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Portrayal of Older People in Disney Live Action Films from the 1990s and 2000s

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THE PORTRAYAL OF OLDER PEOPLE IN DISNEY LIVE ACTION FILMS

FROM THE 1990s AND 2000s

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Communications

Brigham Young University

August 2009

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

of a thesis submitted by

Jennifer Martin

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

As chair of the candidate's graduate committee, I have read the thesis of Jennifer Martin in its final form and have found that (1) its format, citations and bibliographical style are consistent and acceptable and fulfill university and department style requirements; (2) its illustrative materials including figures, tables, and charts are in place; and (3) the final manuscript is satisfactory to the graduate committee and is ready for submission to the university library.

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ABSTRACT

THE PORTRAYAL OF OLDER PEOPLE IN DISNEY LIVE ACTION FILMS

FROM THE 1990s AND 2000s

Jennifer Martin

Department of Communications

Master of Arts

Children as young as three years old are scared of the idea of growing old, and negative stereotypes about older people have started to develop by the time children enter elementary school. Negative stereotyping of older characters has been found to be prevalent in all forms of media. Because children use media to figure out who they are and what the world is like, this study looks at some of the most popular films of the past two decades aimed toward children. This study is a content analysis of older major and minor characters from the 60 top grossing Disney live action films in the 1990s and 2000s. This study is a continuation of an earlier study conducted analyzing the same subject in Disney animated films. The two studies will be compared throughout in order to identify trends in Disney's portrayal of older characters.

The results of this study found an even more disparate underrepresentation of women and minorities than previous studies. However, this study found a majority of positive portrayals of older people. The majority of older characters in Disney live action

films were identified with: the personality traits of "friendly" and "intelligent"; the primary roles of "friend" and "boss"; the health status of "active" or "very active" and in good health; and the stereotypes of "Perfect Grandparent", "John Wayne Conservative", and "Golden Ager". These positive portrayals in all areas are in sharp contrast to many previous studies conducted concerning the portrayal of older characters in the media and are even more positive than the results from the previous study conducted on Disney animated films.

As children interpret their social reality based on the media they watch, including Disney live action films, this research postulates that children will cultivate a more positive image of older people as they are portrayed in these films.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Researchers have found that children as young as three years old are afraid of the idea of growing old (Rich, Myrick, & Campbell, 1984). More startling than this is that children's negative perceptions of older people and becoming old continue to grow and become stronger with an increase in age (Issacs & Bearison, 1986). Though children learn attitudes and behaviors from a variety of sources, Gerbner (1997) found that heavier television viewers held more negative stereotypes of older people than those who watched less television.

Numerous studies have found a consistent underrepresentation and negative stereotyping of older people in the media (Baker & Goggin, 1994; Bramlett-Solomon, & Subramanian,1999; Gerbner, 1997; Healey & Ross, 2002; Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Peterson, 1992; Robinson, Magoffin, & Moore, 2007; Signorielli, 1983; Vernon, Williams, Phillips, & Wilson, 1991). Though some studies argue that positive stereotypes of older people exist (Bell, 1992; Miller, Leyell, & Mazacheck, 2004; Robinson & Anderson, 2007; Roy & Harwood, 1997), discrepancies remain as to the overall portrayal of older characters in the media. The persisting negative portrayals of older people from the past few decades are those depicting older people as ugly, senile, less-intelligent, decrepit, and sick (Bramlett-Solomon & Subramaniam, 1999; Broussard, Blackmon, Blackwell, Smith, & Hunt, 1980; Carmichael, 1976; Healy & Ross, 2002). These are just a few of the pervading negative characteristics associated with older characters on television, in magazine ads, and other forms of media. Social learning theory and cultivation theory propose that media has strong effects on its viewers by creating a world that its audience interprets as reality. Because of the negative presentations of older

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people in the media and the prevalence of negative attitudes toward older people across America, this study wishes to explore whether negative or positive stereotyping persists in Disney live action films. This study is a continuation of a previous study that analyzed Disney animated films and will compare the portrayals of older characters between the two forms of Disney media.

In 1999, Disney was worth an estimated 68 billion (Wasko, 2001). Disney films are one of the many sources of revenue for Disney and have been an integral part of U.S. culture and a global culture for 70 years (Dundes, 2001). These Disney films have become a social and cultural force in children's lives (O'Brien, 1996). Disney has created an environment and culture where different generations can join together and share interests and experiences (Brockus, 2004). Cultures also join together because Disney has a worldwide reach.

