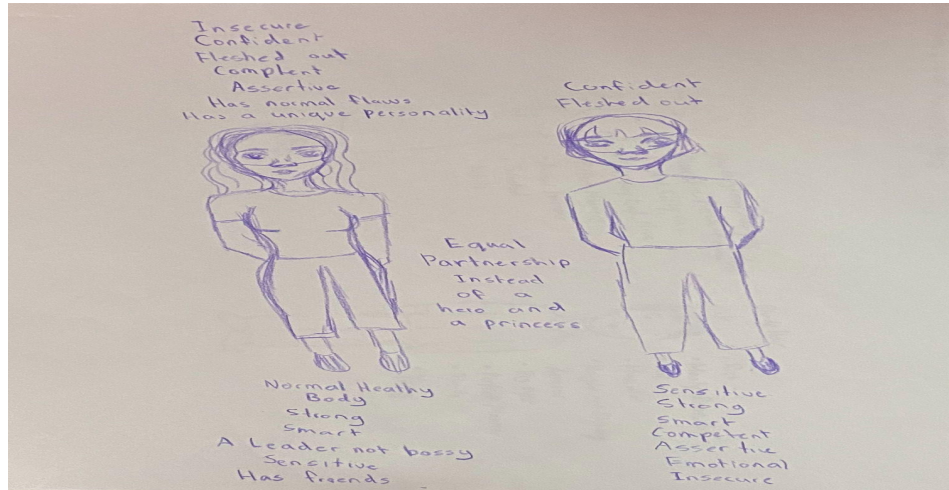


Figure 1. Valentine's Second drawing.

Valentine describes that contrary to Disney's depiction of females being princesses and males being princes, she wants Disney to include female and male characters with overlapping personalities and character attributes. Valentine is tired of seeing femininity and masculinity treated as mutually exclusive. Therefore, she desires to see the characters undertake a partnership relationship rather than Disney's dominant representation of women being dependent – needing help – while males are confined into the 'hero' archetype – doing the helping. Valentine's perspective is crucial to my study as it outlines that Disney lacks strong and realistic characters, as they continuously stick to the same character traits for males and females. Because of Disney's limited character types, she offers new ways to incorporate relatable and realistic character traits in future projects. Throughout the study, Valentine frequently advocated for Disney to develop female characters that are 'fully fleshed out' instead of their 'princesses' title being their only personality trait. Through this, Valentine expressed that Disney needs to add some of the 'male' character attributes to their female characters and vice versa for the male characters to have some 'female' character attributes. For example, add princesses in more leadership roles, and include aspects of insecurities and emotions in male characters.

Theoretical Analysis: Data Set Sub-Theme Two

The following will also examine Valentine's discussion through children's agency. Jerome & Starkey (2022) explain that "traditional views of children and childhood focus on a lack of capacity to act rationally and so position adults as guardians who, in many contexts, act on behalf of children who are considered as not-yet-adults or becoming adults" (p. 439). Through this context, it was previously understood that children needed adults to think for them; consequently, children's media, like Disney, has been produced by adults. These circumstances provided adults the power to distribute media riddled with adult expectations of children in the form of gendered expectations of femininity and masculinity. These expectations produce standards by which children believe they should act.

However, there has been a paradigm shift in perspective; previously, children were considered "people who had things done to them and who were studied as objects" in more modern times, children are now recognized as "people who [act] within their social contexts as subjects with agency" (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998, as cited in Jerome & Starkey, 2022, p. 439). Jerome & Starkey's statement understands that children are increasingly considered active social agents whose voices and opinions have been recognized as valuable. Thus, it is evident that Valentine exercises agency as she voices her opinions and develops alternative ideas differing from Disney's norms and dominant narratives. A fundamental principle of agency acknowledges people's ability to act independently. Valentine exemplifies this by demonstrating her ability to think outside of what Disney wants their audiences to think. Valentine describes the different character traits she desires Disney to incorporate in future projects, as she recognizes the apparent absence of equality among male and female characters. In doing so, Valentine's mere act of critically thinking and

creating her own ideas, in contrast to just consuming Disney's ideas, is the fundamental act of agency.

### **Conclusion**

Kehily (2013) asserts that "[sociocultural researchers] criticized [development and socialization] approaches for always viewing children and young people as inferior to adults, and for only attending to their interests of activities because of how they related to the adults they would eventually become" (p. 225). Kehily (2013) continues by explaining that the principles incorporated into the new paradigm, which was described as an emerging body of research that sought to explore children and young people's interests and activities and to value their contributions to society, could be contrasted with the prior developmental and socialization approaches. My study, being child-centered, relies on the fundamental principles of the new social studies of childhood framework, as my data reflects solely the voices, opinions, and experiences of children.

