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## **Stepping out of the Disney Princess Castle into the New Girl World with the Disney Divas: A Content Analysis of Hannah Montana and Wizards of Waverly Place**

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**Stepping out of the Disney Princess Castle  
into the New Girl World with the Disney Divas:**  
A Content Analysis of *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*

by

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Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

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## Introduction

The June 2008 cover of *Vanity Fair* showcased the Disney sensation Miley Cyrus. Cyrus's show *Hannah Montana* had propelled her to superstar status, and it seemed as if she could do no wrong. Her career was booming, but the cover of *Vanity Fair* caught negative attention before it was even released. *Entertainment Tonight* did an exposé on the photos showcasing the once wholesome *Hannah Montana* star scantily clad, in provocative positions. Cyrus now faced harsh criticism from parents and critics alike. Peggy Orenstein (2011) argued that Cyrus had previously “represented all that was good and pure and squeaky clean about Disney’s intentions” (p. 114) toward young girls. After the photos, Orenstein claimed, “parents felt not only furious but betrayed” (p. 114) because Disney’s reputation has always been rooted in producing good media that is “safe” for children (Sammond 2005). However, after the Cyrus scandal,



Miley Cyrus Vanity Fair 2008  
Cover

many parents began to voice multiple concerns regarding media’s impact on young girls. By posing for these pictures did Cyrus define the standard of attractiveness for her fans? What would Cyrus do next? Would it be worse, and what message would that send to young girls? Parents began to question the overall message that Disney was actually sending to its consumers and worried over what pressures Disney shows placed on young girls to look and act in certain ways.

The parental backlash of the Vanity Fair photo indicates the importance of the message that Disney Channel shows presents to viewers. This project examined representations of the American female gender role reflected in two popular Disney Channel programs: *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*. The portrayal of each program's protagonists, Miley Stewart/Hannah Montana and Alex Russo, were examined through content analysis. The content analysis sought to better understand how the traditional American gender role for females and a "New Girl" role, representing a more liberated set of expectations that might be portrayed in these two Disney shows.

## **Literature Review**

In order to examine the representation of gender roles in contemporary Disney programs let us first consider the history of gender roles. This literature review will also examine girls and gender roles, and the relationship between gender roles and the media. In an effort to better understand the role of Disney in the lives of girls, we will consider how Disney has dominated children's media, the super-sorority of Disney Princesses and the new princesses. Finally, this section will present an alternative to the new princesses: the "New Girl."

## The History of Gender Roles

In American culture, June Cleaver is an icon synonymous with the ideal 1950's wife. Mrs. Cleaver kept a clean house and put dinner on the table. She embodied the role of a dutiful wife and super mom. Even with her time-consuming duties, Mrs. Cleaver managed to style her hair and never forget her pearls. This ideal of the June Cleaver role stems from



June Cleaver, *Leave it to Beaver*, 1957

traditional American gender roles that functioned to set up clear expectations for men and women.

As a general definition, gender roles attempt to foster “conformity to pre-established expectations” regarding family roles, classroom roles and societal roles (Douván et al. 1980). Gender roles act as a guideline for an individual to determine if she is behaving appropriately, especially within her family unit. An example can be seen in roles within the patriarchal family model, which was typically present and idealized in the United States during the 1950s (Aapola et al. 2005). In this model, women were expected to care and nurture everyone else. Women were expected to serve the men's and children's needs before their own needs.

Not only are gender roles exercised within particular family models, but many argue that family structures can also significantly foster particular gender roles. Heterosexual marriage is considered the traditional familial archetype (Reiss 1980) and scholars argue women face inequality because heterosexual marriage was originally designed to allow the man to dominate the relationship (Douván et al.

1980). For example, heterosexual marriages often involve males as the breadwinners and females as the primary caregivers. Thus the expectation is that men should control the household because they financially support the family. As a result, the female gender role has consisted of expectations of motherhood or home-making rather than career achievements (Reiss 1980). The influence of the female gender role can be seen in the significant pressure felt by full-time working mothers to be both the primary caretakers of their homes and the primary caregivers for their family (Aapola et al. 2005). Studies have even shown that young girls spend more time on housework duties than boys do (Aapola et al. 2005). This shows how the impact of societal pressure on women is present even in the lives of girls.

The feminist movement has always based its claims about women's inequality on Traditional Gender Roles. In other words, gender roles have suppressed women and detracted from their ability to achieve goals outside of these designated roles. According to the feminist movement, differences in job expectation also contribute to the argument that women and girls are often considered inferior to men and boys (Aapola et al. 2005). Society tends to expect women to be less successful or less competent in the same job as a man. Looking at the idea of sex inequality, Ira Reiss (1980) explains: "There are [several forms] of inequality...[including] the social pressures which restrict the aspirations or depress the motivation of individuals on the ascribed grounds of their membership in certain categories" (p. 548). Applying Reiss's idea of gender inequality, many women are less motivated to achieve goals in their careers because they are females attempting to fulfill the female gender role.

In addition to inequality, the feminist movement sparked many discussions about body image problems that women and girls face (Aapola et al. 2005). *Getting Under the Skin: The Body and Media Theory* examined the media's effects on the perception of the female body (Wegenstein 2006). According to Wegenstein (2006), the advancements in technology have exposed society to a new female ideal who consists of "bodily bits and pieces" which creates a thinner, sexier female (p. 120). Wegenstein's (2006) research determines women feel flawed due to the inability to match computer-generated ideals. Similarly scholar Susan Bordo (1993) asserts "social, economic and psychological factors have combined to produced a generation of women who feel deeply flawed, ashamed of their needs, and not entitled to exist." (p. 47) In this way, a woman can accept herself only if she successfully reinvents her image to match the sexy, independent women portrayed in today's popular media. However, this pursuit often ends in fad diets, low self-esteem, eating disorders, depression and even, in extreme cases, death (Covino 2004). Many women unknowingly impact younger generations of females through their tireless pursuit of physical perfection (Covino 2004). The feminist movement's efforts to raise awareness regarding the danger in the perceived body image facing females acknowledges yet another divide between men and women.