The potential impact of Disney media on the lives of its audience is significant because children spend a significant amount of time watching television and DVD's, and Disney is an important force in media geared toward children, adolescents, and family audiences. This study augments the research already done on the stereotypes of older people found in Disney animated films (Robinson, Magoffin, & Moore, 2007) by looking at Disney live action films from the 1990s and 2000s and how they portray older characters. This study contributes to literature on the negative and positive portrayals of older characters because it analyzes some of the highest grossing movies in the past two decades that are geared toward younger audiences and shows how older characters are represented.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Stereotypes of Older People

Ashmore and Del Boca (1981) have defined stereotypes as schema developed in long term memory that contain beliefs about a particular concept or idea. Stereotypes can be both negative and positive and are "rooted in cultural beliefs and…produced by social interaction, but exist only in each individual's cognitive representations" (Miller, Leyell, & Mazacheck, 2004, p. 317). Studies consistently show that people of all ages have stereotypes of older people whether positive or negative (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981; Chasteen, Schwartz, & Park, 2002; Hummert, 1990; Schmidt & Boland, 1986). Stereotypes about older people and becoming old have been studied for decades. As early as 1956, a study found that college students viewed old age as years of diminished happiness, diminished ambition, and increased worries (Tuckman & Lorge, 1956). Brewer et al. (1981) were some of the first to suggest that there is not one universal stereotype that all people have of older people. Schmidt and Boland (1986) expanded this idea after young adults identified 99 traits characterizing older people. Schmidt and Boland divided these traits into common stereotypes and found that even though more negative stereotypes existed than positive, positive stereotypes were still quite prominent. They also suggested that the presence of so many stereotypes could mean that society may react to older adults in a variety of different ways. Hummert (1990) conducted a study using Schmidt and Boland's (1986) method of research and found consistent results that both positive and negative stereotyping of aging occurs among college age students.

These negative attitudes toward older people and becoming old are especially prevalent in children and often begin in childhood (Blunk & Williams, 1997; Burke,

1981-1982; Isaacs & Bearison, 1986; Jantz, Seefeldt, Galper, & Serock, 1976; Middlecamp & Gross, 2002; Seefeldt, 1984; Seefeldt, Jantz, Galper, & Serock, 1977). Preschool children described older people as "all wrinkled and short," "don't get out much," and "have heart attacks and die" (Jantz et al., 1976). Seefeldt et al. (1977) found that children considered older people to be sick, tired and ugly and expressed a disgust for growing old. In another study, Seefeldt (1984) found consistent results when children described old people as less helpful, uglier, dirtier, and less healthy than young people. Younger adults are perceived by children as being more fun, better looking, and more physically able that older adults (Miller, Blalock, & Ginsburg, 1984). A preference for younger adults was also found by Burke (1981-1982) who found that children ages four to seven were less likely to portray older adults in positive ways.

Many studies have determined stereotypes held by various age groups, but few have studied the differences in attitudes according to age. Hummert, Gartska, Shaner, and Strahm (1994) studied young, middle-aged, and older adults but found no significant differences in the way they stereotyped older people. However, Isaacs and Bearison (1986) found that older children were more 'ageist' than younger children.

Similar to findings among adolescents (Gerbner, 1997), children have been found to be more prejudiced against older women than older men (Isaacs & Bearison, 1986). Children as young as three years old were found to be scared of the idea of growing old (Rich, Myrick, & Campbell, 1984). These findings have been consistent with many studies (Burke 1981-1982; Seefeldt et al., 1977). Isaacs and Bearison (1986) discovered that by the time children enter elementary school, negative stereotypes about older people have already started to develop. This study measured attitudes of children ages four, six,

and eight and found that eight and six-year-olds had significantly high levels of ageist prejudice while four-year-olds did not. The study also found that these children were also more prejudiced toward older women than older men (Isaacs & Bearison, 1986). In school, children are often exposed to more negative stereotypes than before entering school and these often effect the way children perceive older people (Seefeldt & Ahn, 1990). However, Middlecamp and Gross (2002) found that preschoolers were very positive about their own aging. The children in this study viewed older adults less positively than younger adults, but did not view their own aging in the same light.

