

## PRINCESSES WITHOUT A PRINCE: A CONSIDERATION OF GIRLS' REACTIONS TO DISNEY'S "PRINCESS" MOVIES

ALEXANDER M. BRUCE

In Fall 2004 I taught a course on "Folklore and Fairy Tales" at Florida Southern College. For that course, I assigned, among other works, a number of psychoanalytic and feminist arguments about what fairy tales, especially in their "disneyfied" incarnations, had to say to young girls. By and large, the critics stressed the negative qualities of the stories, notably how the heroines rarely have any "heroic" qualities about them. Yet I noticed that the critical works tended to rely on anecdotal or limited evidence of girls' reactions, or were simply out-of-date. Thus my students and I decided to survey and interview real, live second- and third-grade girls about their understanding of the "disneyfied" fairy tales and their heroines, specifically those whom the Walt Disney Corporation, in recent years, has very actively and aggressively packaged as "princesses." The results of this preliminary study suggest that a re-evaluation of girls' responses to the popular fairy tales is in order. The girls, who were absolutely familiar with the animated versions of the stories (and also of course their "princess" heroines), were not necessarily blinded by the marketing. As can be expected, the girls exhibited a wide range of reactions and attitudes, from those who were absolutely enchanted by the tales to those who recognized the absolute fantasy within the stories. Still, despite this lack of singular interpretation, the girls did tend toward one general reaction: they want the life of the princess—just not necessarily the prince himself.

It is not an understatement to say that in the twenty-first century, Disney's princesses have become a directing force of young American girls' culture. Since 2000, the Walt Disney Company has been pointedly marketing their self-styled "princess" merchandise, including videos, clothing, games, and dolls and other toys. The company has enjoyed steadily increasing profits from the sales of such "princess" items, from approximately \$300 million in 2000 to a projected \$3 billion in 2005.<sup>1</sup> Disney's success in its princess line stems from the high visibility and recognition of the female characters deemed "princesses" who each appear as central characters in popular animated Disney films. In its initial marketing overtures, Disney identified six princesses: Snow White from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937); Cinderella from *Cinderella* (1950); Aurora, better known as *Sleeping Beauty* (1959); Ariel, *The Little Mermaid* (1989); Belle, the "Beauty" of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991); and Jasmine from *Aladdin* (1992).<sup>2</sup> With the exception of Jasmine, each princess is in effect

the title character of her movie, and also with the exception of Jasmine (and arguably Belle), each movie focuses on the princess character nearly exclusively. In summer 2005, Disney did assert in several press releases that Pocahontas (1995) and Mulan (1998) have “always” been numbered among the princesses, and while they are still not consistently packaged with the original six, their presence is indeed growing.<sup>3</sup> However, for this study conducted in 2004, neither Mulan nor Pocahontas was presented or considered as a “princess,” for Disney had not clearly marketed them as such.

The six princesses that were considered have clearly dominated Disney’s marketing. For example, of the 648 products listed in their 2004 holiday catalog, 125 (19.3%) are princess items, that is, products featuring at least one of the princesses and/or with “princess” in the product’s name. In fact, of the 57 items advertised in the first thirteen pages of the 128-page catalog, 49 (86%) are explicitly princess items, such as the Disney princess dolls, the \$300 “Princess Bounce Castle,” and the “Princess Racing Helmet” to go with the “Princess Jeep.”<sup>4</sup> Notably, the princesses come earlier in the catalog than the merchandise associated with “The Incredibles,” which at the time was Disney’s most recent animated film.

These princesses—through their movies and merchandising—have become immediately identifiable to young girls, who may even think of them as their role models and inspiration. Such has been the concern of critics who, since at least the 1970s, have been arguing vocally about the depiction of women in these movies, with most arguments claiming that the princesses convey ultimately negative messages to young girls.<sup>5</sup> The critics argue that since 1937, when Snow White first sang “Some day my prince will come,” the Disney movies have been reinforcing the idea that women should play a subservient, passive role, and that the females who have taken the movies to heart have thus been taught that they should fulfill that passive role in society, not acting but waiting for a man to give them the perfect life. The active women in the movies, the critics note, are almost always evil; in fact the villain in four of the six princess movies is female. The arguments of the critics are strong, but as it has been fifteen or more years since the wave of criticism hit its greatest height, it is now worth exploring the question again; times have changed and, arguably, so have the interests and perceptions of young girls.