Throughout my study, it has been evident that Valentines, Christmas, and Rudolph were capable of critically analyzing Disney's narratives, crafting and exploring new ideas, rationalizing their experiences in connection to their identity and childhood while also proposing new solutions for future generations consuming Disney. These reasons exemplify why this field is necessary. It is vital to recognize that my participants are doing these amazing things for which they and other children were never given credit. Through my participant's engagement with such critical thinking, other researchers and society as a whole need to acknowledge children as active agents whose voices, perspectives, and experiences are valuable. Children and young people are agentic being; they are not passive recipients of knowledge; they are not empty vessels into which adults pour

information. Children and young people are capable of creating and constructing their own identity based on their own understanding of the world around them.

### **Final Reflections**

After two years of meticulous planning and carrying out data collection sessions with my participants, my research project is finally complete. I am grateful I had an opportunity to connect with and hear from Valentine, Christmas, and Rudolph. I am grateful for their voices, opinions, perspectives, and experiences, and even more thankful that you trusted me and shared even painful experiences and insecurities.

My research project, methodologies, and execution went well. Initially, I did not plan to incorporate group discussions. Instead, I anticipated holding conversations through one-on-one interviews. However, if I only were to choose the latter, this project would be at a deficit as I believe the group conversations were fundamental to the findings of this project. There were times when I just sat back and observed as the group discussed their perspectives with each other. I witnessed the three girls sharing their own experiences, in which they saw similarities and differences between each other. It was fascinating watching these girls rally off each other: for every comment made, someone had something new to share, which allowed the others to either share a differing perspective or add a new idea to the general argument. The group discussion also taught me new ideas about Disney I had never thought of; for example, the girls exposed Disney's involvement in disseminating compulsory heterosexuality.

Additionally, using one-on-one interviews as a methodology was the correct choice. My participants shared more personal experiences with me through one-on-one interviews. Although many of these personal conversations and experiences were not included in the data set, they still

shaped my analysis as they provided a clear understanding of Disney's impacts on their childhood. From this, I came to understand where my participants were coming from and why they were saying what they said. These conversations allowed me to investigate more deeply into their second set of drawings. What they wanted to see Disney incorporate in future projects mirrored the things missing from the films and characters they consumed in their childhood. These exclusions regarding Disney's films and characters impacted how they saw and understood themselves. Furthermore, because they experienced Disney's harmful impacts first-hand, their drawings worked in tandem with their desire for future generations of children to have better, more inclusive experiences with Disney.

There were limitations to my study. The first limitation is the themes and the data I chose to exemplify those themes. The only reason I see this to be a limitation is that I could not meaningfully incorporate all of my participant's drawings in the way I wanted to. I felt that what my participants were saying was more indicative of the topic than the drawings, and I did not want to take attention away from the stories and perspectives they shared. Thus, although each drawing later helped me understand my data and formulate arguments that supported what my participants drew, I still found it unfortunate to have not discussed their drawings in more depth and included those discussions in my analysis.

Furthermore, after transcribing, I had about twenty pages of data that I wanted to include in my *Finding* section. Given the timeline, I could not analyze each piece, conversation, and comment in my final report. This is a limitation because if I were to include every piece of data, my project would incorporate many other themes and important topics outside of the three themes and multiple sub-themes that ended up in my final project. Moreover, these unnamed themes and topics would be used to further argue and exemplify CCY concepts, theories, and frameworks.



This project has and will continue to impact how I undertake future research projects. I have a better understanding of what it means to be a researcher conducting a child-centered project. In the future, I would like to execute a project where I would not speak at all but instead opt to be an observer of a focus group. My participants told me that this project provided them a safer space to talk about Disney in a way that differed from casual conversations in everyday life. Because of this, I believe that children discussing important topics that impact them are best examined from an outsider's perspective, as my participants garnered more conversations talking with each other. To this end, I want to continue to investigate children's consumption of media, the ways it shapes their understanding of themselves, and how they use such understandings to construct their identities and social worlds.

My study directly involved children, unlike most academic research I included in my *Literature Review* that employed either quantitative or observational methods. By doing this, it built on previous studies that were about children or used them as passive subjects. My data contributes to the field of Childhood Studies as it exemplifies many concepts and frameworks I have learned in this field that support and recognize children as agentic beings. As I am now an adult who spent my childhood consuming Disney's narrative, it has become apparent through Valentine, Christmas, and Rudolph's conversations and comments that they have allowed me to make sense of my own experiences with Disney. For that, I am thankful.