A study of stereotyping done by young, middle-aged, and older adults found positive results when compared to earlier studies (Hummert et al., 1994). This study found that adults of all ages "share seven powerful cultural archetypes of aging: *the Golden Ager, John Wayne Conservative, Perfect Grandparent, Shrew/Curmudgeon, Recluse, Despondent,* and *Severely Impaired*" (Hummert et al., 1994, p. 249). The Hummert et al. study also found that older adults have more complex representations of aging than do middle-aged and young ones. Therefore, more archetypes were identified associated with older people in addition to the seven that applied to adults of all ages. These additional stereotypes are that of *Activist*, *Liberal Matriarch/Patriarch* and *Small Town Neighbor,* which are overall positive, and the negative stereotypes of *Vulnerable*, *Mildly Impaired*, *Self- Centered*, and *Elitist* (see *Appendix B* for operational definitions). These stereotypes are significant because earlier studies had found negative stereotypes being greater than positive ones and this study found the negative and positive stereotype to be equal. In both Schmidt and Boland's (1986) and Hummert et al.'s (1994) studies, participants associated negative or positive feelings with the correlating stereotype.

Impact of Stereotypes on Society

Palmore (1990) identified an effect of negative stereotyping as a disruption of the socialization of young people with respect to older people. Older adults are often the focus of negative social attitudes that results in ageism (Falchikov, 1990; Newman, Faux, & Larimer, 1997; Seefeldt, Jantz, Galper, & Serock, 1977). Hummert (1990) discovered that negative stereotypes grow with an increase in age. This finding is consistent with other studies that have also found that more negative stereotypes are associated with individuals ages 65 and older while positive stereotypes are associated with the ages in the range of 55 to 65 (Hummert, 1993; Hummert et al., 1994).

After reviewing 43 studies dealing with beliefs and attitudes toward older people, Kite and Johnson (1988) concluded that attitudes toward the elderly are more negative than those toward younger people. The meta-analysis found smaller differences between attitudes toward younger people and older people when looking at personality traits (as compared with measuring competence), and when specific information was provided about the target person (instead of just knowing that a person was old). Gerbner (1997) studied the approximate 353 characters that a typical child views each week in prime-time dramatic programs and addressed how characters of different ages and genders were represented. The results found that young people (sixth to ninth graders) who viewed television more heavily believed that men and women became old at a significantly younger age than those who were not considered heavy viewers. These adolescents also believe that women become old before men do. Gerbner attributed this to the increasing role that television plays in teaching the social roles of gender and aging.

Despite the many negative stereotypes held by young people associated with older people, a recent study found that strong grandparent-grandchild relationships might play a mediating role in creating positive stereotypes (Anderson, Harwood, & Hummert, 2005). It was found that when children had positive, strong relationships with their grandparents, they perceived old age in a much more positive light. Another factor that influences children's attitudes toward the elderly is culture. Seefeldt and Ahn (1990) compared the perceptions of older people between Anglo-American, Korean American, and Korean children and found differences in perceptions that corresponded with each group's cultural background.

In conjunction with this idea, McCann, Daily, Giles, and Ota (2005) found that positive stereotyping of older adults by younger people led to less 'avoidance' of interaction. The more young adults viewed older adults as benevolent and personally vital, the less likely they were to avoid communicating with them. Certain studies can be skewed depending on the approach to determining stereotypes. Positive perceptions of older people were found when children's values (as opposed to adult values) were used to interpret stereotyping (Newman, Faux, & Larimer, 1997).

Representation of Older People in Media

The U.S. Census for the year 2000 reported that 21% of the population of the United States is 55 years and older. Of those 65 and older, who make up 12.4% of the total population, approximately 41% are male and 59% female.

In spite of such a significant percentage of the population being classified as older adults, the representation of characters over 55 years in the media is extremely low in

comparison. A number of studies have shown that older people are underrepresented in all forms of media including newspapers (Krueger, 2001; Vasil & Wass, 1993), advertising (Bramlett-Solomon & Subramanian, 1999; Peterson, 1992; Roy & Harwood, 1997), and television (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, & Shanahan, 2002; Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Robinson, 2006; Robinson & Skill, 1995; Signorielli, 2001).

This expansive collection of studies and the consistent results have led researchers to describe the depiction of older characters in media as "approaching invisibility" (Gantz, Gartenberg, & Rainbow, 1980) and "the invisible generation" (Robinson & Skill, 1995). Krueger (2001) addressed how aging is covered in print media. He recognized the lack of representation and stated that topics related to aging in newspapers are almost non-existent and rarely given priority in the news world.

