The Internet Marketing of Disney Theme Parks: An Analysis of Gender and Race

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the portrayal of gender and race in the images on the official Disney websites used to market five theme parks: the Disneyland Parks in California, Paris, Tokyo, and Hong Kong, and the Magic Kingdom in Florida. This is important because of the growth of e-commerce, Disney’s global influence, and the potential impact on those who view the images. The 452 images that had Disney human characters, human-like characters, animals, cast members, or guests were coded for gender. The main gender hypothesis, that the percentage of male-dominated images would exceed the percentage of female-dominated images, was tested using gender disparity values, which measured the gap between the percentage of male-dominated and female-dominated images. The hypothesis tended to be supported overall, and for most of the resorts (e.g., Florida), lands (e.g., Adventureland), and activities (attractions, entertainment, dining) for human characters, human-like characters, animals, and cast members, but not for guests. Furthermore, the hypotheses that gender disparity values would be highest for images of animals and lowest for images of guests was supported for all five resorts, six of eight lands, and all three activities. Additional analysis also revealed the preponderance of same-sex pairings in parent–child combinations in the images. With regard to race, while the images of some theme parks displayed more racial diversity among their guests than others, in some images, individuals of different races were shown interacting whereas in others they were not. Explanations for these findings and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords

Disney, gender, race, theme park, Internet marketing

“I’m going to Disney World!” Over the past 25 years, a variety of American athletes and celebrities have given this response when asked, “What’s next?” shortly after their championship games or award-winning performances. Of course, this advertising campaign was designed to encourage children and families to take the quintessential family vacation to one of the Disney resorts. For years, Disney has promoted such visits through television advertisements as well as with travel packets full of colorful brochures mailed directly to prospective vacationers or provided to them by travel agents. These travel packets included pictures, but as a result of the expansion and accessibility of the Internet, The Walt Disney Company has increasingly turned to marketing these vacation locations by developing an elaborate web presence. The five Disney resort websites have the potential to reach many more prospective visitors than the travel packets of the past, and these websites provide hundreds of images of the theme parks in California, Florida, Paris, Hong Kong, and Tokyo (The Walt Disney Company, 2010b).

While previous studies of the Disney’s portrayal of gender and race have predominantly focused on film, and content analyses of the gender and race of characters associated with children’s products have tended to focus on children’s books, the purpose of this research was to examine and compare how gender and race were portrayed in the still images of the attractions, entertainment, and dining establishments on the official Disney websites devoted to the most recognizable theme parks within each of Disney’s five resorts, namely, the Disneyland Parks in California, Paris, Tokyo, and Hong Kong, and their equivalent in Florida, the Magic Kingdom.

This study makes a number of contributions to the existing scholarly literature. First, this research analyzes images used by The Walt Disney Company, a company with a powerful influence on consumer culture that Giroux (1997) described as penetrating “every aspect of social life” (p. 54) and Schor (2004) described as an “architect of consumer culture” (p. 9). Bryman (1999) perceived the influence of Disney to be so wide-reaching that he coined the term Disneyization to describe the ways in which Disney principles continue to infiltrate an increasing number of aspects of
society, and Faherty (2001) used Disneyfication to refer to this same phenomenon. This very successful, multinational corporation reported total revenues of 40.9 billion dollars for 2011 of which 11.8 billion came from its resorts (The Walt Disney Company, 2011). Thus, it is important to study images about these resorts put forth by a company with such a wide-reaching impact (Faherty, 2001) and influence on consumer culture.

Second, the Internet is a relatively recent form of consumer marketing that is skyrocketing in popularity (Pew Research Center, 2010). Consequently, it is useful to examine the extent to which the results of this study of images associated with e-commerce replicate the findings regarding past studies of Disney regarding gender (Bell, Haas, & Sells, 1995; Davis 2006; Do Rozario, 2004; England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011; Faherty, 2001; Giroux 1997; Wiersma, 2000) and race (Faherty, 2001; Giroux, 1997; Hurley, 2005; Mo & Shen, 2000; Pewewardy, 1996; Pinsky, 2004; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2004) as well as the findings of studies of children’s literature regarding gender (Hamilton, Anderson, Broadus, & Young, 2006; Cortese & Demarest, 1993; McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido, & Tope, 2011; Oskamp, Kaufman, & Wolterbeek, 1996; Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada, & Ross, 1972) and race (The Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2007; Larrick, 1965; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Pescosolido, Grauerholz, & Milkie, 1997).

Third, while most studies of various aspects of Disney have been historical, narrative, or used qualitative data, Faherty (2001) suggested that quantitative studies of various aspects of Disney would be a welcome addition to these already existing predominantly qualitative studies. While researchers have made many useful contributions to the literature with these qualitative works, quantitative works would provide needed breadth. Consequently, our quantitative study helps fill this gap.

Finally, it is important to study the images on the websites of the five Disney theme parks because they are both a set of images and a venue that have been previously overlooked by researchers studying Disney or more generally the marketing of popular culture through this form of media. The portrayal of gender and race in the images not only reflects the decisions of marketing executives, but these images may also shape individuals’ perceptions of gender and race regardless of whether they reflect the reality of the demographics of the population or not.

**Literature Review**

Although much of childhood socialization occurs as the result of interaction with other people, media viewed by individuals also shapes their perceptions of the world around them (Bandura, 2001; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). Children learn about the social construction of reality from many sources, including images that appear in books as well as those on television and movie screens, video game screens, and computer screens. Yet, such images may not reflect the reality of the distribution of individuals by sex or race (Rudy, Popova, & Linz, 2010). These images may then affect how individuals think about themselves and also shape their beliefs about and attitudes toward those of a variety of categories of individuals, including those of other races (Cortese, 2008; Holtzman, 2000; Kern-Foxworth, 1994; Mendoza & Reese, 2001). Regardless of the impact of such images on their viewers, both gender (Holtzman, 2000) and racial representations in the images are “reflections of contemporary social relations and power structure” (Cortese, 2008, p. 91). Giroux (1997) further believed that “[D]isney] films appear to inspire at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles, values, and ideals as do the more traditional sites of learning” (p. 53). As a result of the potential impact of various forms of media, Rudy et al. (2010) suggested that the goals for conducting a content analysis can include examining the extent to which the media accurately presents reality as well as the impact that producers have on the content of their media. This provides further support for our study of the portrayal of gender and race in the images associated with the marketing of Disney theme parks.

**Portrayal of Gender**

Researchers have studied the representation of males and females in a wide variety of venues, including those venues that include children as their audience. One of the most well-known early studies is that of Weitzman et al. (1972) in which they analyzed books written for children. They concluded that, “Most children’s books are about boys, men, and male animals” (p. 1128). When they looked at 284 illustrations, they found a ratio of 11:1 for pictures of males compared with females and a ratio of 95:1 for the ratio of male animals to female animals. In the 1990s, Cortese and Demarest (1993) used 150 more recent picture books and found there were still significantly fewer female characters than male characters though the percentage of female characters had increased over time. Again, the ratio of male animal characters to female animal characters was more unbalanced than that of human characters. Oskamp et al. (1996) looked at preschool picture books published somewhat later and found that 43.7% of human characters were female, the most balanced yet. However, 84% of personified animals were male and 16% were female. The findings of Hamilton et al. (2006) again showed the predominance of male over females in pictures as well as among title characters, main characters, and overall characters in 200 popular children’s picture books. The most recent and most comprehensive study of 20th-century children’s books examined the gender ratio of male and female central characters and the titles of 5,618 children’s books (McCabe et al., 2011). Similar to earlier studies, males were more likely than females to be included in the titles of these books, boys
appeared more often than girls as central characters, and the disparities were even greater for the presence of male and female animals as central characters. Although the gender disparity persisted in every subgroup of books, there was some variation in the degree of disparity by historical period and book series (e.g., Golden books, Caldecott Award winners). Using Tuchman’s (1978) notion of “symbolic annihilation,” McCabe et al. (2011) suggested that the underrepresentation of female human and animal characters reflects society’s underlying gender inequalities.