This study thus began with the following questions: Do girls of 2004 “read” these movies as girls of the past did (at least according to the earlier critics)? And do these movies indeed exert any influence over girls today? To answer these questions, I, with the assistance of the eleven students in my “Folklore and Fairy Tales” class, surveyed and interviewed groups of young girls in second and third grades—girls aged seven to nine—to learn from them directly what they thought of the nature and role

of the princesses in the Disney films. I also sought to discover if the girls had internalized any of the arguably anti-feminist messages of the movies, or even if they could identify any such messages.

The discussion necessitates a definition of a Disney “princess.” As noted, Disney has identified the princesses by name and visual appearance through its own marketing efforts. To supplement that overt definition, the corporation has sought to clarify the qualities of a princess in its line of princess-themed materials, especially books. For example, the Disney-approved 2004 publication *What Is a Princess?* by Jennifer Weinberg says that “a princess is kind . . . smart . . . caring”; “a princess likes to dress up,” “is brave [and] ready for fun,” and “loves to see new things”; and “a princess is a dreamer,” “is polite,” “loves to sing and dance,” and, of course, “a princess always lives happily ever after!” Empirical observations add to the understanding of a princess. Each of the princesses is the protagonist (or one of two very close protagonists) in an animated film made by the Walt Disney Company. Each princess is a human being (except in one case of a mermaid who becomes a human). She has as an overt motive finding the right man to marry; as such marriage represents fulfillment to her: even for those princesses in an unpleasant situation, marrying their true love is presented as a stronger motivation than escaping the unpleasant situation (for example, Snow White and Cinderella do not complain about cleaning but rather sing for their wishes and dreams to come true in the form of a prince). She meets and marries this man and is rewarded by becoming a “princess”—living in a castle, having wealth and servants, etc. By this definition, Cinderella, Aurora (the Sleeping Beauty), Snow White, and Belle are all princesses. Ariel (the Little Mermaid), does not fit the definition perfectly, as she is already a princess—but in the undersea world of the mer-people, which is apparently not satisfactory. Jasmine of *Aladdin* challenges the definition two ways: she is not the clear protagonist nor is she rewarded by becoming a princess, for she actually begins as a princess. Still, she is a central character; she does have marriage to the right man as her goal; she does find and marry him and thereby reach fulfillment. Other human female characters from animated Disney films either are not the protagonists of their films (as in Esmerelda from *Hunchback* or Megara from *Hercules*), or they do not have as a primary motive marriage to their “princes” with its expected reward of becoming princesses (as in Mulan, who fights for her father’s honor, or Pocahontas, who chooses to stay with her people rather than go off with her love interest in the end).

For this study of girls’ reactions to the “princesses,” I selected second- and third-grade girls of Lincoln Avenue Academy and of Resurrection Catholic School, both in Lakeland, Polk County, Florida. The two schools were chosen mostly because of convenience: I had experience with both

schools and anticipated that the principals would be open to assisting with the research project. The respective principals, Ms. Evelyn Hollen and Ms. Nancy Genzel, having reviewed the research proposal with its accompanying approval of the Institutional Review Board of Florida Southern College, agreed to participate.

Lincoln Avenue Academy is a public “magnet” school concentrating on mathematics and science with students enrolled in kindergarten to fifth grade. Lincoln reported that of its 507 students enrolled in Fall 2004, 33% were African-American, 4% were Asian-American, 4% were Hispanic, 4% were Indian, and 55% were white. As a magnet school, Lincoln is required by state law to have a percentage of African-American students that mirrors the percentage of African-Americans in Polk County. Lincoln also reported that 24% of its students qualified for free or reduced lunches.<sup>6</sup> Voluntary responses gathered from the surveys administered as part of this study suggest that almost all students at Lincoln are Christian of various denominations. Finally, Lincoln reported that in the Fall of 2004 there were 33 girls in second grade and 56 in third.

Resurrection Catholic School is a parochial school with students enrolled in three-year-old pre-kindergarten classes to eighth grade. Resurrection reports that of its 555 students enrolled in Fall 2004, 4% were African-American, 4% were Asian-American, 12% were Hispanic, and 80% were white. Resurrection also reported that, based on its own surveys conducted in the Spring of 2004, 8% of its families made less than \$36,000 annually—that is, perhaps 8% would be eligible for free or reduced lunches in the public school system. Resurrection also reported that 71% of its families made more than \$71,000 annually. Not surprisingly, Resurrection indicated essentially all the students were Christian (96% being specifically Roman Catholic). Finally, Resurrection reported that in Fall 2004 there were 30 girls in second grade and 30 in third.