Bramlett-Solomon and Subramanian (1999) found similar trends to be true in magazine advertisements. This study studied a decade of advertisements in *Life* and *Ebony* magazines and found that fewer older figures appeared in magazines in the 1990s than during the previous decade. The authors concluded that "if magazine advertising is indeed responsive to reader taste, then the elderly are not highly valued consumers in these magazines" (Bramlett-Solomon & Subramanian, 1997, p. 565). Peterson (1992) conducted another content analysis found similar results when looking at magazine advertisements in a large number of different magazines directed toward the general public (*Reader's Digest*, *Newsweek*, *Business Week*, *Esquire*, *Gentleman's Quarterly*, *T. V. Guide*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Family Circle*, *Women's Day*, *Time*, *The New Yorker*, *McCalls*, and *Field and Stream*). This study found that older consumers were not shown as frequently as their younger counterparts, and that when compared to their composition

of the total population, they were underrepresented. A more recent study of magazine advertisements found that though underrepresented in relation to their demographics, older people are being featured significantly more which suggests that marketers are perhaps recognizing the growing economic importance of the market segment that older people make up (Robinson & Callister, 2007).

An underrepresentation of the elderly has been studied in television more than any other media. Robinson and Skill (1995) added to decades of research on the portrayal of older characters in prime-time television. This study took a random sample of 100 prime-time shows and found that less than 3% were judged to be over 65 years of age, and only 8.8% of those accounted for were cast in major roles. Robinson and Anderson (2006) found similar results when looking at children's animated television programs. This content analysis found that only 8% of characters in the animated programs were old. These are just a few of the many studies done that have consistently shown that older people are underrepresented in all types of media.

Representation of Older People in Major and Minor Roles

Numerous studies have found that not only are older characters underrepresented in relation to their U. S. demographics, but also when elderly characters are portrayed, they occupy relatively small and unimportant roles in television (Cassata, Anderson, & Skill, 1983; Elliott, 1984; Greenberg et al., 1980; Robinson & Skill, 1995). The most recent of these studies found that in prime-time television the proportion of characters 65 or older cast in major roles decreased from 4.5% in 1975 to 2.8% in 1990 (Robinson & Skill, 1995). This study took a random sample of 100 prime time television shows and

coded all adult-speaking characters. The results showed that little improvement had been made in the previous decades in regard to representation and portrayal of older character even though the public had perceived the contrary. Similar studies have been conducted which studied older characters and their roles in television commercials. The consistent finding among these studies is that when older people are portrayed, they are rarely depicted in leading roles and almost always holding minor and relatively unimportant roles (Robinson, Duet, & Smith, 1995; Swayne & Greco, 1987). In their content analysis of children's animated television shows, Robinson and Anderson (2006) also found that older characters were principally featured in minor roles and underrepresented in general.

Representation of Older People in terms of Gender and Race in Media

Numerous studies have concluded that, when portrayals of older people are present in the media, men are consistently represented more than women (Baker & Goggin, 1994; Ganahl, Prinsen, & Netzley, 2003; Gerbner, 1997). Baker and Goggin (1994) studied the stereotyping of age and gender through a content analysis of the magazine *Modern Maturity* from 1987 to 1991. This study found women significantly underrepresented while men were overrepresented.

Racial diversity is a virtually untapped area of study in relation to the portrayal of older characters. The portrayal of different races has been studied but relatively few studies have explored racial diversity among older people in the media and results have not been consistent. Baker and Goggin studied "people of color" in their content analysis of the magazine *Modern Maturity* and found that those older people of racial minorities were significantly underrepresented. This same finding was reported in Roy and

Harwood's content analysis of television commercials (1997). Bramlett-Solomon &
Subramanian (1999) also studied race in their content analysis and found a higher
proportion of black elderly figures to white elderly figures in their study of older
characters in two top magazines. However, one of those two top magazines was *Ebony*, a
magazine targeted specifically to African-Americans.

The one exception to older characters consistently being underrepresented in the
media was a content analysis of popular television shows that found elderly people
portrayed proportionate to their U.S. demographics (Peterson, 1973). However, this study
was conducted decades ago and there are no recent studies that confirm this finding. This
study is also one exception among numerous studies with similar results.