A recent analysis of another source of images, cereal boxes, revealed that 72% of characters pictured were male while only 28% were female (Black, Marola, Littman, Chrisler, & Neace, 2009). And as before, the gender difference was more exaggerated among images of animals, of which 90% were male and 10% were female (Black et al., 2009). Most recently, a study of coloring books displayed patterns similar to these other forms of media with regard to animals: 82% of the animals depicted in the color books were male and 18% were female (Fitzpatrick & McPherson, 2010). However, of characters that were human, 70% were female and 30% were male, which was different from some of the findings of studies described above.

These general patterns were also born out by specific studies of media, mostly films, produced by Disney. For example, Hoerner’s (1996) calculations of the demographics of Disney’s animated films led her to describe them as “a world dominated by both human and animal male characters” (p. 219). Faherty’s (2001) quantitative study of 19 Disney films revealed that there were more than twice as many male characters as female characters. Davis (2006) was somewhat more circumspect, acknowledging that the narrowly defined gender roles portrayed in the films were likely to reflect the historical context and era in which they were produced. Do Rozario (2004) further suggested that the princesses of the early animated films were then carried over into the Magic Kingdom and “perpetuate a timelessness detached from social progress” (p. 36), though she acknowledged that the princess characters in some later films, including The Little Mermaid, Aladdin, and Pocahontas, take on a larger role in making their own choices. Nevertheless, Giroux’s (1997) analysis indicated that even in films released in 1980s and 1990s, the portrayal of female characters was quite traditional, though Pinsky (2004) described more recent films as having a “growing assertiveness with which they [Disney films] portray girls and young women” (p. 264). Towbin et al. (2004) similarly found that while some films portrayed men and women in narrowly defined roles, other more recent films included courageous female characters and emotionally sensitive male characters though many contained contradictory messages about the value of such traits. Gillam and Wooden (2008) have also pointed to the more nurturing and caring “new man” unveiled in recent Disney/Pixar films.

Nevertheless, Wiersma’s (2000) comprehensive, longitudinal study of Disney’s animated films revealed patterns previously found in children’s books and other venues, namely that males continue to outnumber females. Here, using calculations based on her raw data, we found that among the 282 human and animal characters in 16 films, 71% were male and 29% were female, and in only one film did females outnumber males. In addition, most of the films displayed narrowly defined gender roles with regard to physical appearance, activities, power, personality traits, and sexuality (Wiersma, 2000).

In short, female human characters tended to be underrepresented relative to male human characters, and this was even more exaggerated among male and female animal characters. For the most part, these patterns were not only evident in children’s literature, coloring books, and on cereal boxes, but also in Disney’s animated films.

Portrayal of Race

Similar to the studies of the portrayal of gender, a number of studies have evaluated the portrayal of race using samples of children’s books. Larrick’s (1965) study of more than 5,000 children’s books from the early 1960s showed that less than 1% made any reference to contemporary African Americans, drawing attention to the invisibility of people of color in children’s books. Pescosolido et al. (1997) also analyzed children’s books and found that the extent to which Blacks were included in children’s books varied by the extent of racial strife in wider society. More specifically, Blacks were the least visible during times of racial conflict and challenge. Despite these shifts over time, plotlines and pictures rarely displayed interracial relationships, including childhood and adult friendships, and those that existed were not usually central to the plotline. Moreover, Whites and Blacks did not typically appear on the same page, and even when they did, they did not usually “interact in intimate egalitarian ways” (Pescosolido et al., 1997, p. 460).

The Cooperative Children’s Book Center (2007) of the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin–Madison has been collecting data about “trade books typically available for sale to public schools and public libraries.” Even based on the approximately 3,000 books they received in 2007, less than 5% were about African/African Americans and 2% were about Latinos. Asians were found in another 2% of books, and American Indians were found in less than 1% of the books. Other researchers have also pointed to the invisibility of people of color in picture books (Mendoza & Reese, 2001) as well as in the entertainment media more generally (Holtzman, 2000). Cortese (2008) reported that only 3% of people in national advertisements as late as 1990 were Black; however, he also noted that more recently, multicultural advertisements have become increasingly popular as companies try to be sensitive to people of all races and ethnicities in
the global village and want to create markets for their products among these many groups.

With regard to portrayal of people of various races by Disney, Giroux (1997), in his review of Disney films, found that the early films, in particular, presented denigrating images of people of color. In the narratives, Hurley (2005) further noted the absence of people of color, particularly among the Disney princesses. Using the raw data provided by Faherty’s (2001) quantitative study of 19 Disney films, we found that of the 195 characters that he coded by race, 81.5% of the characters were of European or European American descent, while characters coded as African American, American Indian, Arabic, Asian, or Hispanic together comprised only 18.5% of the characters. Others have observed that in many films, marginalized groups were portrayed negatively, stereotypically, or often not at all (Bell et al., 1995; Mo & Shen, 2000; Pewewardy, 1996; Pinsky, 2004; Towbin et al., 2004), though Pinsky (2004) acknowledged that some of the portrayals merely reflected the historical context in which the story was created. Similar to Pescosolido et al.’s (1997) findings about books, Towbin et al. (2004) found Disney films tended to display friendships between characters who were similar; this suggests that friendships between those of different races might not fit Disney’s portrayal. Cortese (2008) further believed that limiting images of interethnic contact creates even more social distance between majority and minority groups. Finally, Pescosolido et al. (1997) suggested that the notion of symbolic annihilation that Tuchman (1978) applied to gender can be extended to race; here, the invisibility of people of color in images symbolically reflects racial inequality.

Compared with females, people of color have been much less visible in many forms of media, including Disney narratives and films, though both females and people of color have been portrayed in stereotypical and often denigrating ways. However, unlike the female characters in Disney stories who were often intimately involved with males as family members, friends, and romantic partners, Whites and people of color were not often shown engaged with one another in these types of intimate relationships.

The Walt Disney Company

In 1923, Walt Disney and his brother Roy founded the Disney Brothers Studio for the purpose of producing and distributing cartoons and releasing the “Alice Comedies” (Davis, 2006, p. 73). In 1928, Mickey Mouse made his public debut in a short film, “Plane Crazy” (Davis, 2006, pp. 26-27). By 1955, Disneyland, the first of five Disney resorts, opened in Anaheim, California, followed by the opening of the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, in 1971. Tokyo Disney Resort opened in 1983, and Disneyland Paris, formerly Euro Disney, opened in 1992 (Marling, 1997). Hong Kong Disneyland opened in 2005, 50 years after the opening of the first resort. Throughout the rest of this article, rather than use the full names of each resort, the two resorts in the United States will be referred to by the state in which they are located, namely, California and Florida, and the remaining three resorts will be referred to by city, namely, Tokyo, Paris, and Hong Kong.

While some authors have written about the planning, design, and architecture of the resorts (Marling, 1997), others have focused more on the biography of Walt Disney and how that was intertwined with the business of Disney (Watts, 1997). Most authors have written using their academic expertise, but others have brought their own perspective as a Disney employee (Lainsbury, 2000) to their work. Regardless of these authors’ perspectives, all of them acknowledge the powerful influence of The Walt Disney Company on consumer culture. In addition to the Disney resorts, the company has infiltrated many different kinds of markets with Walt Disney Studios, Disney Channels, ABC Television Network, ESPN, and Disney Consumer Products, including toys, apparel, home décor, electronics, food, books, and magazines (The Walt Disney Company, 2010a). Giroux (1997) explained that children, in particular, “experience Disney’s cultural influence through a maze of representations and products” (p. 54). According to Davis (2006), “Disney became an inseparable aspect of American popular culture . . . an integral part of the American social fabric” (p. 222). If Disney films are “vehicles of cultural production” (Bell et al., 1995, p. 7), then the resorts so tightly associated with such films can certainly be thought of in the same vein.