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**Appendices**

In the pages that follow, I have included the following appendices:

APPENDIX A – Drawing Activity Instructions

APPENDIX B – One-On-One Interview Questions

APPENDIX C – Informed Consent Form for Participants Over the Age of 16

APPENDIX D – Substitute Consent Form for Parents with Participants Under the Age of 16

APPENDIX E – Assent Form for Participants Under the Age of 16

APPENDIX F – Verbal Consent Script to Maintain Ongoing Consent

APPENDIX G – Participant's Drawings

## **APPENDIX A – Drawing Activity Instructions**

During the drawing session, you will be asked to draw two separate drawings: [1] your perspective on how Disney depicts princesses and heroes, and [2] create your own princess and hero. In this activity, you have full control over any artistic decisions you choose to make. You will select what type of paper and drawing utensil you would like to use to execute your visual representation of the two subjects; princess and hero. I, the researcher, will provide all drawing materials. There will be a time limit of two hours. This time period will be completely devoted to the drawing activity, so you all have time to interpret the drawing instructions and not feel pressured to rush your creativity. However, you are free to leave whenever you feel like your drawings are complete or can stay longer if you want to have any conversations about your drawing and/or questions related to the research project.

**APPENDIX B – Sample One-On-One Interview Questions**

1. What is the Disney film you watched? Why did you choose these films? What did you notice about the characters in the film?
  - a. If you could change anything about the film you watched, what would it be?
  - b. What do you think are the differences between princes and princesses?
2. Can you tell me what you drew and why? *Have the participants explain the two drawings they did in the first meeting. Have them elaborate on what they wish to see and what they did see in the Disney film*
3. What are your favourite Disney films? And why?
4. Who is your favourite Disney princess? And why?
5. If you could be any Disney character, who would it be? And why?
6. What kinds of stereotypes do you notice Disney distributes to young people like you?
  - a. How does their inclusion of stereotypes and character features make you feel in your own body?
  - b. Does Disney's portrayal of princesses and heroes make you feel like you have to present yourself a certain way? *This may sway the conversation to their personality, activities they indulge in, clothing choices, etc.*
7. Do you want to see something different from Disney? Any particular topics? Kinds of character types?

## APPENDIX C – Informed Consent Form

**Date:** November 1st, 2022

**Study Name:** Girls' Perspectives on Disney Films

**Researcher name:**

I, Joy Lynne Lam, will be the principal investigator of this study. I am an undergraduate student studying Children, Childhood and Youth at York University. Please feel free to contact me through my email: joylynnne01@gmail.com

**Purpose of the Research:**

This research study examines girls' perspectives and experiences with Disney films and characters. The goal of this study is to address specific encounters with Disney in order to analyze unique childhood experiences. To do so, this study will use multiple child-centered methods where you will be asked to participate in drawing and one-on-one interviews. The findings of this study will be recorded in a document and presented to fourth-year classmates in the Children, Childhood, and Youth program at York University.

**What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:**

You play a central role in this study, as it is based on your personal experiences and perspectives. You will be responsible for watching one Disney movie before the first session. You will also be responsible for attending two in-person sessions, including participating in drawing and one-on-one interview activities and completing the appropriate tasks during those times. Data will also be collected and safely secured during these meetings. During the drawing session, you will be asked to draw two separate drawings: [1] your perspective on how Disney depicts princesses and heroes, and [2] create your own princess and hero. One-on-one interviews entail that each of you will talk to me privately about your drawing and be able to voice any opinions you have of Disney films and characters. As said before, this study will be split into two sessions, meaning that you will be committed to attending two separate days, which will be no more than 2 hours at a time. There will be no rewards offered to you involved in my study. However, I will provide the drawing materials for you and snacks during the two-hour sessions. However, the snacks will not be compensation for agreeing to participate in my study.

**Risks and Discomforts:**

There will be no physical, economic, or social risks that you, as a participant, will be exposed to at any point in my study. However, there are potential discomforts that may result from the research. A potential discomfort stems from the drawing activity that connects to your confidence in your artistic ability. To minimize any form of discomfort that you may feel, I hope

to create a welcoming space during the first session and engage with each of you equally, so you feel the most comfortable conversing with me one-on-one. This may mean that I would have conversations with you on topics you enjoy and feel passionate about that lie outside my research question; however, that data will not be included in my final research findings. In addition, to minimize the harm to your confidence, I want to make it very clear that the emphasis lies on the meaning of your artwork rather than the quality of your drawings. This is to eliminate any insecurities that you may have about your artistic ability.

### **Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:**

There are multiple benefits to participating in my study. Firstly, you will have the opportunity to learn and experience the process of being involved with research. With this, your perspectives can be heard by 4999 Children, Childhood, and Youth students (CCY) at York University. Your participation is also beneficial as you hold the ability to improve CCY students' understanding of children and childhood perspectives on Disney. Another benefit would be your enjoyment as you will be drawing and hopefully forming friendships with the other participants, given that you will all be performing the same tasks and roughly around the same ages. Overall, the benefits of my research study seek to have young girls' voices heard, as it is imperative to look at diverse childhood experiences rather than assuming or ignoring unique encounters in favour of majorities.

### **Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:**

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary, and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researcher or with York University either now or in the future. If you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

### **Confidentiality:**

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence. All data collected will be in the form of handwritten notes, computer documents, and audio recordings during drawing discussions and one-on-one interviews. Your data will be safely stored electronically, password-protected, and handwritten notes will be stored in a journal with a physical lock, all of which will be securely stored. Only the researcher will have access to this information. Aside from your consent form, all hard copies and electronic data will not include any identifying information about yourself. Instead, you will choose a different name to be included in all data in substitute of your real name.