Overall, the trend in media throughout the past few decades has been an
underrepresentation of older people. When the elderly are depicted it is usually in minor
roles, and males are depicted much more often than females. Race, though few studies
have focused on their representation, is also not accurately portrayed in relation to
demographics. Unless the target audience is older people, older people are not depicted
nearly as often in mainstream media as their demographics suggest.

Positive Portrayals of Older Characters in Media

The issue of underrepresentation is easier to identify and quantify than that of
portrayal, and as a result, a significant number of studies have addressed the issue of how
older characters are portrayed in various types of media.

Signorielli (2001) noted that because television programs and movies are
restricted by time constraints, they often rely on stereotypes to help portray certain types

of characters. Throughout the past few decades, researchers have found varying results as to the portrayal of older characters in the media and the stereotypes used to typify older characters as both positive and negative. Peterson (1973) reported that elderly on prime-time television were represented as active, independent, and in good health. Positive images of the elderly in the media were also reported in 1980 by Broussard, Blackmon, Blackwell, Smith, and Hunt when looking at how old people and aging were portrayed in ten daily U.S. newspapers. The portrayal of elderly in magazine advertisements was also found to be positive as over half portraying older characters showed them in working situations, most of which were prestigious jobs (Ursic et al., 1986). Another study found favorable portrayals of the elderly on prime-time television shows. The older characters identified where identified with stereotypes of being powerful, affluent, healthy, active, admired, and sexy (Bell, 1992).

Positive portrayals of elderly people have most commonly been found in advertisements while other forms of media fall behind. Langmeyer (1983) found neutral portrayals of the elderly in a content analysis of advertisements found in nine popular magazines. Miller et al. (1999) also found relatively little overall stereotyping of the elderly in a longitudinal study of stereotypes of the elderly in magazine advertisements from 1965-1996. The magazines analyzed for this study were *Better Homes & Gardens*, *Popular Mechanics*, and *Life* and though negative stereotyping of older people was low (4% of the sample had negative stereotypes), the study found that in the four decades studied, there was an increase in the percentage of negative stereotypes and a decrease in the percentage of positive stereotypes. An overall positive portrayal of older people was found in Gantz et al.'s study (1990) of elderly characters in magazine ads. Gantz et al.

suggests, however, that advertising may project less negative stereotypes of the elderly when compared to other forms of media because advertisements seek to attract audiences and encourage purchases instead of poke fun or focus on only one age group. A more recent study found consistent portrayals when looking at how national magazine advertisements portray older adults (Robinson & Callister, 2007). The findings of this content analysis indicate that magazines present an "idealized" image of older people as healthy, happy, and of average body weight. Though this representation of older people is a positive one, the study addressed the potentially harmful influence these idealized images may have on its audience when comparing themselves to the images.

Advertisements in the form of television commercials have also been studied and have consistently portrayed older characters in a more positive light than television programs. A content analysis of 778 television commercials found that though underrepresented, older adults were depicted as strong, happy, and active. The authors found it significant that older characters were portrayed in business or outdoor settings more than the home (Roy & Harwood, 1997). Another longitudinal study found positive results when looking at television commercials from the 1950s to the 1990s (Miller et al., 2004). This study collected commercials from each decade and determined which common stereotypes were used to characterize each older person. The most commonly used stereotypes over the decades were that of the *Perfect Grandparent*, *Adventurous Golden Ager*, and *Productive Golden Ager*, all of which are positive stereotypes according to previous studies (Miller et al., 2004).

A majority of positive portrayals was the predominant finding in a study looking at popular children's animated television programs and their portrayal of older characters

(Robinson & Anderson, 2006). This content analysis found that older characters were principally featured in minor roles and underrepresented in general. In this content analysis, physical and personality characteristics were coded for and more characters were described as having positive personality traits (59%), than negative. Despite the positive portrayals found, this study also drew attention to the preponderance of negative portrayals of older characters in popular children's animated films, especially in the role of villain.