Hypotheses

For several decades, social scientists have been studying the portrayal of gender and race in a variety of forms of media for children, including media produced by Disney. This study examines the following categories: (a) Disney human characters, (b) Disney human-like characters, (c) Disney animal characters, (d) Disney cast members, and (e) guests at the Disney resorts. For our purposes, Disney human characters included Aladdin, Belle, Prince Charming, Snow White, and many others; some were actual people dressed in costume, while others were animatrons of human characters or life-size two-dimensional cutouts. Human-like characters included C-3PO from Star Wars, Woody from Toy Story, and the talking playing cards from Alice in Wonderland. These appeared human-like in that they typically had a face, arms, and legs, but their characters in a Disney film did not have flesh but were made, for example, of plastic, wood, or metal, or they appeared only in a cartoon-like form. Animal characters were those that were fully animals, such as Mickey Mouse, Minnie Mouse, and Donald Duck, even if they were clothed. Although Disney uses the term cast member to refer to all employees, we used cast member to refer only to Disney employees who were not a specific character as defined above. This would include, for example, waitresses, ride operators, and dancers in shows. Finally, guests, a
Disney term, was used to refer to those who are visitors at a Disney resort.

Much of our study focused on the gender of those in the images on the five Disney websites used to market the theme parks in California, Florida, Hong Kong, Paris, and Tokyo (The Walt Disney Company, 2010b) and the extent to which they would replicate the findings of previous studies, including those of children’s literature and Disney films. Previous studies indicated that there were more male than female characters in a variety of forms of children’s literature and Disney films. Previous studies indicated that there were more male than female characters in a variety of forms of children’s literature (Hamilton et al., 2006; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; McCabe et al., 2011; Oskamp et al., 1996; Weitzman et al., 1972) as well as in the images on cereal boxes (Black et al., 2009) and in coloring books (Fitzpatrick & McPherson, 2010). Some studies of Disney animated films revealed this same pattern (Davis, 2006; Faherty, 2001; Giroux, 1997; Hoerrner, 1996; Wiersma 2000). In many of these studies, the disparity between males and females was even greater for animal characters (Black et al., 2009; Fitzpatrick & McPherson, 2010; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; McCabe et al., 2011; Oskamp et al., 1996; Weitzman et al., 1972).

Although the findings of previous studies suggest hypotheses with regard to Disney characters and cast members, none of these studies examined images of guests at Disney resorts. Davis (2006) acknowledged that images of males and females portrayed in films likely reflected the historical era in which they were produced. As seen above, the images of males have exceeded the images of females in a variety of venues, but Disney marketing executives would not be tied to past characters or films in their choice of the gender of guests in the images. However, because boys tend to avoid that which appears feminine, Schor (2004) suggested that males must be pervasive in advertisements for items for boys, while girls are more likely to cross gender lines. Similarly, Auster and Mansbach (2012) found that the Disney toys marketed to both boys and girls, rather than to boys only or girls only, resembled toys for boys rather than toys for girls in terms of their color. Thus, one might surmise that even though Disney wants males and females to visit Disney resorts, images of males would exceed images of females.

Although past studies would generally suggest that there would be more images of male guests than female guests, marketing executives could have selected images of guests that reflect somewhat more gender parity.

To be able to compare the direction and degree of disparity across a variety of categories, we used gender disparity values, calculated by subtracting the percentage of female-dominated images from the percentage of male-dominated images for each category. A positive value indicated that the percentage of male-dominated images exceeded the percentage of female-dominated images, a negative value indicated that the percentage of female-dominated images exceeded the number of male-dominated images, and a zero indicated that the percentage of male-dominated images and the percentage of female-dominated images were equal.

As a result of the findings of past studies, we developed the following hypotheses regarding gender:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Overall, there will be more male-dominated images than females-dominated images for each of the following categories: human characters, human-like characters, cast members, animals, and guests. Consequently, the gender disparity values will be positive for all five of these categories.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Overall, the gender disparity value will be highest for animals.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Overall, the gender disparity value will be lowest for guests.

**Hypothesis 4 (H4):** For each of the a) resorts (California, Florida, Hong Kong, Paris, Tokyo), b) lands (e.g., Fantasylnd, Adventureland), and c) activities (attractions, entertainment, dining), there will be more male-dominated images than female-dominated images for each of the following categories: human characters, human-like characters, cast members, animals, and guests. Consequently, the gender disparity values will be positive for all of these categories.

**Hypothesis 5 (H5):** For each of the a) resorts, b) lands, and c) activities, the gender disparity values will be highest for animals.

**Hypothesis 6 (H6):** For each of the a) resorts, b) lands, and c) activities, the gender disparity values will be lowest for guests.

**Hypothesis 7 (H7):** Among guests, parent-child combinations will be more likely to be of the same sex than of the opposite sex. That is, fathers will be more likely to be pictured with sons than daughters, and mothers will be more likely to be pictured with daughters than sons.

We also focused on the race of those portrayed in the images. Past research pointed to the relative invisibility of people of color in American children’s books (The Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2007; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Pescosolido et al., 1997), and in Disney films, people of color were portrayed negatively, stereotypically, or not at all (Bell et al., 1995; Faherty, 2001; Hurley, 2005; Mo & Shen, 2000; Pewewardy, 1996; Pinsky, 2004; Towbin et al., 2004). These findings about characters in American children’s books and Disney films suggest that the number of White guests displayed in the images would exceed the number of people of color displayed in the images, even beyond the proportion of people of color in the population. Although this seemed a reasonable prediction for the California, Florida, and Paris resorts, it seemed to be an illogical prediction for the Hong Kong and Tokyo resorts because their populations are largely Asian, and Disney needs to be sure to market its resorts to potential visitors in the country in which the resort is located.
Hypothesis 8 (H8): Although the racial diversity of guests will vary by resort and reflect the existence of diverse racial groups in that country’s population, the dominant racial group in the country of the location of the resort will be most frequent in the images, and interracial friendship groups and families will be extremely rare or invisible.

Method

Sample

The most recognizable of Disney’s theme parks are the Disneyland Parks in California, Paris, Tokyo, and Hong Kong, and their equivalent in Florida, the Magic Kingdom. Some theme parks are only found in some of the resorts, such as the Animal Kingdom and Epcot in Florida, Disney Studios in Florida and Paris, California Adventure in California, and Tokyo Disney Sea in Tokyo. Although each of these theme parks exists within some of the Disney resorts, the resorts in California, Florida, Hong Kong, Paris, and Tokyo all include the Disneyland Park/Magic Kingdom, which also best reflects classic Disney, complete with a castle resembling the image that appears at the opening of Disney films and television programs. As a result, we focused on only the four Disneyland Parks and the Magic Kingdom to see how gender and race were portrayed in images used to market the Disney resorts.

Each year, The Disney Company markets its resorts to millions of people using brochures, booklets, DVDs, and websites. We analyzed only the official English language version of the Disney websites associated with the four Disneyland Parks and the Magic Kingdom. Although there were words on all of these websites, we analyzed only the still images to see whom, by gender and race, The Disney Company marketing executives chose for their potential guests to see. Whether potential guests are thrill seekers or fans of their favorite cartoon mouse, guests must ride, watch, and eat to have the complete Disney experience. On all five of the Disney resort websites, The Disney Company presented and we chose to use all of the images associated with three activities: (a) attractions, namely, rides, interactive and walk-through activities, and play areas; (b) entertainment, namely, shows and parades; and (c) dining. Although websites for all five resorts included shopping and places to stay, nearly all of the images of these were devoid of characters and guests to code. Moreover, places to stay, though on resort property, were not located within the theme parks.