Gender inequality is still present in U.S. society despite the feminist movement's efforts to bring equality to women and girls. The societal pressures discussed earlier highlight the lack of social change even with all of the legislative changes in place to offer women the same opportunities as men in the work environment, employment opportunities, collegiate opportunities and collegiate



sports. Employers, schools and the judicial system claim to no longer discriminate against women, but many still argue that the Traditional Gender Roles are still present (Aapola et al. 2005). The impact of female gender roles may be attributed to the idea that “it is far easier to change laws which presently penalize women as workers, students, or citizens than it will be to effect social changes in family life...(p. 185)” (Reiss 1980) These inequalities facing women call into question what effects strictly defined gender roles have on girls and their development into women.

### **Girls and Gender Roles**

There are many differing opinions and schools of thought on how girls should be raised. Arguments often center on whether today's society places too much significance on unobtainable standards or if there is too much pressure to grow into a specific role as a woman. In the news article, “Teenage Girls Report Pressure to Live Up to Sexual Ideals” (2011), Alexandra Topping believes “young girls today often feel as if there is a growing checklist of ideals they have to adhere to.” This “checklist” leads to stress and anxiety to fit in and, thus, be deemed acceptable. The ever-growing checklist includes meeting strict appearance expectations of being pretty and thin, reaching goals to be popular, participating in the right club or activity and reaching goals set by parents. Similarly scholars Sinikka Aapola, Marina Gonick and Anita Harris (2005) explored the ways that girlhood is actually lived and shown in society and the media today. They found that girls today strive to fulfill their “checklist” while desperately hoping to fulfill the

standards set forth by today's society (Aapola et al. 2005). Girls are expected to grow into mothers who put their family's needs before their own needs and work to constantly look thinner and sexier. Society demands that girls fulfill not only the Traditional Gender Role discussed earlier but reach unobtainable aesthetic standards (Aapola et al. 2005).

Recently scholars including Sarah Hughes (2009) have dubbed American girls as "Super Girls" because of the significant pressure to be perfect in school, relationships, extra curricular activities and any other aspect of their lives. The intense pressure felt by girls today compounded with the pressure to fulfill Traditional Gender Roles leaves girls facing high stress levels and anxiety (Hughes 2009). The "Super Girl" pressure affects the impact of gender roles because it amplifies the inequality between males and females. Today's society demands perfection from girls, setting up a pattern in which girls are set up to fail. Girls strive toward perfection, but society constantly demands more: that she do more for her family, that she lose more weight, and so on until the girl develops an insatiable desire for perfection (Hughes 2009).

### **Gender Roles and the Media**

The presence of these "Super Girls" in today's movies, TV shows, books and websites has led many critics to blame the media for setting girls up with unrealistic expectations about what they should be aspiring to achieve in their lives (Hughes 2009). Because they serve as a resource of information and often sets the tone about

significant issues in society (Cole, Daniel 2006), the media influence and educate publics about societal expectations including expectations about gender roles.

*Miss Representation* (2011), a media campaign movement started by feminist Jennifer Newsom, gives insight to the media's negative and exploitative portrayal of women and the resulting impact seen in women and girls. The campaign includes the film, *Miss Representation*, classroom materials, a blog, a Facebook page and a Twitter campaign. The film has partnered with the Oprah Winfrey Network and has won awards at nine film festivals, including The Sundance Film Festival (Newsom 2011). *Miss Representation* points out that American teenagers consume 10 hours and 45 minutes of media each day. While this fact only addresses teens, it highlights the major presence that the media have in today's culture. This is especially problematic because girls (ages five to thirteen) tend to spend more time watching television compared to boys who spend more time engaging in sports, outdoor activities and video games (Cherney, London 2006). *Miss Representation* also argues that as a result of the violent and sexually exploitative portrayal of females, girls are less likely to place importance on success in the classroom or in their careers when compared to the importance of their physical appearance (Newsom 2011).

Psychologist and Women Studies scholar Sandra Bem (1994) asserts that society and the media highlight differences between males and females in every human experience, from clothing styles to social roles to acceptable ways to express desires. The media further the idea of socially induced pressures by constantly showing girls and women that they are different from boys and men. The constant highlighting of differences likely leads to girls feeling less capable because they are

not exposed to many successful female role models in the media. This troubling relationship between girls and the media causes concerns about popular programming including the shows produced by Disney.

### **Disney Dominates Children's Media**

To understand Disney's impact on girls and gender expectations, Disney's role in shaping the experience of children in general must first be considered. Since its creation, Disney has dominated children's media and arguably helped to set the tone for the ideal child. Neal Gabler (2006), author of *Walt Disney: the Triumph of the American Imagination*, believes Walt Disney's greatest legacy was his belief that, "you could look at the world and imply your will on it." (pg. 20) Essentially, Walt Disney thought if you believed in something you could force the world to accept it. Using this logic, *Pinocchio* (1940) enabled Walt Disney and his team to link the newly produced image of Disney as a wholesome company and their definition of a "good child" in an effort to market to the American family (Sammond 2005). Disney set out to portray a wholesome American company that fulfilled the American ideals of being morally sound, uncorrupt and most importantly, striving toward fulfilling one's dreams. Walt Disney and his team played on the public's desire for children's media to deliver a moral lesson to children. The moral lessons aimed to make a resilient child, dubbed the "manageable" child, for marketing purposes during the Depression (Sammond 2005). The mark of the "manageable" child was being quiet, respectful, humble and dutiful toward his parents. From the "manageable" child stemmed the idea of the ideal child who would be a successful, polite and desirable

representation of one's upbringing. Disney essentially put forth a child model that gauged how parents valued their own child's progress (Sammond 2005). For example, Pinocchio only became a "real boy" when he lived out the middle-class virtues of truthfulness and unselfishness and denied himself gratification for a good cause (Sammond 2005). Through this, parents were encouraged to think their children would be exceptional if they were able to exhibit similar characteristics.