Negative Portrayals of Older Characters in Media

Though many studies have found positive portrayals of older people, a significant number of studies have found the opposite (Baker & Goggin, 1994; Broussard et al., 1980; Carmichael, 1976; Healy & Ross, 2002; Lauzen & Dozier, 2005; Northcott, 1975, O'Hallaren, 1977; Palmore, 1990; Peterson, 1992; Signorielli,1975; Subramanian, 1999). Various studies in the 1970s found that old people were depicted as ugly, toothless, sexless, incontinent, senile, confused, less-intelligent, decrepit, sick, slow, and helpless (Carmichael, 1976; O'Hallaren, 1977). In accordance with these results, Signorielli (1975) found that personality traits of younger characters were more positive than those of older characters. A study of the portrayal of older people in newspapers found stereotypes of the elderly being weak, sexless, passive, unproductive as workers, senile, and not in good health (Broussard et al., 1980). Similar stereotypes were found in prime-time television drama by Northcott (1975). Another study conducted on older characters in prime time television found aging to be associated with evil, failure, and unhappiness (Aronoff, 1974). In 1983, Signorielli found that older people in prime time television

were the group most likely to be alcoholics, smokers, and overweight. Swayne and Greco (1987) found that elderly people were portrayed most often in the home suggesting that the elderly "don't get out much anymore…" (p. 53).

More current research has found that not much has changed in to the overall negative portrayal of older characters in the media. Palmore (1990) believes that negative stereotypes of the elderly are the foundation for ageism, which involves prejudice and discrimination against older people. This consensus has been found time and time again over the past four decades. More recently, Baker and Goggin (1994) found a preponderance of older people when looking at advertisements in a magazine geared toward that population, but found the stereotypes portrayed as less than positive. Older people were depicted as having a decrease in attractiveness and sexual intimacy as well as a dependency on children for love and purpose in life. Baker and Goggin also found a predominance of advertisements for products geared toward minimizing the effects of aging. Another study similarly found that magazine advertisements tend to portray older people in a less than desirable way (Peterson, 1992). When following up from a previous study, Bramlett-Solomon and Subramanian (1999) found that the portrayal of older people in magazines grew more negative from 1989 to 1999.

Research has not found the past two decades in television to be any more positive in its portrayal of older people. When older people were interviewed and asked to explain how older characters were portrayed in television, they shared similar negative stereotypes as those found in magazines such as dependent, vulnerable, asexual, stupid, and grumpy (Healey & Ross, 2002). In a study on recognition and respect toward older people in prime-time television, respect was found to decrease for characters that reached

60 years of age (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005). This decrease in respect was measured by a decrease in characters that held leadership roles, a decline of characters with occupational power, and a significant fall in goal achievement of characters.

Relatively little research has been conducted on the portrayal of older characters in popular films. Lauzen and Dozier (2005) examined the top 100 films for the year 2002 and found similar results to studies that have been done with television. Older characters aged 50 and over were underrepresented and women were portrayed in a more negative light than men. Age was significantly related to occupational power and leadership with male characters, but the same was not true for female characters.

In addition to the scarcity of studies on older characters in films, children's media has hardly been addressed as to portrayals of the elderly. The exception to this trend is a study looking at the portrayal of older characters in animated films conducted by Robinson, Callister, Magoffin, and Moore (2007). The Robinson et al. study analyzed the entire population of Disney animated films and their portrayal of older characters. Through the use of content analysis, the authors found that older characters were portrayed positively overall, but that the percentage of negative portrayals was still significant. More recent decades portrayed a greater number of older characters in general as well as a greater number of older characters (an average one character per film) with major roles than previous studies have found. However, 22% of these older major characters were villains. Consistent with previous studies was the finding that older men were represented much more than their female counterparts. Negative characteristics such as the use of physical aids and wrinkles were less common while neutral characteristics such as gray or white hair, baldness, and limited wrinkles were much more

common. Personality characteristics followed similar trends. Robinson et al. found that more overall portrayals were positive than negative. Some of these negative portrayals included characters depicted as grumpy, evil or sinister, helpless, senile or crazy, and as an object of ridicule. Of the films studied, a great majority contained at least one negative portrayal of an older character. This study concluded that the high number of persisting negative stereotypes can have a great effect on children and is significant when compared to the much lower percentage of negative stereotypes in media geared toward adults.