When the number of attractions, entertainment shows, and dining establishments were added together across the five resorts, this yielded a total of 343 activities. Each activity was displayed on a separate webpage on the Disney website, sometimes with multiple images to market that activity, yielding a total of 1,027 separate images. While about 75% of the webpages for entertainment sites (M = 2.09 images) and more than 90% of webpages for dining establishments (M = 1.85) had only two images, this was true for about 50% of webpages for attractions (M = 4.14 images). Since screenshots were taken of all 1,027 images for attractions, entertainment, and dining that appeared on the websites for the five resorts, all of the 1,027 images were initially considered for potential inclusion in analysis. We then retained all images that had human characters, human-like characters, animal, cast members, or guests that could be coded by gender and excluded any images that had only a sign or an image of the attraction as well as those images in which people in a crowd in the background were so small that we could not code them for gender or race. For example, the image of “Space Mountain: Mission 2” in Paris, which showed only the large dome-like figure that was outside of the ride, was excluded, whereas the image containing The Mad Hatter enjoying a ride in a giant teacup with a man and two children was retained. This yielded 452 images: 287 images of attractions, 95 images of entertainment, and 70 images of dining. Inferential statistics were not utilized in the analyses because the 452 images constitute a population.

Measures

Using the listings on the Disney website, each image was assigned three codes, two of which represented the location: (a) resort, such as Florida or Hong Kong; (b) land within the theme park, such as Fantasyland or Tomorrowland; and (c) type of activity, namely, attraction, entertainment, or dining. For the 452 images in the sample, separate variables for Disney human characters, human-like characters, animal characters, and cast members were created and coded on the basis of the gender of those in the image, including categories such as single male or two females and a male. When there were four or more discernible characters or cast members in a group, we coded the group as all-male, mostly male, all-female, mostly female, or gender balanced. The gender display, including hairstyle, figure, clothing, and accessories, were used to determine gender. The detailed categories were later recoded into only five categories: (a) all-male, which included single males, two males, and all-male groups; (b) predominantly male, which included three-person groups with two males and one female as well as groups that were predominantly male; (c) gender balanced, which included one male and one female and balanced groups; (d) predominantly female, which included three-person groups with two females and one male as well as groups that were predominantly female; and (e) all-female, which included single females, two females, and all-female groups. Of the images that contained Disney characters or cast members, less than 5% of the images were predominantly male and less than 5% of the images were predominantly female. Because these percentages were so low, the five categories of images were recoded into
three categories for use in the analysis: (a) “male-dominated,” which included images that were all male or predominantly male; (b) “gender balanced,” same as above; and (c) “female-dominated,” which included images that were all female or predominantly female.

To accurately depict guests with regard to gender, we used the same categories as before, but we added additional codes that would allow us to analyze family groups, such as female parent with same-sex child, male parent with two or more same-sex children, or two parents and mixed-sex children. As before, we created five categories and then reduced them to three categories using the same criteria and method as for the Disney characters and Disney cast members.

We also considered four categories of race/ethnicity, hereafter referred to as race: White, Black, Latino, and Asian. These were among the categories used by previous researchers (The Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2007; Faherty, 2001). Separate variables were created for each of these four categories, and each image was coded for whether there were individuals of that race in the image or not. Admittedly, by using such markers as skin color or eye shape, we based our judgments only on how individuals appeared; we did not know what actual race they might be or with what race they identified. Nevertheless, our assumption for race and for gender was that potential guests viewing these images in anticipation of a trip to Disney would be likely to classify individuals in the same way. We added a fifth category of race, unidentifiable people of color, for those individuals who appeared to be people of color, but whose race was not easily discernible.

Reliability

It was not necessary to measure the intercoder reliability of resort, land, or activity because these were determined by the listings on the Disney websites and required no judgment by us. Both researchers coded the 452 images. To evaluate the intercoder reliability, a systematic sample of every fourth image was taken, yielding a sample of 114 or 25.2% of the sample, exceeding the minimum of 50 units or 10% of the full sample recommended by Lombard, Snyder-Duch, and Bracken (2010). Cohen’s kappa was then used as the index of intercoder reliability. The three-category version of the gender-balance variable (i.e., male-dominated image, female-dominated image, and gender-balanced image) was used in the calculation of Cohen’s kappa because that was the version of the variable used in the analyses. The Cohen’s kappa values were very high for the gender coding of all of the categories: human characters (.96), human-like characters (.93), animals (.90), cast members (.95), and guests (.95). The ease with which the gender of individual characters and guests could be determined using manifest content may be the result of Disney’s choice to display males and females easily identified by traditional markers of gender, including clothing, accessories, and hairstyle. The five variables representing race of guests also produced high Cohen’s kappa values: Whites (.96), Blacks (.95), Latinos (.95), Asians (.96), and unidentified people of color (.95). Regardless of the race with which guests might have identified, the coders were likely to agree on the apparent race of guests. The kappa values may also have been high because of the “unidentified people of color” category that may have captured those guests who might have otherwise have created more coding discrepancies between the two coders.

Although we were prepared to resolve the coding discrepancies by alternating between the two coders’ choices of codes (Auster & Mansbach, 2012; Lombard et al., 2010), we found it more fruitful to discuss the details of the image and resolved the discrepancies using that method (Lombard et al., 2010).

Results

Human Characters, Human-Like Characters, Animals, Cast Members, and Guests

Based on previous research on children’s literature and other media, for H1 we predicted that there would be more male-dominated images than female-dominated images for each category. The gender disparity values calculated for each category are displayed in the first column of numbers in Table 1. The positive gender disparity values indicated that H1 was supported for animals (73.0%), human-like characters (23.3%), human characters (18.6%), and cast members (8.0%), but this hypothesis was not supported for guests (−4.1%) because the gender disparity value was negative. With the gender disparity values displayed in descending order, it is evident that H2, that the gender disparity value would be highest for animals (73.0%), and H3, that the gender disparity value would be lowest for guests (−4.1%), were supported. In addition, it is notable that there were more gender-balanced images (27.3%) for guests than for any other category.

Resorts

To test H4a, H5a, and H6a, all of the gender disparity values for human characters, human-like characters, animals, cast members, and guests for each of the five resorts were calculated, yielding the 25 gender disparity values that appear in the first column of numbers in Table 2. These values were arranged in descending order by resort. H4a, which predicted that the percentage of male-dominated images would exceed the percentage of female-dominated images, was partially supported for resorts. This hypothesis was supported for 17 of the 25 categories; that is, 68.0% of the gender disparity values that appear in the first column of numbers were positive. Hypothesis 4a was not supported by the 5 gender disparity values equal to 0 or the remaining 3 gender disparity values that were negative.
Table 1. Images of Human Characters, Human-Like Characters, Animals, Cast Members, and Guests by Gender

| Category               | Gender disparity value | Male-dominated images | Female-dominated images | Gender-balanced images | n |
|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Animals                | 73.0                   | 82.9                  | 9.9                     | 7.2                    | 111 |
| Human-like characters  | 23.3                   | 55.4                  | 32.1                    | 12.5                   | 56  |
| Human characters       | 18.6                   | 52.6                  | 34.0                    | 13.4                   | 97  |
| Cast members           | 8.0                    | 46.6                  | 38.6                    | 14.8                   | 88  |
| Guests                 | -4.1                   | 34.1                  | 38.2                    | 27.6                   | 217 |

*a The combined percentage of male-dominated, female-dominated, and balanced images displayed in each row equals 100% of the n for that row.