The data collected during my study will be stored for one year after the study's conclusion. Afterward, I would delete all files and shred all physical content collected **in April 2024**. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

I plan to uphold your rights to anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality to the highest degree; however, there is one limitation. If you at any point in my study disclose that you have been abused, have abused someone, or have harmed or threatened to harm yourself or others, please recognize that I have to report it to my supervisors and authorities. These circumstances will be the only time your confidentiality will be breached.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at joylynn01@gmail.com or my supervisor, Kael Reid at katereid@yorku.ca.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri- Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

### **Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent to participate in Girls' Perspectives on Disney Films conducted by Joy Lynne Lam. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date**

Participant if over 16

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Principal Investigator

### **Additional consent**

This study also requires additional consent for audio recordings and photographs of your drawings. Please check the boxes beside both options if you consent to audio recordings and photographs of your drawings to be taken during the two sessions.

**1. Audio recording**

I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s) and drawing session.

**2. Use of photographs**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to the use of images of the drawings I have created in session one in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In final academic report  N  Y

In final academic presentation  N  Y

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D – Substitute Consent Form

**Date:** November 1st, 2022

**Study Name:** Girls' Perspectives on Disney Films

**Researcher name:**

I, Joy Lynne Lam, will be the principal investigator of this study. I am an undergraduate student studying Children, Childhood and Youth at York University. Please feel free to contact me through my email: joylynnne01@gmail.com

**Purpose of the Research:**

This research study aims to examine girls' perspectives of and experiences with Disney films and characters. The goal of this study is to address specific encounters with Disney in order to analyze unique childhood experiences. To do so, this study will use multiple child-centered methods where your child will be asked to participate in drawing and one-on-one interviews. The findings of this study will be recorded in a document and presented to fourth-year classmates in the Children, Childhood, and Youth program at York University.

**What Your Child Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:**

Your child will play a central role in this study, as it is based on their personal experiences and perspectives. They will be responsible for watching one Disney movie prior to the first session. They will also be responsible for attending two in-person sessions, which include participating in activities such as drawing and one-on-one interview sessions and completing the appropriate tasks set during those times. Data will also be collected and safely secured during these meetings. During the drawing session, your child will be asked to draw two separate drawings: [1] their perspective on how Disney depicts princesses and heroes, and [2] create their own princess and hero. One-on-one interviews entail that each participant will talk to me privately about their drawing and be able to voice any opinions they have of Disney films and characters. As said before, this study will be split into two sessions, meaning that should your child consent to being a participant, they will be committed to attending two separate days, which will be no more than 2 hours at a time. There will be no inducements offered to participants involved in my study.

However, I will provide the drawing materials for each participant and snacks during the two-hour sessions. However, this will not act as any form of compensation for agreeing to participate in my study.

**Risks and Discomforts:**

There will be no physical, economic, or social risks that your child will be exposed to at any point in my study. However, there are potential discomforts that may result from the research. A potential discomfort stems from the drawing activity that connects to your child's confidence in their artistic ability. To minimize any form of discomfort that they may feel, I am hoping to create a welcoming space during the first session and engage with each participant equally in order for them to feel the most comfortable when conversing with me one-on-one. This may mean that I would have conversations with you on topics you enjoy and feel passionate about that lie outside my research question; however, that data will not be included in my final research findings. In addition, to minimize the harm to your child's confidence, I will make it immensely clear that the emphasis lies in the substance of their artwork rather than the drawing's quality. This is to eliminate any insecurities your child may have towards their artistic ability.

**Benefits of the Research and Benefits to Your Child:**

There are multiple benefits to participating in my study. Firstly, your child will have the opportunity to learn and experience the process of being involved with research. With this, they can have their perspectives heard by 4999 Children, Childhood, and Youth students (CCY) at York University. Their participation is also beneficial as they hold the ability to improve CCY students' understanding of children and childhood perspectives on Disney. Another benefit would be your child's enjoyment as they will be drawing and hopefully forming friendships with the other participants, given that they would all be performing the same tasks and roughly around the same ages. Overall, the benefits of my research study seek to have young girls' voices heard, as it is imperative to look at diverse childhood experiences rather than assuming or ignoring unique encounters in favour of majorities.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:**

Your child's participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and they may choose to stop participating at any time. Your child's decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship they may have with the researcher or their relationship with York University, either now or in the future.

In the event your child withdraws from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible.

**Confidentiality:**

All information your child supplies during the research will be held in confidence. All data collected will be in the form of handwritten notes, computer documents, and audio recordings during drawing discussions and one-on-one interviews. Your child's data will be safely stored

electronically, password-protected, and handwritten notes will be stored in a journal with a physical lock, all of which will be securely stored. Only the researcher will have access to this information. Aside from your child's consent form, all hard copies and electronic data will not include any identifying information about themselves. Instead, they will choose a different name to be included in all data in substitute of their real name.

