

GENDER, RACE, NOSTALGIA, AND FANSHIP: FACTORS AFFECTING
PARENTAL MEDIATION OF DISNEY ANIMATED FILMS

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

GENDER, RACE, NOSTALGIA, AND FANSHIP:
FACTORS AFFECTING PARENTAL MEDIATION
OF DISNEY ANIMATED FILMS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my favorite person in the universe, Monique. I love you most and am glad you are here with me, at the beginning of all things.

It is also dedicated to every person who grew up and did not see themselves in the media.

You are all beautiful and the world would not be as amazing as it is without you. Here is to a better, more inclusive, and fair future!

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explored several gaps in the literature related to parental perceptions of Disney animated films and parental mediation of those films including how willing parents are to use Disney animated films to talk with their children about social issues, such as gender and racial representation, as well as what themes exist within parent-child communication about those films. Specifically, this research focused on parents' and children's perceptions of race and gender stereotypes in the films, how willing they were to communicate about these issues, and how various social identities affected these communicative exchanges. Using a mixed-methods approach, the author conducted two studies to explore this topic.

In Study 1, 20 parent-child dyads were interviewed. These interviews explored how the parents and children had previously communicated about Disney animated films. Then, the dyads were asked to have conversations together about race and gender after watching two Disney animated film clips. Seven distinct themes from those parent-child interactions are identified and discussed in this dissertation. While dyads seemed to agree that Disney has made attempts to be more inclusive, communication about race and gender was distinct with dyads tending to focus on positive aspects of gender representation as opposed to more negative aspects of racial representation. The

prevalence of these themes also varied based on the demographics of the parent-child dyads. Specifically, dyads with non-White parents were much more likely to have engaged in communication about race prior to the interview than in dyads with White parents.

Study 2 built upon the first study by examining whether specific characteristics of parents and social identities of parents and children predicted the willingness of parents to have conversations with their children about media representation. Specifically, 190 parents were surveyed to assess their willingness to have conversations with their children about Disney, gender, and race. Parents were also asked about their parental mediation techniques, Disney fanship, and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films. Overall, this study indicated that active mediation, fanship, and nostalgia for Disney films were often significant predictors of parental willingness to engage in any type of conversation about Disney animated films with their children.

Overall, the results of this research increase understanding of parental mediation theorizing, and whether media fanship and nostalgia for media predict the parent-child-media relationship, regarding sense-making of messages in family films. Specifically, results illustrated that parents are willing to have conversations about popular films important to their identity and sensitive topics such as race and gender representation despite their race, age, gender, fanship of Disney animated films, and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films. Moreover, this study showed that parents and children were aware of many of the stereotypes that exist within these films. Given the impact that parental mediation can have on child behavioral and attitudinal outcomes, it is imperative

that future research continue to bridge the gap between parental willingness to communicate and their communicative efficacy.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research aims to fill several gaps in the literature related to parental perceptions of Disney animated films and how parents choose to mediate their children's consumption of these films. More specifically, this dissertation project explores the following questions: How do parents discuss Disney animated films with their children? And how do parents discuss portrayals of race, gender, or other social issues that exist in Disney animated films? The results of this research will increase understanding of parental mediation theorizing, and whether media fanship and nostalgia for media predict the parent-child-media relationship, regarding sense-making of messages in family films.

The Disney Empire

Disney animated films are a central part of worldwide popular culture (e.g., Forgacs, 1992) and have been demonstrated to affect how children make sense of and engage with the world around them (e.g., Coyne et al 2016). Studies demonstrate that characters in Disney animated films have frequently been stereotyped by gender (e.g., Davis, 2007) and race (e.g., Luisi, 2021) wherein the heroes of these films are typically White, CIS gendered, heterosexuals and where minority social identities are marginalized or condemned (e.g., Lacroix, 2004). Furthermore, Disney animated films have been found to affect child consumers' understanding of gender (e.g., Golden & Jacoby, 2018) and race (e.g., Moffitt & Harris, 2014). Disney media has also demonstrably influenced child behaviors including how children play with others (Coyne et al., 2016) and whether they are willing to engage in more prosocial behaviors (de Leeuw & van der Laan, 2018).

Relationships with Disney media can be long-lasting, influencing adult fans (e.g., Brock, 2017) who pass these films onto children of their own (e.g., Cross, 2015).

Sheriff Woody. Queen Elsa. Mickey Mouse. These are not just characters, but names that resonate throughout the world, especially in the United States (U.S.) and are particularly popular amongst children (T. Smith, 2020). A cowboy doll, a queen with magical powers, and a mouse; the only commonality that these iconic figures share is their home: The Walt Disney Company. These iconic names demonstrate that the Walt Disney Company is more than a typical media production company – it is a powerful cultural institution. Worth more than 200 billion dollars, the company has a foothold in almost every corner of the U.S. entertainment industry, producing movies and television shows that have millions of viewers (Navarro, 2022) with content available through traditional channels like movie theaters and television channels. Disney media is also prominent on new platforms such as streaming services and virtual reality.

Beyond the media content itself, the company also has a large presence in the worldwide economy including merchandise such as toys and clothing, its own cruise line, and finally a host of immense theme parks that stretch across the world. Founded in 1923, this is a company with a rich history that is still one of the most trusted and respected companies in the U.S (“#17 Walt Disney,” 2019). Additionally, Disney is only continuing to increase its share of the theatrical market (through business deals like the acquisition of 21st Century Fox) as well as its share of the streaming market (through its consolidation of Hulu and the launch of Disney+). In fact, by 2019, Disney controlled over 37% of the U.S. theatrical market, with the company bringing in an estimated 11 billion dollars, which set the record for the biggest studio haul in history (Hughes, 2019). Even despite

the theatrical slow down caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Disney still held a strong presence in movie theaters in 2021, taking in over \$1 billion at the U.S. box office and 27% of the overall theatrical market, which was the most of any movie studio (D'Alessandro, 2022).

The Walt Disney Company's reach potentially extends even further than other media corporations and well beyond financial ramifications as some have argued its business model is to advertise to Disney babies who become Disney adults who then have to buy products for new Disney babies (Forgacs, 1992). Sperb (2018, p. 53) discusses the challenges associated with discussing and/or critiquing Disney media content, "The challenge is thus twofold: Disney is not only a 'sacred' brand associated generally with innocent and optimistic family fun, a space beyond analysis, but also one that is most often tied up specifically with one's actual childhood" (Cross, 2015, p. 5). Cross further argues that Disney nostalgia is nearly religious in its power, describing people's trips to Disneyland as "Disney Jerusalem (or Mecca)" and certain characters as "saints" (p. 5). In summation, the Walt Disney Company is an enterprise that is almost omnipresent in U.S. culture from the time a person is very young to when a person is very old, and which has an influence that may become even greater the more one reflects upon its products over time.

While newer Disney animated films such as *Mona*, *Frozen*, *Zootopia*, and most recently *Encanto*, have been championed by some as being progressive (e.g., Tóth, 2017), Disney animated films have not always been described this way (Libby, 2019). In several early Disney films for example, side characters have been depicted in exaggerated racial stereotypes such as the "Siamese" cats in *Lady and the Tramp* or the "Jim Crow" crows

in *Dumbo* (Libby, 2019). Many Disney films have also been criticized for traditionally having female characters that are less dynamic and more often stereotyped than male characters (England et al., 2011). Other research, meanwhile, has demonstrated that villainous characters have been presented as homosexuals (Li-Vollmer & LaPointe, 2003).

The Walt Disney Company seems well aware of its controversial past (Biesiada, 2021). Responses to these criticisms have included documentaries containing the potentially problematic films that have discussed the era in which the films were released (Libby, 2019). The parks division of the company has also made efforts to make its theme parks more inclusive by removing racist imagery from some rides and modifying the appearance of cast members to include more visible tattoos and piercings as part of the costume design in films (Biesiada, 2021). More recently, the company has made certain films such as *Song of the South* unavailable for purchase or viewing, while putting content warnings on its new streaming service Disney+. These warnings state “The program is presented as originally created. It may contain outdated cultural depictions” (Libby, 2019).

Although the Walt Disney Company is clearly trying to modify its image, little research to date has examined whether modern audiences are protective or critical of the “outdated” content in Disney animated films or how their attitudes influence discussions of it. Specifically, research prior to this dissertation exploring how parents navigate discussions of race or gender in relation to Disney animated films with their children has been limited. Given the omnipresence of Disney animated films in the cultural consciousness, and the long-term loyalty that many fans seem to have for these films, it is

important to assess how adults who are fans of or nostalgic for Disney animated films continue to interact with the films once they become parents. As past interpersonal communication research demonstrates that parental discussion of gender and race affects children's' acceptance of non-traditional gender roles (Epstein & Ward, 2011) and racial minorities (Vittrup & Holden, 2011), parental discussion of these concepts in relation to Disney animated films potentially offer an avenue for significant prosocial outcomes in children.

While parental mediation theorizing is a growing body of research, most of the research done in this area has been quantitative (Collier et al., 2016) and has not explored the themes present within the discourse that parents use to mediate content with their children. Additionally, parental mediation studies have mostly focused on how parents mediate content containing sexualized or violent behaviors (Collier et al., 2016). This study differs by examining how or if parents mediate content which they admit to being highly invested in and specifically explores how parents mediate their child's consumption of stereotyped Disney media content.

Parental Mediation

For this dissertation, parental mediation is defined as how parents choose to intentionally restrict the media use of their children, experience media with their children, and/or finally how parents explicitly communicate about media with their children (Clark, 2011). Because parental communication about social identities such as gender and race can influence how children perceive and express their own social identities (e.g., Bauermeister et al., 2017) and how they perceive and engage with people they perceive as different from themselves (e.g., Vittrup & Holden, 2011), it is of significance to

understand how parents are or are not mediating content that they may have enjoyed as children, but which they may understand to be dated or problematic as adults. This is especially true because vicarious contact with people different from oneself can influence how members of that group are perceived and judged in the future (Ortiz & Harwood, 2007). Media that portray social outgroups in stereotyped ways can also lead to stereotyped behaviors in children viewers (Coyne et al., 2016). Moreover, these stereotyped behaviors are not always reduced by parental instruction and can be increased by parental involvement depending upon the strategy or combination of strategies that the parent chooses to employ (e.g., Collier et al., 2016).

Another gap in parental mediation theory is that little is known about how individual parental characteristics influence how parents mediate their children's media consumption. Studies have begun to examine the role that race and socio-economic status plays in the parental mediation process (e.g., Top, 2016) and have found that as children age, parental mediation becomes less common (e.g., Collier et al., 2016). However, there is still much that could and should be explored in this area to better understand what drives parents to discuss media containing stereotypes, such as Disney animated films, with their children or what causes them to avoid having those discussions. Emerging research indicates that active parental mediation and media literacy skills may predict parents and children having more conversations with children in general about the media they consume as well as more sensitive conversations related to gender and race depictions in those films (Behm-Morawitz et al., in press) This dissertation research, then, investigates whether parental characteristics other than active mediation or media literacy skills also predict whether parents are more willing to have conversations with

their children about race or gender issues. As scholars contend that for many people Disney animated films are a source of identity from the time they are very young to the time they are very old (Forgacs, 1992), the nostalgia that one has for these films and the degree to which they identify as a fan of these films (fanship) are two variables that may influence how someone is or is not willing to critically evaluate those films in terms of gender or race. For this dissertation, nostalgia was defined as the extent that Disney animated films produced positive feelings in parents as they thought about films that were important to them in their childhood (Natterer, 2014). Conversely, fanship was conceptualized as the extent to which parents perceived that Disney animated films were important to their identity and the level to which a parent invested resources into engaging with those films (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010).

In summation, the research within this dissertation aimed to fill several gaps in the literature related to perceptions that parents hold regarding Disney animated films and how they choose to mediate their children's consumption of these films. More specifically, the project explored the following question: How do parents choose to discuss Disney animated films in the context of gender and race? However, it was also essential to understand whether parents would be willing to have those conversations with their children in the future. These issues were explored using a mixed methods approach. The first phase of research consisted of parent-child interviews to understand the discourse present in parent-child conversations about these films. This was followed by a quantitative survey administered to parents to better understand parental nostalgia for, fanship of, and overall willingness to discuss the content within these films more broadly. By doing so, this research contributes a greater understanding of parental

perceptions and mediation techniques used by the parents, which is significant given the popularity and influence of these films historically and the easy accessibility the films currently possess.

In the next chapter, I will more fully explore how gender and race are depicted in media in general, in children's media, and finally in Disney animated films specifically. Furthermore, I will discuss how these representations have been found to affect child audiences, how parents influence these effects through parental mediation, and the role parental demographics play in this process. Finally, I will present findings on how fandom and nostalgia influence the behaviors and identity of media consumers and make the argument that these should be explored in the context of the parent-media-child triadic relationship.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Issues in Children's Media

Children are a unique media audience that often lack real world experience who until the age of 7 years old may struggle to distinguish between what is seen in the media and what occurs in reality (Strasburger et al., 2009). Children's identities and perceptions of the world are not as permanently established as those of adults, meaning that the effects of media on children are likely greater than the effects of media on adults (Bandura, 2001). Children also commonly re-watch the same program several times in a relatively short time period, which results in the ideas communicated through these programs being more easily accessible to the children when they are asked to make judgments about the world (Tidhar & Lemish, 2003). Moreover, children now have more agency with what they consume, including access to personal mobile devices and streaming services where they can choose to re-watch content as many times as they would like without parental involvement (Rideout & Robb, 2020). One such service that is available to children is Disney+, a service where children can watch their favorite Disney movies as many times as they would like to if they have access to a mobile device or smart television. Children may also have access to their own profile in these services, which means they have greater control of what they watch, as parents may not be aware of what is in a child's queue (Weir, 2020).

Not only do children have greater access to media, but they are arguably surrounded by it. Indeed, children in the U.S. on average consume close to 5 hours of screen media per day and teenagers consume over 7 hours of screen media per day

according to a 2019 probabilistic survey of over fifteen hundred children and teens in the U.S. (Rideout & Robb, 2020). The survey also found that of the reported screen time, much of the content being watched was comprised of online videos including those available on streaming services such as Disney+. The survey also found that even among children aged 8-12 years, over 40% report having a smart phone, giving the children even more of an opportunity to watch media content without parental input. In summation, the findings of this survey suggest that not only are children watching a high amount of media content, but they are often doing so without parental guidance or surveillance.

In addition to streaming content on services such as Disney+, traditionally theatrically released children's films are still part of thriving industry. In 2019, animated films made an estimated \$3 billion at the international box office (Whitten, 2019). After the film's run in theaters is complete, they are often bought for home-viewing in the forms of Blu-Rays and DVD's, with three animated films being bought by over one million people each in 2019 ("Top-Selling Blu-Rays in the United States 2019," 2019). These films have not only generated large amounts of ticket sales, but also have resulted in popular merchandise based on the films, which is another multibillion-dollar industry, itself (Gibbs, 2015). Films, too, are different now than they were in the past when a person might only have a chance to see a film while it was in movie theaters. Now, these films become available to watch on streaming services very soon after their theatrical release. This means that people and children can watch it the moment it becomes available to stream as many times as they want without ever leaving their home.

As animated films are clearly still popular amongst child and family audiences, it is necessary to review previously identified stereotypes within them and how they have

been shown to affect child audiences. In the following section, work that has examined issues of representation in children's films and television programs will be highlighted. Specifically, work that has focused on representation of gender and race as well as the effects of viewing gender-stereotyped media and racial-stereotyped media will be discussed.

Gender Representations in Children's Media

For many children, media play a key role in their understanding of normative gender roles and behaviors (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Martin & Kazyak, 2009). This is potentially concerning given that female characters are represented far less frequently than male characters in animated films (Hare, 2018). Representations of male characters are also more frequently androgynous than representations of female characters (England et al., 2011), which indicates that male characters often contain more depth. One possible explanation for why depictions of female characters lack as much depth is simply that there are fewer female characters in media in general (e.g., Hare, 2018) and therefore less opportunities for female characters to be portrayed as different from stereotypical gender norms. Moreover, as research has demonstrated that children prefer media with characters similar to their own gender (Holler et al., 2016), the lacking depiction of lead female characters in children's films could be considered a form of symbolic annihilation, which states that social outgroups are either condemned, trivialized, or omitted from media (Tuchman, 1978).

Historically, characters that are overtly feminine (defined here as characters played by female actors, given female names, fulfilling traditionally female roles, or being obviously feminine in appearance) (Birthisel, 2014) have been underrepresented in

all media (Tuchman, 1978) and especially in children's media (Hare, 2018). When they do appear, approximately only 16% of leading/title roles are occupied by female characters (Hare, 2018). Even when they are present, female characters are stereotyped by gendered behaviors and characteristics than male characters (England et al., 2011). Gender-role stereotypes can be defined as groupings of specific attributes or societal norms centered on gender that are used to differentiate male and female behaviors (Mayes & Valentine, 1979). Although gender stereotypes can be cognitively useful heuristics, internalization of gender stereotypes have been empirically linked with negative outcomes such as lowered self-esteem (Rodgers et al., 2017), increased gendered play (Coyne et al., 2016), increased hostility against perceived gender transgressions (Epstein & Ward, 2011), and even occupational attainment (Dicke et al., 2019). A more comprehensive review of stereotyped media effects in relation to children specifically is provided in the next section of the literature review.

The lack of female representation in children's media is not a new concern. In two separate content analytic studies spanning from 1950 to 2016, male characters have made up almost 80 percent of all characters in mainstream animated media (both television and film) (Hare, 2018; Klein & Shiffman, 2009). This ratio has also been present in films aimed at teenagers and adolescents (Coyne et al., 2010) as well as adults (Smith et al., 2016). Taken together, these content analyses reveal that not only do children see mostly male characters, but this male/female ratio is present at all stages of media consumption and has continued for over 50 years in U.S. entertainment media. This consistent underrepresentation of women and girls then, signals to child viewers that male characters are more important than female characters (Tuchman, 1978).

Even when female characters have appeared, they have been subject to trivialization (Tuchman, 1978). For example, England and colleagues (2011) found that male characters are more active than female characters and thus drive the plot more frequently. Other research has found that even though female characters such as mothers are often portrayed positively, they are not as prominent when compared to father characters (Holcomb, Latham, & Fernandez-Baca, 2014). Perhaps most significantly, female characters are often placed in positions of subordination to male characters at the end of the film in which they appear (Martin & Kazyak, 2009; Luisi, 2019).

In addition to being trivialized, female characters are sometimes condemned in the media in which they appear (Tuchman, 1978). It is telling that some of the most significant female characters in children's film history have been villains (Davis, 2007). For example, Ursula and Maleficent are both female characters portrayed as villainous and who are defeated based upon the actions of a male hero (Davis, 2007).

Children's media also has negatively stereotyped male characters based on their gender (Ebrahim, 2014). In *Toy Story 2*, for example, Jessie is portrayed as an antagonist to Woody and throughout much of the film as someone who Woody believes is actively trying to keep him from reuniting with his family (Gillam & Wooden, 2008). Male characters have also been portrayed as engaging in stereotypically feminine behaviors only as a result of a significant personal failure (Ebrahim, 2014). A textual analysis of villains in animated films has even indicated that male villains are given female characteristics, both physical and personality traits, to make the male hero they are facing appear more masculine (Li-Vollmer & LaPointe, 2003).

In addition to the roles that male characters and female characters take on in children's media, there have been demonstrated differences in characters appearance based on gender. For instance, female characters have been sexualized with far greater frequency than male characters and often have their physical appearance discussed by other characters within the films they appear (England et al., 2011). Male characters have also objectified female characters within children's films by overtly staring at them, often in exaggerated ways including the male character's jaw dropping at the sight of the female character (Luisi, 2019; Martin & Kazyak, 2009). Another trend in recent years has been to have female characters who are more or less "heroes In drag", where female representation is increasing slowly, but only by merging stereotypical feminine characteristics (including sexualized appearance and exaggerated emotions) with stereotypical masculine characteristics (including increased physical strength) (Baker & Raney, 2007; Ebrahim, 2014) instead of creating more dynamic male and female characters. Even in scenarios where female characters are becoming more androgynous, they are still rarely placed in positions of authority and are often beholden to male mentorships (Baker & Raney, 2007). An example of this would be a character like Batgirl, who acts very similarly to Batman, but does not have the authority to make her own decisions when fighting crime as opposed to her mentor.

In Disney animated films specifically, scholars have noted problematic gender depictions (Bazzini, Curtin, Joslin, Regan, & Martz, 2010; England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011). For both male and female characters in Disney animated films, Bazzini et al. (2010) found that the more physically attractive a character was, the more likely the character was to be portrayed as a good person, to be successful romantically, and to have

a positive outcome at the end of the film. In a content analysis of prince and princess characters in Disney animated films, England et al. (2011) found that prince characters were more androgynous and that female characters were much more likely to fulfill stereotypical gender roles than male characters. Furthermore, this study found that the possibilities that exist for Disney female characters have also traditionally been more limited and tied to stereotypical feminine behaviors such as house-cleaning when compared to male characters who were significantly more often associated with independence, critical thinking, and athleticism. In terms of romance, Hefner et al. (2017) found that male characters in Disney princess films were significantly more likely to be portrayed as a romantic pursuer than a female character in those films, suggesting to viewers that males must be the ones to initiate romantic relationships. Moreover, while both male and female characters in animated films have challenged the idea of getting married, female characters are more regularly punished in the film for doing so (Hefner et al., 2017).

While the portrayal of romance and gender roles in Disney animated films is potentially problematic, the disparity in gender depictions in these films has not been limited to romantic interactions alone. Female characters in Disney animated films have not typically depicted been as having female friends, with the first female-female friendship not arriving in a Disney animated feature film until 1995's *Pocahontas* (Davis, 2007). This means that until this interaction, the only significant interactions female Disney characters have had were with male characters or with female characters who represented an obstacle to their success (Davis, 2007). Holcomb et al. (2015) also found that father characters in Disney animated films are often much more integral to the plot of

these films but are rarely shown nurturing child characters. The same study found that mothers were much more likely to perform stereotypically gendered behaviors in comparison to fathers.

Beyond the parent-child relationship in these films, the role of female protagonists has arguably been tied to the characters' gender in a way that male characters' story arcs have not been. In a textual analysis of 15 Disney films, Griffin, Harding, and Learmonth (2017) found that although initially female characters in Disney animated films were shown as domestic-bound, newer characters like Tiana in *The Princess and the Frog*, are expected to work, but are still expected to be thoroughly feminine while they do so. Although Princess Elsa in *Frozen* has been praised by some for not having a romantic relationship, Streiff and Dundes (2017a) argue that the depiction of Elsa in the film still relies on gendered stereotypes as Elsa is driven to action as a result of her father's request for her to stay isolated. Moreover, the same study suggests that Elsa is only truly accepted by others in the film when she becomes more stereotypically emotional and less independent. In a separate study, Streiff and Dundes (2017b) suggest that Moana is similarly motivated to action to please her father and that the films' resolution, where the island Te Fiti is restored from lava-covered and desolate to lush and green, suggests that a female's worth is tied to their reproductive capacity.