Portrayals of Older Characters and Gender in Media

Research has consistently found older women portrayed in a less positive light than their older male counterparts. Signorielli (1975) found older females to be the most likely to be portrayed as victims of violence. In a later study, Signorielli (1982) found that older women characters were less likely to have a job and rarely had an occupation outside the home. England et al. (1981) referred to this portrayal of older women (or lack thereof across all types of media) as the 'sexist double standard of ageing.' Consistent with these findings is a study that found men were more likely to be portrayed positively on seven out of nine desirable traits and women were more likely to be portrayed negatively on six out of seven undesirable traits in television programs (Vernon, Williams, Phillips, & Wilson, 1991). When looking at prime-time television, Gerbner (1997) discovered that older women "virtually vanish from the screen in major, positive, and powerful roles. They tend to be both underrepresented and overvictimized, isolated, infirm, often ridiculed" (p. 93). The one exception to the overwhelming research showing the negative portrayal of older women when Aronoff (1974) found that chances of male

villainy increased with age more than that of female villains. However, Aronoff also concluded that only 40% of older men and even fewer women were portrayed as happy, successful, and good. This one finding that suggests older men are cast in a more negative light than women has not been supported in the last few decades.

Disney's influence on children and families

Disney has not only found success in producing theater-released films, but has re-released its films on DVD and video resulting in an increasingly successful home viewing market (Brockus, 2004; Dundes, 2001). This home viewing market is significant because once videos are owned, children watch them repeatedly and with the same frequency as television (Lin, 2001). In 2005 the Kaiser Family Foundation Report found that young people ages 8-18 watch an average of three hours of television and videos/DVDs per day (Roberts, Foehr, & Rideout, 2005). One in four children under six watches a DVD or video every day and 73% of children under the age of six spend time watching DVDs and videos (Rideout, Vandewater, & Vandewater, 2003). The amount of time children spend watching television and DVDs warrants that research be done on these popular media and the effects they could potentially have on young viewers.

Disney's cultural impact is significant because it has become a central aspect of not only individual, but also family experiences (Brockus, 2004). Disney films inspire "at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles, values and ideals than more traditional sites of learning such as public schools, religious institutions and the family" (Giroux, 1995, p. 25). Pecora and Meehan (2001), reported that, "Disney has become a central part of a person's life cycle and a family's existence" (p. 323).

Disney is known for its ability to overtly promote values of goodness, kindness, and innocence (Brockus, 2004). These values are a result of Disney's efforts to provide family entertainment intended for the American "family" audience. The defining of this "American family audience" is ambiguous and all encompassing, but certainly the aim of Disney productions (Natale, 1991).

Disney Film Research

An expansive collection of studies has been conducted that explore Disney films and their various aspects. Disney research has attracted a lot of attention and contributes to the socialization of children because of its strong presence in the lives of children. The attention given to the research of Disney films in the field of communications supports the importance of this study in adding to the literature that already exists. An especially popular topic among researchers has been the issue of gender in Disney animated films (Stone, 1975; Lieberman, 1977; Crafton, 1989; Trites, 1991; Addison, 1995; Sells, 1995; Downey, 1996; Hoerrner, 1996; O'Brien, 1996; Beres, 1999; Dundes, 2001; Wiersma, 2001; Craven, 2002; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund, & Tanner, 2003; DoRazio, 2004; Lacroix, 2004). In the past 30 years, multiple papers have been written addressing the stereotypical, sexually provocative, and sometimes denigrating portrayals of women in Disney films. Disney has been criticized for its emphasis on beauty (Lieberman, 1977), the passivity of its female characters (Stone, 1975), and the restrictive "motherhood" identity imposed on women as evidenced in *Peter Pan* (Crafton, 1989). Other studies have found women to be portrayed as either self-effacing or evil and often depending on men as their source of power (Trites, 1991). Some researchers have analyzed the

patriarchal world that dominates Disney films and how that further propels the "voiceless" and isolated female characters (Addison, 1995; Sells, 1995; Trites, 1991). Hoerrner (1996) studied sex roles in Disney films to identify the "gendered" world view and gender role stereotypes they provide to young viewers. Craven (2002) studied the feminist concerns Disney has addressed in recent years and discovered that only superficial feminist ideologies are upheld, if any. O'Brien (1996) also studied gender stereotypes through a textual analysis of *Cinderella* and *The Little Mermaid*. O'Brien's findings were consistent with previous studies in that patriarchal values were embraced and females oppressed.