I chose to focus on second- and third-graders—that is, seven- to nine-year-olds—because, as Jean Piaget outlined, children of that age are moving into the “concrete operational stage”—they are able to think more critically because they have some ability to understand symbols. They think logically and can understand more complex cause-effect relationships. They can also empathize with others’ feelings; they are less egocentric than children younger than they are.<sup>7</sup> As well, they have not reached puberty with all of its complexities, nor are they so old as to be bored with Disney’s princess films. For the interviews, the subjects were sorted by grade level instead of age with the assumption that they would be more comfortable and open in their academic peer groups.

In consultation with the school principals, I developed a survey to be distributed to all the target subjects at the respective schools. (See Appendix 1.) The surveys were distributed approximately two weeks before

the interviews were scheduled. Lincoln returned 46 surveys: 19 from second graders, 27 from third graders; this represented a return rate of 58% for second grade and 48% for third grade, or 52% overall. Resurrection returned 29 surveys, 18 from second graders and 11 from third graders; this represented a return rate of 60% for second grade and 37% for third grade, or 48% overall.

Parents were asked to assist in completing the survey. The subjects were asked to give their age and grade and to consider a list of selected Disney films and indicate which they owned, which they had seen, and which were their three favorites (without having to rank them first, second, third); the Disney films in the list were chosen because each featured a human female as a central character. The parents of the subjects were then invited to answer several optional questions: with whom the subject lives, the subject's race and religious affiliation, and the mother's and father's education and occupation, though I will note that the responses from those questions offered little insight, and I have not pursued those data.<sup>8</sup>

After the surveys were returned, I proceeded with the interview process with the assistance of my student researchers. I had prepared a list of questions that was meant to allow for multiple means of approaching issues; each research assistant received a copy of the questions and collectively reviewed them. (See Appendix 2.) As we were conducting group interviews, the assistants were divided into teams of two, three, or four (depending on the situation), with one researcher designated as the interviewer and the others as note-takers who assisted in collecting responses; we audio-taped the interviews as well, but having the note-takers helped resolve any confusion about who was speaking at a given moment. Both interviewers and note-takers were coached in the principles of proper interviewing technique, primarily not leading the subjects with either verbal or non-verbal cues as well as ensuring that subjects had equal opportunities to share their responses.

The interviewing conditions at each school were similar. Each school allowed us to conduct interviews first thing in the day. Each offered the use of their cafeteria, with the students sitting in groups at tables as far removed from one another as possible. There were minimal distractions: Lincoln had some student art on the walls, while Resurrection had essentially nothing. A staff member was on hand at each school to oversee the interviews. Each interview session lasted between 30 and 35 minutes.

The subjects were arranged by grade level. At Lincoln, where 37 subjects reported for the interview, there were two tables of second graders (six at one table, seven at another) and two tables of third graders (twelve each). At Resurrection, 28 subjects reported for the interview and were placed at three tables: two tables of second graders (nine at each) and one table of third graders (ten subjects). The subjects each wore a nametag to

facilitate identification. The interviews were audio-taped, with at least one note-taker at each table to assist in recording the responses. Following the interviews, the researchers typed up the transcripts for each interview group.

With the survey results and transcripts of the interviews, I was prepared to make some analysis of the data. I knew from the beginning that given the small populations of both schools, even their combined population would not allow for a true random sampling. Therefore any results must be considered tentative and preliminary at best—certainly not absolute “conclusions.”

Table 1 indicates the percentages of the 75 subjects who have seen a given princess movie, who also own a copy of the movie, and who consider the movie among their favorites.

TABLE 1: Survey responses

Movie	Seen it	Also own it	Favorite
<b>Among top 3 favorites</b>			
<i>Snow White</i>	88%	65%	12%
<i>Cinderella</i>	91%	69%	35%
<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	80%	40%	24%
<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	95%	71%	32%
<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	91%	65%	17%
<i>Aladdin</i>	84%	63%	21%

The percentage of subjects who reported that they own the movies warrants commentary. For one, it cannot be determined if the subjects asked for the movies or were given unsolicited copies. Such is especially worth noting as Disney has adopted a particular strategy for encouraging people to buy the movies whether they are immediately desired or not. Disney offers the movies for sale on VHS tape or DVD only for limited periods and then removes them from circulation. Then, after a period of several years and with great fanfare, Disney re-issues the movie in some form of a “special edition” (and Disney has certainly taken advantage of DVD technology to create fancier and fancier editions)—again with the advisory that they won’t be available forever! (See Table 2.) The strategy may encourage some parents (or grandparents) to buy copies whether children have requested them or not. In short, because they do not indicate if the child asked for the movie or was just given the movie, the results simply support the observation that the movies seem to sell well.