Given these concerns about how gender is portrayed in children's media, including specifically within Disney animated films, it is important to understand how these portrayals impact child audiences. In the next section, scholarship that has examined how mediated portrayals of gender have affected children will be examined. Moreover, the role that parents play in these empirical effects will also be discussed.

Children's Media Effects and Gender

Gender portrayals in several forms of media, including music and music videos (Ey, 2016), television series (Rodgers et al., 2017), and film (de Leeuw & van der Laan, 2018; Golden & Jacoby, 2018), have been found to affect child audiences. Multiple studies have indicated that consuming media content where thinness and beauty are highly correlated result in children feeling lower levels of self-esteem (Coyne et al., 2016; Rodgers et al., 2017). This effect has been demonstrated in children as young as the age of five years (Rodgers et al, 2017). Exposure to stereotyped media has also resulted in children more often relying on gendered stereotypes when asked to perform specific tasks by researchers and when participating in socializing events in the real world (Ey, 2016; Coyne et al, 2016; Golden & Jacoby, 2018). Ey (2016) found that children were significantly more likely to dress a female doll in a sexualized way. Coyne et al (2016), meanwhile, found the amount of Disney princess content in the first wave of a longitudinal study predicted gender-stereotyped play at the second wave. In short, the more Disney princess content that was watched, the higher likelihood the child's play would be to reflect stereotypes present in the content. This effect held regardless of the child's own gender. Golden and Jacoby (2018) similarly found that when asked to play with Disney princess costumes and props, pre-school aged girls often played in ways where they described themselves as "beautiful," physically enacted perceived appropriate princess behaviors (like twirling and dancing), and demanded that boys not play with the costumes. The girls engaging in princess costume play had behaviors consistent with the portrayals in the films, whereas non-princess costumes led to more dynamic playstyles.

Although there are several factors that influence how children are affected by portrayals of gender, this dissertation is particularly informed by prior research that has examined how parents monitor what media their child consumes, and the conversations parents have with their children about that media. Valkenburg et al. (1999) described three possible strategies that parents use to negotiate and discuss the media used by their children: 1) co-viewing (where parents and children simply watch media together without discussing it; this is sometimes also referred to as social viewing), 2) restrictive mediation (where parents forbid their children from watching certain media content or set specific limits on the amount they can watch the content), and 3) active mediation (where parents discuss specific aspects of the content in a more meaningful way than just whether the child did or did not enjoy it). Parents likely use all three forms of mediation strategies although the frequency with which any of the three is used by a parent is often dependent upon demographics including socio-economic status (Valkenburg, et al, 1999), race (Top, 2016), or age or gender of the child (Collier et al, 2016).

Scholarship shows that parents influence their children's perception of gender norms by explicitly discussing what behaviors are expected of certain genders and also through the gendered behaviors that parents model for their children (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Epstein & Ward, 2011; Witt, 1997). Firstly, parents may police or try to control how their child expresses their gender, which can have a detrimental psychological impact later in the child's life (Bauermeister et al., 2017). In addition to policing gender, how parents communicate about gender roles and attitudes also matters. For example, a survey of 291 undergraduate students and 259 adolescents showed that recalled parental communication of gender expectations was strongly associated with the gender beliefs of

the participants where those who more easily recalled egalitarian gender messages from parents were more likely to express those beliefs themselves (Epstein & Ward, 2011). Moreover, women in the study more frequently recalled stereotypical gender messages than men did. Kulik (2002) found that children are more likely to endorse the gender attitudes and behaviors of a same-sex parent. Moreover, the study indicated that fathers were especially likely to communicate traditional gender expectations to sons than mothers were to daughters. Halpern and Perry-Jenkins (2016) similarly found that six-year-old boys whose fathers endorsed more stereotypical gender roles were more likely to be familiar with gender stereotypes, whereas sons whose fathers who endorsed more egalitarian gender attitudes were less aware of these stereotypes. The most important predictor of stereotype awareness in this study was the behaviors that mothers performed in the home, which suggests that actions and communication about gender roles both matter to how children understand and begin to form beliefs about gender roles.

Although many scholars have demonstrated the importance of interpersonal parent-child communication about gender, less is known about how parents discuss gender representations in media. In terms of gender-stereotyped media, Coyne and colleagues (2016) found that active mediation of gender-stereotyped media led to increased stereotyped play by children. Similarly, Vandebosch and Eggermont (2012) found that sons who were closely attached to their mothers and watched a significant amount of television were more likely to endorse stereotypical gender characteristics. Parental mediation theorizing suggests that one possible explanation for this would be that if parents watch content with their children without discussing it critically that the child might read this as an endorsement of that content (e.g., Clark, 2011). In contrast to

these studies, emergent scholarship indicates that actively discussing gender stereotypes with children can reduce sexual objectification in adolescent boys (Rousseau et al., 2019). Despite the influential role that parents play in how children process messages about portrayals of gender stereotypes in media, little research has examined how aware parents are of gender-stereotyped content in children's media, and if they are aware of the stereotypes present, how they choose to discuss or not discuss those issues with their children.

Recent research has begun to fill this gap. Behm-Morawitz, Luisi, and Pennell (in press) found that parents who had high media literacy skills and who scored high in active mediation were more likely to engage in discussions about gender with their children after viewing *Black Panther* and/or *Wonder Woman*. This held true despite parent or child gender, suggesting that these films and films like them have great potential to increase parent-child communication about gender stereotypes and their significance. No study yet, however, has examined if parents are aware of gender stereotypes present in Disney animated films, and if they are if they are using those issues to start conversations with their children. Given the stated impact and reach of Disney animated films and the abundance of studies that point to the problematic gender representation within those films, the study seeks to address the following research question:

RQ1: How do parents discuss issues of gender representation with their children in relation to Disney animated films?

In the next section, issues and findings related to depictions of race in children's media will be highlighted and discussed.

Racial Representation in Children's Media

Of course, females are not the only social outgroup that have been symbolically annihilated in children's media (Tuchman, 1978) as racial minorities have also historically been underrepresented, trivialized, and condemned in children's media (Klein and Schiffman, 2009). Symbolic annihilation has been especially prevalent in film (Eschholz et al., 2002) and television (Mastro & Greenberg, 2000). In these industries, minorities have often been underrepresented and White male characters are typically put in roles more significant to the overall plot (Scharrer & Comstock, 2003). Even when minority groups have been included, they have typically not been major characters within the films (Bazzini et al., 1997). Lacking power and being treated as a joke within the narratives they do appear, these characters have been omitted, trivialized, and condemned contributing to the symbolic annihilation of minority characters in the overall media landscape (Tuchman, 1978). In the following paragraphs, an overview of racial representation in the film and television landscape will be discussed. Then, results from content and textual analyses of children's film and television specifically will be provided. Finally, these results will be compared to the larger media landscape regarding racial representation.

In an influential study about racial representation in prime time television shows, Mastro and Greenberg (2000) found that approximately 80% of important characters, or those who were central to a film's plot, were White. The same study found that Latinx, Asian, and Native American characters were nearly non-existent in these programs, especially when compared to actual U.S. census data of these groups. Even when minority characters appeared, they were far more likely to appear in crime programming

than White characters and were also more likely to be negatively depicted. Another content analysis of 39 network television shows found that Black and White characters were often segregated from being on the same programs and that Black characters were more likely to be portrayed as aggressive than White characters (Glascock, 2003). Monk-Turner et al. (2010) replicated many of the findings of both Mastro (2000) and Glascock (2003) nearly a decade later, suggesting that these trends are long-standing and an indicator of what audiences are exposed to on primetime television programming.

These trends are not isolated to adult entertainment media. Bramlett-Solomon and Roeder (2008), for example, found that Black characters on advertisements on Nickelodeon were predominantly portrayed as athletes or entertainers as opposed to the wider range of occupations that White characters in advertisements were shown as such as doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. In addition, Black characters were not often featured without at least one White character also appearing in the ad. Gilmore and Jordan (2012) similarly found that Black characters were shown eating at fast food restaurants and eating unhealthy foods significantly more frequently than White characters in ads featured on children's television networks. Even in animated programming that does not contain human characters, racial stereotypes have been used in conjunction with villainous characters (Warren, 2002). An example of this would be how in *The Lion King* the hyenas are given accents that mark them as separate, or "other," from the rest of the society and are more prone to violence than others in the film.

While much of the work in this area has focused on the portrayal of Black characters in mainstream television, additional research makes it abundantly clear that

other minority groups such as Hispanic and Indigenous peoples are similarly underrepresented and trivialized throughout the media landscape (Behm-Morawitz & Ortiz, 2013; S. Smith et al., 2016). In a content analysis of 900 of the highest-grossing films from 2007-2016, S. Smith et al. (2016) found that less than 30% of all characters came from minority groups. When characters do appear in film, research indicates that these characters are often trivialized in context of the film's narrative (Smith & Huber, 2018). Through a textual analysis of popular films featuring minority characters in significant roles, Smith (2013) found that characters generally do not refer to their race, making the world of these films essentially color blind. Smith and Huber (2018) found that another way that race is dealt with in film is by having White characters in heroic roles compared to minority characters who are often depicted as less moral and more likely to be in a villainous role. Hughey (2009) also found that films with minority and White characters often have the minority character help the White character on their journey and are often portrayed as having less power.

These problematic tropes that have been identified in popular media are also present in Disney-produced content (Turner, 2012). For example, Turner (2012) found that friendships in Disney channel programming often featured friendships where the primary character was White, supported by a Black character. Similar to the concept of color-blindness (Smith, 2013), Turner (2012) found that the characters in these programs only rarely mentioned race or the role it played in their lives. These patterns are also evident in Disney animated films (Mitchell-Smith, 2012; Towbin et al., 2004). In a content analysis of 19 of the highest-selling Disney animated films of all time, Faherty (2001) found that only 5.7% of speaking characters in these films were of African or

Hispanic descent. Similarly, an analysis of 20 animated Disney films found that older characters were almost always White characters, especially if they played an important role within the film's plot (Atkinson & Plew, 2017).

Although the relatively lacking representation of non-White characters in Disney films historically is problematic, so too are portrayals of racial minorities when they have appeared. LaCroix (2004), for example argued that female non-White characters are sexualized in ways that their White counterparts are not. The same analysis also notes that characters like Jasmine and Esmeralda are pursued by villainous characters and that these characters are more likely to not be married at the end of the film in which they appear when compared to White princesses, such as Ariel and Belle. Mitchell-Smith (2012) notes that non-White Disney characters like Jasmine and Mulan are often depicted as out-of-time and specifically isolated from other cultures. Luisi (2021) likewise found that Indigenous male characters in Disney animated films are usually separated from the modern world, are usually not romantically involved with other characters, and have less emotional range compared to other males in Disney animated films.

In a close reading of *The Princess and the Frog*, Barker (2010) notes that Princess Tiana does not get to rule an actual kingdom at the end of her film, nor does she get marry a prince. The same study also discusses that Tiana has straightened hair when she does appear and that she spends much of the film's running time as an animal instead of a human character. In a critical examination of Disney's *Pocahontas*, Kiyomi (2004) concluded that although the titular character was meant to represent a more inclusive era of Disney animated film that the film still positions White culture as the optimal culture.

This is a position that other scholars have argued persists in many Disney animated films that contain non-White characters (Towbin et al., 2004).

Given the history of underrepresentation and racial stereotyping that is present in the media generally in Disney animated films specifically, it is important to further understand how this content can impact child audiences. In the next section, literature highlighting demonstrated effects of this type of media content will be discussed as well as what role parents may have in this process.

Children's Media Effects and Race

Visual media (i.e., movies, television, videogames, etc.) containing stereotypes, including racial stereotypes, can significantly affect audiences that consume it. Such effects may include increased racial stereotyping (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2016), increased stereotyped children's play (Coyne et al., 2014, 2016), and increased negative perceptions of body image and self-efficacy (Aubrey, 2006; Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2009). Alternatively, prior research has demonstrated that mediated contact with people who are not similar to one's own ethnicity can result in reduced prejudice towards social outgroups (Schiappa et al., 2005) depending on how much the viewer liked or identified with the outgroup in the mediated interaction (Joyce & Harwood, 2014) and whether the minority character in the interaction was stereotyped (Ahmed, 2017). In the next paragraphs, sections detailing effects that have been empirically linked with children's media will be further discussed.

To begin, there are some positive effects that may result from racial representation in children's media (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Matabane & Merritt, 2014; Ward, 2004). As an example, Ward (2004) found that identifying with a racially

congruous media character was associated with participants scoring significantly higher on self-esteem measures. Research further demonstrates that positive minority representation in media can significantly reduce a child's bias towards their own ethnicity and prejudices against other ethnicities (Gonzalez et al., 2017). The study used a series of vignettes for the stimuli, changing the picture of who the story was about to either a Black or White child without changing anything else about the story. After being exposed to these vignettes, the children showed significantly reduced bias during implicit association tests than they had prior to the exposure. While the effect of this study was interested in immediate effects, other research has found that consistently viewing positive exemplars can have enduring impacts (Matabane & Merritt, 2014). Matabane and Merritt (2014), for instance, found that viewing *The Cosby Show* or *A Different World* was a significant predictor of black women choosing to attend historically black colleges.

While prosocial effects of minority representation are possible outcomes, racial representations in children's media have also been associated with problematic outcomes. Dal Cin et al. (2013), for example, found that exposure to racially congruent media where smoking was featured heavily increased the risk of smoking in black adolescents. Belonging to a racial minority that is not typically represented in the media you watch has also been shown to reduce children's self-esteem (Fryberg et al., 2008; Martins & Harrison, 2012; Ward, 2004) and can limit their ability to imagine themselves in certain occupations (Fryberg et al., 2008). Moreover, children who watch media content that portrays a member of a social outgroup as a threat are more likely to report disliking or not trusting a member of that group in real life (Durkin et al., 2012).

As mentioned previously, there is a large body of research that indicates parents play a crucial role in moderating some of the more problematic outcomes of media use (e.g., Collier et al, 2016). In some of these studies, the race of the parent or child is looked at for possible differences among groups (e.g., Top, 2016). Despite the demonstrated negative effects of racially stereotyped media and the lack of representation for racial minorities in general, little scholarship exists on how parents are discussing racial representation in the media with their children. Moffit and Harris (2014) conducted focus groups with Black mothers on how they perceived *The Princess and the Frog* and how they thought the film may affect their daughters. The study revealed that parents believed Tiana was problematic overall as she was depicted as animal through most of the running time. Although this study looked at parents' perceptions of a specific Disney animated film, it did not explore parent-child communication about race. In one of the few studies to examine this, Vittrup and Holden (2011) found that children's attitudes towards social outgroups improved after watching educational videos with their parents or having discussions about race with their parents after watching an educational clip. However, in the same study, parents often were hesitant to have these conversations even when they were prompted to do so by the researchers. Lane et al. (2020) also found that parents ascribing a negative value to a made up race of people caused children to quickly internalize what had been said to them and made them less likely to want to interact with or trust people from the made up race. Because of these findings, it is vital to see not only if parents are using media to talk to their children about race, but also what those conversations consist of.

Based on the many effects of racial representations and the lack of scholarship on how parents discuss this generally or in terms of Disney animated films specifically, the current project seeks to answer the following question:

RQ2: How do parents discuss issues of racial representation with their children regarding Disney animated films?

Having demonstrated the effects of gender and racial representations in films on child audiences, the next section of the literature review will focus on parental mediation and what personal characteristics of parents may affect how they regulate their children's media consumption.

Parental Mediation

Taken in totality, it is quite clear that media play a significant role in the lives of children, and parental mediation also has a meaningful role. Parental mediation theorizing has consistently demonstrated that parents moderate their child's media engagement 1) restrictively, 2) socially/passively, and 3) actively (Clark, 2011; Coyne et al., 2014; Valkenburg et al., 1999). As this dissertation is concerned primarily with parental willingness to have specific types of conversations with their children and the theme within these exchanges, only active mediation and its effects will be discussed in this section.

An **active mediation** style refers to a technique where parents discuss what was in the content they engaged with and why the content was positive or negative (Clark, 2011). This practice is most commonly used by mothers (Valkenburg et al., 1999), by parents of younger children (Barkin et al., 2006), and by parents of a higher socio-economic status (Top, 2016). Parents who regularly employ active mediation techniques

have also been found to score highly in media literacy (Behm-Morawitz et al., in press; Rasmussen et al., 2016). Parents who frequently use active mediation are also demonstrably more likely to have conversations with their children about the content their children watch in general and about sensitive topics such as race and gender (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2019). Therefore, this dissertation hypothesizes that:

H1: Parental active mediation will be positively associated with parent willingness to have conversations with their child about a) gender and b) racial representation in Disney animated films.

While exploring what messages are present in conversations that parents have about Disney animated films will lend to increased academic understanding, it is also necessary to investigate the willingness of parents to engage in these conversations. If they are hesitant to initiate these conversations, it is also important to understand what factors may be stopping parents from doing so. Demographics of parents are one factor that may predict parental willingness to have these conversations. Firstly, age of parents has previously been linked with parental mediation styles (Valkenburg et al., 1999). Mothers have also been found to be more likely to engage in active mediation with their children than fathers (Valkenburg et al., 1999). Some have suggested that this is because mothers are typically the parent that predominantly communicates with their children about their day to day lives, whereas fathers might be expected to set the rules that their children follow (Clark, 2011; Valkenburg et al., 1999). Finally, the race and/or ethnicity of the parent also plays a role (Top, 2016) with culture seeming to influence how parents choose to regulate their children's media consumption. Findings related to parental mediation theorizing are not always consistent, however, as emergent scholarship has

demonstrated that mediation style is not always associated with a parent's age, race, or gender, but is based on how media literate a parent is (Behm-Morawitz et al., in press). As research has only just begun to explore how parental and child demographics influence the willingness of parents to have conversations with their children about sensitive topics like race and gender, this dissertation seeks to fill this gap by asking several questions:

RQ3: Does the age of a parent significantly predict their willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ4: Does the gender of a parent significantly predict their willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ5: Does the race of a parent significantly predict their willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent

Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

Beyond parental demographics, the willingness to have conversations about gender, race, and Disney animated films may also be predicted by child demographics. For example, parental mediation tends to decrease as children age where parents are significantly more likely to regulate the media use of younger children (those 12 years of age and younger) than adolescents (Collier et al., 2016). Other research indicates that a child's gender may play a role in how a parent chooses to mediate their media consumption (Valkenburg et al., 1999). However, these findings in recent samples have not always been replicated (Behm-Morawitz et al., 2019). Therefore, this dissertation asks the following research questions:

RQ6: Does the age of a child predict their parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ7: Does the gender of a child predict their parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ8: Does the race of a child predict their parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ9: Does the gender composition of a parent-child dyad predict a parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

While these questions begin to assess how parents and children communicate about Disney animated films including the willingness of parents to have conversations about their own favorite Disney animated films, parents' willingness to engage in critical discussions with their children may also be influenced by other variables. Fanship, or how invested in Disney animated films a parent is and how much they consider Disney films to be a part of their identity is characteristic that may capture how important older Disney films were to the parents when they were children. In the next section then, research about fanship including its impact on communication and what that may suggest about a parent's willingness, proclivity, or ability to have these sensitive conversations with their children will be discussed.

Fanship

As mentioned previously, scholars interested in parental mediation techniques have often looked at how demographics of parents and children may influence which strategy is used most frequently (Top, 2016; Collier et al, 2016). While gender, age, race, socio-economic status, and media literacy levels have all been considered as possible factors that influence parental mediation styles, researchers have not typically addressed the relationship that a parent may have with the media that is being monitored. Based on social identity theorizing, individuals categorize themselves into groups and form their self-concept based on how they relate to people within that same group and how those groups compare to other perceived groups (Tajfel et al., 1979). Also, by identifying with others who they perceive to be like themselves, people strengthen their sense of self. One way that individuals may try to relate to others who they perceive as being similar to themselves is by seeking out and engaging media of which they are a fan, a set of behaviors that is considered fanship (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Based on these concepts, the present study is interested in how a parental fanship or a parent identifying as a fan or investing in that identity potentially impacts their parental mediation techniques. Before assessing how fanship has been demonstrated to influence media effects, it is important to define what being a fan is.

To begin with, “fan” is a term that historically began as a shortened version of “fanatic” in reference to religious extremists in 17th century England (Duffet, 2013). The term also has roots from the Latin *fanaticus*, which refers to someone who is out of their minds or obsessed- something that fans have certainly been accused of in the past (Cochran, 2008). Although in the United States, the term first came to prominence to

describe American sports devotees (e.g., Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998), it has since come to be associated with devotees of other social contexts including passionate followers of various media texts (Click et al., 2010). Unlike sports fans, those who consider themselves to be fans of media content may be more likely to be stigmatized or stereotyped by others (E. L. Cohen et al., 2017; Jenkins, 1992). As such, fans of media may be uniquely affected by the media they consume. To better understand how media fandom has been explored in the past, it is necessary to first define what being a media fan or belonging to a media fandom refers to.

To begin, there are some media affinity concepts that should be defined and situated in relation to fanship. Identification is a term that refers to an audience member imagining or feeling like he or she is a character within a media text (J. Cohen, 2001). Beyond imagining that one is a character within a media text, other scholarship indicates that someone can have a parasocial relationship with a media character where they feel like they know a media character or that the character might interact with them in real life (e.g., Brown, 2015). While it is possible for a fan to engage in identification while consuming a media text or to feel they have a parasocial relationship with characters in that media text, engaging in fanship or being a part of a fandom can also be associated with an overall relationship with a media text or world and not just with any one character specifically (Hills, 2002). Fanship specifically as operationalized in the current study, refers to the level to which a person socially identifies as a fan of a specific media text and the level to which they invest in that media text (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017).

To begin, the terms “fan” and “fandom” are potentially loaded terms. To be a fan can mean many different things to a person depending on their understanding of the

concept and how they perceive their own identity (Duffet, 2013). Moreover, it is even possible that someone could be labeled a fan of something based on their actions and words (Lewis, 2002), without considering themselves a fan or being willing to label themselves a fan as a result of the perceived stigma around that identity (Click & Scott, 2018; E. L. Cohen et al., 2017; Duffet, 2013). Defining fandom then, is something that many scholars have contended with in the past. As just one example, Hills (2002, p. IX) states, “Everyone knows what a ‘fan’ is. It’s somebody who is obsessed with a particular star, celebrity, film, TV program, band; somebody who can produce reams of information on the object of their fandom, can quote their favored lines or lyrics, chapter and verse.”