*b The gender disparity value, measured in percentage, was calculated by subtracting the percentage of female-dominated images from the percentage of male-dominated images.

Table 2. Images of Human Characters, Human-Like Characters, Animals, Cast Members, and Guests by Gender and Resort

| Resort      | Category               | Gender disparity value | Male-dominated images | Female-dominated images | Gender-balanced images | n |
|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|---|
| California  | Animals                | 53.9                   | 71.8                  | 17.9                    | 10.3                   | 39 |
|             | Cast members           | 38.5                   | 66.7                  | 28.2                    | 5.1                    | 39 |
|             | Human                  | 19.5                   | 56.5                  | 37.0                    | 6.5                    | 46 |
|             | Human-like              | 0.0                    | 42.9                  | 42.9                    | 14.3                   | 28 |
|             | Guests                 | -8.1                   | 31.9                  | 40.0                    | 28.1                   | 135|
| Florida     | Animals                | 89.7                   | 93.1                  | 3.4                     | 3.4                    | 29 |
|             | Cast members           | 60.0                   | 60.0                  | 0.0                     | 40.0                   | 5  |
|             | Human                  | 4.0                    | 44.0                  | 40.0                    | 16.0                   | 25 |
|             | Human-like              | 0.0                    | 42.9                  | 42.9                    | 14.3                   | 7  |
|             | Guests                 | -12.5                  | 33.3                  | 45.8                    | 20.8                   | 24 |
| Hong Kong   | Animals                | 77.8                   | 88.9                  | 11.1                    | 0.0                    | 9  |
|             | Human-like              | 60.0                   | 80.0                  | 20.0                    | 0.0                    | 5  |
|             | Cast members           | 27.3                   | 45.5                  | 18.2                    | 36.4                   | 11 |
|             | Human                  | 0.0                    | 40.0                  | 40.0                    | 20.0                   | 5  |
|             | Guests                 | 0.0                    | 28.6                  | 28.6                    | 42.9                   | 14 |
| Paris       | Animals                | 87.5                   | 87.5                  | 0.0                     | 12.5                   | 16 |
|             | Human-like              | 63.6                   | 81.8                  | 18.2                    | 0.0                    | 11 |
|             | Human                  | 50.0                   | 62.5                  | 12.5                    | 25.0                   | 16 |
|             | Guests                 | 8.3                    | 44.4                  | 36.1                    | 19.4                   | 36 |
|             | Cast members           | 0.0                    | 50.0                  | 50.0                    | 0.0                    | 10 |
| Tokyo       | Animals                | 73.7                   | 84.2                  | 10.5                    | 5.3                    | 19 |
|             | Human-like              | 66.7                   | 66.7                  | 0.0                     | 33.3                   | 6  |
|             | Human                  | 16.7                   | 50.0                  | 33.3                    | 16.7                   | 6  |
|             | Guests                 | 9.1                    | 36.4                  | 27.3                    | 36.4                   | 11 |
|             | Cast members           | -60.9                  | 8.7                   | 69.6                    | 21.7                   | 23 |

*a The combined percentage of male-dominated, female-dominated, and balanced images displayed in each row equals 100% of the n for that row.

*b The gender disparity value, measured in percentage, was calculated by subtracting the percentage of female-dominated images from the percentage of male-dominated images.

More specifically, H4a was supported by the gender disparity values for animals for all five resorts and for human characters for four of five resorts but not for Hong Kong (0.0%). For images of human-like characters, the positive gender disparity values for Hong Kong (66.0%), Paris (63.6%), and Tokyo (66.7%) offered support for the hypothesis; however, for California and Florida, the gender disparity value was 0. For cast members, the gender disparity values

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supported H4a for California (38.5%), Florida (60.0%), and Hong Kong (27.3%), but not for Paris (0.0%) and Tokyo (−60.9%). For guests, the gender disparity values supported H4a for Paris (8.3%) and Tokyo (9.1%), but not for California (−8.1%), Florida (−12.5%), and Hong Kong (0.0%).

Hypothesis 5a, which predicted that the gender disparity values would be highest for animals, was supported by each of the five resorts: California (53.9%), Florida (89.7%), Hong Kong (77.8%), Paris (87.5%), and Tokyo (73.7%). Hypothesis 6a, which predicted that the gender disparity values would be lowest for guests, was supported for California (−8.1%), Florida (−12.5%), and Hong Kong (0.0%). Even when H6a was not supported for the other two resorts because cast members had a gender disparity value in Paris of 0.0% and an extremely low gender disparity value in Tokyo (−60.9%), there was still a dramatic difference between the gender disparity values in Paris and Tokyo for animals (87.5% and 73.7%, respectively) compared with guests (8.3% and 9.1%, respectively). In addition, relative to other types of images, the highest percentage of gender-balanced images was found for guests for California (28.1%), Hong Kong (42.9%), and Tokyo (36.4%) and was ranked second for the percentage of balanced images for Florida (20.8%) and Paris (19.4%).

Lands

The hypotheses regarding lands, H4b, H5b, and H6c, were tested using the gender disparity values for the human characters, human-like characters, animals, cast members, and guests. All of the gender disparity values for each of the eight lands were calculated, yielding 40 gender disparity values. The values were then arranged in descending order by land; however, the 10 categories with fewer than five images, identified with the superscript “d” in Table 3, were not considered in the evaluation of the hypotheses. Hypothesis 4b, which predicted that the percentage of male-dominated images would exceed the percentage of female-dominated images, was supported for 22 of the 30 categories; that is, 70.0% of gender disparity values that appear in the first column of numbers in Table 3 were positive. However, H4b was not supported by the gender disparity value that was equal to 0 or the remaining 7 gender disparity values that were negative.

More specifically, for those categories with more than five images, the gender disparity values were positive for human characters, human-like characters, animals, cast members, and guests for three lands: Discoveryland/Tomorrowland, lands focused on the future and worlds beyond; Frontierland/Westernland, lands where cowboys show guests the ways of old West; and Main Street USA/World Bazaar, lands filled with shops that have everything Disney where visitors are greeted with scenes of the 1900s. For Adventureland, filled with exotic areas and jungle exploration, and Critter Country, a land where woodland creatures can hang out or have a splash, the hypothesis was supported for all categories except guests, for which the gender disparity values were negative (−50.0% and −40.0%, respectively). For Liberty Square/New Orleans Square, with waterfront scenes of early America, three of the four eligible categories did not support the hypothesis; the gender disparity values for human-like characters (−14.2%) and guests (−47.0%) were negative and the gender disparity was 0.0% for animals because all five images were gender balanced.

Fantasyland, a land of magic that reflects Disney’s classic animated films, was notably different from the other lands. While positive gender disparity values supported the hypothesis for animals (76.4%) and cast members (44.5%), the gender disparity values were negative or near parity not only for guests (−42.8%), but also for human (−3.7) and human-like (−4.8) characters, both of which had notable positive gender disparity values for the other seven lands.

Hypothesis 5b focused on the highest gender disparity values for each land. For those categories that had five images or more, images that included animals yielded the highest gender disparity value for six of the eight lands, namely, Adventureland (70.0%), Critter Country (60.0%), Fantasyland (76.4%), Frontierland/Westernland (86.6%), Main Street USA/World Bazaar (65.6%), and Toontown (80.0%), a land where guests can visit the houses of Mickey Mouse and his friends. Although H5b was not supported for two lands for which the gender disparity value for animals was 0.0%, Liberty Square/New Orleans Square and Discoveryland/Tomorrowland, there were only 5 images of animals for each. For Discoveryland/Tomorrowland, however, the gender disparity value for human-like characters (84.6%) far exceeded that of animals (60.0%), not lending support to H5b.