Table 2: Schedule of releases of Disney videos

Movie	First video release	Most recent release (as of October 2004)
<i>Snow White</i>	1994	2001 ("Disney Special Platinum Edition")
<i>Cinderella</i>	1995	No other release
<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	1997	2003 ("Special Edition")
<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	1990	1999 ("Limited Edition")
<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	1992	2002 ("Disney Special Platinum Edition")
<i>Aladdin</i>	1993	2004 ("Disney Special Platinum Edition")
<i>Pocahontas</i>	2000	No other release
<i>Mulan</i>	1999	2004 ("Special Edition")

The subjects' notation of their three favorite movies on the survey may be likewise considered suspect. Initially, quite a few of the subjects did not indicate their three favorites, suggesting that the directions for doing so were easily overlooked. Thus the interviewers asked those subjects who had not indicated their three favorites to do so. However, the subjects may have been influenced by their peers, as many subjects completed the survey at the interview table surrounded by their peers.

The "Seen it" category offers perhaps the safest conclusion, as the data indicate that the subjects clearly were familiar with the princess movies. Nor was there any appreciable difference between the two school populations; the subjects knew the movies and their princesses.

The interviews offered much greater insight than the surveys, and I will talk about my observations in several categories. Again, because of the small sample, my observations should not necessarily be considered "conclusions"; I rather see them as some patterns worthy of continued exploration.

Several of the questions prompted girls to think about the qualities or definition of a princess. In practical terms, the girls knew that a princess was either the daughter of a king or married a Prince, and that there are no princesses today outside of a few in Europe or Asia. More striking were the comments the girls made about what princesses did and why they would like to be a princess. Princesses "act cool," "dance," "live in a castle," "wear pretty dresses," "kiss people," get saved by a Prince, and "marry a Prince." But they also "do their own thing," get to "boss people around," get "whatever they want." In terms of what it takes to be a princess, comments included having "self-respect" and "courage and leadership," but more than such character traits, the leading feature of a

princess was her beauty: while princesses were often described as kind and helpful, they were more often described as pretty and beautiful.

Over and over again, the girls equated "beauty" with "good" and "ugly" with "bad." Of course, they absolutely agreed that the princesses were all beautiful, and they consistently pointed out that bad characters "scowl" and that their "face always looks mean" or "ugly" or "scary looking," and they often had such features as a "long nose" or "creepy fingernails" or even a "uni-brow." In response to the question "What do good female characters in Disney films do?" answers focused on appearance as much as action: good females "look pretty," are "nice," "sing," "dance," "save people," "fall in love," and, interestingly, "take orders" (just one such comment, though).

The girls also frequently associated material objects with princesses—their crowns, their dresses, their hair and jewelry. Having such objects seemed to an attraction for these girls. Without being too cynical, I think that the association of the princesses with material objects is part of Disney's marketing plan, as evidenced by their commitment to having plenty of princess merchandise available for girls to request. Whether Disney created the desire for material objects or is simply tapping into a pre-existing desire can be debated, but I think it is worthwhile to note how effectively Disney has used folklore to make a profit.

Finally, to gain a sense of what sort of future the girls saw for themselves, I asked about marriage and career plans. The questions about marriage did not lead to many different responses, as by and large the girls either assumed they would get married or had no real comment. (Only one said "We'll probably have to.") The girls' comments about falling in love did suggest that they recognized that the "love at first sight" of the Disney films was not so realistic. In terms of their careers, most girls have in mind a job—or two or three! There were four who saw their future in terms of an attribute rather than a career, saying that they wanted to be "famous," "rich," or a world traveler; of the rest, as only two replied with an "at-home" career ("mother"), it is fair to say that they see themselves as having a job outside the home. Such counters the general sentiment of the 1980s feminist criticism, which feared that girls would all sit around waiting for their Prince. Still, the choices of careers warrant some attention, for they fall into two broad categories, each related to the princesses: "service" jobs and "appearance" jobs, as outlined in Table 3. Granted, the types of jobs the girls noted are easily seen as a function of their experience—that is, we should not expect an eight-year-old who has not been around lawyers to say she wants to be a lawyer. Still, however, the girls most want to pursue jobs which focus on being "kind" (a key attribute of the princesses) or otherwise serving others or which focus on having or creating an

attractive public appearance—"beauty" (the signal attribute of the princesses). There are few business-related careers noted.