Although Hills’ definition is probably what many imagine when they encounter the term “fan,” as he and others have noted, there is more to fandom than obsession. Perhaps the most common way of thinking of fandom is as a form of investment – investing one’s time (e.g., how much time does a person spend consuming content related to what they are a fan of or discussing that content with other like-minded individuals?), one’s money (e.g., how much related merchandise does a person buy?), and/or one’s creative energies (e.g., does the person produce fanfiction or participate in cosplay?) (Barton & Lampley, 2013; Duffet, 2013; Hills, 2002). Indeed, a fan may refer to a person who buys products related to a topic or artifact that they are invested in, but it also can refer to a sense of belonging to a community who share a similar investment in that topic or artifact (Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Moreover, fandom can also refer to identification that a person has with a text or character, thus shaping, at least in part, how a “fan” sees the world around him/herself (Grossberg, 1992). In summation then, in the context of media, a fan refers to a person who believes that media content is important to

their identity and invests something of themselves in further exploring that passion/connection, with both the identification and investment processes occurring on a continuum.

With this definition in place, it is also important to consider whether fandom is something that is innate, something that is performed, or both. Fiske (2010), contended that fandoms form as people have trouble gaining acceptance in more mainstream spaces, thus moving towards and interacting with like-minded others who can appreciate and share their passions. Jenkins (2006, p. 41) further argues that, “One becomes a ‘fan’ not by being a viewer of a particular program but by translating that viewing into some kind of cultural activity, by sharing feelings and thoughts about program content with friends, by joining a ‘community’ of other fans who share common interests.” With Jenkins’ argument then, fandom is less a part of an inner identity and is instead a performative act shared with others- in other words, a social identity.

This argument can also be extended to research findings that indicate fandoms represent a chance for diverse social identities to come into contact with each other in spaces that would otherwise not be available to them (Kerry, 2019). Other scholars argue, however, that being a fan does not require any interaction with other people, but may happen as a result of viewing media content and becoming increasingly invested in it over time (Brown, 2015; Duffet, 2013). Whether engaging with other fans or not, most scholars contend that fans are active audience members who seek specific media content in order to strengthen their identity (Morley, 1992).

Research has attempted to describe members of the Disney fandom (Wasko et al., 2001). For example, Franklin (2012) compared belonging to the Disney fandom to

belonging to a religion, including traveling to Disney theme-parks as a pilgrimage/rite of passage among Disney fans to engage with the texts beyond simply viewing them or discussing them with others. Another form of engagement among Disney fans is cosplaying, which can be defined as creating and wearing a costume of one's favorite media character that can be done in such a way where the character only serves as inspiration or where a fan attempts to almost completely replicate the look of the character (Mongan, 2015). Brock (2017) found that one way that Disney fans commit to being fans is to wear clothing that emulates their favorite Disney characters on a regular basis. Although not always obvious, this dedication shows that some Disney fans consider Disney content an essential aspect of their identity. Although often associated with children, adults also engage in extreme forms of Disney fandom (Kiriakou, 2017). If Disney truly does inspire lifetime loyalty among its fans (Forgacs, 1992), it is of theoretical value to see how identifying and investing as a Disney fan influences parental mediation of children's engagement with Disney media. Despite this, fandom research has not yet explored the dynamics of being both a Disney fan and a parent and how these two identities may influence each other.

Although describing fandoms and how nonfans react to those fandoms (e.g., the effects of bullying or stigmatizing on fans) are consistently topics concerning fandom scholars, other scholars in this area have sought to examine fan identification and its impact on future behaviors. The first way that identifying as a fan has been demonstrated to affect a person is that the person may go from simply consuming content to creating content inspired by the original text, taking existing media content and making it their own (Barton & Lampley, 2013; Duffet, 2013; Jenkins, 1992). Though fan-produced

media content has always existed in some form, the increase of digital technology has allowed fans to reach and connect with more people like them than ever before (Bruns, 2009). Lingel and Naaman (2012) found that one behavior fans engage in is recording live events in order to share a memory of the event with other fans who were there. These recordings have led to relationships between fans, even at the expense of enjoyment of the original content. Similar to fan video recordings are fan recaps of programs, where fans create websites that serve to capture details of the original story and where members of a fandom can discuss the program long after it is gone (Booth, 2009).

In addition to recapping and sharing existing media texts with other members of a fandom, fans have begun to use media characters in new ways, such as creating fan-fiction (Barton & Lampley, 2013), re-cutting existing films to better satisfy fans (Phillips, 2012), as well as using the characters to talk about their daily lives on social media sites such as when users post memes containing a character in status updates (Hills, 2017). Although emergent scholarship indicates that Disney fans use similar strategies to appropriate existing characters for their individual use (e.g., Kapurch, 2015), there is still much to learn about Disney fan-created content (i.e., fan fiction, fan films, etc.). This is important as corporations that have noticed the proclivity of fans to create content inspired by the texts they adore have called for the creation of fan content that the corporation has then used when advertising the original text (Wee, 2016). In these ways, fan-generated content continues to support the original text, leading to increases in fan activity (both producing new fan-created content as well as making social connections with other fans).

While fan-created content is one element that has been analyzed, other research has examined how belonging to a fandom or identifying as a fan can impact individual characteristics and personal behaviors. Firstly, belonging to a fandom has allowed people to feel that they are a part of something bigger than themselves and connect with others who may also be looking for others like themselves (Cinque & Redmond, 2019; McInroy & Craig, 2020). Participation in fandom has also led to conversations that these individuals may not otherwise have had. For example, Masanet and Buckingham (2015) found that fans of the television show *Skins* who met and interacted with other fans of the program on an online forum, first discussed sexual interactions that were depicted on the show, but then shared their own experiences and sexual beliefs with others on the forum. By discussing the content of the show, fans were able to learn from others who may have had experiences they did not or had not even heard of before. Neville (2018) found that fan websites hosting fan fiction provided a space for people to further explore their gender and sexual identities via communicating with other fans and engaging in fan-fiction writing themselves. Similarly, Leongrande (2010) found that in addition to experiencing an increased bond between themselves and their daughters as a result of watching, reading, and talking about *Twilight*, mothers reported that the media text allowed them to have conversations about sex with their daughters that they may otherwise have been hesitant to have. Conversations between fans have also been demonstrated to include arguments about the importance of the original text in terms of what it should or should not mean to the culture at large (Williams, 2011). Once again, Disney fandom has largely been ignored in this strain of research; that is, despite its

consistent presence in American families, scholars have not yet investigated what type of conversations being generated because of Disney media consumption.

In addition to increases in communication and knowledge acquisition, fanship can also impact cognitions and emotions. For example, fans have been found to experience similar feelings to drug withdrawal when a series ends- symptoms that persist for months after the culminating event (Rudski et al., 2009). Identifying as a fan and receiving positive reaction to that identification has also been found to increase self-esteem and the likelihood of continuing fan-associated behaviors (Groene & Hettinger, 2016; Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Moreover, feeling that you are part of a fandom has been shown to contribute to one's overall well-being (Vinney et al., 2019). Being a fan can also impact the way people perceive and judge media (Hunt, 2019; Kistler & Lee, 2009; Tsay-Vogel & Sanders, 2017). Tsay-Vogel and Sanders (2017) found that the more someone believed they were connected to a fandom, the more they enjoyed the media they watched. Hunt (2019), meanwhile, found that Marvel comic book fans acknowledged racism existed in superhero media content, but rationalized and accepted it in the film adaptations of these stories due to wanting the films to be like the comic books where the characters and stories originated. Similarly, Kistler and Lee (2009) found that identifying as a fan of a media genre that is often sexualized can lead to increased acceptance of sexual objectification.

Identifying as a fan of specific media content then, clearly has an impact on one's personal identity, perceptions, and behaviors. These effects may result in prosocial behaviors (e.g., Vinney et al., 2019), hostile behaviors (e.g., Kistler and Lee, 2009), or both (e.g., Coyne et al., 2016). This holds true not just for general fans, but also for child

and adolescent fans (McInroy & Craig, 2020; Na, 2017). Indeed, youth members of fandoms were found to use fan communities to explore and discuss identity issues they may otherwise not have felt they had the space to do so (McInroy & Craig, 2020; Wohlwend, 2017). Moreover, fanship activity in young children has been correlated to increased self-esteem and life satisfaction (Na, 2017). Through the lens of social cognitive theory, child fanship of stereotyped texts has also been shown to lead to stereotyped behaviors and increased acceptance of stereotypes (Golden & Jacoby, 2018). Parental mediation theorizing would similarly suggest that parental mediation reinforces stereotypes either through direct conversations that reinforces values in media or by not critiquing media with a child (Valkenburg et al, 1999). Chia and Poo (2009) found that media fanship may have additional negative consequences for youths as fan involvement with celebrities was significantly associated with increased materialism and reduced self-esteem possibly as a result of feeling embarrassed at being so fascinated by media figures. Other research suggests that if a media figure is associated with prosocial behaviors, child fans may also try to emulate that behavior (Wen & Cui, 2014), which suggests that effects of fanship on children can result in prosocial or hostile behaviors.

The influence of parents is one possible factor that may moderate the effect that fanship may have on child audiences. Some studies have demonstrated that parents and children affect each other's sports fan activities and involvement (Hyatt et al., 2018; Spaaij & Anderson, 2010). Spaaij and Anderson (2010), for example found through child focus groups that children often felt pressured to support the same professional cricket team as their parents to feel closer to their parents and to avoid criticism from their parents. Additionally, these children expressed belief that their parents were more of an

influence on why they watched sports and played sports than anybody else. Conversely, Hyatt et al. (2018) found that as children became interested in professional sports teams, their parents' interest in those professional sports often increased. Some parents further indicated that their children changed the way they had previously interacted with professional sports teams, specifically in the intensity with which they behaved while watching the sport and how they discussed their favorite team with non-fans. In many cases, parents seemed to be more open-minded about supporting multiple teams because their child followed a different team than the parent grew up supporting and became more interested in a sport that did not interest the parent as a child because of their child's engagement with that sport.

Despite the demonstrated influence that parents have on children's sports fandom and vice versa, there has been little research done that explores the parent-child-fandom dynamic in terms of media fandom effects. This research then, begins to answer the call for increased intersectional fandom research (Click & Scott, 2018). And, while consumption of Disney content by children has been associated with significant effects on behaviors and perceptions, the interaction of parents between children and this content has yet to be explored. Thus, the current study seeks to add to media fandom theorizing by exploring how Disney fandom in parents influences how they discuss this content with their children. While in general, one would expect fans to be more willing to engage in conversations about Disney animated films than non-Disney fans, it is unclear if those types of conversations extend to more sensitive topics such as gender and racial representation (Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Based on the literature discussed, the current study asks the following research question:

RQ10: Does parental Disney fanship moderate the relationship between a parent's active mediation score and the likelihood that a parent will be willing to engage with their children about a) gender and b) racial representation in Disney animated films?

In addition to Disney fanship, it is possible that how the content makes parents feel or what memories the films elicit may be an influence on a parent's willingness to critically discuss Disney animated films with their children. In the next section, nostalgia will be defined, its relation to Disney content will be discussed, and its influence on previously demonstrated media effects will be highlighted.

Nostalgia

Nostalgia as a term was first conceptualized in the late 1600's by a Swiss doctor, Johannes Hofer, and referred to a theorized disease that was characterized by constant thinking of one's home and very visible signs of distress including crying spells and physiological problems such as irregular sleep patterns (McCann, 1941). Although, nostalgia first carried quite a negative connotation, it eventually became understood to be distinct from homesickness, instead, referring to a process where thinking of a past memory can also trigger positive feelings associated with the past (F. Davis, 1979). It is under this conceptualization that nostalgia has come to be understood by media scholars as an emotional process characterized by positive and negative emotions associated with one's past (e.g., Wildschut et al., 2006) where a person may actually desire to go back to that moment in time (Wildschut et al., 2014).

These emotions can be tied to a sensory memory or experience, and sometimes occur because of a connection between one's past and a media text. Nostalgia,

importantly, may also refer to a collective process, whereby a society fondly recalls a text or event, or an individual process whereby a text may hold nostalgic properties for one individual, but not for others (Wildschut et al., 2014). The nostalgia process is similar across multiple societies and has been found to occur an average of 3 times per week per person (Hepper et al., 2012). With Disney films and parents, parents could experience nostalgia in a variety of ways. For example, when a parent watches a movie with their child, seeing the movie could invoke parental memory of when they watched the same movie for the first time in their youth. Similarly, a parent may become nostalgic for their own childhood when they see their child pretend to be one of the parent's favorite Disney characters.

As a cognition that produces emotions, nostalgia has been demonstrated to potentially have several positive effects for people who experience it across multiple contexts (Wildschut et al., 2006; Willson et al., 2019; Wulf et al., 2018). This corresponds to what many consider to be the media origins of nostalgia, Homer's *The Odyssey*, where inspired by memories of home, Odysseus was able to gain strength and complete his journey (Hepper et al., 2012). Hepper et al. (2012) found that increased self-esteem was one of the empirically demonstrated positive outcomes of experiencing nostalgia. Similarly, recalling nostalgic events has been associated with increases of optimism (Cheung et al., 2013). Ismail et al. (2018) found that in addition to increased self-esteem that nostalgic-induced experiences can also result in increased memory retrieval in people suffering from dementia. Wildschut et al. (2014) found that collective nostalgia brought on by reflecting on a memory that involved other people like themselves resulted in people being significantly more likely to approach and support

people like themselves. Willson et al. (2016) also argued that nostalgia may inspire people to repair ecosystems that have been damaged and are remembered as being better than they currently exist.

In addition to understanding the effects of nostalgic memories, emergent scholarship in the field of mediated communication has begun to explore the interaction between nostalgia and media. Natterer (2014) argued that there are two types of media-related nostalgias: 1) historical (positive feelings brought on by media created before a person was born) and 2) personal (positive feelings brought on by a media text that was important to a person in the past). Menke (2017) further argued that personal nostalgia could also refer to nostalgia brought on consuming media that reminds someone of events in their lives (i.e., a photo of their graduation day). As demonstrated by the prior studies, all these types of media-related nostalgia are involved in media effects outcomes. However, it is important to note that almost all of the research done in the realm of media nostalgia to date has considered nostalgia from an individual perspective rather than a collective perspective, possibly as a result of the subjectivity of media nostalgia (Kalinina, 2016).

In summary, historical nostalgia is a feeling where people wish they could experience a time and place that seems more ideal than the one they currently are in whereas personal nostalgia is experienced when one is transported back to a time when life was simpler and based upon a person's actual experience (Natterer, 2014). As Disney animated films have often been described as timeless, the nostalgia experienced in relation to Disney animated films is likely not a historical nostalgia, but rather a personal one, especially for parents re-experiencing media that was important to their own

childhood. Also, several Disney animated films are not associated with a specific historical era. Thus, in the current study, a parent's personal nostalgia for Disney animated films will be examined as opposed to historic nostalgia.

All these nostalgia types are involved in media effects outcomes. Firstly, consuming media can itself spark nostalgia (Natterer, 2014; Wulf & Rieger, 2018). For example, Wulf and Rieger (2018) found that parasocial relationships functioned similar to real relationships whereby reflecting on memories from that relationship could spark nostalgic feelings and thoughts. Nostalgia is not only produced through media consumption, but nostalgia for a media text can also make it more likely that individuals will return to consume that text at a later time and also explore related texts (Menke, 2017). Menke (2017) found that it was especially likely that people would return to nostalgic media if they feared or were made uncomfortable by newer media texts. Nostalgia for a media text can also predict other behaviors as well. Kim et al. (2019), for example, found that thinking back fondly on films set in Hong Kong specifically increased the likelihood that participants would intend to travel to the city. Similarly, Baranowski and Lyons (2020) found that nostalgia for Pokémon was associated with an increased likelihood that they would engage in significantly more physical activity in order to play the game, and that this effect was long-lasting. Nostalgia for Mary Tyler Moore predicted the intent to share the information about her death on social media platforms, suggesting that nostalgia can lead to communication with others who may share nostalgia towards a media text or figure (Myrick & Willoughby, 2019). Nostalgia has also been associated with increases in media brand loyalty and in the intent to

purchase related products/texts (Natterer, 2014) as well as belong to brand communities online (Grębosz-Krawczyk et al., 2021).

In addition to influencing future behaviors, nostalgia for media has been linked to changes in perceptions. Wulf et al. (2018), for example, found that participants who were asked to think back on memorable video-game experiences felt significantly more connected to others than people who did not think about video-game experiences, suggesting that nostalgia centered on media experiences can make people feel more connected in the present. The same study also found that well-being and nostalgia were associated. Other research suggests that experiencing media nostalgia can increase the level of self-continuity experienced by a person (Wulf et al., 2019) as well increase their psychological resilience (Bonus et al., 2018). Additionally, media can spark comparisons between one's current situation to their past situation, which can potentially result in positive or negative psychological perceptions of well-being (Bonus, 2021).

Although research has looked at nostalgia as a media effects moderator, only limited attention has been paid to how nostalgia affects parenting practices. Both types of nostalgia identified by Natterer (2014) have the potential to affect parental-child communication (Bolin, 2016). For example, historic nostalgia may drive a parent to describe an idealized world to their children, one of which neither the parent nor child had directly experienced. Alternatively, parents who experience personal nostalgia may want to share that experience with their children and will then be inspired to communicate about the media that caused the parent to experience the nostalgia or co-view the media together. Bolin (2016) found that parents were often frustrated as they believed their children would never be able to understand media that had been important

to them even though they were able to identify times they had been able to talk about such media with their children. Leick (2019) similarly argues that parents often fear their children are interacting with media that is far worse than the nostalgic-laden media they remember. Boumaroun (2017) argues that parents sometimes buy clothing for children if it sparks nostalgia related to media from their own youth. Cardona (2003) similarly found that marketing of children's products often incorporates parental nostalgia into marketing materials. Additionally, Cross (2015) argues that parents may sometimes try to "collect" their past by buying action figures associated with media they care about and then passing those down to their children.

One media text arguably holds more nostalgic value than any other: media from the Walt Disney corporation. Indeed, Walt Disney's business model, some have argued, is to advertise to Disney babies who become Disney adults who then have to buy products for new Disney babies (Forgacs, 1992). Sperb (2018, p. 53) discusses the challenges associated with discussing and/or critiquing Disney media content, "The challenge is thus twofold: Disney is not only a 'sacred' brand associated generally with innocent and optimistic family fun, a space beyond analysis, but also one that is most often tied up specifically with one's actual childhood." Cross (2015, p. 5) further argues that Disney nostalgia is nearly religious in its power, describing people's trips to Disneyland as "Disney Jerusalem (or Mecca)" and certain characters as "saints".

Disney content also has nostalgic properties as it is so able to be experienced by all the senses including sight and sound (the films themselves) and feel (the toys and theme parks), any one of which may trigger feelings of nostalgia, especially memories that relate to a person's childhood (Carson, 2004). Spiegel (2015) notes that both Disney

and Pixar animated films often have themes related to America's past and thus use music and imagery from that time to connect to a more collective nostalgia of Americana. Cross (2015) similarly suggests that Disney animated films usually depict patriarchal societies, more reflective of 1950's America than the time that they are set in, another phenomenon that has continued in the work of Pixar (Luisi, 2019). Even Disney's "vault" has been used to nostalgic effect as the company has previously selected when a film can be made available to the public (McGowan, 2018). McGowan (2018) notes that as certain versions of the film disappear and/or are modified, these more problematic versions of the films disappear from collective memory.

Discussion of media and parenting practices is scarce in the literature and none of the literature that does exist specifically mentions Disney animated films. This is significant as many studies pertaining to nostalgia indicate that it has real capacity to impact future behaviors and to possibly affect the well-being of those who experience it. The current study seeks to address this gap in the research by examining how personal nostalgia for Disney animated content influences the likelihood that parent-child communication about the content will ensue. While research indicates that nostalgia increases communication about brands (Grębosz-Krawczyk et al., 2021), Disney animated films are often not criticized by those who are nostalgic for it (Cross, 2015). Having conversations about gender and racial representation could be seen as a form of criticism of a nostalgia-inducing media text, which could negatively affect one's self concept (Wulf et al., 2019), thus making it likely that those high in nostalgia would be more hesitant to participate in that type of communication. Based upon the literature presented in this section, then, the researcher hypothesizes that:

H2: Parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated films will moderate the relationship between a parent's active mediation score and their willingness to engage in conversations with their child about a) gender and b) racial representation in Disney animated films, such that greater nostalgia will reduce parent willingness to have this type of conversation.

Lastly the following research question asks:

RQ11: Are parental mediation, Disney animated film fanship, and nostalgia for Disney animated films related?

In the next chapter of this dissertation, the methodology and analytic strategies of the two studies will be discussed in detail.

Chapter 3: Methods

To explore my research questions and test my hypotheses about how parents and children communicate about gender, race, and Disney films, I conducted a mixed-methods study using a convergent design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Convergent design is an approach typically used by researchers in order to gain a broader sense of a phenomenon than would be captured with quantitative or qualitative methods alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This design was achieved by conducting two studies: 1) a qualitative parent-child dyadic interview study and 2) a quantitative survey of parents. This convergent design is different from triangulation, because instead of comparing the results of two types of data, Study 1 employed qualitative methods to explore how parents and children communicate about Disney, gender, and race whereas Study 2 used a quantitative approach to measure differences in parental mediation behaviors based on race, gender, Disney fanship, and personal nostalgia. Secondly, my intention with Study 2 was to also see how nostalgia, fanship, and parental demographics have affected parental willingness to have conversations about gender and race in the context of these films with their children. In other words, each study had unique goals to build toward greater understanding of parent-child communication about Disney animated films. The qualitative and quantitative data were gathered simultaneously through interviews with parent-child dyads and an online survey, respectively.

Study 1

Parent-Child Interviews

To assess the research questions of Study 1, I used a dyadic interview approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) where a parent and their child were co-interviewed about their previous experiences with Disney animated films. This included asking open-ended questions that both the parent and child would respond to and then conversations between the two that followed their responses. I used this method because previous parental mediation approaches have largely relied upon parental participation or child participation alone where either group has been asked to recall previous parent-child communication (Collier et al., 2016). Dyadic interviews that include both a parent and child, however, allowed the pairs to remind each other of previous experiences and through their interactions have new conversations about Disney that would not have been possible with individual interviews alone (Morgan et al., 2013). It is also important to include both the parent and child in these exchanges as research suggests that communication about media is often sparked by the child and not necessarily by the parent (Collier et al., 2016). This suggests that child involvement may result in richer responses than parental involvement alone would. Previous research has also indicated that even when parents are instructed to have conversations with their children about sensitive topics such as racial representation that many parents will not do so without a researcher present for that communication (e.g., Vittrup & Holden, 2011). For this study then, I was present as an interviewer for all parent-child communication to encourage further communication within the dyads. This also allowed me to be able to ask follow-up questions to the dyad based on their communicative exchanges.