The gender disparity values for seven of eight lands supported H6b, the prediction that guests would have the lowest gender disparity value; Adventureland was the exception with cast members having a lower disparity value (−50.0%) than guests (28.0%).

Activities

The gender disparity values were calculated for each of the three activities, namely, attractions, entertainment, and dining, for human characters, human-like characters, animals, cast members, and guests. The gender disparity values were then arranged in descending order by activity; however, the 2 categories with fewer than five images, identified with the superscript “c” in Table 4, were not considered in the evaluation of the hypotheses. H4c was supported by 10 of the 13 categories; that is, 76.9% of gender disparity values that appear in first column of numbers in Table 4 were positive. The remaining three gender disparity values were negative for guests in images of entertainment (−15.8%) and dining (−31.1%) and for cast members (−30.0) in images of dining.

Hypothesis 5c, which predicted that images with animals would have the highest gender disparity value, and H6c, which predicted that images with guests would have the lowest
| Land                        | Category          | Gender disparity value | Male-dominated images | Female-dominated images | Gender-balanced images | n  |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----|
| **Adventureland (CFHPT)**   | Human-like        | 100.0                  | 100.0                 | 0.0                    | 0.0                    | 1  |
|                             | Animals           | 70.0                   | 80.0                  | 10.0                   | 10.0                   | 10 |
|                             | Human             | 46.7                   | 60.0                  | 13.3                   | 26.7                   | 15 |
|                             | Guests            | 28.0                   | 56.0                  | 28.0                   | 16.0                   | 25 |
|                             | Cast members      | -50.0                  | 14.3                  | 64.3                   | 21.4                   | 14 |
| **Critter Country (C)**     | Animals           | 60.0                   | 60.0                  | 0.0                    | 40.0                   | 5  |
|                             | Cast members      | 0.0                    | 0.0                   | 0.0                    | 0.0                    | 0  |
|                             | Human             | 0.0                    | 0.0                   | 0.0                    | 0.0                    | 0  |
|                             | Human-like        | 0.0                    | 0.0                   | 0.0                    | 0.0                    | 0  |
|                             | Guests            | -40.0                  | 10.0                  | 50.0                   | 40.0                   | 10 |
| **Discoveryland (P)/**      | Human-like        | 84.6                   | 84.6                  | 0.0                    | 15.4                   | 13 |
| **Tomorrowland (CFHT)**     | Animals           | 60.0                   | 80.0                  | 20.0                   | 0.0                    | 5  |
|                             | Human             | 50.0                   | 70.0                  | 20.0                   | 10.0                   | 10 |
|                             | Cast members      | 16.7                   | 50.0                  | 33.3                   | 16.7                   | 12 |
|                             | Guests            | 12.8                   | 42.6                  | 29.8                   | 27.7                   | 47 |
| **Fantasyland (CFHPT)**     | Animals           | 76.4                   | 88.2                  | 11.8                   | 0.0                    | 34 |
|                             | Cast members      | 44.5                   | 66.7                  | 22.2                   | 11.0                   | 6  |
|                             | Human             | -3.7                   | 40.7                  | 44.4                   | 14.8                   | 27 |
|                             | Human-like        | -4.8                   | 41.5                  | 46.3                   | 12.2                   | 41 |
|                             | Guests            | -42.8                  | 14.3                  | 57.1                   | 28.6                   | 49 |
| **Frontierland (CFP)/**     | Animals           | 86.6                   | 93.3                  | 6.7                    | 0.0                    | 15 |
| **Westernland (T)**         | Human-like        | 50.0                   | 50.0                  | 0.0                    | 50.0                   | 2  |
|                             | Cast members      | 44.5                   | 66.7                  | 22.2                   | 11.1                   | 18 |
|                             | Guests            | 20.7                   | 51.7                  | 31.0                   | 17.2                   | 29 |
| **Liberty Square (F)/**     | Human             | 69.2                   | 84.6                  | 15.4                   | 0.0                    | 13 |
| **New Orleans Square (C)**  | Animals           | 0.0                    | 0.0                   | 0.0                    | 100.0                  | 5  |
|                             | Human-like        | -14.2                  | 42.9                  | 57.1                   | 0.0                    | 7  |
|                             | Guests            | -47.0                  | 5.9                   | 52.9                   | 41.2                   | 17 |
|                             | Cast members      | -50.0                  | 25.0                  | 75.0                   | 0.0                    | 4  |
| **Main Street USA (CFHP)/** | Animals           | 65.6                   | 75.0                  | 9.4                    | 15.6                   | 32 |
| **World Bazaar (T)**        | Human-like        | 42.8                   | 71.4                  | 28.6                   | 0.0                    | 7  |
|                             | Human             | 35.7                   | 57.1                  | 21.4                   | 21.4                   | 14 |
|                             | Cast members      | 29.0                   | 54.8                  | 25.8                   | 19.4                   | 31 |
|                             | Guests            | 6.5                    | 35.5                  | 29.0                   | 35.5                   | 31 |
| **Toontown (CFT)**          | Animals           | 80.0                   | 90.0                  | 10.0                   | 0.0                    | 10 |
|                             | Guests            | 9.1                    | 45.5                  | 36.4                   | 18.2                   | 11 |
|                             | Human             | -100.0                 | 0.0                   | 100.0                  | 0.0                    | 2  |
|                             | Human-like        | -100.0                 | 0.0                   | 100.0                  | 0.0                    | 1  |
|                             | Cast members      | -100.0                 | 0.0                   | 100.0                  | 0.0                    | 1  |

Notes:

- The resorts in which each land was found is listed in parentheses: C=California, F=Florida, H=Hong Kong, P=Paris, and T=Tokyo.
- The combined percent of male-dominated, female-dominated, and balanced images displayed in each row equals 100% of the n for that row.
- The gender disparity value, measured in percent, was calculated by subtracting the percent of female-dominated images from the percent of male-dominated images.
- The category was not included in the evaluation of hypotheses because n<5.
- The two lands listed for this category were equivalent and their images were combined for this analysis.
gender disparity value for each activity, were supported for all three activities. Despite this, the gender disparity value for animals was much higher for attractions (78.5%) and entertainment (72.7%) than for dining (33.4%), and the gender disparity value for guests was lowest for images of dining (−31.1%) followed by entertainment (−15.8%) and attractions (4.5%). The highest percentage of gender-balanced images was found for guests for attractions (26.5%) and dining (33.3%) and among cast members (30.0%) for entertainment.

**Guest Parents and Children**

To test H7, that guest parents and children combinations would be more likely to be of the same sex than of the opposite sex, additional detailed coding was done for those images that appeared to be of family groupings. Family images included those that appeared to be, for example, a mother and her daughter or a father with three children. Although the adults with children in these images may not have been the parents, they will be referred to as parents in this analysis. The images were coded in a way that took into account the gender of any children as well as that of the parent or parents, which were coded as male parent only, female parent only, or both male/female parents. In addition, all of the images of families were analyzed together rather than by resort, land, or activity.

Hypothesis 7, concerning the likelihood of parent and child combinations being of the same sex, was supported by the results displayed in Table 5. Nearly two thirds of images with a male parent only were pictured with boys (65.2%) rather than girls (21.8%) or both boys and girls (13.0%). Nearly two thirds of images with a female parent only were pictured with girls (62.5%) rather than boys (25.0%) or both girls and boys (12.5%). This sex segregation was even more surprising because images of male parents only (30.3%), female parents only (31.6%), and both a male and female parent (38.1%) were divided relatively equally as were images of boys only (38.2%) and girls only (39.4%). In short, there were more images of father-boy(s) combinations and mother-girl(s) combinations than mixed-sex parent-child combinations.