### **The Super-Sorority of 10: Disney Princesses**



The Disney Princesses: (From left to right) Snow White, Pocahontas, Belle, Cinderella, Rapunzel, Tiana, Sleeping Beauty, Jasmine, Ariel and Mulan

Disney Princesses have become icons of what children should aspire to become. Similar to Pinocchio's iconic status during the Depression, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* introduced the first Disney Princess, Snow White, in 1937. Following Snow White, Cinderella (1950) and Sleeping Beauty (1959) made up the classic princesses. Thirty years later, Disney introduced the next wave of princesses including Ariel (*The Little Mermaid*, 1989), Belle (*Beauty and the Beast*, 1991), Jasmine (*Aladdin*, 1992), Pocahontas (1995) and Mulan (1998). The most recent princesses are Tiana (*The Princess and the Frog*, 2009) and Rapunzel (*Tangled*,

2011). Prior to 1999, the Princesses operated as separate successful entities. Each Princess was marketed in her own campaigns specifically promoting the corresponding movie and her specific merchandise (Orenstein 2011). In fact, Pocahontas and Mulan were often considered a different style of princess. Unlike their counterparts, they took a much more active role in their communities and in some senses could be considered warrior princesses rather than traditional princesses. In 1999, Andy Mooney, Nike executive turned Chairman of Disney Consumer Products, saw an untapped market in the princess franchise. While attending a Disney On Ice Show, Mooney recognized an opportunity to group the then eight Disney Princesses to reach young girls. Mooney believed, contrary to the Disney family's view, that grouping the princesses would have unparalleled success in the market (Orenstein 2011). After persuading the Disney family, Mooney grouped the princesses and successfully created a "super-sorority."<sup>1</sup> Since then, Disney has showcased the super-sorority in movies, books, songs, merchandise, theme parks, theatrical shows and websites (Orenstein 2011). Despite the success of the "super-sorority," one of the Disney family's original stipulations that the princesses never acknowledge each other can still be observed. Whether they appear on books or clothing or products none of the princesses are facing each other as a nod to the Disney family's view that the princesses were meant to be separate entities (Orenstein 2011).

The Princesses' impact on girls is evident in the degree of success the super-sorority has had. According to Industry Awards by the Toy Industry Association, Inc.

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that Pocahontas and Mulan are often excluded from the

some of the accomplishments of the Princesses include: five of the top six Disney Movie video releases of all time; four of the top five direct-to-video premiers of all time; the most sold girl's book; the top kid's room paint color; Walt Disney Records' "Disney Princess Collection" achieved platinum status and the Disney Princess animated films grossed \$2.6 billion in box office revenue worldwide (Toy Industry Association, Inc. 2005).

Young girls have idealized the princesses and revered them as examples of what girls should look like and how they should act. Critics such as Lydia O'Connor (2011) argue that the "Princess Effect" teaches a young girl to only do things that princesses do, such as giving up everything for their prince. The "Princess Effect" theory scares many parents concerned with unrealistic expectations for their daughters. Many argue that the impact of Disney Princesses is too prevalent for girls to escape and places undue pressure to be a modern princess.

The concern over the pressure to look beautiful, be sexy and attract men has called Disney's physical portrayal of the princesses into question. Elizabeth Bell (1995), author of *From Mouse to Mermaid*, argues that Disney contributed to the American ideal of beauty. According to Bell (1995), through the princesses, Disney has dictated what Americans should value as beautiful and what women and girls alike should strive toward. For example, when Sleeping Beauty is "dead" under the witches' spell, she still radiates beauty. Sleeping Beauty's ability to maintain her beauty even in the face of death sends a strong message to girls because it is depicted as unwavering (Bell et al. 1995). Peggy Orenstein (2011) also argues that Disney media depict undesirable behavior for young girls. Throughout *Cinderella*

*Ate My Daughter*, Orenstein questions the impact of playing princess on her daughter's development into a strong, independent and self-assured woman. Orenstein has found "ample evidence that the more mainstream media girls consume, the more importance they place on being pretty and sexy." (p. 230)

Princesses Ariel and Belle have also garnered controversy. Many critics question the message young girls receive when they watch the female heroine, Ariel, chose to give up her voice to be with her true love, Prince Eric. Psychologist Joan Gould (2006) argues that Ariel's choice to give up her voice would be non-existent if Ariel was a male protagonist. Gould (2006) claims that female protagonists often face different paths than male protagonists because society has showcased different experiences for women and men. Similarly Gould (2006) explains that Belle's role, as the protagonist in *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), is also different as a female, because she was expected to forgive the Beast without question or hesitation for not sharing his secret identity with her.

This concern about different experiences for women and men has trickled down from expert scholars, such as Bell and Gould, to regular women. Bloggers, mothers and comedians have also begun expressing their concerns about the message the Super Sorority of 10 sends young girls. For example, Stephanie Hallett (2011), a contemporary blogger on issues facing young women, points out that Ariel sacrificed her voice and thus her ability to state her opinions, concerns and general thoughts. Giving up her ability to communicate sends a message similar to the constraints of the Traditional Gender Role, because it strips a girl of her ability to communicate her opinions, desires and expectations in various situations. Similarly,



despite the Beast's second transformation into a handsome prince, Danielle Uhlarik (2011), comedian and princess critic, questions if girls learn that money and a nice home are more important qualities than being attracted to your mate, because of *Beauty and the Beast* (1991).

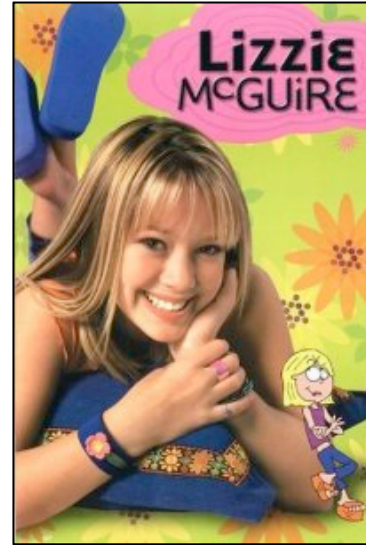
With the ever-growing prevalence of media consumption in today's society, these concerns raise a notable question: What are the Disney Princesses actually teaching young girls? And do the Disney Princess campaigns go further than girls simply playing princess and leave lasting impacts on a female's ability to reach equality with males?