Finally, previous research has demonstrated that parents and children often recall specific communications and parental mediation approaches differently from each other, with parents often over-estimating how often they engaged in active communication when compared to their children's perceptions of that type of communication (e.g., Buijzen et al., 2008). Using a dyadic interview approach, however, allowed for the interviewed pairs to have interactions about these recalled exchanges and co-viewing experiences, which sometimes resulted in one participant surprising the other or one of the participants to express changes in how they felt about specific Disney content.

Participants

Twenty parent-child dyads were recruited to participate in dyadic semi-structured interviews on Zoom. I used a criterion sampling approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) in order to obtain a sample of parents who had children who were currently between the ages of 5 and 12 years old. The age of the children was selected as prior research suggests that as children become adolescents, parental mediation decreases (Clark, 2016) and because children are likely less influenced by parents as adolescents (Strasburger et al., 2009).

To identify fans of Disney animated films, a snowball sampling technique was used. Initially, parents were recruited on Facebook and Twitter through a recruitment advertisement that asked users to contact me if they were interested in participating or to share the advertisement to others who they thought would be willing to participate. These recruitment posts were set as public so they could be seen by those outside of my friend group. The advertisement included my contact information including my email address. If parents were interested, they contacted me directly for more information. When people

contacted me, I also asked them to share the information with others they thought may be interested in participating in the study. I continued to repost the advertisement on these platforms until I had scheduled twenty parent-child dyad interviews. Each participant was entered in a drawing to win one of two \$25 Amazon gift cards.

In total, $N = 20$ parent-child dyads agreed to participate in the study ($n = 20$ parents, $n = 20$ children). The parent participants ranged in age from 27 to 43 years of age ($M = 34.5$ years old, $SD = 4.39$), and the children participants ranged in age from 5 to 12 years of age ($M = 6.85$ years old, $SD = 2.56$). The study included 15 mothers and 5 fathers as well as 13 daughters and 7 sons. Most parent participants identified as White ($n = 15$; 75%), 3 parents (15%) identified as Black, 1 parent (5%) identified as Hispanic, and 1 parent (5%) identified as multi-racial. Many children participants identified as multi-racial ($n = 12$; 60%) and 8 children (40%) identified as White. Parental education attainment included high school graduates ($n = 4$, 20%), college graduates ($n = 7$, 35%), those who had obtained graduate degrees ($n = 7$, 35%), and some who had completed a trade school degree ($n = 2$, 10%).

Procedure

After obtaining IRB approval, interviews were conducted between August 8th and September 8th, 2020. To protect the anonymity of participants, all interviews were conducted virtually, in a password-protected Zoom room. This also ensured the safety of participants during the COVID-19 pandemic (Self, 2021). In addition to protecting the safety of participants, virtual interviews also allowed for greater access to participants and allowed parents to include their child in the interview in their home environment, which was arguably a more natural setting for the participants than a research lab

(Archibald et al., 2019). Interviews ranged from 29 to 63 minutes in length ($M = 42.05$, $SD = 8.16$). Before beginning the interview, I obtained consent from both parents and their children to participate.

The semi-structured interview consisted of two steps. First, I asked the dyads open-ended questions about Disney animated films and the portrayal of gender and race in Disney animated films in general (i.e., “Tell me what you like most about Disney animated movies”). Some of the questions were asked of both the parent and the child where one would answer the question followed by the other answering the same question (i.e., “Tell me about your favorite Disney movie. What do you most like about it?”). Some questions, however, were asked of only the parent or child (i.e., “Describe a time where you’ve used Disney to try to teach your child something.”). Sometimes a parent or child would say something that would then spark a reaction from the other and take the conversation into unexpected directions. See Appendix A for a full list of interview questions, as well as the mapping of interview questions.

Next, using the “share screen” function in Zoom, I showed the dyad two film clips: 1) a Disney animated film clip containing negative gendered and racialized stereotypes, and 2) a clip where a Disney animated film depicts a character or group of characters in a manner that combats gendered and racialized stereotypes. For consistency, these clips were shown in the same order to all of the parent-child dyads without any discussion in-between. After watching the two clips, the parents and children were asked to have a conversation together about how the clips made them feel and what they noticed about the gender of the characters within and across the clips.

To ensure that the clips were similar in content, both were clips of popular Disney musical sequences with an Indigenous Chief and daughter interacting with a larger community. In addition to the content being thematically similar, the clips were also similar in length. The first of these clips was from *Peter Pan* (1953) and shows the Chief singing about why his tribe says “how” in addition to other traditions in the tribe. In the clip, Wendy is criticized for dancing when she should be working. There are stereotypes in the scene about indigenous peoples and gender stereotypes about how women should interact with men (Parasher, 2013). Specifically, Parasher (2013) highlights how in the clip, the Indigenous men in the tribe are portrayed as ugly and dumb whereas Tiger Lily, a young female, is portrayed as attractive and as a romantic love interest of Peter Pan, a white male character. In the same clip, the men are portrayed as violent and the women as caretakers, with even Wendy being asked to do chores while Peter and the rest of the Lost Boys play (Parasher, 2013). Finally, Parasher (2013) notes that Peter Pan is welcomed by the tribe as almost a figure of royalty, which is a common trope in Indigenous-White interactions in stereotyped popular media. In these ways, this clip is a good depiction of both racialized and gendered stereotypes decried by other researchers.

The second clip is from *Moana* (2016) and similarly shows an Indigenous Chief describing the traditions of a tribe through song. In this clip, the daughter, Moana, is being trained to take over as the next leader of the tribe. The selection of a female as Chief is counter-stereotypical and contrasts with the gender depiction in *Peter Pan*. Moana demonstrates independent thinking and goals and resists her father’s insistence that she follow in his footsteps. Her grandmother encourages her individuality and strong will. There is no romantic plot in this clip and women characters are given much more of

an active voice as other scholars have called for in past critiques of Disney films (e.g., England et al, 2011).

Analysis

Upon completion of all interviews, the interviews were transcribed which resulted in 184 pages of single-spaced text. The transcription process involved me going back to the recordings and playing them at about a quarter speed. Using a pedal, the interviews were typed verbatim including any verbal fillers. To ensure that the transcript matched what was said, I would re-listen to the audio while reading what I had transcribed.

The data were analyzed for themes based upon the research questions. To ensure anonymity, all participants were assigned pseudonyms from Disney movies and identifying information was removed from the completed transcripts.

I used Altheide and Schneider's (2013) process to determine dominant themes within the text, which defined themes as the reoccurring and dominant ideas that were present in the selected content. In this case, that consisted of the communication between parents and children in the interviews as well as communication between the participants and me. During this process, I re-read the transcripts and engaged in open coding of the data, describing how Disney films were discussed in general by the participants and then specifically how the participants communicated about the two clips that were shown. A code in this study referred to an interaction between a parent and child. These varied in length where they could be one or two sentences per participant in a transcript to close to a page in length. A code was complete when the topic of a parent-child communication changed. I took notes on these codes by looking at the transcripts in Microsoft Word documents and then in a sentence or two describing what ideas were present in parent-

child interactions. These codes ranged from noting anytime a participant described a gender or racial stereotype or when parents talked about when they had tried to use Disney to illustrate life lessons or morals to their children. It was possible for an exchange to have multiple notes about it. After I had finished taking notes in the Word document, these notes were added to a Microsoft Excel document where it was noted whether these communications consisted of the parent-child dyad referencing past communication and whether the conversations were sparked by an interview question. After going through the codes that had been created, I engaged in axial coding, examining relationships that existed among these previous codes into themes (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), specifically looking to see how parent-child-dyads discussed Disney, gender, and race. After all notes from all the interviews were included in the Excel document, I determined which notes comprised similar themes and created additional Excel sheets for those themes. Finally, when I had over-arching themes in the Excel document (e.g., parent-child discussions of race), I attempted to find sub-themes within those main themes (e.g., White vs. Non-White). In Chapter 4 of this manuscript, the over-arching themes and subthemes are defined, exemplars of these themes are highlighted and discussed in relation to theory.

Study 2

Quantitative Survey

In addition to the parent-child interviews, quantitative survey data were collected to test the following research questions and hypotheses:

RQ3: Does the age of a parent predict their willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and

gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ4: Does the gender of a parent predict their willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ5: Does the race of a parent predict their willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ6: Does the age of a child predict their parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ7: Does the gender of a child predict their parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ8: Does the race of a child predict their parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

Based on trends in how parent-child dyad congruency affected the types of conversations that I observed in Study 1, I was also interested in the following research question:

RQ9: Does the gender composition of a parent-child dyad predict a parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ10: Does parental Disney fandom moderate the relationship between a parent's active mediation score and the likelihood that a parent will be willing to

engage with their children about a) gender and b) racial representation in Disney animated films?

RQ11: Are parental mediation, parental Disney animated film fanship, and parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated films related?

H1: Parental active mediation will be positively associated with parent willingness to have conversations with their child about a) gender and b) racial representation in Disney animated films.

H2: Parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated films will moderate the relationship between a parent's active mediation score and their willingness to engage in conversations with their child about a) gender and b) racial representation in Disney animated films, such that greater nostalgia will reduce parent willingness to have this type of conversation.

Finally, this study did not test whether parent-child race congruency predicted conversation types as there were only 7 parent-child dyads that were racially incongruent.

Participants and Procedure

An online panel of 190 parents of children ages 5 to 12 years was used for the quantitative survey. The survey was answered by parents who at the time of taking the survey still had children ages 5-12 living in their home. This stage of childhood was selected due to the popularity of Disney animated films amongst this age group (Smith, 2020) and due to parental mediation generally declining as children enter adolescence (e.g., Collier et al, 2016). Thus, I was interested in parents and children who were likely to still watch Disney animated films together. Moreover, this age-range of children may still be dependent on their parents to help interpret and make sense of the world around

them, meaning that conversations with their parents about this type of media would likely be more impactful than similar conversations between older adolescents and parents (Strasburger et al., 2009).

After obtaining IRB approval, parents of children ages 5 to 12 years old were recruited to participate in a Prime Panel via CloudResearch. These parents could identify as White (Caucasian), Black (African American), Hispanic or Latinx, Native American or American Indian, or Asian or Pacific Islander. The survey had a targeted quota of at least 50% non-white participants so that comparisons could be made across groups. In exchange for completing a short, online survey, participants were compensated through the Cloud Research platform based upon previously agreed-upon compensation between Cloud Research and the panel participants. The survey was conducted between March 2, 2021 and April 4, 2021.

Demographic information including the parent's age, education level, race, gender, overall media use, Disney media use, and socio-economic status was collected. Parents were then asked to think about one of their children and report that child's age, race, gender, overall media use, and Disney media use. Parents were then asked to identify their favorite Disney animated film when they were a child as well as a recent Disney animated film that they believed their child enjoyed the most. Parents were allowed to choose one film out of a list of the top 10 highest-grossing Disney animated films that contain primarily human characters released prior to 2000 and one of the top 10 highest-grossing Disney animated films featuring primarily human characters released between 2000 and 2019. These films were picked as participant choices because of their popularity and the films' inclusion of human characters, which should make them easier

to talk about gender and race than films about animal characters. Participants were forced to select a film from both lists so they would have films to think about when answering questions later in the survey. Their choices from these respective lists determined which films they would answer questions about later in the survey (i.e., if a participant selected *Cinderella* as their favorite Disney animated film prior to 2000, they would then be asked about their willingness to have conversations about *Cinderella* and gender representation). For a full list of these films, please see Appendix B.

Parents were asked to complete semantic differential scales for both the film they selected as their favorite Disney animated film from prior to the year 2000 and then for a recently released Disney animated film that they believe their child enjoyed the most. In order to ascertain the parents' willingness to have conversations with their children about the film they selected from the list, the parents were presented semantic differential scales and asked to indicate how willing they would be to use the films they previously selected to have conversations with their child about 1) gender representation, 2) racial representation, 3) how much they enjoyed the film, 4) what they remember about Disney movies from their childhood. Additionally, as distractor questions, this study also asked the parents how willing they would be to use the films selected to have conversations with their children about character morals, and comparing Disney animated films to other types of media. These conversation topics were selected so the participants would not be thinking about only gender and race as well as for future analysis.

Finally, to ensure that responses to the survey were of high quality, there were two questions that checked whether participants were paying close attention to the survey (i.e., "Select strongly agree to show you are reading this survey"). If participants failed to

accurately follow instructions on either question they were taken to the end of the survey and their responses were not included for analysis.

Measures

In addition to demographic information, each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire that measured parental mediation, Disney animated film fandom, and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films.

Parental Mediation. Parental mediation was measured by responses to a modified parental mediation scale (Valkenburg et al, 1999), which has three subscales for active mediation, restrictive mediation, and social mediation styles. In total, this scale has 14 items. The parents were asked to rate from one (“never”) to four (“often”), how often they use specific mediation techniques with their children. For each mediation style, there were either four or five items measuring that specific style. For example, parents were asked to assess how often they “specify in advance what movies can be watched” (restrictive), how often they “watch together because you both like a movie” (social), or how often they “point out why some things actors do are good” (active). Five questions were combined to create an active mediation scale for the participants ($\alpha=.83$). The average participant scored high in active mediation ($M = 3.21, SD = .57$) Four questions were combined to create a restrictive mediation scale ($\alpha=.74$). On average, participants scored highly in restrictive mediation ($M = 3.13, SD = .66$). Finally, five questions were combined to create a social mediation scale ($\alpha=.89$). The average participant scored highly in social mediation ($M = 3.56, SD = .54$).

Disney Animated Film Fanship. Disney animated film fanship was measured by using a modified version of the Reysen and Branscombe (2010) fanship scale which

assessed how important being a fan of Disney is to the parent's identity on a scale of one ("strongly disagree") to five ("strongly agree") and how invested they are in watching Disney animated films. The original scale is composed of 10 questions such as "I am emotionally connected to Disney animated films" and "When Disney animated films are popular, I feel great". For this study, I added 4 new items to further measure investment. In total, there were two subscales with 8 items that measured Disney fan investment (fanship investment subscale) and 7 items that measured identifying as a fan of Disney animated films (fanship identification subscale). An overall fanship scale that combined all 15 questions was created ($\alpha=.95$) and used for analysis. The full scale is provided in Appendix D. On average, participants scored slightly above average in overall fanship ($M = 3.20, SD = .99$).

Parental Personal Nostalgia for Disney Animated Films. Parental personal nostalgia for animated films was measured by using a modified version of the Natterer (2014) personal nostalgia scale ($\alpha=.93$). On average, participants scored well above average in Disney personal parental nostalgia fanship ($M = 4.8, SD = .82$).

The scale has 4 items that measure how strongly participants agree that a type of media causes them to feel personal nostalgia. This is measured on a 7-point scale from one ("completely disagree") to seven ("completely agree"). Parents were asked to assess this with questions such as "Disney animated films make me think of good times from my past," and "Disney animated films remind me of when I was young".

Analysis

Research questions and hypotheses were analyzed using SPSS. For a full list of tests that were used and the variables for each test, please see Appendix C. Based upon

past research that demonstrates that specific parental demographics can influence the frequency of parental mediation style use (e.g., Collier et al., 2016) all analyses testing the hypotheses used parent gender, parent race, parent socioeconomic status, and parent education levels as control variables.

Chapter 4: Results

Study 1 Results

This study represented a unique opportunity to observe parent-child dyads as they recalled past communication about Disney animated films in relation to race and gender representation. Overall, the parents that participated in the interview process seemed to express that it was important to communicate about gender and race with their children. Moreover, it seemed most of the parents wanted their children to respect others' different social identities and to treat everyone fairly regardless of those identities. However, not all of the parents agreed that Disney animated films were effective bridges to communicating about race and gender with their children.

Firstly, some parent-child dyads expressed that they had not had these types of conversations about Disney animated films in the past because to them, Disney was just a way of being entertained together. When asked if she had talked about Disney movies beyond the plot, Parent R, a 40-year-old White mother, exemplified this concept in the following exchange:

Parent R: No, I really think that movies, unless they're like documentaries or educational specifically are more entertainment. So I'm like hey, if you all want to talk about this movie, that's fine, but I don't see these um, huge like thematic things to discuss with them in like a Disney movie, personally.

Tim: Gotcha.

Parent R: I know they're probably there. I mean, but I just, I think that I don't want to get into the overanalyzing of a Disney movie because I think if I do I'll stop letting them watch them.

In this exchange, Parent R indicates that she doesn't see the utility of Disney animated films. Moreover, she seems to suggest that if she were to think of Disney content beyond its capacity to entertain that she may not want her child to watch it. In other words, watching Disney animated films together may be easy for parents and may make them feel closer to their children, but talking about it beyond the story or addressing any potentially problematic parts of them may make the films themselves less entertaining for some.

While some parents only viewed Disney animated films as entertainment, other parents indicated that while they would use Disney to help their children understand some aspects of the world, that there were more effective ways to teach their children about gender and race. For example, when asked if she had used Disney animated films to teach her child about race, Parent L, a 30-year-old White mother responded:

Parent L: But yeah, we haven't talked about that aspect too much. Just in general with their ages being five and three, you know, we have quite a bit of exposure to ethnicity in our family because my husband's brother is married to an African-American woman and then my best friend for years and years is Black and so we have, it's been kind of a normal part of their childhood, like you know, to interact with people of different ethnicities and so we haven't actually sat down and had the discussion too much. Especially regarding Disney movies, specifically.

This exchange demonstrates that for this parent, real-life interactions with people who had different social identities was a more effective way for their children to learn about race. Interestingly, the parent and others interviewed also seemed to believe that this exposure to people who were different would suffice and that their children did not need to be explicitly told that judging others for their differences was wrong. Rather for many of the parents, they took for granted that these were lessons they assumed their child already knew because of their lived experience. Finally, this mother also expressed that their children were too young to communicate with effectively about race, which other parents similarly expressed about their children.

Beyond allowing me to learn about how parents and children had communicated about Disney animated films in the past, this study also allowed me to encourage the dyads to have new conversations about specific Disney animated clips in relation to race and gender representation. While I will describe the themes found in more detail, it is interesting to note what did not appear in these conversations. Firstly, most of the parent-child dyads talked about race and gender as distinct concepts and did not discuss how these identities can intersect. Additionally, the parents did not talk much about the dominant gender (male) or racial (White) identities that are most common in these types of films, suggesting that when talking about representation that the emphasis for these parents was usually on the other instead of the majority. Finally, when parents and children were asked to have these conversations, it seemed that for many of the dyads, this was something that they were not accustomed to doing. Many of the parents seemed to rely on their child's responses, asking the child what they thought before saying how they felt about the clips. It is possible that the parents felt that their responses may lead to

judgment from me, which may have altered how they approached these conversations. It is also possible that the parents didn't want to talk about things beyond what they perceived their child was capable of understanding.

In addition to the cautious approach that the parents seemed to take, many of the conversations also seemed to involve parent-child dyads talking about differences in terms of physical appearance and did not always include parents talking with their children about real-world implications of the differences between White and non-White characters or the differences between male and female characters. This could be because the parents perceived their children were too young to comprehend these consequence or because they didn't know how to effectively communicate about these concepts. Parent S, a 34-year-old White mother, exemplified this in the following exchange:

Parent S: Yeah, I mean definitely, I feel uncomfortable during the Peter Pan one. It's pretty racist.

Tim: Yeah.

Parent S: But, like I'll be honest, with you sitting here, I'm not sure how to talk about that with her at the age she is right now.

While it is possible that parents did not feel equipped to have these conversations effectively, I do not, believe that the limited nature of these conversations was because parents were unaware of the problematic issues within the clips. Indeed, several parents stopped talking to their child at points during the interview and started to talk with me directly about how surprised they were at some of the tropes in the *Peter Pan* clip. During these exchanges, parents seemed almost embarrassed by the clip and felt like they wanted me to know that they knew why the clip was potentially problematic. For

example, when her child left briefly to go to the bathroom, Parent F, a 34-year-old White mother and I had the following exchange:

Parent F: I knew it was bad, but it's been a long time since I've seen Peter Pan. It's not really on my top favorite's list.

Tim: Mhm

Parent F: I, it's just like when you go back and watch the crows from Dumbo it's like

Tim: How does that make you feel watching with (Child F)?

Parent F: Uncomfortable. Like, I wanted to talk to him about it right then and there.

Tim: Absolutely

Parent F: And like, I'm glad that Moana's a better representation of the Native, of Native people than you know, Peter Pan for that he's seen.

Even though the parent expresses surprise about the content, it is clear that she sees it as problematic. Throughout the interview process parents were able to identify several stereotypes related to gender and race representation. Not all of these, however, led to conversations between the parent and child.

While I have briefly discussed my perceptions of how the parents in these interviews approached parent-child communication about Disney animated films, race, and gender, the remainder of the results discussed here will be centered on the themes uncovered in those communicative exchanges. In total, there were 211 unique codes in parent-child communication about Disney animated films within the parent-child dyadic interviews. Of these, 59 (27.96%) codes were related to parent-child communication

about Disney and race. Additionally, 41 (19.43%) codes consisted of communication about Disney and gender. Beyond communication about gender, race, and Disney, 38 codes (18.01%) consisted of parental attempts to use Disney animated films to teach their children life lessons, 37 (17.54%) centered on parent-child communication about the plot of specific Disney animated films, and 36 (17.06%) were made up of parent-child communication about how much they enjoyed Disney animated films overall. Because the goal of this dissertation was to specifically explore how parents and children communicate about Disney, race, and gender, only themes related to these concepts are further described in this chapter. In the following sections of this chapter, themes present in parent-child communication about gender, race, and Disney are defined, and exemplars of these themes are presented and discussed. Additionally, statistics related to the prevalence of these themes within the interviews are reported and how participant demographics related to trends within the responses.

Parent-Child Communication About Gender in Disney Animated Films

RQ1 asked how parents discussed issues of gender representation in Disney animated films with their children. Out of the parent-child communication related to Disney animated films, discussions of gender comprised $n=41$ (19.43%) of the $N=211$ codes. A code in this study referred to an interaction between a parent and child. These varied in length where they could be one or two sentences per participant in a transcript to close to a page in length. A code was complete when the topic of a parent-child communication changed. Overall, 51% ($n=21$) of the parent-child communication about gender was focused on physical differences between male and female characters or in the

differences in actions performed by male versus female characters. The other codes were related to discussions of gender stereotypes ($n=20$, 48.78%).