*Table 3: Possible careers noted by subjects, with frequency of response*

<b>"Kindness Service"</b>	<b>"Beauty/Appearance"</b>	<b>Other</b>
Vet (12)	Actress (7)	Athlete (4)
Teacher (6)	Singer (4)	Artist (2)
Doctor/nurse (6)	Hair Stylist (3)	Mother (2)
Army (1)	Princess (3)	Travel (2)
Waitress (1)	Dancer (2)	CPA (1)
		Famous (1)
		Rich (1)
		Work at Disney World (1)
		Writer (1)

Thus the responses from the interviews suggest that girls have heard several different (and somewhat mixed) messages from Disney's princesses. Girls associate the princesses with bravery and kindness to others—a sense of selflessness. Princesses are also independent, which is generally a positive trait, although too much independence in a princess can lead to rebellion and insistence on getting things her way—and given that princesses seem to have all the beautiful possessions they could hope for, such an attitude suggests that "getting things your way" means "getting the material things you want." The girls also make extensive value judgments about the significance of physical beauty, as reinforced by the very consistent comments that equate "beauty" with "good" and "ugly" with "evil." But the movies do not seem to have had such a negative influence on the girls' future plans, as so many had careers in mind—though the careers tended toward careers tied with kindness or beauty.<sup>9</sup>

The significance of folktales in the development of our children is not to be doubted—but the sort of influence is constantly changing, and we ought to be sensitive to the means and extent of such current influence, especially as folktales become most esteemed for their marketing opportunities. Girls today may not be looking for their Prince, but in some ways, they're still looking to be a princess.<sup>10</sup>

**Appendix 1: Survey**

**“The Role of the ‘Princess’ in Animated Walt Disney Films”**

**Parent/Child Survey**

**RESPONSES WILL BE HELD IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE.**

**Name of child being interviewed:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Age of child being interviewed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Grade:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Child lives with**

Mother and Father  Mother  Father  Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Daughter’s race/ethnic background:**

African American  Hispanic  Asian  White  
**Other:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Religious Affiliation:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Mother’s occupation:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Father’s occupation:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Level of education (indicate highest level completed)**

**Mother**

some high school

high school

some college

Associate’s degree  
 (AA, AS)

Bachelor’s degree  
 (BA, BS)

some graduate school

Graduate degree

**Father**

some high school

high school

some college

Associate’s degree  
 (AA, AS)

Bachelor’s degree  
 (BA, BS)

some graduate school

Graduate degree

**Please review the following Disney titles with your daughter. Which of the films do you own or has your daughter seen? And what are her top three favorites? (Please circle her favorites—no need to rank them.)**

Own it	Seen it	
___	___	<i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i>
___	___	<i>Cinderella</i>
___	___	<i>Alice In Wonderland</i>
___	___	<i>Peter Pan</i>
___	___	<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>
___	___	<i>The Little Mermaid</i>
___	___	<i>Beauty And The Beast</i>

Own it	Seen it	
___	___	<i>Aladdin</i>
___	___	<i>Pocahontas</i>
___	___	<i>Hunchback Of Notre Dame</i>
___	___	<i>Hercules</i>
___	___	<i>Mulan</i>
___	___	<i>Tarzan</i>
___	___	<i>Lilo And Stitch</i>

## Appendix 2: Interview questions

### Interview process

*Two goals of interview: To establish that the girls can "read" movies as text and that the movies affect the girls' own self-perception.*

*Have girls sit in semi-circle. Be sure all are within microphone range. Leader reads the following: "Thank you for being here. We're going to talk about some Disney movies you may have seen. Do you all like Disney movies, like Cinderella and The Little Mermaid? Alright! We're going to audiotape our meeting today, so I hope you'll speak loudly. Now let me check everyone's name before we begin."*

*Check names, left to right, against the permission forms. Speak very clearly so that it's clear who is there.*

*"Now, as we begin, let me point out that there's not a right or wrong answer to any of these questions. We just want to hear what you think." Begin interview. Encourage each girl to respond to each question.*

### QUESTIONS

What is your favorite Disney animated (cartoon) movie?  
Who is your favorite character?