**Race**

With regard to race, we predicted that the racial group representing the statistical majority in each country in which the Disney resort was located would most often appear in the images. Although logic might suggest this, H8 was also informed by research on children’s books in the United States as well as other forms of media that revealed that people of color, the statistical minority in the United States, were often invisible. Based on more specific results reported in the literature indicating that those of different races were not shown interacting in “intimate egalitarian ways” (Pescosolido et al., 1997), we also hypothesized that interracial friendship groups and families would be extremely rare or invisible even if there was greater diversity in the

| Activity       | Category     | Percentage | Gender disparity value | Male-dominated images | Female-dominated images | Gender-balanced images | n  |
|----------------|--------------|------------|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----|
| Attractions    | Animals      |            |                        | 78.5                  | 86.3                   | 7.8                    | 5.9 51 |
|                | Cast members |            |                        | 55.6                  | 77.8                   | 22.2                   | 0.0 18 |
|                | Human        |            |                        | 19.5                  | 54.2                   | 34.7                   | 11.1 72 |
|                | Human-like   |            |                        | 15.5                  | 51.1                   | 35.6                   | 13.3 45 |
|                | Guests       |            |                        | 4.5                   | 39.1                   | 34.6                   | 26.3 156 |
| Entertainment  | Animals      |            |                        | 72.7                  | 81.8                   | 9.1                    | 9.1 55 |
|                | Human-like   |            |                        | 50.0                  | 70.0                   | 20.0                   | 10.0 10 |
|                | Cast members |            |                        | 15.0                  | 42.5                   | 27.5                   | 30.0 40 |
|                | Human        |            |                        | 4.5                   | 40.9                   | 36.4                   | 22.7 22 |
|                | Guests       |            |                        | −15.8                 | 31.6                   | 47.4                   | 21.1 19 |
| Dining         | Human        |            |                        | 100.0                 | 100.0                  | 0.0                    | 0.0 4 |
|                | Human-like   |            |                        | 100.0                 | 100.0                  | 0.0                    | 0.0 2 |
|                | Animals      |            |                        | 33.4                  | 66.7                   | 33.3                   | 0.0 6 |
|                | Cast members |            |                        | −30.0                 | 33.3                   | 63.3                   | 3.3 30 |
|                | Guests       |            |                        | −31.1                 | 17.8                   | 48.9                   | 33.3 45 |

*The combined percentage of male-dominated, female-dominated, and balanced images displayed in each row equals 100% of the n for that row.

*The gender disparity value, measured in percentage, was calculated by subtracting the percentage of female-dominated images from the percentage of male-dominated images.

*The category was not included in the evaluation of hypotheses because n<5.
images for resorts in countries with a more racially diverse population.

We chose to test H8, concerning race, among guests only (see Table 6) because the images of guests would not have to reflect classic Disney characters, potentially providing Disney marketing executives more room for variation and choice of race in the images. Since each race was coded separately for each image of guests, the figures reported in Table 6 indicate the percentage of images for that resort had people of that race in an image. This means, for example, that 67.9% of the images for California had Whites in them. Because there is the possibility of more than one race in the image, rows can add up to more than 100%.

For Hong Kong and Tokyo, each of which has a population that is 95% or more Asian (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012), 100% of the images displayed Asians and the images for these two resorts displayed the least racial diversity. For California (67.9%), and Florida (41.7%), there were a higher percentage of images that had Whites than those of other racial groups. This is not surprising because Whites are the statistically dominant group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, Table 6). The images of California and Florida displayed more racial diversity than the other resorts; these two resorts are also located in the United States, the country with the most racially diverse population of those considered in this analysis (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012, Table 6). For example, Blacks, Latinos, and Asians each were found in about 15% of the images for California, and for Florida, Blacks and Asians each were included in about 30% of the images, though Latinos (4.2%) were notably underrepresented. For Paris, 91.2% of images had Whites and 8.8% had Blacks, but there was no basis for comparison because the French government does not collect data on race and ethnicity.

Another way we looked at the race of the guests was how they were placed in the images, more specifically the extent to which they seemed to “interact in egalitarian ways” (Pescosolido et al., 1997, p. 460), a more qualitative assessment. Although individuals of different races rarely appeared in the same images, some were sitting in separate cars on a ride or at separate tables in a restaurant. For example, in the image of “Cinderella’s Royal Table”, a dining establishment in Florida, there was a family of Asians, another a family of Blacks, and an adult White couple, each sitting at different tables. However, in California, “Davy Crockett’s Explorer Canoes” showed about 15 young people of different races all in the same boat, smiling and paddling together. And in Paris, there was an image of girls of different races gathered around a map in “Adventure Isle,” freely mingling with one another. There were also occasional images of interracial couples or groups, such as the image of the “Tiki Juice Bar” in California, in which a couple comprised of a White male and a Black female was shown.

In addition, we noticed that images of cast members sometimes included those of several different races. An image of the “Dream Along With Mickey” stage show in Florida had cast members of several races on the stage. Perhaps they were not interacting in an intimate egalitarian relationship, but they were working together. This was similar to one of the images of “Pixie Hollow–Tinker Bell and Her Fairy Friends” in Fantasyland in California, in which five smiling human fairies of several races were displayed.

In short, the four resorts for which national data were available supported H8, that the statistically dominant group would appear most often in the images, and Florida and California revealed the greatest racial diversity in the images of the guests. When images were viewed more closely, people of different races were shown working together when they were engaged in a Disney activity, but few images displayed more intimate egalitarian relationships between those of different races.

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**Table 5. Images of Guest Parents and Children by Gender**

| Gender of parents | Boys only | Girls only | Both sexes | Parent total<sup>b</sup> | n  |
|-------------------|-----------|------------|------------|--------------------------|----|
| Male parent only  | 65.2      | 21.8       | 13.0       | 30.3                     | 23 |
| Female parent only| 25.0      | 62.5       | 12.5       | 31.6                     | 24 |
| Male and female parents | 27.6  | 34.5       | 37.9       | 38.1                     | 29 |
| Total             | 38.2      | 39.4       | 22.4       | 100.0                    | 76 |

<sup>a</sup>The combined percentage of images of boys only, girls only, and both sexes displayed in each row equals 100% of the n for that row.

<sup>b</sup>The combined percentage of images of male parent only, female parent only, and male and female parents in the parent total column equals 100% of n = 76.

**Table 6. Race of Guests by Resort**

| Resort    | White | Black | Latino | Asian | Unidentifiable<sup>b</sup> | n  |
|-----------|-------|-------|--------|-------|----------------------------|----|
| California| 67.9  | 17.2  | 14.2   | 15.7  | 4.5                        | 134|
| Florida   | 41.7  | 33.3  | 4.2    | 29.2  | 4.2                        | 24 |
| Hong Kong | 7.1   | 0.0   | 0.0    | 100.0 | 0.0                        | 14 |
| Paris     | 91.2  | 8.8   | 0.0    | 5.9   | 0.0                        | 34 |
| Tokyo     | 0.0   | 0.0   | 0.0    | 100.0 | 0.0                        | 10 |

<sup>a</sup>Since each race was coded separately and there is the possibility of more than one race in an image, the percentages in a row may add up to more than 100%.