In total, 16 (80%) of the 20 parent-child dyads discussed gender and Disney films during the interviews. Additionally, 12 (60%) of the dyads indicated they previously had similar conversations before the interviews whereby the parent or child referred to a past communicative exchange about Disney. Sometimes these recalled interactions resulted in parent-child dyads discussing these exchanges, and this new interaction was marked as a new code. When looking at the content of the past conversations remembered by the parent-child dyads and the conversations initiated after I showed the animated clips, the themes present were very different. Although parents sometimes reported having conversations with their children about gender stereotypes and problematic representation, these types of conversations were not often present in interactions sparked by the *Moana* or *Peter Pan* clips. In the following sections, I will define subthemes present in parent-child communication related to gender and Disney and identify exemplars of these themes. I will also specifically discuss how parents mediate these conversations and what significance their choices might have on their child's understanding of gender and race. Then, I will discuss how participant demographics influenced how and when these interactions took place – that is, did these exchanges happen only during the interview or were there also references to prior communication about these topics?

Theme 1: Gendered Appearance. Research question one asked how parents discuss Disney animated films and gender representation with their children. When engaged in communication with each other, parents and children in this study sometimes

compared male and female characters based on the physical characteristics of those characters. This subtheme was defined by parents and children talking about physical anatomy of Disney characters, beauty of Disney characters, or general differences in appearance of male and female characters in Disney animated films. When asked to talk about anything they noticed about the characters in the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clips together, Parent A, a 33-year-old Hispanic father, and Child A an 8-year-old multi-racial son, had an interaction that exemplified this theme:

Parent A: Did you notice anything different between the boys and the girls?

What did you notice?

Child A: They were wearing different clothes.

Parent A: They were wearing different clothes.

As this interaction illustrates, parents typically re-asked a question to their child that I had already asked the pair. Child A only focuses on physical differences between the boy and girl characters in the two clips and offered very little in the way of description. Parent A did not go further in his observations here or expound on Child A's observations, only repeating what their child said. In this way, Parent A seemingly put the responsibility for the conversation on his child and did not go further in depth or point out additional detail than what the child had already pointed out.

While most of the physical comparisons between male and female characters were driven by parents asking their child what they had noticed, an exchange between Parent C, a 43-year-old White father, and Child C, a 10-year-old multiracial son, demonstrated a conversation that went against the norm:

Tim: Um, have you ever talked together about the gender of characters in Disney movies, like differences between boys and girls or men and women in those movies?

Parent C: (laughs). Well, we were actually, just a recent conversation that I remember having is we're watching Once right now on Netflix, if you're familiar with that, and the Mulan character came up and uh, we were all like she doesn't look like a guy (all laugh). Didn't we say that?

Child C: Say what?

Parent C: Mulan, that she you know in the cartoon she's supposed to, um, people don't know that she's a girl, right? And so, we're talking about, well she looks like a girl (laughs). I mean that's the only recent conversation that I can think of when it comes to that. Can you think of anything?

Child C: Hm.

In this interaction, Parent C recalled a prior time where they have talked about the physical differences between male and female Disney characters. Just like the previously discussed interactions, however, Parent C did not attempt to ask his child about what this means or go beyond noting physical differences.

While most of these interactions were led by child observations, some parents did try to get their child to understand more about the differences they had observed. For example, Parent D, a 41-year-old White mother, and Child D, a 10-year-old White daughter had the following exchange:

Parent D: Yeah, have you seen Peter Pan? Do you remember Peter Pan?

Child D: No.

Parent D: We saw it a long time ago before your brother and I were in Peter Pan and that is one- no you were not one.

Child D: I was like two.

Parent D: You might have been three. It was a while ago, but I purposefully have not shown you Peter Pan much because it is such a problematic movie. I mean, you saw how that was. Why don't you tell me a little bit about what you thought of that particular scene?

Child D: Go get the firewood, I didn't like it.

Parent D: Yeah, and you notice how the animation style for every one of the Red men.

Child D: Yeah.

Parent D: Was not very flattering except for Tiger Lily.

Child D: Yeah.

Parent D: Because she was supposed to be a potential love interest for Peter, so she had to be beautiful and a threat to Wendy to be believable, but yeah that song is incredibly problematic and is one that I have never ever liked even when I saw it years and years ago. And I kind of try to forget that it's in the movie for that reason.

Child D: Yeah.

Parent D: The rest of the movie is not nearly as bad, but that one scene is just like, oh Disney, just no.

In this exchange, the mother tried to get her daughter to think about what they had just watched together. Parent D then further guided the conversation from those observations

and tried to get her daughter to think about why things in the scene happened in that way and what that might mean. This was a great example of a parent who was willing to try to have a more in-depth conversation than was typical in the sample. Even though the parent was willing to describe it as problematic, however, the parent did not go into great detail as to why it was problematic or assess whether the child understood why it was problematic. So, while the parent may feel like they have clearly communicated about why the scene is not good, it is possible that the child did not understand. This also speaks to the need of communicating messages about gender frequently and consistently in order for them to be most effectively understood over time.

To summarize then, this subtheme was defined as communication within a parent-child dyad where they discussed physical differences between male and female characters in Disney animated films, and these conversations were typically driven by child observation. In total, conversations about physical differences between male and female Disney animated characters were present in $n=11$ (26.83%) out of $N=41$ total conversations related to Disney and gender and were present in 9 parent-child dyad interviews (45%). When these conversations happened, they typically were within a current conversation ($n = 9$, 81.82%), meaning that they were taking place because of the dyad being shown the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clip, rather than being a previous communication that was being reported by the parent or child. Four (36.37%) of these interactions happened in a male-male parent-child dyad, $n=6$ (54.55%) happened in a female-female dyad and $n=1$ (9.08%) took place in a mixed-gender dyad. Parents within this theme were an average age of 35 years, and children within this theme were an average age of 8.11 years. Of the 11 interactions coded in this theme, 4 ($n=4$) were led by

male parents (36.37%) and 7 ($n=7$) were led by a female parent (63.63%) while male children were represented in $n=5$ of these interactions (45.46%), and female children were represented in $n=6$ of these interactions (54.55%).

Theme 2: Gender Stereotypes. In addition to talking about physical differences between male and female characters, parent-child dyads also talked about gender stereotypes in Disney animated films. This theme was defined by parent-child dyads talking about gender stereotypes they were aware of generally, how these stereotypes were or were not present in Disney animated films, what gender representation in Disney animated films meant to them, and how these gender stereotypes in Disney films compared to gender stereotypes and gender roles in the real world.

In total, conversations about gender stereotypes in Disney animated films were present in 30 (73.17%) out of 41 total conversations related to Disney and gender and were present in 15 (75%) parent-child dyad interviews. Most ($n = 18$, 60%) of these communications were a part of a current conversation, while the rest ($n = 12$) consisted of previous communications that were reported by the parent or child. 19 (63.33%) of these conversations happened in a female-female parent-child dyad, and the remaining 11 (36.67%) took place in a mixed-gender dyad. In this type of interaction, parents were on average 33.53 years-old, and children were on average 7.97 years-old.

Some of the communications within this theme happened after watching the *Moana* and *Peter Pan* clips. When asked what differences between male and female characters they noticed in the clips, Parent E, a 30-year-old White father, and Child E, a 5-year-old multiracial daughter had the following exchange:

Parent E: Did you notice anything different between boys and girls between the first and second clip? No. What were some things, like did you see the little girl with the firewood in the first clip?

Child E: Are you talking about Wendy?

Parent E: Yeah, what was it they were having Wendy do?

Child E: Set up a fire.

Parent E: Ok Did she seem like she was having fun? She was not having fun.

Child E: No

In this exchange, Parent E asks Child E to identify any differences between boy and girl characters in a specific clip. Like the previous theme, this shows that the responsibility for pointing out differences was placed on the child. When Child E was unable to initially do so, Parent E talks about a specific character and action. While Parent E begins to ask whether the character was having fun, he stops short of comparing the character to other male characters or suggesting how those differences in representation might affect audiences of the clip.

Whereas in the prior example the parent did not go beyond describing the difference between the actions of the male characters and female characters in the *Peter Pan* clip, other parents did attempt to talk about the importance of gender representation in conversations initiated by the *Moana* and *Peter Pan* clips. For example, Parent J, a 32-year-old White mother and Child J, her 5-year-old White daughter had the following exchange:

Parent J: What did you think it's, do you think it's cool that Moana gets to be a Chief?

Child J: Yeah

Parent J: Yeah.

Child J: Hello.

Parent J: I thought that was pretty cool

In this interaction, Parent J tries to have a conversation with her daughter about Moana, a female character in a position of leadership. Like recalled communications from other parent-child dyads, this exchange is about a positive example of female representation and not a negative one. Although Parent J says she thinks that is “cool” and Child J agrees, Parent J does not attempt to say why or go in further detail. This indicates that this dyad may not feel natural having these conversations as it goes outside of how they normally talk about Disney animated films. Again, for many these films are entertainment only and even if they can identify positive aspects of the films, they may not feel like they need to really discuss the consequences of these depictions.

While some of these interactions centered on a specific Disney film, other parent-child dyads discussed Disney more generally. For example, when asked what conversations they had together about gender in Disney films, Parent G, a 34-year-old White mother, and Child G, a 10-year-old multiracial daughter had the following interaction:

Child G: I feel like, kind of like girls, like they’re always like in the movies, they’re always like, the girls always, they’re always like girls watching it and boys are always like oh she looks so good and they’re like I wonder how they made the boys do exactly that and the work of it. And the girls just get complements.

Parent G: Huh? Explain it again. I didn't understand.

Child G: So, like, so like, I feel like kind of people think that the boys don't really matter in the films because they're not a big role that much. Like in the dwarves, what's it called, like in Snow White, that she was always like kids will make her dresses and then Prince Charming isn't really that important in the movie.

Parent G: No, he's not, he has like one line?

Child G: Because they didn't really pay attention.

Parent G: Yeah, that's true. I agree.

In this exchange, it is the child that articulates differences in gendered behavior. While Parent G at first does not understand what Child G is talking about, Child G tries to explain it further. They eventually agree that female characters do more in Disney movies than male characters, however they do not talk about why this is or is not significant.

Beyond differences in how male and female characters in Disney animated films behaved or the role they held in the films, parent-child dyads also talked about gender stereotypes they perceived in Disney animated films. Most of the time, instead of talking about negative gender stereotypes, parents or children were more likely to talk about examples of counter-stereotypes, or positive representations. For example, when asked if they had talked together about differences in men and women characters, Parent H, a 40-year-old White mother, described two past communications:

Parent H (laughs): Not, not, not as such, no. We talk about in Frozen that there, that the love in Frozen is sister love. And that they support each other. Um, and

that as you know, a girl, um, as a girl you can do whatever want to. We talk about that in Mulan, she was able to defeat um that monster with caring.

In this example, the mother described how she had tried to use two different Disney films previously to talk about positive gender characteristics to Child H, her 5-year-old White daughter. These concepts show an attempt by the parent to talk about gender as more than physical difference or action taken by a character. In this exchange, the mother did not ask her daughter what she remembered about either of these conversations.

Parent I, a 32-year-old White mother, similarly recalled past conversations that she and Child I, her 10-year-old White daughter, had about gender representation in Disney films:

Parent I: Mulan is one, yep. Um, for a while, I mean you were into Elsa and Anna for a while, not anymore. But you were for a while, and I liked that story as well because they do take care of their own problems. They don't need this guy to come and save them. Anna, well she fell in love, but she doesn't need him to save her.

Tim: Do you remember having those conversations with your mom and how that made you feel if you did?

Child I: Yeah, I remember them. They made me feel ok.

Tim: Made you feel ok?

Parent I: Do you want to expound on that? (laughs)

Child I: I don't really

Parent I: Yeah, you don't, you don't really do interviews.

In this exchange, Parent I was able to quickly identify times where she had talked about positive gender representations with Child I. However, when I attempted to ask Child I what she recalled about conversations she had previously had Parent I, she did not seem to particularly remember the conversation nor want to go more in depth. This further shows that having these conversations can be difficult as some children may not know how to express how they feel. In this instance, it is possible that the parent was protecting their child because Parent I could sense that Child I did not feel comfortable going more in depth about the topic.

To summarize then, this subtheme was defined as communication within a parent-child dyad where they discussed the role of male and female characters in Disney films, gender stereotypes in Disney films, or instances where the dyad felt a character went against gender stereotypes. In these instances, parents and children seemed to be enthusiastically in favor of the general direction Disney was going when compared to past films. Although these conversations were more than surface observations of physical difference, parents did still not always attempt to talk about the greater significance of their observations with their children and the children when asked to recall these conversations were not always able to do so. Most ($n = 21$, 70%) of these interactions occurred with a female-female parent-child dyad, and the other 9 (30%) were in a mixed-gender dyad. 7 (23.33%) of these conversations were initiated by fathers and the other 23 (76.67%) by mothers. Strikingly, only 4 (13.33%) of these interactions included sons, meaning that nearly 90% of the conversations included daughters. In this type of interaction, parents averaged 32.5-years-old, and children averaged 7.08-years-old.

Parent-Child Communication About Race in Disney Animated Films

Research Question 2 asked how parents discuss issues of racial representation with their children regarding Disney animated films. These conversations were slightly more prevalent than conversations about Disney and gender representation. In total, 59 parent-child interactions were related to Disney and race. This represented 27.96% of all identified unique interactions in the parent-child dyads. Most of these interactions ($n = 41$, 69.49%) were not recalled communication between the dyads, but rather were conversations specifically initiated either by the *Moana* and *Peter Pan* clips or by interview questions. This means that in general recalled interactions were less common ($n = 18$, 30.51%). To provide more context, 11 (55%) parent-child dyads indicated they had not talked about Disney and race at all prior to the interviews. Of these dyads, $n=10$ (90.91%) included White parents. Only $n=4$ (26.67%) White parents out of 15 interviewed had talked to their child about this prior to the interview, whereas all the non-White parents reported previously speaking about Disney and race with their children. In conversations that happened because of the interview process, the interactions between White and non-White parents were noticeably different in content. Although most parents indicated they felt that Disney had improved racial representation compared to past Disney content, many still talked about problematic content in Disney films. In the following sections, I will define subthemes present in parent-child communication related to Disney and race, identify exemplars of these themes, and discuss whether these themes were mostly present in recalled or current interactions.

Theme 3: Race, Identity, and Real Life. When communicating with each other about Disney and race, conversations sometimes turned to comparisons between Disney

animated content and real life including the racial identity of the child participants. This theme was defined by parent-child dyads comparing Disney animated characters to people they knew in real life or their own lived experiences. This included discussions of physical characteristics of characters, or the cultures depicted in Disney movies compared to real life appearances and cultures. When asked how the *Moana* and *Peter Pan* clips made them feel, Parent K, a 31-year-old Black woman, and Child K, her 5-year-old multiracial son, had the following interaction:

Parent K: You didn't like it? What didn't you like it about it?

Child K: I don't like anything

Parent K: You don't like anything? Did you not like the songs or the people or?

Child K: I did not, I did not like the people that are Red

Parent K: Why didn't you like the people that are Red?

Child K: Because no one in this town is Red.

Parent K: Because no one in the world is actually Red? That's a good point, but what if

Child K: What

Parent K: I'm trying to think, um, why do you, do you have an idea why they'd, why they might be Red? Do you think that the show explained why they might be Red?

Child K: Because they're robots and they paint them

Parent K: So, you think they're not real. They're like robots or monsters or

Child K: I think they're monsters

Parent K: You think they're monsters? What if I told you that they were supposed to be people, but the people who drew them didn't have a good understanding of who they were? And drew that to kind of make fun of them?

Child K: What

Parent K: What would you say if I told you that the people who drew them did that to make fun of them?

Child K: What'd you say?

Parent K: How would you feel if I told you that the people who drew them that way did that to make fun of them?

Child K: Maybe cause they're not, maybe they're mean people.

Parent K: You think the people who drew it are mean?

Child K: Yeah

In this interaction, Child K is upset because the Indigenous characters in *Peter Pan* are not realistic or recognizable to him, so much so that he is reminded of monsters. Parent K uses the stereotyped appearance of Indigenous Disney characters to talk with her son about motivations of animators in real life and the problems of stereotyped racial representation. This also demonstrates the challenge that parents might have with these types of conversations. Indeed, when having conversations that present Disney as more than a way of being entertained, it is possible that the child may feel emotional or upset. In this way, what is meant to be a bonding experience may be more challenging for both the parent and the child, especially if it leads to ideas that may lead to the child being more upset about the world as a result of what they have learned.

In addition to talking about the difference of animated characters versus real life people generally, parent-child dyads sometimes talked about characters' race in relation to themselves. For example, Parent C, a 43-year-old, White father, and Child C, his 10-year-old multiracial son, had the following conversation:

Parent C: K. If you're watching those and you're thinking about um the two people groups, you know, the Native Americans in the first one and um the Islanders from the second one, how does that make you feel about, do you feel different when you were watching those?

Child C: Not really

Parent C: Did you feel, when watching the first one?

Child C: What?

Parent C: Did you feel any way? You have Native American blood; did you feel any way watching that?

Child C: Like, what way?

Parent C: I don't know. What'd you think watching it?

Child C: I liked it, and I thought it was, it was kind of um, I didn't know what they were saying

Parent C: Didn't know what they were saying- yeah.

Child C: Yeah

Parent C: Yeah- ok. Did you feel proud?

Child C: Yes

Parent C: Yeah, ok. (laughs)

In this conversation, Parent C connects Child C's racial identity to the characters within the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clips. Parent C tries to possibly connect with Child C by asking if seeing characters that were had similar characteristics to him made him feel proud. In this interaction though, Parent C did not discuss the differences between the Indigenous characters in *Moana* compared to those in *Peter Pan* and whether one made Child C feel different than the other.

While Parent C used the media as an opportunity for Child C to reflect on his own racial identity, other parents attempted to use the clips as an opportunity to initiate a conversation with their child about different cultures than their own. For example, Parent L, a 30-year-old White mother, and Child L, her 5-year-old White daughter had the following conversation about the clips:

Child L: The people had tattoos on them

Parent L: Ok, well and it was for trying a different culture, right? What culture?

Child L: I don't know

Parent L: You don't know what culture was in the first video with Peter Pan?

Child L: What is culture?

Parent L: What is culture? Um, culture is they were portraying a different ethnicity in the first video. Did you see that? Who were they with? Who was Peter Pan and all of them with?

Child L: I don't know.

Parent L: There was Native Americans, right?

Child L: Mhm. Why did they have red on them?

Parent L: Well, that's because they're a, they're a different ethnicity than us, so they have a different skin color and a different culture. Different traditions and stuff like that. So that's what the first video was portraying.

Like the previous examples, the child participant noticed differences between the Indigenous characters in *Peter Pan* compared to people she knew. However, in this example, Parent L did not suggest the red coloring of the character was problematic, but instead suggested that it was because the characters were a different ethnicity than that of the parent and the child. This exchange also demonstrates that talking about race is not easy as it brings up ideas that are hard to define. When Child L asks, what is culture, that is a hard question for anyone to answer, especially for those who have not thought about it much before or for groups of people who only want to engage with these texts as entertainment. In this way, even though parents may believe they are having a conversation that is challenging, they may only be beginning to scratch the surface of the potential depth of the conversations they could have about Disney animated films.

To summarize then, this theme was defined as communication within a parent-child dyad where they discussed how Disney animated characters compared to people in real life or how it compared to their lived experience. In total, conversations about race in real life compared to Disney animated films were present in 10 out of 59 total conversations related to Disney and race (16.95%) and were present in 7 parent-child dyads (35%). Most of the discourse within this theme came because of the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clips and took place in current interactions as compared to recalled interactions. Indeed, of the 10 instances of this theme, only 3 interactions were recalled interactions (30%). 8 (80%) of these interactions happened in a dyad where the child was multiracial

and only two where the child was White. In this type of interaction, parents averaged 34.6-years-old, and children averaged 7.3-years-old.

Theme 4: Old Disney, New Disney, and Race. Parent-child dyads sometimes compared how diverse representations in older Disney films compared to newer Disney films. This theme then was defined as anytime a parent and child directly compared older and newer Disney content whether that be specific character comparisons, film comparisons, or just generally how they thought Disney was progressing as a company. Overall, these comparisons painted Disney as a company that has significantly improved over time, and a company that the parent-child dyads believed was trying to have more diverse racial representation in its films even if those representations still were not perfect.

In total, this theme was present in 12 (20.34%) out of 59 total conversations related to Disney and race and were present in 7 (35%) parent-child dyads. Most of the discourse within this theme also resulted from the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clips and took place in current interactions. Indeed, of the 12 instances of this theme, only 2 (16.67%) interactions were recalled interactions. Eight (66.67%) of these interactions happened in a dyad where the child was multiracial and 4 (33.33%) where the child was White. In this type of interaction, parents averaged 38.86-years-old, and children averaged 9.57-years-old.

When asked how the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clips made them feel, Parent I, a 32-year-old White mother, and Jasmine I, her 10-year-old White daughter had the following interaction:

Parent I: What did you think?

Child I: The Indians, were very disrespectful. That's what my mom said, and I was asking her why?

Parent I: Well, that's what we are going to do. We're going to talk about it.

Child I: And um

Parent I: Go ahead

Child I: Um, in the Moana part, I actually don't know

Parent I: Um, the reason I said that was disrespectful in the first one was because they were kind of making fun of the Native Americans and it was like they were making a joke out of them versus I would say the Moana clip showed more like an authentic representation of this is how these people lived and it was more a respectful way to show that. I think that the scene, maybe Peter Pan wasn't being disrespectful, but I think, but to like the scene as a whole, I don't think it showed that culture in a respectful way and it was the song, I don't know if you could hear the words, but the song was like, what makes the red man red and it was just kind of a rude way to like point out the differences in their colored skin because that doesn't matter, you know, and so, that's what I think, I think it was not a very respectful way to show their culture. What do you think? You don't have to agree with me. Ok. Was there anything you liked or didn't like about either one?

Child I: I liked Moana. It made me want to watch it.

Parent I: Yeah, it's a fun song. Yeah. Ok

In this interaction, Parent I and Child I talked about the *Peter Pan* clip while they were watching it. Parent I remarked that she thought the clip was disrespectful and then fully explained to Child I why she believed that. She did this by trying to compare it to the

Moana clip, which as she explained she felt was more of an authentic depiction of a different culture than the representation of Indigenous peoples in the *Peter Pan* clip. In this exchange, Child I agreed that she liked *Moana*, but did not indicate whether she agreed that the *Peter Pan* clip was disrespectful or not.