- Do you like the movies with princesses?  
 Have they also read or heard the stories? (Does story exist only in the movies?)  
 How can you tell a good character from a bad character in these movies?  
 More than action?  
 What do good female characters in Disney films do? What do they look like?  
 What do bad female characters in Disney films do? What do they look like?  
 What is a step-mother, step-sister?  
 Who are the princesses?  
 What do princesses do? What does it take to be a princess? What's a princess look like? What makes them happy? What do they want—what's really important to them?  
 Why do you like the princesses? Why is \_\_\_ your favorite princess? (If you could be any princess, which one would you be and why?)  
 What words would you use to describe a princess?  
 Do the princesses have fathers? How do their fathers treat them? Do you think they are treated right?  
 Can a girl become a princess today? Could something like Snow White or Sleeping Beauty happen today?  
 (To those who don't name a princess as their favorite) Who's your favorite character again? And why?  
 What do you want to be when you grow up?  
 How do you think young women and men meet and fall in love?  
 What is love like? Do you think it's like what you see in the movies? Do you think it's like what you see in *Cinderella* or another of the "princess movies"?
- Do you think Cinderella was right to act as she did?  
 Do you think it was right for the Little Mermaid to do what she did?  
 How do Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*) and Mulan differ from Aurora (*Sleeping Beauty*) and Snow White?  
 Which princess would you like to have as a big sister, and why?  
 What song(s) do you associate with each of these movies: *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Pocahontas*, *Aladdin*, and *Mulan*  
 What do you think your favorite movie has as its message?

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Disney reported this information in the press release "Disney Princess proves she's still the fairest of the land; girls' lifestyle brand set to become world's largest in 2006":

Disney Consumer Products (DCP) (NYSE:DIS) announced today that Disney Princess will add another jewel to her tiara in 2005: \$3 billion in worldwide consumer products retail sales. The young girls' lifestyle brand continues to expand into more categories and countries, such as India, and with the release and marketing of the Cinderella Platinum Edition DVD this October [2005] and Little Mermaid Platinum Edition DVD in Fall 2006 to support its popularity, the brand is on track to become the largest global girls franchise in 2006 with 40% growth in 2005 and 300% growth over the last three years.

<sup>2</sup> Although Disney has produced straight-to-video sequels to many of these movies (such as *Cinderella 2: Dreams Come True* or *Little Mermaid 2: Return to the Sea*), these sequels were not considered at any point throughout the study.

<sup>3</sup> See "Disney Princess proves she's still the fairest of the land." Interestingly, the Disney Corporation, in the introduction to its 2001 collection of quotations entitled *Disney's Princess Magic*, called Pocahontas and Mulan "nonroyal Disney heroines." Apparently, Disney has since elected to drop the cumbersome yet accurate description of Pocahontas and Mulan and simply count them among the Princesses.

<sup>4</sup> This same catalog does reveal Disney's efforts to expand its marketing base by creating "princesses by association." Disney offers 11-inch dolls of the six princesses—but also of Mulan, Pocahontas, Esmerelda (from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*), and Tinkerbell. The inclusion of the first three seems to be an effort to make the group of princesses more ethnically diverse: Mulan is Asian, Pocahontas is Native American, and Esmerelda is at least "non-white," as she has darker skin. Tinkerbell is heavily marketed throughout the catalog, but not as a princess; Disney elsewhere distinguishes her from the princesses, such as by offering a shirt with a Tinkerbell design or with a Princess design—but not with both. The fact that Mulan and Pocahontas are featured only as these dolls—and are not part of other Princess packages—undermines Disney's claim that the two have always been considered Princesses.

<sup>5</sup> See, among others, the following works: Alan Dundes, "The Psychoanalytic Study of the Grimms' Tales with Special Reference to 'The Maiden Without Hands'"; Lauren Dundes and Alan Dundes, "The Trident and the Fork: Disney's 'The Little Mermaid' as a male construction of an Electral fantasy"; Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "The Queen's Looking Glass"; N. J. Girardot, "Initiation and Meaning in the Tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs"; *In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences*, ed. Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham; Marcia K. Lieberman, "'Some Day My Prince Will Come': Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale"; Kay Stone, "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us"; Kay Stone, "Three Transformations of Snow White"; Jane Yolen, "America's Cinderella."