### **The New Princesses: Disney Divas**

While Disney has utilized the super-sorority of princesses as role models for young girls, Disney has recently incorporated New Princesses into their company. While these princesses do not wear shiny evening gowns and tiaras, they still set standards for many girls today (Orenstein 2011). These New Princesses are found on the Disney Channel and have been dubbed the Disney Divas by many critics. The New Princesses have TV shows, movie spin-offs and music downloads to reach America's girls. Unlike their animated counterparts, the New Princesses are real girls who are more relatable to their audiences. The New Princesses are played by real girls and are no longer living in fairy tales. The real-life elements enable the audience to better associate with the New Princesses because they look like everyday viewers and are going to schools and have families that are like their viewers' schools and families.

Depicting the first New Princess, *Lizzie McGuire* premiered on the Disney Channel in January 2002.

Disney targeted young girls by setting Lizzie McGuire up as a spunky and cute middle-school girl who was facing exactly what her viewers face day in and day out (Orenstein 2011). Within a year of the show's premiere, Lizzie McGuire became a household name and led to a spin-off movie, books, a clothing line and a soundtrack. Following the *Lizzie McGuire* success,



Lizzie McGuire starring Hilary Duff  
2002

Disney created *That's So Raven*, *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place* (Orenstein 2011). Each series showcased a female lead that became the face of the show, the face on merchandise, and eventually a superstar celebrity. The New Princesses have become the trendsetters for today's girls and examples of what girls should be wearing to what they should be doing. Young girls undoubtedly emulate the behavior portrayed on the shows because, unlike their animated counterparts, the New Princesses portray real-life examples of how to act with friends and boys (Orenstein 2011). The lack of animation enables young girls to believe they can obtain a life like that of Lizzie McGuire, Raven Simon, Miley Stewart/Hannah Montana and Alex Russo. Before, regardless of their admiration, young girls could not become an actual Princess. But now there is no longer the buffer of animation standing between girls and becoming New Princesses.

### The New Girls

Outside of Disney, other entertainment and popular media showcase an updated, modern girl: the “New Girl.” What makes her distinctive is that she acts outside the traditional American gender roles and leads a liberated and independent lifestyle. Many consider these strong female characters to be women living outside the Traditional Gender Role (Aapola et al. 2005). The “New Girl” appeared on television programs and movies in the form of strong female leads who take control of their personal situation (Aapola et al. 2005). Notable examples include *iCarly*, *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, *Charlie’s Angels* and *Kim Possible*. The main female protagonist in each of these examples is empowered and demonstrates to viewers her control over the various challenges she faces. In *iCarly*, Carly produces her own show “iCarly” and is in control of the show’s content and the decisions about the show itself. Claudia Mitchell and Jacqueline Reid-Walsh (2008) argue that with the emergence of these female characters there has also been an emergence of a contemporary girl-world. While this girl-world is filled with many traditionally gendered expectations as discussed earlier, the girl-world also showcases strong, independent female characters living as “New Girls” (Mitchell 2008). For example, while the Traditional Gender Role expects that girls should place unparalleled importance on their looks and how attractive or sexy they are perceived by males, rather than accepting these expectations the “New Girls” live daily lives that focus on reaching personal goals uninhibited by gendered constraints. “New Girls” strive to reach success in the classroom, to become masters at their professions and to feel fulfilled in their personal lives.

### **This Study: A Step Further**

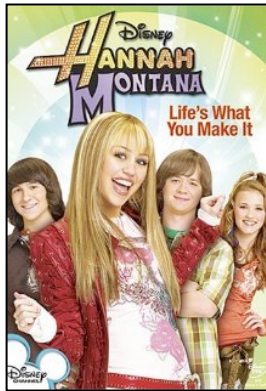
This project aims to examine Disney's New Princesses and to assess whether Miley Stewart/Hannah Montana and Alex Russo embody girls fulfilling the Traditional Gender Role or if they embody the "New Girl" role. The representation of the Traditional Gender Role will be evaluated through two categories: the Traditional Gender Role and the Suppressed New Girl, so that the protagonist will have more household duties, place more importance on male opinions, show more concern with her appearance and less motivation to reach success than her New Girl counterpart. The representation of the New Girl role will be evaluated through two categories: Modern Independent Gender Role and the New Girl, so that the protagonist will place importance on forming her own opinions and problem-solving, instead of prioritizing her personal appearance or relying on male opinions about her abilities to reach her goals.

### **Methodology**

This project involved a content analysis to assess whether the female protagonists follow a Traditional Gender Role model or a New Girl role. This project examined two Disney Channel programs, *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*. The shows were selected based on their proven success through Nielsen Ratings, the industry achievements and records each show held, the music success

of soundtracks and the celebrity achieved by the respective actresses, Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez.

To briefly summarize the premise of each show:



*Hannah Montana* 2006

- *Hannah Montana* follows a regular, preteen girl Miley Stewart who has a secret life as the pop sensation Hannah Montana. Miley has recently moved from Tennessee to Malibu. Miley lives with her father, Robbie Ray Stewart, and brother, Jackson. The only people who know about Miley's secret are Robbie Ray, Jackson, and her friends Lilly and Oliver. Throughout each show, Miley/Hannah is the protagonist of the show and often faces obstacles created by her secret double life.



*Wizards of Waverly Place*  
2007

- *Wizards of Waverly Place* follows a family who owns a sub shop on Waverly Place in Manhattan. The Russo family has three children, Justin, Alex and Max. Each of the children are in secret wizard training led by their father Jerry Russo. The show's main focus is on Alex, a teenaged girl, trying to navigate school, friends, boys and being a wizard. The Russo family must keep its magic capabilities a secret, because mortals cannot know about the magic world.