Many interactions in this theme were similar with parents and children talking about how they felt *Moana* was respectful and *Peter Pan* was not. When asked what they thought of the differences between White and non-White characters in the *Peter Pan* clip, Parent M, a 36-year-old Black father and Child M, his 12-year-old multiracial daughter had the following interaction:

Parent M: But they knew what they were talking about. I getcha, yeah. That makes sense. So, they're dumb and smart at the same time and you understood, ok. But you think that, do you think that they were supposed to be as smart as Peter Pan, like actual Peter Pan, do you think they were smart as he was, or do you think that they made them seem like not as smart as the lost boys and all.

Child M: Not as smart

Parent M: Not as smart as the lost boys

Child M: Yeah. Mhm

Parent M: Cause back then they used to think, they called Native Americans red men, so because of the their skin color. They're not literally red, but they're saying because they're out in the sun, they turn red. And so they called them red men. That's why they colored

Child M: Mhm

Parent M: In the movie that's why they colored them red. Because they called them red men, which is not ok (laughs). Anymore, it's not ok. So, when they made them seem like that, they made them seem like they were savages like they weren't smart, and they weren't educated is basically what they're saying. That's why they're talking about how and saying you know; they didn't use good English. They weren't speaking very well and when they were doing the sign language and all that stuff and when Wendy or was it, which lost boy was interpreting, they were saying that because that was how they used to speak, because they didn't use to deal with Indians. They think that all Indians lived in teepees out in the wilderness and all that, which is not true, like, but they were making them seem like that they didn't have education, they weren't civilized people, so, but with Moana, did they seem like they knew, they had, they were smart?

Child M: Yes

Child M: It looked like they were normal people?

Child M: Mhm

Parent M: Yeah, because they treat them with, they drew them with respect, they didn't make fun of them, they didn't draw them with like big noses or different colors because they're not, they were like real people. They weren't like cartoons, right? Yeah, so I mean that's the difference that you understood. I don't know (laughs).

In this interaction, Parent M and Child M talk about how in *Peter Pan*, they perceived Indigenous characters as being jokes in the narrative, whereas in *Moana* they were

depicted as real people. This interaction tries to explain some of the reasons why newer Disney content may be less problematic than older Disney content.

While most of the interactions within this theme resulted in parents and children favorably comparing new content to old content, some suggested that the newer representations of race in Disney films were not always done with the best of intentions. When recalling past conversations that they had together about Disney and race, Parent N, a 29-year-old multiracial parent, said she and Child N, her 12-year-old multiracial daughter, discussed the following:

Parent N: I think we talked about kind of, uh, we definitely talked about like, because they have the captain in there who is now Black and uh, we talked about kind of the political side of that of how like society says there has to be inclusion, but they're clearly Nordic, so there doesn't have to be Black people. So, I don't know why society gets so uproarious. It's a kid's cartoon and technically they're being correct saying way back then there technically wouldn't be any Black people there, but then they felt they had to include it. We definitely discuss the political side of Disney.

Tim: No, that's great, so it actually bothered you. Was it the conversation about it that bothered you or the fact that there was a character that you thought shouldn't necessarily be there?

Parent N: Uh, it didn't necessarily bother me. It was just uh that you know we had the conversation of, I mean, it's kind of ridiculous that they felt forced to put this person, like if it was something else, I could understand, but they're just

being accurate. Like, historically accurate, which is something you can't necessarily always say for Disney.

In this example, Parent M recognizes that there is more diversity in newer Disney representation but doesn't necessarily think it adds value to the films. It is unclear from the recalled communication whether Child M agreed or disagreed with her mother.

In summary then, this theme was defined as parents and children comparing older and newer Disney content. Most of the time, the conclusion was that newer content was better at representing all races as real people and not stereotypes.

Theme 5: Race as Appearance. Another theme that emerged was that parent-child dyads would talk about the appearance of characters in Disney films. This theme was defined as a parent-child interaction where they talked about the physical appearance or dress of racial minority characters in Disney films. Often this resulted in the dyads comparing physical characteristics of White and Non-White characters in the films.

In total, this theme was present in 18 (30.51%) out of 59 total conversations related to Disney and race and were present in 10 (50%) parent-child dyads. Most of the discourse within this theme also resulted from the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clips and took place in current interactions. Indeed, of the 18 instances of this theme, only $n=2$ (11.11%) interactions were recalled interactions. 13 (72.22%) of these interactions happened in a dyad where the child was multiracial and 5 (27.78%) where the child was White. In this type of interaction, parents averaged 33.44-years-old, and children averaged 8.78-years-old.

When asked if they noticed anything different between characters of different race, ethnicities, or skin colors, Parent E, a 30-year-old White father, and Child E, a 5-year-old multiracial daughter had an interaction that epitomized this theme:

Parent E: What did you think? Did you notice anyone with different skin colors in the first one?

Child E: Uh, actually I think I didn't

Parent E: Really?

Child E: The only person I did was actually those ones that were playing music.

Parent E: The ones that were playing music, what did they look like?

Child E: They looked like monsters!

Parent E: Ok, what was it that made them look like monsters?

Child E: Well, their skin was red!

Parent E: Their skin was red, what else has red skin?

Child E: Peter Pan did because he accidentally got too hot, I think.

Parent E: Peter Pan did for a little bit, but not the whole time.

Child E: I know

Parent E: Yeah, is there anything that you see in the world around you that has red skin?

Child E: No

Parent E: That was like that red.

Child E: Uh, dragons are imaginary, and they have red and teeth

Parent E: Yeah, what about, you had a candy box the other day. What was that candy box got you from nutty nut house? What was it that was drawn there?

Child E: The devil

Parent E: Yeah. Do you think they made them red on purpose?

Child E: No.

Parent E: To scare you from them?

Child E: No

Parent E: Not at all?

Parent E: Do you think the person who made that didn't do that on purpose

Child E: (screams)

Parent E: Alright, alright. She's a big Peter Pan fan too.

In this interaction, Child E's description of the Indigenous characters in the clip is significant as she calls them "monsters", which shows that has not only noticed that the characters are different from the White characters but are different in such a way as to be perceived as scary and/or villainous. Parent E points out the differences in skin color and how Indigenous characters were drawn not as realistically and tries to explain to Child E why there was this discrepancy. Unlike Parent K in a similar interaction, Parent E did not try to compare the characters to real life people, but instead compares the characters to other characters in the same films. He does so by asking her about something she has seen in real life, the candy box, and asks her if she thinks the creators of these images have represented the characters the way they have on purpose or to scare her.

When asked how the characters in *Moana* compared to other Disney films they watch, Parent O, a 40-year-old Black father, and Child O, his 10-year-old multiracial daughter had the following conversation:

Child O: I can't tell the difference

Parent O: What do you mean? Think about it. Is Moana, does Moana, you mean the animation?

Tim: Um, more yeah, the animation, just how they look compared to other Disney characters. It could be skin color or anything else, yeah.

Parent O: Their features seem less human, definitely uh what's his name? Maui? Um, he doesn't seem

Child O: They restore the heart.

Parent O: Yeah, but if you think about in Tangled, the White people look like actual people.

Child O: That's because

Parent O: That's because why, but no why isn't why aren't the characters misshapen, like you don't know their body types? Like the animation? It seems a little bit off. It seems less human in a way.

Tim: Seems less human you think?

Parent O: Yeah, the body type. Like Maui is very boxy.

Child O: He has tattoos

Parent O: he has tattoos, yes. I feel like there's not the definition of a, of a big, muscular man that you could have, I guess. I don't know. I'm going to think of that a little bit more. Are there other characters in other Disney films that are that size? Um, no because it's apples to oranges. I can't think of other ones. I can think of The Incredibles, the way Mr. Incredible is shaped, he kind of has that same kind of Maui-esque animation so it's not like there's more definition. Let me think. I'm, I'm thinking of the type of detail that goes into some of the

characters and I feel like, I feel like the animation is different. It's more basic in Moana in a way.

Tim: Gotcha.

In this example, Child O initially indicates that she doesn't notice any differences between the characters in Moana and other Disney films she watches. Parent O challenges her to re-think this and indicates that he believes the characters in Moana have bodies that are less human than those of White characters in other films. While he describes the differences he perceives in physical characteristics of White and non-White characteristics, he does not ask his daughter what she thinks of this or if she understands.

While most of the interactions representative of this theme were primarily centered on the appearance of characters in the *Moana* and *Peter Pan* clips, other parents discussed times where they had previously pointed out differences in White and non-White Disney characters to their children. For example, Parent J recalled the following communication between her and her daughter, Child J:

Parent J: But we talk about like, um, hold on one second when we talk about Tiana and stuff, I ask her like what she likes about her, and I make it a point to comment on the differences.

Tim: Mhm

Parent J: And, but her very first dolls that she picked out were Merida and Tiana. Those were her first Barbies and um, so you know I just talk about how I love Tiana's Black hair, you know and just and then Merida's Red hair, freckles, whatever, so I kind of use them also to point out differences between people.

Tim: Yeah

Parent J: So, we kind of use Disney as a pretty big learning mechanism, I guess. In this example, the parent says that she used her daughter's Disney toys to talk about differences between White and non-White characters. In this case, the parent specifically talks about Black hair, but did not go into detail about what else these conversations consisted of beyond describing physical differences. It was also not clear if Child J recalled these conversations.

In summary then, this theme was defined as a parent-child interaction where they talked about the physical appearance or dress of racial minority characters in Disney films. Most of these conversations involved parents and children talking about the physical differences of characters from the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clips compared to White characters in other films.

Theme 6: Racial Stereotypes. A final theme that emerged in parent-child conversations about race and Disney animated films was that parents would talk about racial stereotypes present in Disney animated films with their child. This would often involve the parent pointing to a specific character's behaviors or role in a film and an explanation of why they perceived these concepts as problematic. Moreover, a parent would often try to use these examples to explain to their children how these depicted tropes might affect people who viewed them.

In total, this theme was present in 19 out of 59 total conversations related to Disney and race (32.20%) and were present in 10 (50%) parent-child dyads. 11 of the interactions in this theme were recalled communication between the parent-child dyads (57.89%), while the rest represented current interactions sparked by the *Peter Pan* and *Moana clips*. 12 (63.16%) of these interactions happened in a dyad where the child was

multiracial and 7 where the child was White (36.84%). In this type of interaction, parents averaged 32.42-years-old, and children averaged 7.11-years-old.

Some of these conversations happened after viewing the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clip. For example, Parent G, a 34-year-old White mother, and Child G, her 10-year-old multiracial daughter had the following conversation:

Parent G: How did they make you feel?

Child G: I like them

Parent G: You like those movies?

Child G: Especially Moana

Parent G: Especially Moana? What did you say to me when we were watching Peter Pan?

Child G: Why is the big Chief Red?

Parent G: She said, I never realized they were red before.

Tim: And what did that make you think about, Child G?

Child G: I don't know.

Tim: You don't know? Is there anything you would want to say to Child G about that Parent G? Just curious.

Parent G: I don't know. The pressure's on.

Tim: No pressure (laughs)

Parent G: I don't know what I would say to her about it except that I don't think it was a very honoring portrayal of Native American people. Um, it's a little bit disrespectful, right? Native American people. They kind of joked on who they are.

Child G: That's true.

Parent G: Yeah.

In this interaction, Parent G and Child G have a conversation about the representation of Indigenous characters in the *Peter Pan* clip. While Parent G does not identify specific stereotypes here, she does describe the representation as disrespectful and thinks that the characters are made to be a joke.

While the clips inspired several interactions amongst parent-child dyads, Princess Tiana from *The Princess and the Frog* was also a popular topic of conversation in this theme. For example, Parent N, a 29-year-old multiracial parent, and Child N, a 12-year-old multiracial daughter, had the following exchange:

Parent N: I think the big moment was when they like announced Tiana. You know, first Black Disney princess. Um, I think, I was, I felt a little guilty that I didn't like it as much as I should have just because it was the first Disney Black princess, um. I don't know, how did you feel about, what else did we talk about with race and Disney?

Child N: I don't know

Parent N: You don't know? Clearly my lessons have not stuck.

Tim: Did you talk about differences between people who had different race or skin color in the movies?

Parent N: um, I think we've talked about different like behaviors, um, like especially when you watch *The Princess and the Frog*. I feel like Tiana kind of gets angry a lot and I don't know like; I feel like there's that stereotyping of the mad Black woman and for a lot of other Disney princesses they're just always so

cool and calm. Part of it I felt was good because like ooh she's standing her ground, but then I was like this is going to be misinterpreted that a) she's mad black woman, b) standing your ground for a woman definitely means something different than standing your ground for a man.

In this interaction, Parent N explains the importance of Tiana to her and her daughter but is unable to remember specifics of the conversation. Interestingly though, Parent N believes that she has used the first Black Disney princess as an example of how not to act.

In addition to talking about specific examples of representation, other parent-child dyads used this conversation to talk about racial stereotypes and why they were harmful. For example, Parent K, a 31-year-old Black mother, and Child K, her 5-year-old multiracial son, had the following exchange:

Parent K: Ok, so sometimes people do mean things, no sometimes people do mean things or draw mean things or use they make generalizations, do you know what that means?

Child K: Cause they're mean, mean!

Parent K: Kind of, so you're a boy, right?

Child K: Yes

Parent K: And your name is Child K, does that mean all boys are named Child K?

Child K: No

Parent K: Right. That's a generalization. Um, so what if I didn't know you and I said your name is Bob? Does that mean that your name is Bob?

Child K: No

Parent K: Does that mean all little boys are named Bob?

Child K: No

Parent K: Ok, so the people who drew in the Red people saw a whole group of people and didn't know anything about them, kind of like if I didn't know anything about you and I said your name was Bob and they said everybody in this group, they are Red and they dance around

Child K: So, if you are Parent K, does that mean every girl is Parent K?

Parent K: No, so you did it. So, you and I know you have to meet people and learn

Child K: They don't have the same name

Parent K: You meet people and learn about them, and you can't make generalizations. Because you can hurt someone

Child K: You mean hurting their feelings?

Parent K: Hurting their feelings because there are people, real people

Child K: That can make fun of people

Parent K: Well, you shouldn't, but what I mean is, who they were trying to draw, the Red people

Child K: They were mean

Parent K: No, the Red people are real people, in real life, like Moana

Child K: Then why are they red?

Parent K: Because the people who drew them did that because they didn't know anything about them, yeah.

Child K: I think they should draw them Brown?

Parent K: You think they should draw them Brown or again?

Child K: Draw them again or change the video so they can come to an end

Parent K: So, you think they should update it so they can be real people again?

In this exchange, Parent K talks about the harm of depicting entire groups of peoples stereotypically and how one type of representation makes characters seem like real people and the other makes them seem not human. In this exchange, Parent K uses the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clips to explain what stereotypes are and how hurtful they can be. She then asks what Child K would change about the clip if he could, and he responds that instead of the cartoonish red that they should be drawn brown.

In summation, parent-child dyads talked about racial representation and stereotypes present in Disney animated films. These interactions usually were negative in tone towards the Disney content and tried to help children understand concepts like stereotypes and why they have previously existed.

Study 2 Results

To examine the research questions and hypotheses, a series of statistical tests were run using version 27 of IBM's SPSS. The research questions were examined through either linear regression, bivariate correlation, or Haye's (2021) Process Model #1. The hypotheses were tested either through a linear regression or by using Haye's (2021) Process Model #1. For a full explanation of statistical tests performed, please refer to Appendix C.

Participant Demographics and Media Use

In total, there were N=190 participants who were eligible to participate that completed the survey. These were all parents of children ages 5 to 12 years old. On

average, participants were 40.94 years old ($SD = 10.06$). To compare older parents and younger parents, nearly half of the participants were 39 years or younger ($n = 89, 46.8\%$) and nearly half were 40 years or older ($n = 101, 53.2\%$). The children that the participants reported on were on average 8.66 years old ($SD = 2.19$). Most participants identified as female ($n = 118, 62.1\%$), while the rest of the sample identified as male ($n = 72, 37.9\%$). Most children reported on were male ($n = 105, 55.3\%$), and the remaining children were female ($n = 85, 44.7\%$). Of the parent-child dyads, most were of incongruent genders where the parent and child did not share the same gender ($n = 85, 44.7\%$). Female parent-child dyads were the next most common in the sample ($n = 59, 31.1\%$), followed by male parent-child dyads ($n = 46, 24.2\%$).

In terms of race, approximately half of the participants were White ($n = 98, 51.6\%$), while the remaining participants identified as non-White or multiracial ($n = 101, 53.16\%$). Non-White participants included Asian/Pacific Islanders ($n = 42, 22.11\%$ of the overall sample), Black/African Americans ($n = 46, 24.21\%$ of overall sample), and Native American/American Indians ($n = 15, 7.89\%$ of overall sample). About half of the children reported on were also White ($n = 103, 54.2\%$) while other races represented included Black/African American children ($n = 46, 24.2\%$), Asian/Pacific Islander children ($n = 42, 22.1\%$), Native American/American Indian children ($n = 15, 7.89\%$), Hispanic/Latinx children ($n = 5, 2.63\%$), and other races ($n = 2, 1.05\%$). It was possible for participants to identify as multi-racial or report that their children were multiracial. For purposes of analysis, these cases were re-coded as non-White. White parent-child dyads were the most common type of dyad in the sample ($n = 97, 51.1\%$). The next most

common was non-White dyads ($n = 86$, 45.3%) followed by White/non-White dyads ($n = 7$, 3.7%).

Overall, participants seemed to watch many movies per week. Participants reported watching an average of 5.67 ($SD = 5.95$) movies per week and an average of 3.29 ($SD = 5.11$) Disney animated movies per week. Participants also reported that their children watched many movies per week. On average, participants reported that their children watched 5.29 movies per week ($SD = 5.32$) and 3.60 Disney animated movies per week ($SD = 4.08$). Participants in the sample were on average high in all parental mediation techniques but scored highest in social mediation ($M = 3.56$, $SD = .53$), then active mediation ($M = 3.22$, $SD = .57$), and lowest in restrictive mediation ($M = 3.12$, $SD = .66$). Participants scored slightly high on fan investment ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.05$) and higher on fan identification ($M = 3.44$, $SD = 1.01$). Fans also scored very highly on personal Disney nostalgia ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .81$).

Research Questions

In general, RQ3 through RQ5 asked whether certain parental demographics significantly predicted parental willingness to have conversations with their child in relation to either the film the parent selected as their own favorite Disney animated film or a film the parent selected as a recently released Disney animated film that the parent believed the child most enjoyed. Results of 12 separate linear regressions indicated that neither parental age, gender, nor race significantly predicted parental willingness to engage in conversations with their child about gender or race representation in relation to either of the films the parent selected. For each of these tests, $p > .05$

Whereas the previous research questions examined parental demographics, RQ6 through RQ9 asked whether children-related demographics would serve as significant predictors of parental willingness to engage in conversations about gender or racial representation in the context of either of the films the parents selected. The results of 12 separate linear regressions demonstrated that the age, gender, and race of the children reported on were not significant predictors of the willingness of parents to have those types of conversations for either the parent's favorite Disney animated film or the recently released Disney animated film the parent indicated the child would pick as their favorite. For each of these tests, $p > .05$. Similarly, 2 additional linear regressions showed that the gender composition of the dyads did not significantly predict parental willingness to engage in conversations about gender representation in the context of either film. Another linear regression demonstrated that the gender composition of the parent-child dyad did not significantly predict the willingness of the parent to have a conversation about racial representation and the child's favorite recently released Disney animated film. The results of a simple linear regression, however, did indicate that the gender composition of the parent-child dyad served as a positive statistically significant predictor of a parent's willingness to have conversations with their children about racial representation and the parent's favorite Disney animated film, $F(1, 188) = 4.04, p < .05$. This relationship shows that female and mixed-gender dyads were significantly more likely than male dyads to be willing to have conversations about the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation. This relationship explained 2.1% of the variance and had a small effect size of .05.

RQ10a asked if parental Disney fanship significantly moderated the relationship between a parent's active mediation score and the likelihood that a parent would be willing to engage in conversations with their children about gender representation in Disney animated films. Results demonstrate that Disney fanship accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in the relationship between parental active mediation and parental willingness to have conversations about gender representation and Disney animated films with their children, $R^2 = .15$, $F(7, 182) = 4.42$, $p < .001$. Examination of the interaction revealed that participants with low and medium levels of fanship were significantly less likely to be willing to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender, even when considering active mediation as an independent predictor variable. This significant moderating effect did not hold for participants who scored highly in Disney fanship, demonstrating that those who scored highly in Disney fanship were also the most willing to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation. This model, which also included parent income, education, gender, and race as control variables explained 14.57% of the overall variance and had a large effect size at low levels of fanship (.72) and a medium effect size at medium levels of fanship (.44).

Next, RQ10b asked if parental Disney fanship significantly moderated the relationship between a parent's active mediation score and the likelihood that a parent would be willing to engage in conversations about racial representation and Disney animated films with their children. Results demonstrate that Disney fanship accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in the relationship between parental active mediation and parental willingness to have conversations about racial representation and

Disney animated films with their children, $R^2 = .14$, $F(7, 182) = 4.42$, $p < .001$. The results indicate that the Disney fanship operated similarly as a moderator of the relationship between active mediation and willingness to have conversations about race as it did for willingness to have conversations about gender. That is to say that examination of the interaction showed that participants with low and medium levels of fanship were significantly less likely to be willing to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial representation, even when considering active mediation as an independent predictor variable. This significant moderating effect once again did not hold for participants who scored highly in Disney fanship, which indicates that participants who scored highly in Disney fanship were also the most willing to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial representation. This model, which included the same control variables as RQ10a, explained 14.47% of the overall variance and had a large effect size at low levels of fanship (.71) and a medium effect size at medium levels of fanship (.44).

Finally, RQ11 asked if parental mediation, parental Disney animated film fanship, and parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated film were related. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated there was a significant positive association between active mediation and Disney animated film fanship ($r(190) = .48$, $p < .001$). Similarly, results of the Pearson correlation indicated there was a significant positive association between active mediation and parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated films ($r(190) = .49$, $p < .001$).

Disney animated film fanship and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films were also found to be correlated. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated there was a

significant positive association between Disney animated film fanship and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films ($r(190) = .60, p < .001$).

Hypotheses

H1a hypothesized that active mediation of parents would significantly predict a parent's willingness to have conversations with their children about gender representation and Disney animated films. The results of a simple linear regression indicate that active mediation scores are a positive statistically significant predictor of a parent's willingness to have conversations with their children about gender representation and Disney animated films, $F(1, 188) = 24.20, p < .001$. This relationship explained 11.4% of the variance and had a medium effect size of .34. With this, the results demonstrate that higher active mediation styles in parents significantly predicted a higher likelihood of parents being willing to have conversations with their children about gender representation and Disney animated films. Thus, H1a was fully supported.