<sup>b</sup>Person of color of unidentifiable race.
Discussion

We conducted a study of the images of attractions, entertainment, and dining establishments that appeared on the official websites of five Disney resorts to examine human characters, human-like characters, animals, and cast members in terms of gender as well as guests in terms of both gender and race. Our overarching hypothesis regarding gender was that there would be more male-dominated images than female-dominated images. This was best measured by the calculation of the gender disparity value. Overall, H1 was supported for human characters, human-like characters, animals, and cast members, but not for guests. In addition, the hypothesis was supported by 68.0% of the gender disparity values for the five resorts (H4a), 70.0% of the gender disparity values for the eight lands (H4b), and 76.9% of the gender disparity values for activities (H4c). Interestingly, across all of those categories, only 19 of the 68 gender disparity values did not support the hypothesis; of those, 8 were values for guests, while the remaining 11 were values spread across human characters, human-like characters, and cast members, but not animals. In addition, the hypothesis that gender disparity values would be highest for animals was supported for all five resorts (H5a), six of eight lands (H5b), and all three activities (H5c). Likewise, the hypothesis that the gender disparity value would be lowest for guests was supported by three of five resorts (H6a), six of eight lands (H6b), and all three activities (H6c). Thus, although there were variations, all of these hypotheses were more likely than not to be supported by the gender disparity values. Many of the findings were reminiscent of past research on children’s literature (Hamilton et al., 2006; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; McCabe et al., 2011; Oskamp et al., 1996; Weitzman et al., 1972), coloring books (Fitzpatrick & McPherson, 2010), and cereal boxes (Black et al., 2009) as well as on Disney’s animated films (Davis, 2006; Faherty, 2001; Giroux, 1997; Hoerrner, 1996; Wiersma, 2000) that has shown that female characters tended to be underrepresented relative to male characters, and that this was even more exaggerated among male and female animal characters (Black et al., 2009; Fitzpatrick & McPherson, 2010; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993; McCabe et al., 2011; Oskamp et al., 1996; Weitzman et al., 1972). Many of the above findings do not represent the distribution of males and females in the countries in which each of the five resorts is located (Central Intelligence Agency, 2012); the explanation may be that the distribution by gender did not have to be tied to characters from the older classic Disney films. Guests were also more likely than not to have the lowest gender disparity value by resort, land, and activity, though some of those values were positive and some were negative. For example, Fantasyland (~42.8%) and Frontierland/Westernland (20.7%) continued with the same pattern for images of guests that was described above for Disney characters and cast members; this may indicate that lands within the Disney parks are marketed as gendered: princesses for girls, cowboys for boys. The pattern of the number of male-dominated images exceeding the number of female-dominated images did not persist for family groupings; the number of images with boys only or a male parent only was nearly equal to the number of images with girls only or a female parent, respectively. However, sex-segregated pairs, namely, father-son and mother-daughter pairs, were more prevalent than mixed-sex parent-child combinations (H7). Perhaps this was due to attractions being marketed in a gendered way.

With regard to race of guests, we hypothesized that the racial group representing the statistical majority in each
country in which the Disney resort was located would most often appear in the images based on past research on race in various media (The Cooperative Children’s Book Center, 2007; Cortese, 2008; Holtzman, 2000; Mendoza & Reese, 2001; Pescosolido et al., 1997), including Disney films (Giroux, 1997; Towbin et al., 2004). We expected those resorts located in countries with the greatest diversity would reflect the greatest diversity but also hypothesized that those of different races would not be likely to be shown interacting in “intimate egalitarian ways” (Pescosolido et al., 1997) and that interracial friendship groups and families would be extremely rare or invisible. While H8 was in general supported, some images of guests of different races showed them enjoying an attraction together and some images of cast members showed them working well together. Although it is difficult to know whether these constitute “intimate egalitarian relationships,” it showed that Disney has included those of different races in the same image and has not necessarily segregated them all by tables at a restaurant or cars on an attraction.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this research using the website images of the four Disneyland parks and the Magic Kingdom as the sample for this analysis. First, the images from the five Disney websites were collected at one point in time, namely, during the summer season. If the Disney Company has shows or attractions that vary by season, these images were not a part of our sample. Second, although each of the webpages for the activities included words and many also included short videos, we chose only to analyze the still images that appeared on the webpages. Third, we used standard gender markers, such as figure, hair, clothing, and accessories, to determine the gender of those in the images. Similarly, the coding by race was based on our assessment of visible physical characteristics, such as skin color and eyelid shape. Obviously, for both gender and race, we did not know how the individuals in the images self-identified, though how individuals appeared and would be perceived by viewers of the images would seem to be more important for this research than self-identification. And there were some images of people that were so small or blurred that their race and gender could not be determined. Fourth, we were focused on coding the manifest content, by counting the number of Disney characters, cast, and guests who had particular characteristics; for the most part, we did not study the images for latent content, such as the ways in which Disney characters, cast, and guests were seen interacting. Finally, although we can report the findings regarding gender and race of those in the images, we do not know who visits the websites, the extent to which visitors to the websites are attentive to the gender and race of those in the images, or the impact of gender and racial balance in the images on either their desire to visit a Disney resort or, more importantly, ideas about gender and race.

Suggestions for Future Research

Researchers interested in the Disney resort websites could analyze the videos or words on the webpages or even compare the websites with official Disney DVDs, posters, and brochures used to market the resorts. We selected the most traditional, classic theme park within the Disney resorts because there was such a theme park in each of the five resorts, but other parks could be examined to see whether the patterns found here persist. For example, at Walt Disney World in Florida, one could look at what is portrayed for Epcot or the Animal Kingdom, two other theme parks within the resort. Although we chose to focus on manifest content, using latent content one could also assess gender performance (McCabe et al., 2011), or social vulnerability and relationships between those of the same and opposite sex (Faherty, 2001).

One could also expand an exploration of the portrayal of gender and race to a variety of other promotional initiatives Disney has used to market its resorts or cruises over time. It would also be interesting to interview Disney executives about how and why they chose the images that appeared on the websites, the extent to which they were aware of how gender and race were portrayed, and whether the images, particularly of guests, were staged or candid. Given the influence of Disney suggested by a number of scholars (Giroux, 1997), including the use of the terms Disneyfication (Bryman, 1999) and Disneyfication (Faherty, 2001), it would be useful to study how people perceive the images on the websites in terms of gender and racial balance and the extent to which this influences their ideas about gender and race.

One could also expand the research by studying the portrayal of gender and race in images used to market theme parks such as Six Flags, Busch Gardens, or Hersheypark, or theme parks for younger children such as Sesame Place or Dutch Wonderland. And, of course, for practitioners, it would be interesting to know to what extent such images have an impact on individuals’ willingness to visit such theme parks. From a sociological perspective, because individuals are active agents in how they consume images, it would be particularly important to learn how such images affect individuals’ perceptions of those who share their gender and race as well as those different from themselves.

As a powerful, multinational corporation, The Disney Company is in the position to potentially influence how individuals viewing their websites see gender and race. At the very least, this study reveals the choices that marketing executives have made about the images used to market the Disneyland parks and the Magic Kingdom. Rudy et al. (2010) suggested that studying such outcomes is an important reason for doing content analysis. Those visiting the Disneyland parks and the Magic Kingdom websites would see that overall, images of males outnumber those of females, though this is somewhat less true of guests. The images of those of various races displayed for some resorts reflected
the degree of diversity of the population in the country in which the resorts were located, while other resorts did not. Cast members of different races were sometimes shown working together, and guests of different races were sometimes shown interacting together. But, other images showed them carefully segregated by table or rollercoaster car.

Advertising and film are two of many important cultural mirrors (Cortese, 2008; Davis, 2006). Yet, it seems that even in the present and despite Disney’s lack of realistic representation of some categories of individuals, the fascination with classic Disney continues. Although the prerogative to do so may not be there, Disney could promote a more equitable representation of those of different genders and races in the images on their websites; this might contribute positively to individuals’ attitudes about gender and race. In addition, as families plan their quintessential vacation, it might expand the repertoire of recreational activities that individuals feel is appropriate for them if they see someone like themselves in the images of the many different activities and lands. That way, when viewers hear American celebrities say, “I’m going to Disney World!” they will know, regardless of their gender or race, that all of Disney is a place for vacationers seeking fantasy-filled days of fun.

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