The data collected during my study will be stored for one year after the study's conclusion. Afterward, I would delete all files and shred all physical content collected **in April 2024**. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

I plan to uphold your child's rights to anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality to the highest degree; however, there is one limitation. If they at any point in my study disclose that they have been abused, have abused someone, or have harmed or threatened to harm themselves or others, please recognize that I have to report it to my supervisors and authorities. These circumstances will be the only time your child's confidentiality will be breached.

**Questions About the Research?** If you have questions about the research in general or about your child's role in the study, please feel free to contact me at joylynn01@gmail.com or my supervisor, Kael Reid at katereid@yorku.ca.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail [ore@yorku.ca](mailto:ore@yorku.ca)).

### **Legal Rights and Signatures:**

I \_\_\_\_\_, consent for my child to participate in Girls' Perspectives on Disney Films conducted by Joy Lynne Lam. I have understood the nature of this project and wish for my child to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent of Participant under 16

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_  
Principal Investigator

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Additional consent**

This study also requires additional consent for audio recordings and photographs of your child's drawings. Please check the boxes beside both options if you consent to audio recordings and photographs of their drawings to be taken during the two sessions.

**1. Audio recording**

I consent to the audio-recording of my child's interview(s) and drawing session.

**2. Use of photographs**

I \_\_\_\_\_ consent to the use of images of the drawings my child has created in session one in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In final academic report  N  Y

In final academic presentation  N  Y

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Parent Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX E – Assent Form

**Date:** November 1st, 2022

**Study Name:** Girls' Perspectives on Disney Films

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a study: that examines girls' perspectives and experiences with Disney films and characters. The goal of this study is to address specific encounters with Disney to analyze unique childhood experiences.

### **What Will I Do?**

I will be asked to participate in two separate in-person sessions and watch one Disney film before coming to the first session.

During the first session, you will be asked to draw two drawings: [1] your perspective on how Disney depicts princesses and heroes, and [2] create your own princess and hero.

And the second session will be one-on-one interviews where you will be asked a series of questions about your ideas, opinions, and experiences with Disney films. Each session will take no more than two hours.

I understand that I do not have to participate, and if I do participate, I can quit at any time and request that all my data be deleted immediately. I also understand that I do not have to answer any questions I do not want to answer or do anything I do not want to do.

### **How Will My Information Be Stored?**

I understand that my data will be safely stored electronically, password-protected, and handwritten notes will be stored in a journal with a physical lock, all of which will be securely stored. Only the researcher will have access to this information. The data collected during this study will be stored for one year after the study's conclusion. Afterward, the researcher would delete all files and shred all physical content collected **in April 2024**. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

### **Confidentiality?**

My parents, teachers, or anyone else will not know what I have said or done in the study. No one but the researcher will know. I also understand that the results of the study will be included in the researchers end of the year report and presentation. I recognize that there will not be any personal information about me shared or included in any report, presentation, or research results. I also know that I will choose a different name that the researcher will use in their data instead.

### **Researcher? Questions?**

This study is being done by Joy Lynne Lam, a student at York University. Her email address is joylynne01@gmail.com

If I have any questions or concerns about the study, I can email her about them or I can contact her supervisor Kael Reid at katereid@yorku.ca

When I sign my name, this means that I agree to participate in the study and that all my questions have been answered.

**Additional consent**

This study also requires additional consent for audio recordings and photographs of your drawings. Please check the boxes beside both options if you consent to audio recordings and photographs of your drawings to be taken during the two sessions.

**1. Audio recording**

I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s) and drawing session.

**2. Use of photographs**

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to the use of images of the drawings I have created in session one in the following ways (please check all that apply):

In final academic report  N  Y

In final academic presentation  N  Y

**Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant Name:** \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX F – Verbal Consent Script to Maintain Ongoing Consent

Hello everyone, my name is Joy, and I will be this study's principal investigator and researcher. For those who did not know, I am a fourth-year undergraduate student at York University for Children Childhood Youth Studies.

The study you will participate in will analyze **Girls' perspectives on Disney films**. It is meant to hear each of your ideas, opinions, and experiences with Disney films, characters, and ideas. You all play a central role in this study, as it is based on your personal experiences and perspectives. Basically, it is all about you!

**Version one for session one:** To do so, you have been asked to watch at least one Disney film before coming here today. Today we will have an activity where you will be asked to draw two pictures. [1] your perspective on how Disney depicts princesses and heroes, and [2] create your own princess and hero. **Version two for session two:** Today, we will have one-on-one interviews where we will talk about your drawings, and I will be asking questions specifically about your opinions about the film you watched or any other Disney films you have ever watched.