H1b hypothesized that active mediation of parents would significantly predict a parent's willingness to have conversations with their children about racial representation and Disney animated films. The results of a simple linear regression indicate that active mediation scores are a positive statistically significant predictor of a parent's willingness to have conversations with their children about gender representation and Disney animated films, $F(1, 188) = 17.07, p < .001$. This relationship explained 8.3% of the variance and had a low effect size of .29. With this, the results demonstrate that higher active mediation styles in parents significantly predicted a higher likelihood of parents being willing to have conversations with their children about racial representation and Disney animated films. Thus, H1b was fully supported.

Next, H2a predicted that parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated films would significantly moderate the relationship between a parent's active mediation score and the likelihood that a parent would be willing to engage in conversations with their children about gender representation in Disney animated films where higher nostalgia scores would significantly reduce the likelihood that a parent would be willing to have these types of conversations no matter how high they score in active mediation. Results indicated that there was not a significant interaction effect between Disney personal nostalgia, parental active mediation, and the willingness of parents to engage in conversations with their children about gender representation in Disney animated films. Thus, H2a was not supported.

Next, H2b predicted that parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated films would significantly moderate the relationship between a parent's active mediation score and the likelihood that a parent would be willing to engage in conversations with their children about racial representation in Disney animated films where higher nostalgia scores would significantly reduce the likelihood that a parent would be willing to have these types of conversations no matter how high they score in active mediation. Results demonstrate that parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated films accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in the relationship between parental active mediation and parental willingness to have conversations about racial representation and Disney animated films with their children, $R^2 = .12$, $F(7, 182) = 3.61$, $p < .001$. The results indicate that parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated films is a significant moderator of the relationship between active mediation and willingness to have conversations about racial representation and Disney animated films. However,

examination of the interaction showed that participants with low and medium levels of personal nostalgia were significantly less likely to be willing to have conversations about racial representation and Disney animated films, even when considering active mediation as an independent predictor variable. This significant moderating effect did not hold for participants who scored highly in Disney personal nostalgia, which indicates that participants who scored highly in Disney personal nostalgia were also the most willing to have conversations about racial representation and Disney animated films. The model explained 12.19%% of the overall variance and had a large effect size at low levels of personal nostalgia (.51) and a medium effect size at medium levels of personal nostalgia (.35). As the relationship between proposed variables was opposite the prediction, H2b was not supported.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This research aimed to fill several gaps in the literature related to how parents mediate their children's consumption of Disney animated films and may be engaging in conversations about gender and race representations. Specifically, the following questions were explored: How do parents discuss Disney animated films with their children? And how do parents discuss portrayals of race, gender, or other social issues that exist in Disney animated films? The results of this research increase understanding of parental mediation theorizing, and whether media fanship and nostalgia for media predict the parent-child-media relationship, regarding sense-making of messages in family films.

Specifically, Study 1 indicates that although both parents and children believe that Disney animated films are a chance to connect with each other, that parents do not always use see these films as an opportunity to discuss sensitive issues like race and gender representation. Parents in this study specifically expressed the beliefs that Disney animated films were meant to be entertaining and should not necessarily be examined critically. Additionally, some parents suggested that there were more effective ways to teach their children about gender and race, specifically referring to people the children know in real life. Finally, communicating about Disney, race, and gender was something that parents in this study were able to do, but after watching clips they seemed embarrassed and unsure of how to communicate, possibly because of the stereotyped nature of the content and possibly because these are not conversations they have with their children normally.

The two-study design also adds to the understanding of the role specific parental characteristics play in their willingness to participate in these conversations including parental age, race, gender, mediation styles, fanship of and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films. Additionally, the studies indicate the limited influence that child demographics have over parental discussion of these topics with their children. Finally, this research reveals significant correlations between parental mediation style, parental fanship, and parental personal nostalgia.

Ultimately this dissertation shows that active mediation, fanship and nostalgia all result in higher willingness to engage in conversations about Disney animated films overall and specifically in the context of gender and racial representation. Additionally, the willingness to have these conversations was not found to be linked between parental or child demographics. However, as illustrated by themes present in actual parental mediation centered on these concepts, willingness to have these conversations does not necessarily suggest that parent-child communication about this type of media will result in significant prosocial outcomes for children. In the remainder of this chapter, results related to gender, race, and Disney will be discussed and what these results suggest in relation to past parental mediation theorizing. Finally, the dissertation will conclude with a discussion of the limitations of the two studies and provide directions for future research.

Gender and Disney

Both Study 1 and Study 2 examined factors of parent-child communication of Disney animated films and gender representation. Study 1 specifically asked parents and children to recall past conversations about Disney animated films and gender

representation. This study also asked parents and children to engage in new discussions of two Disney animated film portrayals of gender. Study 2, meanwhile, asked parents about how willing they were to engage in conversations with their children about gender representation in relation to both the parent's favorite Disney animated film and their child's favorite recently released Disney animated film. This study also investigated several factors to ascertain if they were significantly related to the willingness of the parents to have conversations about gender representation. These factors included parental age, race, gender, mediation styles, Disney animated film fandom, and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films.

Overall, the findings of these two studies illustrate the following: 1) how willing parents are to have these types of conversations, 2) how likely the parents are to have had these types of conversations, 3) what type of conversations comprise parent-child communication about Disney animated films and gender representation, and 4) how parental individual characteristics influence these communicative processes.

Willingness to Have Conversations About Gender

Although parents have been found to have a profound impact on how children understand and express gender (Epstein & Ward, 2011), there has been scarce research on how children and parents communicate about popular media and gender representation and stereotypes. Before discussing themes present in parent-child communication about Disney animated films and gender representation, it is important to first understand how willing parents are to have these conversations. Study 2 found that parents on average expressed a high willingness to have conversations with their children about Disney animated films and gender overall ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.07$). This held true

both for potential conversations about the parent's favorite Disney animated film ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 1.11$) and potential conversations about the child's favorite recently released Disney animated film ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 1.17$).

Although parents in the Study 2 sample were seemingly willing to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation, it was not immediately clear what factors would predict higher willingness to have these conversations. A series of linear regressions demonstrated that parental age, race, and gender were not statistically significant predictors of parental willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation with their children. This was true both for the parent's favorite Disney animated film and a recently released Disney animated film the parent believed the child would select as their favorite. Moreover, results reveal that child demographics did not significantly affect the willingness of parents to engage in these conversations for either film selected.

Whereas parental and child demographics were not found to significantly predict the willingness of parents to engage in conversations about gender representation and Disney animated films, Disney fanship and active mediation scores were both found to be significantly related to a higher willingness to have these conversations amongst parents. Indeed, low and medium levels of fanship predicted lower willingness to engage in discussions of gender representation and Disney animated films even considering a parent's active mediation score, suggesting that those high in Disney fanship were also more likely to be willing to have conversations about gender representation. In short, Disney fanship and active mediation both were linked to higher parent willingness to

have conversations about Disney animated films overall and about gender representation specifically.

Although parental personal nostalgia was predicted to affect the relationship between active mediation and willingness to have conversation about Disney animated films and gender representation, the tested model was insignificant. Therefore, Study 2 showed that Disney personal nostalgia did not significantly predict a higher or lower willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation. This could be because parents in this study scored very highly in Disney personal nostalgia on average. Therefore, comparisons between low, medium, and high levels of nostalgia may not have revealed as much about the role of personal nostalgia as it would have in a sample with a higher range of personal nostalgia scores.

In summation, parents in study 2 expressed a high willingness to have conversations about gender representation and Disney animated films with their children, which increased the higher a parent scored in active mediation and the higher they scored in Disney animated fanship. Whereas past research indicates that active mediation is related to the gender of a parent, the results of Study 2 show no link between parental gender, and expressed willingness to have conversations about Disney and gender representation (Valkenburg et al., 1999). Similarly, the results indicate that contrary to past research, parental race did not play a role in willingness to have these conversations or active mediation scores (Top, 2016). This was the case for both potential conversations of older and newer Disney animated films. These findings align with emergent research that suggests that parent demographics are not always correlated with parental mediation styles and that parental mediation styles may instead be more closely related to other

personal characteristics such as media literacy or the content being mediated (Behm-Morawitz et al., in press).

Parental fanship of Disney animated films and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films were two parental characteristics examined within study 2. Past research has demonstrated that identifying as a fan can lead to increased communication about the media of which an individual identifies as a fan (Masanet & Buckingham, 2015; Neville, 2018) and can lead to parent-child conversations about sensitive topics as a result of watching together (Leongrande, 2010), Study 2 similarly found that Disney animated film fanship did significantly moderate parental willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation. Although past scholarship indicates that parents may be driven to have idealized conversations about the past because of watching media with their children (Bolin, 2016) and that nostalgia can increase communication between parties that are both nostalgic (Myrick & Willoughby, 2019), this study found that parental personal nostalgia did not moderate the willingness of parents to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representations.

While it is important to continue to investigate mediation of specific content and genres (Collier et al., 2016) and other personal characteristics of parents (Behm-Morawitz et al., in press), this study indicates that personal nostalgia for Disney animated films is one variable that is not correlated with parental willingness to have conversations about gender representation in relation to Disney animated films.

Overall, these and the previously discussed findings suggest that Disney animated films are a media text that a diverse set of parents are open to having critical conversations with their children about. This was especially true for parents high in active

mediation scores and Disney animated film fanship. These findings taken together are important as it has been established that Disney animated films have historically been fraught with gender stereotypes (e.g., Davis, 2007) and research has demonstrated that active mediation of gender stereotyped media can lead to both increased (e.g., Coyne et al., 2016) or decreased (Rousseau et al., 2019) gender stereotyped behaviors in children. One possible explanation for these divergent findings may be that it is not only whether a parent is willing to have conversations about gender representation in media, but whether parents use these stereotypes to talk about why a stereotype is problematic (Clark, 2011).

The next section will discuss how frequently parents and children in Study 1 communicated about gender representation in Disney animated film, what themes were present in those communicative exchanges, and finally how those exchanges differed based on parent and child demographics.

Themes in Parent-Child Communication About Gender and Disney

While Study 1 focused on how potentially willing parents were to communicate about gender representation, Study 2 examined how often these conversations occurred amongst the 20 parent-child dyads interviewed and what comprised these conversations. Of the 211 total codes identified within Study 2, 41 (19.43%) of the codes were related to discussions of gender. 16 (80%) of the parent-child dyads discussed gender and Disney animated films during the interviews, and 12 (60%) of the parent-child dyads indicated they had previously communicated about these topics before the interviews. In total, 41 unique interactions and 2 distinct themes about gender and Disney animated films were present in the interviews: 1) gendered appearance (11, 26.83%) and 2) gender stereotypes (30, 73.17%).

The themes present in parent-child communication about gender and Disney animated films differed based on when the interactions occurred. Of the 41 interactions, 17 were recalled communication exchanges. This means that these 17 codes included parents and children discussing previous conversations they had about gender and Disney animated films prior to the interviews. Of these 17 exchanges, 2 (11.76%) belonged to the gendered appearance theme, and the other 15 (88.24%) belonged to the gender stereotypes theme. Of the 24 interactions generated because of being shown the *Peter Pan* and *Moana* clips, 9 (37.5%) and 15 (62.5%) belonged to the gender stereotypes theme.

Most of the interactions generated from viewing the clips did include overt discussions of gender stereotypes. Many of these conversations, however, did not include parents actively telling their children why these depictions were problematic. Instead, even though parents were often willing to engage in conversations about gender differences in Disney animated film clips with their children, these conversations were frequently based on surface observations. This is important because according to both social cognitive (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) and parental mediation (Clark, 2011) theorizing, children who consume media with their parents may believe parents endorse what they are seeing if they do not actively discuss what is harmful about the mediated content. In the communications within these interviews, it is questionable whether children were perceiving parental observations as criticisms of the clips or merely as comments.

These results are also significant as past research demonstrates that although parents frequently report that they have engaged in active mediation techniques, child

reporting of parental mediation techniques have been demonstrated to not align with parental perceptions (Gentile et al., 2012). Based on the results of Study 1, parents may express that they have previously employed active mediation techniques when discussing gender and media with their children. When asked to conduct these types of conversations in real time, however, these conversations were not necessarily as critical of the media they watched with their children as the parents may have perceived them to be. This means that previous gender and media communication may also not have been as critical as parents thought. Finally, this suggests that having critical conversations about media with children about sensitive topics like gender is a skill that must be practiced often in order to be effective- a skill that may rely on parents obtaining a greater degree of media literacy (Behm-Morawitz et al., in press).

In addition to when these conversations occurred, the substance of these interactions was also markedly different based on the demographics of the parent-child dyads. Specifically, of the 30 interactions in the gender stereotypes theme, only 4 (13.33%) of these interactions included sons, meaning that nearly 90% of the conversations included daughters. These conversations were also less likely to be initiated by fathers (7, 23.33%) and most of these conversations occurred between female parents and female children (21, 70%). These results are important because past research demonstrates that parental messages about gender can have enduring impacts on children's gender expectations and attitudes even as they become adults (Epstein & Ward, 2011).

Moreover, past research has also shown that sons are likely to endorse stereotypical gender characteristics if they watch media with their mothers and have a

close relationship with their mothers (Vandenbosch & Eggermont, 2012). Expressed gender attitudes of fathers have also been shown to impact how children understand and develop their own attitudes about gender (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016). Because of the demonstrated impact that consuming gender stereotyped media with parents can have on children even into adulthood, it is vital that parents talk about gender representation and stereotypes with all their children including how they can be problematic, regardless of their children's gender. In the small sample of Study 1, however, these types of conversations were mostly limited to dyads that included female parents and female children, meaning that sons were less likely to discuss gender stereotypes in Disney animated media and as a result less likely to understand their cultural significance.

Thus far, I have discussed how willing parents in Study 2 indicated they would be to have conversations with their children about gender representation and Disney animated films. I have also discussed how frequently parents in Study 1 discussed these issues with their children, when these conversations occurred, and how parental and child demographics impacted the content of these interactions. While these are important contributions to the academic understanding of how parents and children communicate about gender specifically in relation to Disney animated films, it is also necessary to discuss what types of gender stereotypes parents were able to identify and discuss with their children.

When parent-child dyads talked about gender stereotypes in Study 1, they most frequently discussed examples of Disney film characters that the parents or children perceived as different from past stereotyped characters. In this way, parents seemingly endorsed certain characters like Anna or Elsa in *Frozen* or Mulan in *Mulan* as examples

of characters that were not stereotypically portrayed. Parents and children also sometimes expressed agreement that newer Disney media was more gender egalitarian than past Disney media. In this way, the parents were seemingly employing positive active mediation techniques instead of negative mediation techniques (Collier et al., 2016). This means that their children likely understand their parent's messages about these characters as endorsement of these characters and may be more likely to try to act like those characters.

In addition to talking about positive female exemplars in Disney animated films, parent-child dyads also compared behavioral differences between male and female characters. These types of interactions occurred in 10 (50%) of the parent-child dyads. Specifically, parent-child dyads were able to identify that the female characters in the *Peter Pan* clip were expected to do labor while male characters had fun. This type of observation shows that parents and children can identify a message that is typical in Disney animated films: females are expected to do more than males or be criticized for it (Griffin et al., 2017; Holcomb et al., 2015). Although parents were seemingly able to identify these differences, they did not usually explain why this was problematic, which means that children may not comprehend their parent's message as a criticism (Clark, 2011).

While it is encouraging that parents and children communicated about several gender stereotypes, it is interesting to note what stereotypes were not identified or discussed by parent-child dyads. In Study 1, 9 (45%) parent-child dyads discussed physical differences between male and female characters, but these conversations did not talk about the beauty as a goodness stereotype, even though research demonstrates that

the more physically attractive a Disney animated character is, the more likely they are to be portrayed as a good or successful person (Bazzini et al., 2010). Similarly, parents did not discuss how female characters are more often sexualized in Disney films than male characters (England et al., 2011), which may be tied to lower self-esteem in children who frequently watch these types of characters (Coyne et al., 2016). While parents talked about qualities of new Disney characters they found admirable, they did not talk about how characters like Elsa or Moana may still be presented in stereotypical ways (Streiff & Dundes, 2017a, 2017b). There was also very limited discussion in parent-child dyads about how previous Disney films had characters pair romantically at the end of their films, how most Disney characters were heterosexual, or how these heteronormative depictions might affect children (Hefner et al., 2017; Luisi, 2019). Similarly, parent-child dyads did not discuss how media has been saturated with male protagonists- a trend that is common even in Disney films (Hare, 2018). Finally, parent-child discussions of male stereotypes or male representation were very limited in Study 1.

This suggests that although male characters in Disney animated films have also been stereotyped historically (Li-Vollmer & LaPointe, 2003) that parents and children from this sample were not discussing any of those male-related stereotypes. This matters because research demonstrates that if parents do not consistently express egalitarian gender attitudes about both male and females, this may lead to their children's acceptance of non-egalitarian gender concepts even into adulthood (Epstein & Ward, 2011). A lack of discussion about male gender stereotypes can also lead to the assumption that stereotypes are only problematic for females who internalize those stereotypes, when past research demonstrates that internalization of male stereotypes can also have negative

effects on males including increased risk taking (Granié, 2009) as well as increased anxiety and lowered self-esteem (Verrastro et al., 2020).

Finally, discussions of gender representation were typically separate from discussions of racial representation. As different social identities may be more important at times than others and as these identities can overlap and intersect (Tafjel et al, 1979), it is of practical value that parents learn to recognize these intersecting identities and how to communicate with their children about them and how there can be multiple forms of marginalization within one media exemplar (Tuchman, 1978).

When taken together, Study 1 and Study 2 present an interesting overview of how parents and children discuss gender representation in relation to Disney animated films. Study 1 results show that parent-child communication does include discussion of several gender stereotypes identified in academic literature. This demonstrates that parents and children are at least partially aware of these stereotypes. Study 2, meanwhile, shows that parent's willingness to have these types of conversations are seemingly not affected by the parent's age, race, gender, or personal nostalgia for Disney animated films. Instead, it is the frequency with which they practice active mediation and their fanship that seemingly predicts their willingness to talk about gender and Disney. Even though most parents are seemingly willing to have these conversations, it is also clear that parents may still not be aware of many gender stereotypes in media overall or in Disney animated films specifically. Also, parents may perceive that they have shown their children why gender stereotypes are harmful but could go further by condemning specific gender stereotypes or talking about real world consequences of these stereotypes in addition to praising counter stereotypical examples. Finally, given gender stereotyped portrayals can

affect both male and female children, it is vital that 1) parents talk to all their children about gender stereotypes and 2) parents talk to their children about male and female stereotypes in popular media their children consume.

Race and Disney

In addition to gender representation, Study 1 and Study 2 also investigated parent-child communication about Disney animated films and racial representation. Study 1 specifically asked parents and children to recall communications about Disney animated films and racial representation as well as participate in new discussions of two Disney animated film clips' portrayals of racial minority characters. Study 2, meanwhile, measured parents' willingness to have conversations with their children about racial representation in relation to both the parent's favorite Disney animated film and their child's favorite recently released Disney animated film.

This study explored the relationship between parental willingness to have these conversations and the age, race, gender, parental mediation styles, Disney animated fanship, and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films. Overall, the findings of these two studies add to current academic understanding of parent-child communication about race and Disney animated films in the following ways: 1) how willing parents are to communicate with their children about race and Disney (Study 2), 2) how likely the parents are to have had these types of conversations (Study 1), 3) what themes exist in parent-child communication about Disney animated films and racial representation (Study 1), and 4) how parental individual characteristics influence these communicative processes (Study 1 and 2).

Willingness to Have Conversations About Race

Past research has demonstrated that parents often avoid talking about racial representation in educational videos with their children even when they are asked to do so by academic researchers (Vittrup & Holden, 2011). Study 2 therefore sought to add to academic understanding of this phenomenon to see if the same hesitancy would apply to discussions of racial representation and popular media such as Disney animated films. Study 2 found that parents on average expressed a high willingness to have conversations with their children about Disney animated films and race overall ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.08$). This held true both for potential conversations about the parent's favorite Disney animated film ($M = 3.83$, $SD = 1.17$) and potential conversations about the child's favorite recently released Disney animated film ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 1.14$).

Study 2 results demonstrated that parents expressed a relatively high willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial representation regardless of whether the hypothetical conversation would be about a newer or older Disney animated film. A series of linear regressions demonstrated that parental age, race, and gender were not statistically significant predictors of parental willingness to have these conversations with their children. This held true for both the parent's favorite Disney animated film and the child's favorite recently released Disney animated film. Child-related demographics were also mostly unrelated to parent willingness to have conversations about racial representation in the context of Disney animated films.

Results from Study 2 indicated that Disney fandom of animated films and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films were significant moderators of the willingness of parents to have these conversations with their children. Specifically, those

who scored low in fanship and nostalgia and those who scored medium in fanship were significantly less likely to be willing to have those conversations than those high in fanship. As with conversations about gender representation, active mediation (Clark, 2011) was also shown to significantly predict a parent's willingness to have conversations with their child about racial representation in Disney animated films.

This study adds to current academic understanding of how willing parents may be to discuss racial representation with their children in relation to popular children's media and what factors increase that willingness. Overall, the findings of this study demonstrate that parents who are high in active mediation are especially likely to be willing to express a high willingness to have conversations about racial representation and Disney animated films with their children- an effect which increased the higher a parent scored in active mediation. These findings further demonstrate that parental demographics such as race (Top, 2016) and gender (Valkenburg, 1999) are not always correlated with parental mediation styles. Unlike with discussions of gender, findings revealed that personal nostalgia for Disney animated films did significantly moderate the relationship between active mediation and willingness to have conversations about race. As past research suggests that parents may idealize the past when discussing it with their children, (Bolin, 2016), this willingness could potentially mean that the conversations could consist of parents talking about how the racial representation is not all bad. This is especially likely as the longer that nostalgic texts exist, the more collective memory tends to think of only their positive attributes (McGowan, 2018). With Disney films being media texts that often inspire lifelong loyalty (Forgacs, 1992), it is not surprising that fanship significantly moderated active mediation and willingness to have conversations about race and Disney

animated films. This indicates that media fanship may function similarly to being a fan of a sports team where research has demonstrated that a child becoming interested in a parent's favorite sport can alter how parents communicate about the sport (Hyatt et al., 2018), with parents potentially being more willing to engage in critical examination of those texts. Alternatively, however, this relationship could be explained as those scoring high in fanship being more willing to engage in conversations about race in order to defend the content as being acceptable due to the era in which they were created (Hunt, 2019).