The overwhelming success of *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place* speaks volumes about their resonance with Disney Channel viewers. The Disney Channel held the award for the "Top 4 Scripted Telecasts in Total Viewers" from

2007 to 2010 (Seidman 2009). *Hannah Montana and Wizards of Waverly Place* contributed to three of the four shows claiming the title. *Hannah Montana* scored the highest ratings for a regular series in the history of basic cable in 2007 with 10.7 million viewers. *Wizards of Waverly Place the Movie* brought in a recording breaking 11.4 million viewers on August 28, 2009. A crossover event: *Wizards on Deck with Hannah Montana*, which combined three Disney shows, brought in 9.3 million viewers on July 17, 2009.

During the summer of 2009, the Disney Channel delivered “TV’s Top 6 Series” among kids, ages 6 to 11, and tweens, ages 9 to 14 (Seidman 2009). *Wizards of Waverly Place* held the first spot with 1.8 million “kid” viewers and 1.6 million “tween” viewers. *Hannah Montana* held the fifth spot with 1.5 million “kid” viewers and the third spot with 1.4 million “tween” viewers.

*Wizards of Waverly Place: The Movie* was “TV’s Number 1 Entertainment Telecast of 2009” among “kid” and “tween” viewers and “Cable’s Number 1 Telecast in Viewers of 2009.” (Seidman 2009) In 2009, *Wizards of Waverly Place* received an Emmy for “Outstanding Children’s Performance.” The following year *Wizards of Waverly Place The Movie* received the same Emmy at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Primetime Emmys.

The notable success of these two shows also extends to the music industry. *Hannah Montana: The Movie Soundtrack* reached the Billboard Top 200 Chart number one spot in March 2009 (Parker 2009). The soundtrack held the number one spot on the Billboard Top Soundtrack Chart for four consecutive weeks. The *Wizards of Waverly Place: The Soundtrack* peaked at number twenty-four on the Billboard Top 200 Chart in 2009 (Billboard.com 2009).

The record-breaking success of *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place* proves the shows' presence in today's kid and tween popular culture. The success has also made Miley Cyrus, *Hannah Montana*, and Selena Gomez, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, opinion leaders with these age groups. Critics have dubbed Cyrus and Gomez members of the modern Disney Princess Club, also known as the Disney Divas (Orenstein 2011).

For the content analysis, coding focused on the first three seasons of both shows. Research spanning three seasons eliminated patterns in coding that could be attributed to seasonal story plots or current events. Six episodes (episodes 2, 4, 6, 8, 10 and 12) were coded from each season for a total of thirty-six episodes analyzed. (See Appendix 3 for list of shows with titles.) The episodes were coded regardless of length, content or plot.

The coding sheet did not vary between shows, seasons or episodes. (See Appendix 1 for sample coding sheet.) Each notable occurrence of the gendered behavior or dialogue was placed into one of four major categories: Traditional Gender Role, Modern Independent Gender Role, New Girl and Suppressed New Girl. Traditional Gender Role and Modern Independent Gender Role were selected to evaluate occurrences of household behavior, inequality and job expectation. For example, instances in which a female main character fulfilled the household expectations of being responsible for cooking, cleaning or babysitting were coded as evidence of the Traditional Gender Role. On the other hand, instances in which a male character was the primary caregiver or when a female did not fulfill traditional household expectations were coded as an example of the Modern Independent

Gender Role. The New Girl category focused on instances in which females feel empowered and/or have control over challenges. For example, an occurrence was considered New Girl when a protagonist solved a problem or formed her own opinions about a situation. The Suppressed New Girl category focused on expectations of appearance. If a female lead expressed desire to be pretty or fit in with the popular crowd, this was considered a Suppressed New Girl occurrence. (See Appendix 2 for occurrences for each gender role.)

Each occurrence was recorded along with the time of the occurrence, how it occurred (through the plot, visually, or through conversation), who said/did it and a description of the occurrence. All coding was completed over three days and no less than four episodes were coded in one sitting. Intercoder reliability showed that there was an eighty-three percent correspondence in the findings between coders.<sup>2</sup> This high percentage indicates both the reliability of the coding scheme and the findings themselves.

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<sup>2</sup> Heather Watts, a Mass Communications Senior, performed the additional coding. She coded four episodes, two from *Hannah Montana* and two from *Wizards of Waverly Place*. The four episodes were selected randomly and came from different seasons.



## Findings

### The Big Picture

This section reports on the data found through the content analyses of thirty-six episodes of Disney programs. The section gives an overview of the numbers and kinds of occurrences found during research. From the analysis, *Hannah Montana* was found to contain sixteen occurrences representing the Traditional Gender Role and eighteen representing the Suppressed New Girl role. Both of the dominant occurrences come together to create a strong presence of the traditional American gender role discussed earlier. The analysis also shows that *Wizards of Waverly Place* contains twenty-five occurrences portraying the Traditional Gender Role, but thirty-six occurrences portraying the New Girl. The dominant occurrences in this show appear contradictory and, on the surface, do not work together to send a cohesive message.

**Table 1: Gender Role Categories Separated by Show**

	<b>Hannah Montana</b>	<b>Wizards of Waverly Place</b>
<b>Traditional Gender Role</b>	16	25
<b>Modern Independent Gender Role</b>	8	1
<b>New Girl</b>	13	36
<b>Suppressed New Girl</b>	18	10
<b>Total</b>	55	72

By solely considering the occurrences highlighted above, one would assume the program *Hannah Montana* would be more likely to promote the traditional American gender role. One can also note the significant difference between the presence of New Girl examples in *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*. *Hannah Montana* only portrayed thirteen instances representing the behavior and mentality of the New Girl while *Wizards of Waverly Place* portrayed thirty-six. This difference of twenty-three instances indicates that *Wizards of Waverly Place* promotes more problem-solving and independent thinking in its female protagonist. After considering the gender role categories according to each show, let us consider how the categories are distributed by season and show. Looking specifically at the distribution by season will determine if the occurrences point to a possible theme throughout the show as a whole.