Each session will take a maximum of two hours, during which you are free to leave at any point.

There will be no inducements offered to be involved in my study. However, I will provide the drawing materials and snacks during the two-hour sessions. However, this will not act as compensation for agreeing to participate in my study.

Please recognize you do not need to answer any questions you do not want to. I will gladly skip over any questions or topics you are uncomfortable with or just generally do not want to answer. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are allowed to leave at any point in this study. Your departure will not affect any relationship with me or York University. And should you choose to withdraw from my study, you can ask for all data, conversation, audio, and photographs to be deleted, and I will not be using them in either my end-of-the-year report or presentation in my CCY class.

All your data will also be anonymous and confidential, meaning that no one other than myself will have access to it. Additionally, all identifying factors, like your name, will not be used; instead, you can choose

an alternate name to go by in my notes and analysis. However, I can not stress this enough: if you at any point in this study disclose that you have been abused, have abused someone, have harmed or threatened to harm yourself or others, recognize that I must report it to my supervisors and authorities.

This study also needs your consent for me to audio record conversation and photograph your drawings. I will not share any raw data; instead, I will transcribe conversations into a script format. Neither audio recordings nor photographs will have any identifying indicators that can be traced back to you; your chosen name will substitute them for this study.

All hard copies, like your consent forms, written notes, and your drawings, will be kept in a locked drawer in my room. While all electronic data, like audio recordings or typed documents, will be kept on my computer, which is password protected and needs a two-step authentication protocol to access.

All data will be kept for up to one year, after which I will delete all electronic data and shred all hard copies.

You will not be exposed to any physical, economic, or emotional risk by agreeing to participate in my study. If you ever feel uncomfortable, please let me know how to help you or if you want, you can completely depart from my research.

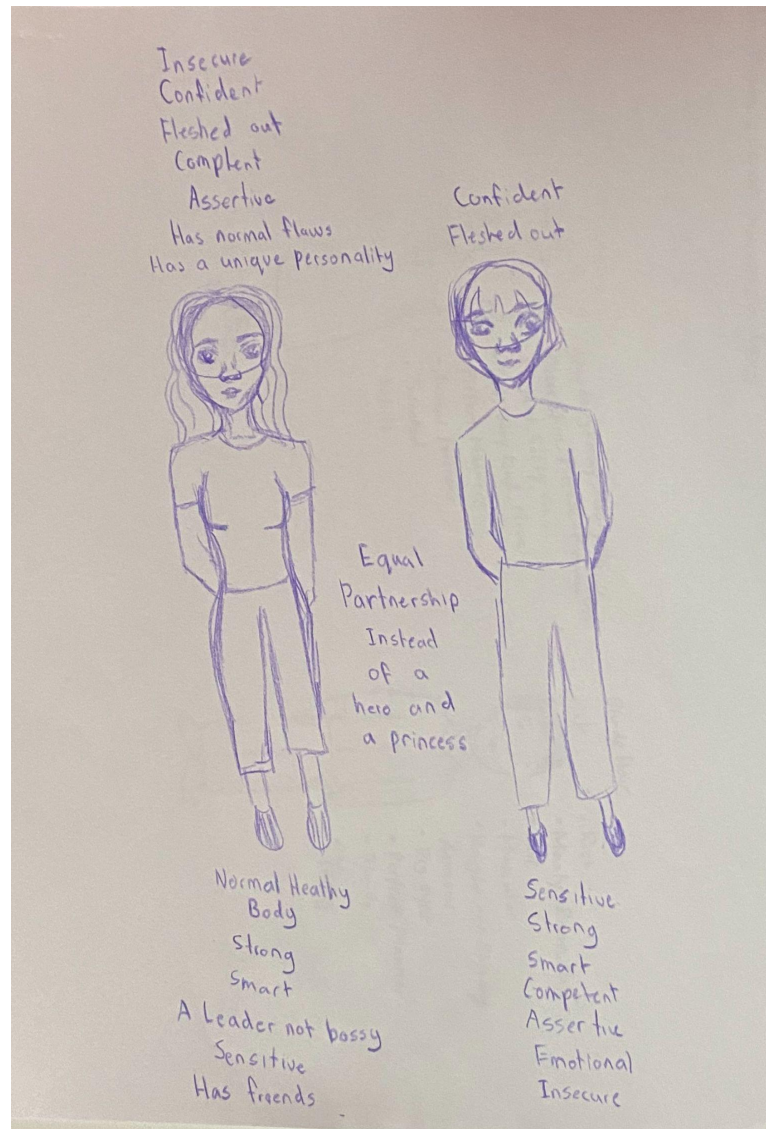
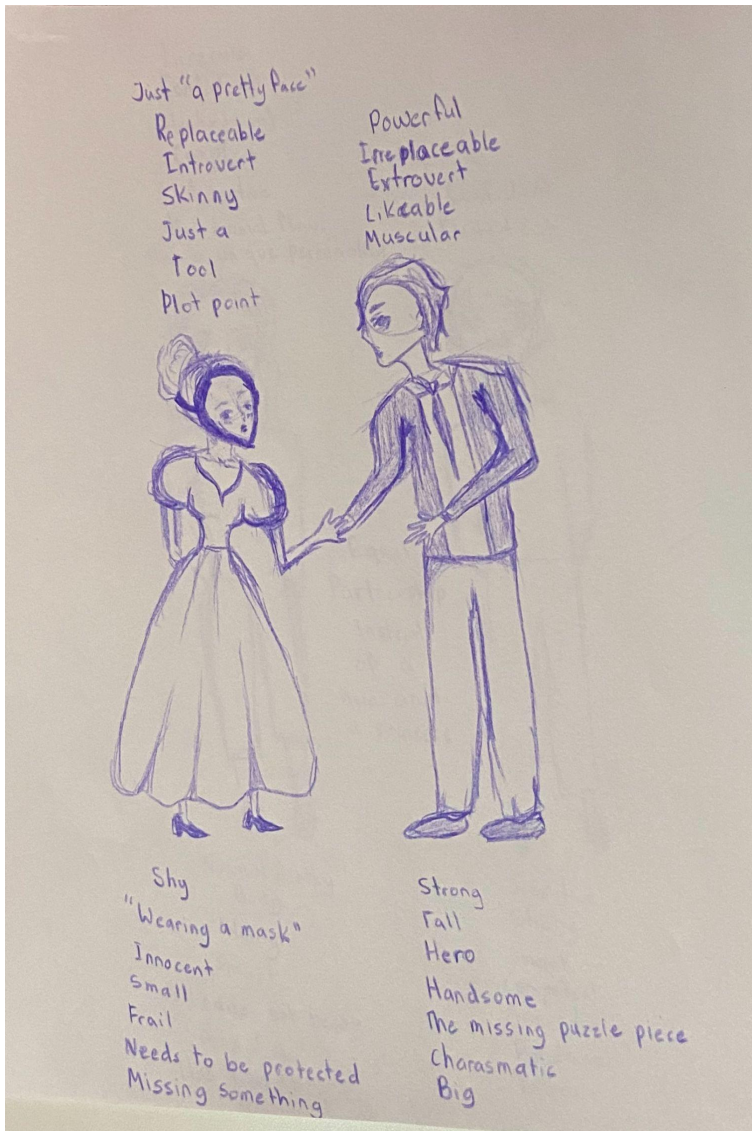
I want to deeply thank you all for coming today. Over the course of this study, I hope to create a welcoming space for all of you to speak your mind, and I hope you make friends with the other participants.