Overall, parents do not seem averse to communicating with their children about racial representation and films even if the films make them nostalgic or if they identify as fans of those films. As Disney animated films frequently featured predominantly White protagonists (Faherty, 2001) and as existing racial minority characters have been stereotyped (Mitchell-Smith, 2012), it is hopeful that these findings suggest that parents are seemingly willing to communicate with their children about these issues. Although parent-child communication can lead to more positive feelings about social outgroups (Vittrup & Holden, 2011), other research suggests that parents can also influence their children to feel negatively about other groups of people if they first talk about them negatively (Lane et al., 2020). These two disparate findings demonstrate the potential importance that parents play in how their children consume stereotyped media such as Disney animated films. The next section will move beyond talking about willingness to have conversations about racial representation and look at how frequently parent-child dyads in Study 1 communicated about racial representation and what themes were present within those conversations. Finally, these findings will be discussed in how they compare

to racial stereotypes identified in popular media and how these communicative exchanges differed based on parent and child demographics.

Themes in Parent-Child Communication About Race and Disney

Whereas Study 2 demonstrated parental willingness to talk with children about Disney animated films and racial representation, Study 1 explored how frequently these conversations occurred amongst 20 parent-child dyads. The results of Study 1 also illustrated what themes were present within these conversations. Of the 211 total codes within Study 1, 59 (27.96%) of the codes consisted of parent-child communication about Disney animated films and race. 16 (80%) of the parent-child dyads discussed race and Disney animated films during the interviews, and 9 (45%) of the parent-child dyads indicated they had previously communicated about these topics before the interviews. In total, 59 unique interactions and 4 distinct themes about race and Disney animated films were present in the interviews: 1) race, identity, and real life (10, 16.95%), 2) old Disney, new Disney, and race (12, 20.34%), 3) race as appearance (18, 30.51%), and 4) racial stereotypes (19, 32.20%)

The frequency of themes within parent-child communication about race and Disney animated films differed based on whether the interactions were recalled communication or communication initiated because of the interview process. Of the 59 interactions, 18 (30.51%) were recalled communication exchanges. Of these 18 exchanges, the large majority (11, 61.11%) belonged to the racial stereotypes theme. 3 (16.67%) belonged to the race, identity, and real-life theme. 2 (11.11%) of recalled communication exchanges belonged to the old Disney, new Disney, and race theme. 2 (11.1%) of recalled communication exchanges belonged to the race as appearance theme.

Most of the parent-child communication about Disney animated films and racial representation occurred because of the interview process (41, 69.49%). Of the communication exchanges that were initiated by the interview process 10 (24.39%) belonged to the race, identity, and real-life theme. 12 (29.20%) belonged to the old Disney, new Disney, and race theme. 13 (31.71%) belonged to the race as appearance theme. 8 (19.51%) belonged to the racial stereotypes theme.

These results demonstrate that most parent-child communication about race occurred because of the interview process. However, unlike the conversations about gender representation, many of the conversations did include parents and children talking about why clips or Disney animated films in general were potentially harmful. While some of the discussions about racial representation sparked by the clips were surface observations about appearance, many parents used this opportunity to talk with their children about how the characters compared to people in the real-world and why that might matter in terms of how these clips could be harmful to people who watched them. Moreover, several parents also used the clips to talk about why these clips might have been produced the way they were and specifically talked about how the portrayals were unfair or harmful. Parents in these interviews then, seemed to use more negative active mediation techniques (Clark, 2011), where they specifically condemned specific ways Disney animated characters appeared and behaved. From a social cognitive (Bandura, 2001) and parental mediation perspective (Clark, 2011), these conversations were potentially encouraging as children may be less likely to accept these type of portrayals or attitudes within them if their parents continually condemn them.

While parent-child communication about racial representation and Disney animated films was often dynamic, it was striking how significant of a role parent and child demographics played in whether these conversations occurred. Specifically, 11 (55%) parent-child dyads indicated that they had not talked about Disney and race at all prior to the interviews. Of these dyads, 10 (90.91%) included White parents. Only 4 (26.67%) White parents out of 15 interviewed had talked to their child about these topics prior to the interview, whereas all the non-White parents reported previously speaking about Disney and race with their children. Of all the interactions, 41 (69.49%) occurred in parent-child dyads where the child was multiracial. These results are important because parental mediation theorizing suggests that when parents do not use active mediation techniques to talk about why something they watch alongside their children is not acceptable, their children may interpret their parent's lack of communication as endorsement of behaviors or beliefs within that content (Valkenburg et al., 1999). Moreover, active mediation techniques have been demonstrated to improve attitudes toward social outgroups . Parents not using Disney as a tool to talk with their children about race may be missing an opportunity to instill egalitarian racial attitudes in their children or shape how their child understands race and culture. Moreover, the fact that so few of the White parents reported talking with their children about race prior to the interview indicates that they might believe their children are "color blind" (Turner, 2012), which could hinder their children's understanding of why racial stereotypes matter or are harmful.

In addition to understanding how frequently parent-child dyads indicated that they communicated about Disney and race, it is also important to discuss what types of racial

stereotypes parents were able to identify and discuss with their children. Unlike discussions of gender stereotypes, parent-child dyads did not as often discuss portrayals that were counter stereotypical, but instead discussed what they considered to be problematic portrayals. Some of these concerns included that characters who were minorities were not depicted as realistically as White characters and were not in romantic relationships as often, which aligns with past research findings (Lacroix, 2004). Even characters that have been celebrated for being “firsts” were not immune to criticism in these dyads. Indeed some of the criticisms aligned with those of Barker (2010) noting that Princess Tiana was still shown as angry and was often an animal when she did appear onscreen. Other parent-child dyads discussed how infrequent it was to see people like themselves, which aligns with the findings of past research (Atkinson & Plew, 2017; Faherty, 2001).

While it is important to understand how parents talked about racial stereotypes with their children, it is equally important to note what stereotypes were not identified or discussed by parent-child dyads in Study 1. Parent-child dyads, for example, did not discuss how minority characters are frequently supporting characters to White characters (Turner, 2012) or that these characters have often been portrayed as separate from modern culture (Mitchell-Smith, 2012). These are potentially impactful conversations to have because past research indicates that not seeing people like oneself in popular media can hurt one’s self-esteem and ability to see oneself in certain roles or occupations (Fryberg et al., 2008). Interestingly, parent-child dyads did not discuss how minority characters in Disney animated films have often been villains (Lacroix, 2004). Finally, parents did not talk about how minority characters have frequently been exoticized

(Lacroix, 2004), which may also be harmful to people who belong to social outgroups and to perceptions of those social outgroups.

When taken together, Study 1 and Study 2 provide insight into how parents and children may communicate about racial representation and popular media texts such as Disney animated films. Firstly, it appears that parents are willing to have conversations about race and Disney despite their age, race, gender, Disney fanship, or personal nostalgia for Disney films. However, most parents in Study 1 did not have these conversations with their children prior to being interviewed. Although non-White parents indicated they had previously discussed Disney and racial representation with their children, most White parents had not had these conversations prior to being interviewed. When prompted to do so, however, many of the parent-child dyads, including dyads where the parent and child were both White were able to identify problematic depictions of race in Disney animated films and even discuss why these could be harmful to audiences of those films. In summation, these findings indicate that parents are aware of many racial stereotypes present in Disney animated films and many diverse types of parents are willing to have these critical conversations with their children but may require encouragement from others or more media literacy education to do so.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Like all research studies, this dissertation had a distinct set of limitations. Firstly, with Study 1, given the small sample size, it cannot be said to be representative of the greater U.S. population. Mothers specifically were overrepresented in my sample, which is a problem in much of the parental mediation literature (Collier et al., 2016). Future research should aim to include more fathers and could also conduct interviews with both

parents and all their children to better understand what messages about Disney animated films are communicated within families. It is also possible that having parent-child dyads resulted in either participant being less likely to say what they wanted to so as not to upset the other participant. Future research should seek to interview parents and children together as well as separately to see if any unique themes emerge in these different environments. Similarly, it is possible that the presence of an interviewer/moderator may have resulted in either the parent or child participant answering how they believe I would want them to. Future research should strive to analyze video or audio recordings or parent-child discussions of children's media to see if similar or different themes to those in this dissertation are found. Moreover, sometimes children did not know how to describe what they were feeling in detail. In the future, having more tools to indicate how children are feeling visually may help produce more understanding. Additionally, the dyads were asked to answer questions after watching two clips. These clips were always presented in the same order with the *Peter Pan* clip shown first, which may have influenced how the dyads felt about the second clip. Future research could show similar clips with different ordering to avoid any ordering effects that may have occurred in this study. Finally, it is necessary to recognize how one's social identities may have impacted the research process. As a straight, White male without any children, it is possible that 1) there are questions or follow up questions that I did not think to ask during the interview and 2) some participants may not have felt comfortable sharing all that they felt about certain topics with me in the same way that they would have with someone who they could more effectively relate to. Future research should attempt to include multiple

interviewers who are representative of many social identities to see how themes within interview responses compare.

It is also undeniable that the COVID-19 Pandemic affected the interview process. Although Zoom interviews may have allowed for parents and children to participate more comfortably, it is also possible that it lowered engagement during the interview process. Similarly, although I made sure to ask if participants could see and hear the clips that I showed during the interview process, it is possible that bad internet connectivity may have resulted in some participants having a disrupted viewing experience. Finally, given that interviews were conducted in August of 2020, it is possible that participants who were parents navigating a global pandemic may not have been able to give their full attention to their interview responses.

Regarding Study 2, although I strived to include a diverse sample, it was not representative of national demographics and was not representative of parents from other cultures. Although I used attention checks to ensure that participants were reading instructions, it is possible that participants in Study 2 were not representative of the general population. Specifically, because these participants were recruited through Prime Panels by CloudResearch, they may be more familiar with taking surveys and how to answer questions in socially desirable ways than members of the general population would be. While it is not possible to measure every variable in a survey, this survey did not include a media literacy measure, which could have potentially moderated the willingness of parents to engage in specific types of conversations. Future research should replicate this study and include a media literacy scale. Similarly, future studies

should capture recalled communication from parents to see if the themes in those conversations are like those of Study 1.

Moreover, this study captured the parent's willingness to have certain types of conversations, but by asking parents to write out conversations they previously had would additionally allow for analysis of parental mediation styles, fanship, nostalgia and demographic characteristics and how these variables affected conversations they remembered having. As this study was focused on personal nostalgia, future work should also consider willingness to have conversations about specific media texts in relation to historical nostalgia to see whether the effect is the same or distinct.

Additional research could further the academic understanding of the concepts examined here by conducting experiments where parents and children are presented stereotyped children's film clips where the control group is asked to talk with their children about what they saw while the experimental group is shown the same clip and given guided discussion points to see how responses between the groups differ. Future studies should also aim to conduct longitudinal analysis of the variables of study 2 to see how time and age of the children affects the willingness of parents to have these types of conversations. Finally, media literacy interventions should be developed to help train parents how to use these films to increase the success of future conversations about sensitive topics including race, gender, and more.

Conclusion

From *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to *Encanto*, Disney animated films have been a dominant cultural force in the lives of children and parents. For better or worse, these films have helped generations of children understand the world around them

including concepts of what is normal expressions of gender and race. From the #MeToo to the #BlackLivesMatter movements, these are social identities that have consequential impacts in the lives of all Disney animated film viewers. This dissertation aimed to better understand how parents and children communicate about these animated films, the characters within them, and how they relate to the real-world. Taking a mixed-methods approach, this dissertation demonstrates that parents are willing to have conversations about these films and sensitive topics such as race and gender representation despite social identities including their race, age, gender, fanship of Disney animated films, and personal nostalgia for Disney animated films.

Moreover, this study shows that parents and children were aware of many of the stereotypes that exist within these films. However, there is a difference between a willingness to have a conversation and having one. The results of this study show that Disney animated films are a potentially fertile ground for parent-child communication. Given the previously demonstrated impact that parental mediation can have on child behavioral and attitudinal outcomes, it is imperative that future research continue to bridge the gap between parental willingness to communicate and their communicative efficacy. In this way, Disney animated films, parents mediating those films, and children consuming those films can work to make the world around them a more equitable one – to infinity and beyond!

Appendix A

PARENT-CHILD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your favorite thing about Disney movies? (Both parent and child)
2. What is your least favorite thing about Disney movies? (Both parent and child)
3. How often do you watch Disney movies together? (Both parent and child)
4. What do you think about watching Disney movies together? Like? Dislike? (Both parent and child)
5. Tell me about your favorite Disney movie. What do you most like about it? (Both parent and child: RQ3 a)
 - a. Who is your favorite character in the movie? Why? (Both parent and child)
 - b. What do you think about the music? (Both parent and child)
 - c. Tell me how the movie makes you feel? (Both parent and child)
 - d. Tell me about your favorite scene (Both parent and child)
6. Describe what you remember about the first time you watched the movie and how it made you feel (Both parent and child; RQ3)
 - a. If you have watched your favorite movie together, talk about how it felt to watch it with each other (Both parent and child; RQ3)
7. What conversations have you had with each other about your favorite Disney movie? (Both parent and child; RQ3)
 - a. What about the most recent Disney movie you have seen together? (Both; RQ3)
8. What other conversations do you remember having about Disney movies? (RQ3) (Both parent and child)
 - a. Do you talk about the characters?
 - b. The story?
 - c. Anything else?
9. Which do you like watching together more: old Disney movies like *Sleeping Beauty*, *Peter Pan*, *Cinderella*, *Pinocchio*, or new Disney movies like *Zootopia*, *Wreck-It-Ralph*, *Frozen*, or *Moana*? Why? (Both; RQ3)
10. Have you ever used Disney movies to try to teach your child about anything? What? (Parent-only; RQ1 and RQ2)
 - a. If yes, what do you remember about these conversations? (Both parent and child; RQ1 and RQ2)
11. Describe any time you have talked together about the race, ethnicity, or skin color of characters in Disney films (RQ2, both parent and child)
 - a. Did you talk about differences that existed between people who had different race, ethnicity, or skin color?
 - b. Did you talk about how these people seemed compared to people you know in real life? How?
12. Describe any time you have talked together about the gender of characters in Disney films or differences that there might be between men and women or boy and girl characters in Disney films (RQ1, both parent and child)
13. I am going to show you 2 clips:

Clip 1: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7yE8TKUB_M)

Clip 2: (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RTWhvp_OD6s)

- a. Please talk together about how the clip made you feel (RQ3; both)
 - b. Now, please talk about any differences you might have noticed between the boys and girls/ men and women in the clips (RQ1; both)
 - i. Differences in what they were wearing? Doing?
 - c. Now, please talk about the race, ethnicity, or skin color of the characters in the scene
 - i. Differences in what they were wearing? Doing? Saying?
 - ii. With *Moana*, how is the race/ethnicity/ skin color of these character different compared to most Disney movies you watch? Do they act any differently than most of the characters you have seen? How? (RQ2: both)
 - d. What do you think about the first clip compared to the second clip (RQ3)?
14. Is there anything I have not asked that I should have? Any final thoughts?

Demographic survey (for parents to complete after the interview is over)

1. What is your age? Your child's age?
2. Choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be? Your child's race?
3. Are you a Spanish, Hispanic, Latino or none of these? If so, which? Your child?
4. What is your highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have completed?
5. Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?
 - a. Heterosexual/straight
 - b. Homosexual/gay
 - c. Bisexual
 - d. Other
 - e. Prefer not to say
6. What is your biological sex?
7. Are you now married, widowed, divorced, separated, or never married?
8. Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, Independent, something else or prefer not to say?
9. How much media do consume on a typical weekday (hours)? On a typical weekend (hours)?
10. How much media do your children consume on a typical weekday (hours)? On a typical weekend (hours)?
11. Prior to this interview had you watched *Peter Pan* and *Moana* with your child?
12. Had you had conversations about either film prior to this interview?
13. Do you subscribe to Disney+?

Appendix B

FILMS USED FOR SURVEY QUESTIONS

Top 10 grossing Disney animated films (1999 and before)

1. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937)
2. *Fantasia* (1941)
3. *Sleeping Beauty* (1959)
4. *Pinocchio* (1940)
5. *Cinderella* (1950)
6. *Aladdin* (1992)
7. *Peter Pan* (1953)
8. *Beauty and the Beast* (1991)
9. *Tarzan* (1999)
10. *Pocahontas* (1995)

Top 10 grossing Disney animated films (2000-2019)

1. *Frozen II* (2019)
2. *Frozen* (2013)
3. *Big Hero 6* (2014)
4. *Moana* (2016)
5. *Wreck-It-Ralph* (2012)
6. *The Princess and the Frog* (2009)
7. *Brother Bear* (2003)
8. *Lilo and Stitch* (2002)
9. *Atlantis: The Lost Empire* (2001)
10. *Meet the Robinsons* (2007)

Appendix C

STATISTICAL TESTS AND VARIABLES

Research Question/Hypothesis	Statistical Test Used	Variables
<p>RQ3: Does the age of a parent predict their willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent’s favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent’s favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child’s favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child’s favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?</p>	<p>linear regression</p>	<p>Independent variables: Parental age</p> <p>Dependent variable: Willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation (semantic differential scales), willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial representations (semantic differential scales)</p>
<p>RQ4: Does the gender of a parent predict their willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent’s favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent’s favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child’s favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child’s favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?</p>	<p>linear regression</p>	<p>Independent variables: Parental gender</p> <p>Dependent variable: Willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation (semantic differential scales), willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial representations (semantic differential scales)</p>
<p>RQ5: Does the race of a parent predict their willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent’s favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent’s favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child’s favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child’s favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?</p>	<p>linear regression</p>	<p>Independent variables: Parental race</p> <p>Dependent variable: Willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation (semantic differential scales), willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial</p>

RQ 6: Does the age of a child predict their parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

Linear regression

representations (semantic differential scales)

Independent variables:

Child age

Dependent variable:

Willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation (semantic differential scales), willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial representations (semantic differential scales)

Independent variables:

Child gender

Dependent variable:

Willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation (semantic differential scales), willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial representations (semantic differential scales)

RQ7: Does the gender of a child predict their parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

Linear regression

RQ8: Does the race of a child predict their parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

Linear regression

Independent variables:

Child race

Dependent variable:

Willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation (semantic differential scales), willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial representations (semantic differential scales)

RQ9: Does the gender composition of a parent-child dyad predict a parent's willingness to have a conversation with their child about a) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and gender

linear regression

Independent variables:

Parent-child dyad gender composition

Dependent variable:

representation, b) the parent's favorite Disney animated film and racial representation, c) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and gender representation, and d) the child's favorite recent Disney animated film and racial representation?

RQ10: Does parental Disney fanship moderate the relationship between a parent's active mediation score and the likelihood that a parent will be willing to engage in conversations with their children about a) gender and b) racial representation in Disney animated films?

Hayes
Process
Model #1

Willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and gender representation (semantic differential scales), willingness to have conversations about Disney animated films and racial representations (semantic differential scales)

Dependent Variables: Willingness to have conversation about gender and racial representation (semantic differential scales)

Independent Variable: Parental Active Mediation Score

Moderator: Parental fanship scale score

Control variables: Gender, SES, Race and Education Level of parent
Parental mediation scale scores, fanship scale scores, and personal nostalgia scores

RQ11: How are parental mediation, parental Disney animated film fanship, and parental personal nostalgia for Disney animated films related?

Bivariate
correlations

H1: Parental active mediation will be positively associated with parent willingness to have conversations with their child about a) gender and b) racial representation in Disney animated films.

Linear
regression

Dependent variable: Willingness to have conversation about gender/racial representation (semantic differential scale)

Independent variables: Active mediation

H2: Parental nostalgia for Disney animated films will moderate the relationship between active mediation and willingness to engage in conversations with their child about a) gender and b) racial representation in Disney animated films, such that greater nostalgia will reduce parent willingness to have these types of conversations.

Hayes
Process
Model #1

Dependent Variable: Willingness to have conversation about gender representation or racial representation in Disney animated films (semantic differential scales)

Independent Variable:
Parental Active Mediation
Score

Moderator: Parental
Personal Nostalgia Scale
Score

Control variables:
Gender, SES, Race and
Education Level of parent

Appendix D

MODIFIED DISNEY FANSHIP SCALE

1. I have rescheduled my work to accommodate watching Disney animated films (Investment #1)
2. I spend a considerable amount of money on Disney animated films (Investment #2)
3. I do not devote much energy to watching Disney animated films (reverse coded) (Investment #3)
4. I would devote all my time to watching Disney animated films if I could (Investment #4)
5. I spend a considerable amount of money on Disney animated films products (i.e., action figures) for myself or my children (Investment #5)
6. I often talk with others about Disney animated films (Investment #6)
7. I often read about or watch videos about Disney animated films online (Investment #7)
8. I often post or share Disney animated film content online (Investment #8)
9. I am emotionally connected to Disney animated films (Identity #1)
10. I want everyone to know I am connected to Disney animated films (Identity #2)
11. I would be devastated if I was told I could not watch Disney animated films (Identity #3)
12. I strongly identify with Disney animated films (Identity #4)
13. When Disney animated films are popular, I feel great (Identity #5)
14. Disney animated films are part of me (Identity #6)
15. I want to be friends with people who like Disney animated films (Identity #7)

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VITA

Timothy Luisi was born on October 2, 1989, in Rapid City, South Dakota. He lived in South Dakota for the first 18 years of his life where he learned to love movies, the Denver Broncos, and writing. He graduated from in 2008 from Stevens High School where he earned Magna Cum Laude honors.

Luisi attended Sterling College where he was editor-in-chief of *The Stir*, the college's newspaper, from 2009-2012. He also acted in theatre productions and was a member of the Sterling College Chorale. For his senior project, he wrote, produced, and edited a feature-length narrative film entitled *The Tallest Men Alive*. In 2012, Luisi earned a B.A. in Communication and a minor in History, graduating with Summa Cum Laude honors.

In 2013, Luisi was admitted to the University of Kansas where he met the love of his life and future wife, Dr. Monique Luisi. During his time there, Luisi's first journal article was accepted for publication, and he graduated with his M.S. in Journalism and Mass Communication in 2015, after completing a mixed-methods analysis of the *Toy Story* films for his master's thesis.

Finally, in 2017, Timothy was admitted to the University of Missouri where he began his doctoral program. While there he and Monique added Arlo and Domino, two loveable puppies, to their family. In addition to living through a solar eclipse and global pandemic, Luisi presented at academic conferences (e.g., AEJMC, ICA, and NCA) and published 6 original research articles in academic journals including *The Journal of Children and Media*, *Howard Journal of Communications*, and *Psychology of Popular*

Media. His work was recognized with the University of Missouri's Department of Communication Graduate Student Research award and the Michael Porter Dissertation Fellowship in 2020, and a section of his mixed-methods dissertation was accepted to the 2021 NCA Doctoral Honors Seminar.

Timothy Luisi aspires to work as a research faculty member at a university where he plans to continue research media effects across the lifespan.