In *Hannah Montana*, the most number of portrayals of the Traditional Gender Role take place in Season 2 (with twelve instances as compared to two in Season 1 and 3 respectively). But other gender role occurrences are almost evenly spread throughout the seasons. The spike in Season 2 is likely a result of the plot content of the episodes coded in that season. For example in Episode 6 of Season 2, “You Gotta Not Fight for Your Right to Party,” depicts Miley and her brother sharing a bathroom after their bad behavior caused the plumbing to break in their individual bathrooms. During the episode, Jackson, Miley’s brother, comments that the only reason Miley cares about keeping her bathroom clean is because she is a “woman.” Traditionally, the cleaning of bathrooms would fall into a woman’s household duties and Jackson’s expectations in this episode reinforce the Traditional Gender Role.

**Table 2: Gender Role Categories Distribution by Show and Season**

<b>Hannah Montana</b>			
	<b>Season 1</b>	<b>Season 2</b>	<b>Season 3</b>
<b>Traditional Gender Role</b>	2	12	2
<b>Modern Independent Gender Role</b>	1	4	3
<b>New Girl</b>	5	2	6
<b>Suppressed New Girl</b>	6	6	6

<b>Wizards of Waverly Place</b>			
	<b>Season 1</b>	<b>Season 2</b>	<b>Season 3</b>
<b>Traditional Gender Role</b>	14	3	8
<b>Modern Independent Gender Role</b>	1	0	0
<b>New Girl</b>	10	12	14
<b>Suppressed New Girl</b>	3	1	6

In *Wizards of Waverly Place*, it should be noted that the three seasons consistently contain equal numbers of occurrences of New Girl behavior or attributes. Alex problem solves or independently develops her opinion ten, twelve and fourteen instances, in Seasons 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The similar numbers suggests that this is an occurrence that carries over to episodes that were not analyzed as well. After looking at the distribution between shows and seasons, let

us consider more specifically which particular behaviors and attitudes were portrayed through each season.

**Table 3: Distribution of Four Gender Role Categories**

<b>Hannah Montana</b>					
		<b>Season 1</b>	<b>Season 2</b>	<b>Season 3</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Traditional Gender Role</b>	<i>Greater Presence of Female Completing Housework</i>	0	3	0	3
	<i>Inequality (Idea of Sex Inequality)</i>	2	3	1	6
	<i>Less School/Work Expectations</i>	0	6	1	7
<b>Modern Independent Gender Role</b>	<i>Less presence of Female Completing Housework</i>	1	4	3	8
	<i>Equality Between Males and Females</i>	0	0	0	0
<b>New Girl</b>	<i>Female Feeling Empowered</i>	1	0	2	3
	<i>Control Over Various Challenges</i>	3	2	5	10
<b>Suppressed New Girl</b>	<i>Great Importance on Appearance Expectations</i>	6	6	6	18

Wizards of Waverly Place					
		Season 1	Season 2	Season 3	Total
<b>Traditional Gender Role</b>	<i>Greater Presence of Female Completing Housework</i>	3	1	1	5
	<i>Inequality (Idea of Sex Inequality)</i>	8	3	5	16
	<i>Less School/Work Expectations</i>	3	0	1	4
<b>Modern Independent Gender Role</b>	<i>Less presence of Female Completing Housework</i>	0	0	0	0
	<i>Equality Between Males and Females</i>	1	0	0	1
<b>New Girl</b>	<i>Female Feeling Empowered</i>	1	2	4	7
	<i>Control Over Various Challenges</i>	9	10	10	29
<b>Suppressed New Girl</b>	<i>Great Importance on Appearance Expectations</i>	3	1	6	10

*Hannah Montana* portrayed many occurrences reflecting the Traditional Gender Role involving Miley/Hannah facing responsibility around the house, but facing less accountability to achieve success at school. Portrayals of the Suppressed New Girl also appeared through expectations in appearance. Miley had the greatest number of occurrences placing importance on her appearance. The appearance expectations found Miley worrying about her appearance and/or worrying if she was pretty eighteen times. In Season 1 Episode 8: "Mascot Love," Miley strives to be a pretty cheerleader. Throughout the episode, Miley comments that she is upset because she is not a cheerleader and that she was instead chosen to be the mascot.

Throughout the episode, an emphasis is placed on the cheerleaders' high social status and the low social status of the mascot. "Mascot Love" portrays a cheerleader as an ideal female who should be revered and emulated. The portrayal leads Miley to feel pressure to live up to expectations of the girls who did make the cheerleading squad.

As we saw earlier, *Wizards of Waverly Place*, on the other hand, has the greatest presence of New Girl and Traditional Gender Roles. This at first looks contradictory because *Wizards of Waverly Place* portrayed sixteen occurrences in which Alex was told she was incompetent or ill equipped to handle a situation. However, the program also showcased Alex's control over various challenges twenty-nine times. Alex asserted control through problem-solving and developing her own opinions about situations. Alex's problem-solving often centers on friends and family, but she also fixes problems she initially created by improperly using magic. The study tracked nine times in which Alex was forced to solve a problem her magic spells had created. For instance, Alex botched an animation spell and then came up with a duct tape finish line to catch the newly mobile trophy man. Alex, also, fixes her friendship with Harper in two separate episodes<sup>3</sup> and helps Justin with girlfriend trouble in another two episodes.<sup>4</sup>

In an effort to better understand the portrayal of traditional and New Girl roles in *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*, let us take an in-depth look and compare an episode from each show.