And if you ever have any questions feel free to reach out to me through my email [joylynnne01@gmail.com](mailto:joylynnne01@gmail.com) or my supervisor Kael Reid at [katereid@yorku.ca](mailto:katereid@yorku.ca).

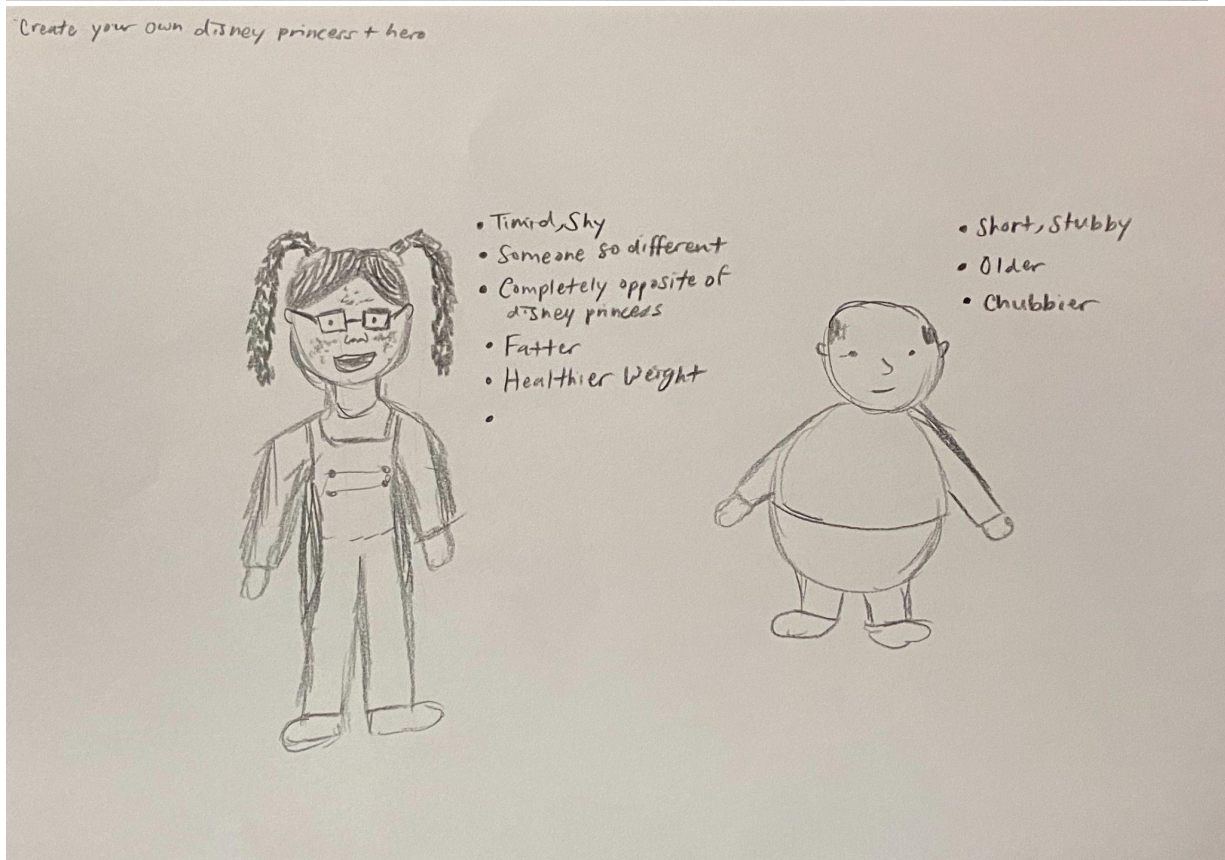
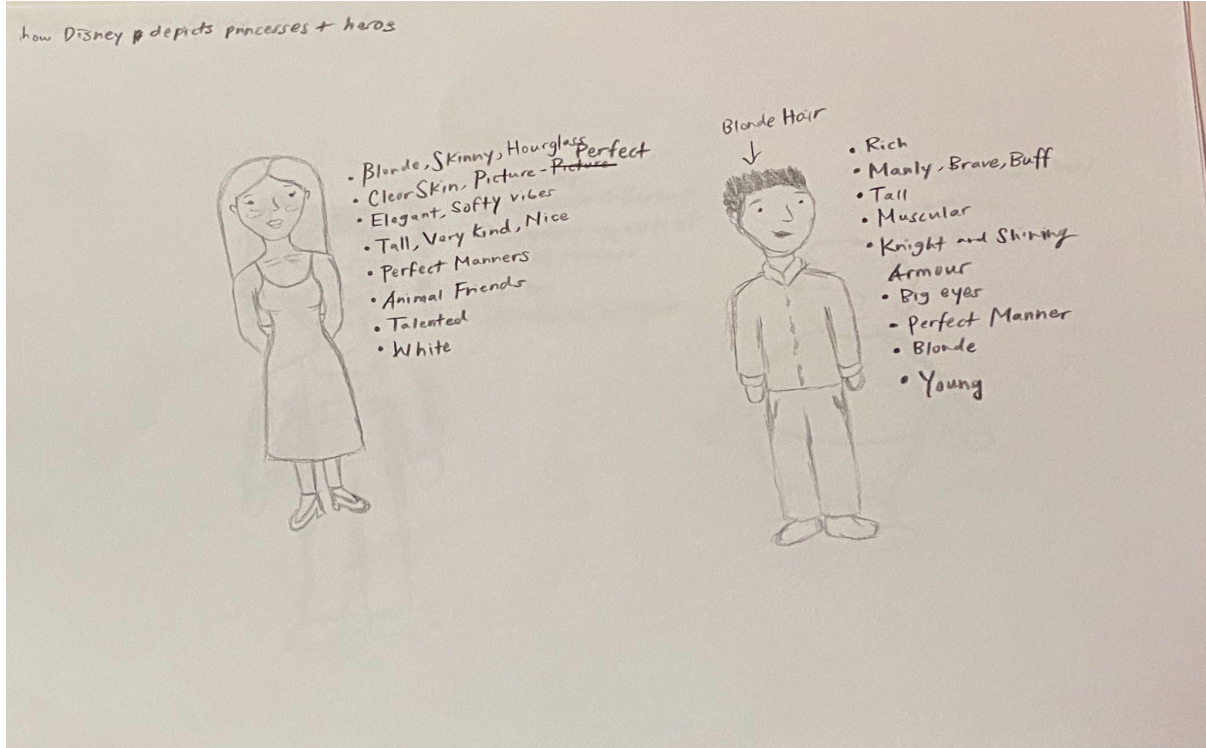
“Please state your name and let me know if you will continue consenting to participating in my study. Also, please state your name if you continue consenting to be audio recorded, knowing that the data will be used in my end-of-the-year report that will only be available to my CCY course director Kael Reid and in a presentation to my fourth-year CCY class.” (These answers will be audio recorded for record).

### APPENDIX G – Participant's Drawings

#### Valentine's Drawings [1&2]



## Rudolph's Drawings [1&2]



Christmas's Drawings [1&2]