<sup>6</sup> According to the 2004 Florida state guidelines, students from a family of four qualify for free lunches if the annual household income does not exceed \$23,920; they qualify for reduced lunches if the annual household income does not exceed \$34,040.

<sup>7</sup> See Miller 29-107, especially 59-62 for more information on Piaget and his theories.

<sup>8</sup> The surveys did point toward one difference between the white and non-white subjects that might bear future consideration, given a greater body of subjects:

non-white subjects reported owning, on average, 6.9 movies each, whereas white subjects reported owning 8.5 each. Potentially, this discrepancy reveals a difference of interest in Disney movies.

<sup>9</sup> There are definite ways that the process of interviewing these girls could be improved—clearer instructions on the survey, smaller groups of interviewees to facilitate discussion and discourage copycat answers, and more focused questions. More striking are the possibilities for further study. It would be worth pursuing a longitudinal study to see what these girls had to say about the importance of the Disney films in their lives in another five or ten years. As well, it would be beneficial to interview older girls and women right now to see how the responses of the subjects correlate to a broader picture. And the effects of the currently popular “live action” princess movies such as *The Princess Diaries* (1 and 2), *Ella Enchanted*, and *A Cinderella Story*, ought to be examined; these movies have some impact on their audience of pre-teen girls, and it would be worth finding out if the audience found the movies and their heroines any more “real” than their animated counterparts. Finally, the study must be expanded beyond the two schools—there need to be more subjects, especially minorities, before solid claims can be made.

<sup>10</sup> A version of this paper was read at the 2005 meeting of the American Folklore Society. My thanks to Ms. Evelyn Hollen and Lincoln Avenue Academy, to Ms. Nancy Genzel and Resurrection Catholic School (both of Lakeland, Florida), and to my student researchers: Lauren Burtz, Patrick Cummings, Sarah Furr, Peter Haynicz, Rachael Kraemer, Sara McDowell, Liz Maddox, Amy Miller, Carlee Miller, Jessica Steinke, and Paul Weaver II.

## WORKS CITED

- “Disney Princess proves she’s still the fairest of the land; girls’ lifestyle brand set to become world’s largest in 2006.” *Disney online*. 21 June 2005. Accessed 21 November 2005. [http://corporate.disney.go.com/news/corporate/2005/2005\\_0621\\_disneyprincess.html](http://corporate.disney.go.com/news/corporate/2005/2005_0621_disneyprincess.html).
- Disney’s Princess Magic: Words from the Heart*. New York: Disney Press, 2001.
- Dundes, Alan. “The Psychoanalytic Study of the Grimms’ Tales with Special Reference to ‘The Maiden Without Hands.’” *The Germanic Review* 62.2 (Spring 1987): 50–65.
- Dundes, Lauren, and Alan Dundes. “The Trident and the Fork: Disney’s ‘The Little Mermaid’ as a male construction of an Electral fantasy.” *Psychoanalytic Studies* 2.2 (2000): 117–130.
- Gilbert, Sandra M., and Susan Gubar. “The Queen’s Looking Glass.” *Don’t Bet on the Prince: Contemporary feminist fairy tales in North America and England*. Ed. Jack Zipes. New York: Methuen, 1986. 201–8.
- Girardot, N. J. “Initiation and Meaning in the Tale of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs.” *Journal of American Folklore* 90 (1977): 274–300.
- In Front of the Children: Screen Entertainment and Young Audiences*. Ed. Cary Bazalgette and David Buckingham. London: British Film Institute, 1995. 141–50.

- Lieberman, Marcia K. "‘Some Day My Prince Will Come’: Female Acculturation through the Fairy Tale." *Don't Bet on the Prince: Contemporary feminist fairy tales in North America and England*. Ed. Jack Zipes. New York: Methuen, 1986. 185–200.
- Miller, Patricia H. *Theories of Developmental Psychology*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman, 1983.
- Stone, Kay. "Things Walt Disney Never Told Us." *Journal of American Folklore* 88 (1975): 42–50.
- Stone, Kay. "Three Transformations of Snow White." *The Brothers Grimm and Folktale*. Ed. James M. McGlathery. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1988. 52–65.
- Weinberg, Jennifer Liberts. *What is a Princess?* New York: Random House: 2004.