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<sup>3</sup> *Wizards of Waverly Place* Season 1 Episode 4 and Season 2 Episode 8

<sup>4</sup> *Wizards of Waverly Place* Season 1 Episode 2 and Season 3 Episode 11

**An In-depth Analysis:  
A Comparison of *Hannah Montana*'s "Get Down, Study-udy-udy" and  
*Wizards of Waverly Place*'s "Justin's Little Sister"**

The following comparison of two episodes will highlight how the representation of the Traditional Gender Role in *Hannah Montana* differs from the representation of the New Girl role in *Wizards of Waverly Place*. In Season 2, the fourth episode "Get Down, Study-udy-udy" showcases the presence and representation of the Traditional Gender Role and gives a detailed look at the gender inequality shown throughout *Hannah Montana*. Miley receives a subpar mid-term grade in Biology. As a result Miley's Dad, Robby Rae, tells Miley that if she is unable to raise her grade, he will cancel Hannah Montana's European tour. Miley consults with her father, her brother and her friends to help her come up with a plan to raise her grade. After taking their advice, Miley seeks help from her brother's boss, Ricco. Ricco is the class genius and is in class with Miley even though he is younger than the rest of the class.

There were five occurrences of the Traditional Gender Role throughout this episode. One occurrence highlighted inequality in the Traditional Gender Role and four showcased the differences in job expectation. The occurrence where a female character faced different scholastic expectations took place because a male character expressed Miley was too incompetent to raise her grade. During a conversation Ricco tells Miley that it is okay that she does not understand biology, because "she can always marry well." The four differences in job expectation occurred because Miley faced less demands and expectations for success at school. For example, through a conversation, Ricco tells Miley and her friend, Lilly, that it is

a good thing they are pretty after the girls misspoke. Ricco also calls Miley a “bubble brain” and tells her that she is “hopeless” in Biology.

Looking specifically at the references made by Ricco, inequality between males and females is highlighted. While Ricco is often used as comic relief throughout the show, in both instances Ricco speaks sincerely and seriously. Miley and Lilly laugh in response to the comment insinuating that they are dumb. The idea that Miley and Lilly laugh along in acceptance of Ricco’s comments with a laugh track on the show, could possibly lead young girls to believe that they should laugh in similar situations, thus accepting that they are less competent or unequal to boys/men.

To understand the differences between the shows we will now consider an episode of *Wizards of Waverly Place*. *Wizards of Waverly Place* also often portrays instances of the Traditional Gender Role, but unlike Miley, Alex Russo moves past these comments to form her own opinions and take control of the situation.

In Season 1, the twelfth episode “Justin’s Little Sister” highlights examples in which her brother, Justin, informs Alex that she is an inferior student and wizard. But Alex manages to continue believing in her abilities. The episode begins with wizard training in which Alex’s father, Jerry, introduces Genies and the Russos meet a Genie in her bottle. Alex decides that she will utilize the wishes from the Genie despite her father’s warnings about the tricky nature of Genies. Alex tries to wish to live outside of Justin’s shadow, but this makes Justin invisible to everyone but Alex. Justin blames Alex, and Alex assures Justin she will fix the situation. Despite Justin’s



disbelief, Alex tries numerous spells. Alex eventually solves the problem and restores Justin's old life.

Three times during this episode, Justin expresses that Alex is inexperienced and ill-equipped to handle the Genie and the mess Alex's wish created. Justin even complains that Alex "ruined his life" by being selfish and ignoring Jerry's warning to not use the Genie. Despite Justin's lack of encouragement, Alex still works toward fixing the situation. Alex's dedication to fixing the problem portrayed an example of a New Girl solving problems and forming her own opinions about a situation. Alex's perseverance reinforces the idea that girls are capable and should work toward goals regardless of the expectation that women will be less successful than men.

## **Conclusion**

The findings from the content analysis highlight that *Hannah Montana* portrays Miley/Hannah more often as fitting the Traditional Gender Role, but *Wizards of Waverly Place* portrays more instances of New Girl behaviors and mentalities. As a result, Miley/Hannah models to her female viewers the desire to place importance on male opinions and her appearance. She also shows less motivation to reach her own personal goals. In contrast, Alex models to her female viewers the capability to problem-solve and develop her own opinions in order to reach her personally developed goals.

As seen in the earlier examples, when Ricco points out Miley's lack of success in Biology, Miley just laughs it off and accepts Ricco's statement as something out of her control. Miley's response to Ricco's comments sends a message to girls that they

should also laugh and accept that boys are correct when saying they are not smart enough. Another message is sent to girls through Miley's emphasis on being a cheerleader and desiring such a status. This desire potentially sends a message to female viewers that they should also value being a cheerleader, thus enforcing that status and popularity hold high importance.

On the other hand, in *Wizards of Waverly Place*, while Alex is often told that she cannot do something or that she is incompetent and will be unable to fix a problem, her problem-solving capability and development of her own opinions sends a strong message to girl viewers that they should persevere to handle situations and not question their ability to do so. The presence of the Traditional Gender Role coupled with the presence of the New Girl shows the importance of perseverance in *Wizards of Waverly Place*. Alex is often told she cannot accomplish something, but Alex tends to move past this and strives to reach her goals. In contrast, *Hannah Montana* does not portray the same perseverance. Miley often becomes discouraged after being told she is unable to accomplish her goal. In addition, as discussed earlier, Miley also tends to turn to her dad, her brother and her friends to solve her problems. As a result, I argue *Hannah Montana* female viewers are more likely to place importance on appearance and their ability to fulfill the Traditional Gender Role. However, *Wizards of Waverly Place* female viewers are more likely to place more importance on developing their own opinions and creating solutions for their problems. After completing the project, I would have liked to code over every season from each show to continue to track the possibility

for progression of gender portrayals in *Hannah Montana* and the continued progression in *Wizards of Waverly Place*.

Considering both *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*, I believe that Disney's New Princesses send a conflicting message to female viewers. This study shows that Disney does portray the New Girl behaviors and mentality, but the shows are more likely to contain the expectations and constraints of a Traditional Gender Role. *Wizards of Waverly Place* showcases the importance of problem-solving and working through situations, but the same protagonist modeling these behaviors is often told she is incapable or ill-equipped to be successful. In this way, it often seems that Disney sends female viewers the message that they are capable of becoming a pop-star or a successful wizard, if and only if, they have the help and support of males. In both *Hannah Montana* and *Wizards of Waverly Place*, Miley/Hannah and Alex rely heavily on the male leadership of their fathers, because Robbie Ray is Miley/Hannah's manager and Jerry is Alex's wizard trainer. In these two examples, Disney continues to model ideal behavior for children as it did through *Pinocchio*. Unlike the Super-Sorority that sends a cohesive message to female viewers, Disney's New Princesses send a conflicting message. As a result, female viewers are encouraged to emulate behaviors and attitudes from both the Traditional Gender Role and the New Girl role. Disney essentially sends the message that girls are capable of a New Girl type of success in their lives only if they are rooted in the Traditional Gender Role.

Disney may choose to send conflicting messages as a means to appeal to more viewers and inevitably increase revenue. The presence of both the Traditional

Gender Role and the New Girl role enables the shows' protagonists to maintain critical ambiguity, essentially appealing to female viewers connecting with both the traditional and modernized components of the character. It is my assertion that Disney intentionally allows characters such as Alex Russo to be New Girl rooted in a Traditional Gender Role model, to resonate with a larger audience as a means to increase revenue.

## Appendix 1: Sample Coding Sheet

Type	Subheading	Code	When? (Time of Occurrence)	How is it Presented? (V, P, C)	Who Does It?	Explanation of Situation/Event:
<b>Traditional Gender Role</b>	<i>Household behavior</i>	Female main character babysitting/cleaning/cooking				
<b>Traditional Gender Role</b>	<i>Inequality (idea of sex equality)</i>	Female main character seeking permission from a male character				
		Male character expressing that a female character is too weak, inexperienced or incompetent to do something				
		Female character determining she is not worthy of affection from a male character				
<b>Traditional Gender Role</b>	<i>Job expectation (work, school)</i>	Female characters facing less demands at school or work				
<b>Modern Independent Gender Role</b>	<i>Household behavior</i>	Female character having dinner prepared/being served dinner by a male character				
		Male character being the primary caregiver				
<b>Modern Independent Gender Role</b>	<i>Inequality (idea of sex equality)</i>	Female main character asking a female for permission but not consulting a male				

<b>New Girl</b>	<i>Female feeling empowered</i>	Female main character expressing value should be placed on other qualities than looks				
		Female main character expressing desire to do something regardless of what others think				
<b>New Girl</b>	<i>Control over various challenges</i>	Female main character problem-solving/ forming her own opinions about a situation				
<b>Suppressed New Girl</b>	<i>Appearance expectations</i>	Female main character comparing herself physically to another female				
		Female main character expressing desire to be pretty				
		Female main character expressing desire to be a princess				
		Female main character expressing desire to "fit in" with "popular" crowd				
<b>Episode Information:</b>						
<b>Series</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Season</b>	<b>Episode</b>	<b>Plot</b>	<b>Memorable Quotes</b>	

## Appendix 2: Coding Sheet Categories

Type	Subheading	Code
Traditional Gender Role	Household behavior	Female main character babysitting/cleaning/cooking
Traditional Gender Role	Inequality (idea of sex equality)	Female main character seeking permission from a male character
		Male character expressing that a female character is too weak, inexperienced or incompetent to do something
		Female character determining she is not worthy of affection from a male character
Traditional Gender Role	Job expectation (work, school)	Female characters facing less demands at school or work
Modern Independent Gender Role	Household behavior	Female character having dinner prepared/being served dinner by a male character
		Male character being the primary caregiver
Modern Independent Gender Role	Inequality (idea of sex equality)	Female main character asking a female for permission but not consulting a male
New Girl	Female feeling empowered	Female main character expressing value should be placed on other qualities than looks
		Female main character expressing desire to do something regardless of what others think

New Girl	Control over various challenges	Female main character problem-solving/ forming her own opinions about a situation
Suppressed New Girl	Appearance expectations	Female main character comparing herself physically to another female
		Female main character expressing desire to be pretty
		Female main character expressing desire to be a princess
		Female main character expressing desire to "fit in" with "popular" crowd



## Appendix 3: Show List

### ***Hannah Montana***

#### Season 1:

Episode 2: Miley, Get Your Gum  
 Episode 4: I Can't Make You Love Hannah If You Don't  
 Episode 6: Grandma Don't Let Your Babies Grow Up To Play Favorites  
 Episode 8: Mascot Love  
 Episode 10: O Say, Can You Remember the Words?  
 Episode 12: On the Road Again

#### Season 2:

Episode 2: Cuffs Will Keep Us Together  
 Episode 4: Get Down, Study-udy-udy  
 Episode 6: You Gotta Not Fight for Your Right to Party  
 Episode 8: Take This Job and Love It  
 Episode 10: Achy Jakey Heart: Part 2  
 Episode 12: When You Wish You Were the Star

#### Season 3:

Episode 2: Ready, Set, Don't Drive  
 Episode 4: You Never Give Me My Money  
 Episode 6: Would I Lie to You, Lilly  
 Episode 8: Welcome to the Bungle  
 Episode 10: Cheat It  
 Episode 12: You Give Lunch a Bad Name

### ***Wizards of Waverly Place***

#### Season 1:

Episode 2: First Kiss  
 Episode 4: New Employee  
 Episode 6: You Can't Always Get What You Carpet  
 Episode 8: Curb Your Dragon  
 Episode 10: Pop Me and We Both Go Down  
 Episode 12: Justin's Little Sister

#### Season 2:

Episode 2: Beware Wolf  
 Episode 4: Racing  
 Episode 6: Saving Wiz Tech: Part 1  
 Episode 8: Harper Knows  
 Episode 10: Baby Cupid  
 Episode 12: Fairy Tale

#### Season 3:

Episode 2: Halloween  
 Episode 4: Three Monsters  
 Episode 6: Doll House  
 Episode 8: Alex Charms a Boy  
 Episode 10: Positive Alex  
 Episode 12: Dude Looks Like Shakira

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