In contrast to these studies that focus on the negative stereotypes Disney portrays, Downey (1996) analyzed Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* and the change in the portrayal of the female role. Downey found that the portrayal of the heroine, Belle, was empowering for women as the narrative created dual gender voices as well as interdependence between women and men. Lacroix (2004) analyzed Disney heroines and how their portrayal fits into the consumerist framework that Disney has created. She argued that female characters of color have become "orientalized" in recent years emphasizing the exotic and an increase in sexuality. Another study was done in 2004 that addressed the changing portrayal of heroines in more recent years (DoRazio, 2004). This study studied the increase of autonomy and openness in Disney princesses and the disruption of the traditionally patriarchal society Disney had initially created. A comparison was made between traditional Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty and more modern, proactive and free-thinking Pocahontas, Jasmine, and Ariel.

Relatively few studies have analyzed the cultural, racial, and ethnic aspects of Disney films (Gooding-Williams, 1995; Martin-Rodriguez, 2000; Palmer, 2000). One of these studies, combined the issue of gender with race, age, and sexual orientation was conducted in 2003 (Towbin et al., 2003). This study found the same gender stereotypes as previous studies and found that non-dominant groups were portrayed negatively, marginalized, or not portrayed at all.

More recent studies have expanded beyond the scope of gender stereotypes and addressed Disney's portrayal of other issues such as societal problems. Beveridge (1996) and Lawson and Fouts (2004) have studied the portrayal of mental illness and madness in Disney animated films, their prevalence, and related stereotypes. It was discovered that many negative references were made to the mentally ill and that children's attitudes toward those with mental illness were affected as a result (Lawson & Fouts, 2004). The topic of smoking and drinking in Disney animated classics was studied by Ryan and Hoerrner (2004). This study found an overwhelming number of instances of both alcohol and tobacco use with no anti-use messages found in any of the viewed films. Death was another topic studied in recent years in a study that examined the potential influence of Disney films on children's perceptions of death. The finality and irreversibility of death portrayed in Disney films, especially the deaths of villains, may serve as a means by which parents can discuss the difficult and serious concept of death with their children (Cox, Garrett, & Graham, 2005). Weight is yet another aspect of Disney films that has been studied. In conjunction with the American obsession with thinness, Trites (1991) found that Disney has begun to associate weight with evil. This is observed in *The Little*

Mermaid where Ursula is extremely large and evil while Ariel is the epitome of goodness and very shapely.

A number of studies have also researched the portrayal of couples and family relationships in Disney animated films. Father-daughter relationships and the extent to which these relationships corresponded with the qualities of successful and unsuccessful father-adolescent daughter relationships were analyzed in one study. This study found that Disney accurately portrayed both restricting (unsuccessful) and unrestricting (successful) relationships between fathers and daughters (Wynns, 2003). Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman, and Lund (2003) explored themes in the couples and families portrayed in 26 Disney animated films. The researchers discovered that only 30% of the films contained traditional family structures with a mother, father, and biological children while 62% of the films presented alternative family structures.

The most recently published study on Disney animated films is the one previously mentioned that identified older characters and the positive and negative stereotypes used in depicting them (Robinson et al., 2007). This content analysis found that though more positive stereotypes existed than negative, the high percentage of negative stereotypes was significant. Robinson et al.'s study of animated films will provide the foundation for the current study on Disney live-action films.

Despite the vast amount of research that has been done on Disney animated films associated with gender, race, mental illness, family relationships, and other various topics, relatively no or little work has explored the sprawling world of Disney live-action films. These films in box office numbers and in quantity far exceed Disney's world of animation, yet Disney animated films have been the only sample taken when looking at

Disney's global media empire and the messages it is perpetuating throughout the world. The goal of this study will be to further the research done on the portrayal of older characters in Disney films, and also to begin filling the gap in research on live-action films and what they portray.

Media Effects Theories

There are several communications theories that can help explain the impact the many stereotypes of older characters pervading the media may have on its audience. The persistent stereotypes toward older people can be attributed to many socializing factors for children including attitudes learned in the home, at school, and through other interactions with others. Children learn societal norms and constructions from many sources, but media are a powerful and influential source for learning (Gerbner, 1997; Signorielli, 2001; Witt, 1997). Social learning theory, also known as social observational theory, posits that children imitate the behaviors they see on television as much as the behaviors they observe in parents, siblings, and friends (Bandura & Walters, 1963). Television and videos therefore become integral in creating social norms and acceptable behaviors for how they should act around certain people.

Gerbner (1997) expressed that television is the new context through which aging roles are learned. A potential reason for this is that children have a more difficult time differentiating between reality and fantasy. Movies and videos that portray a fictional reality can therefore have a powerful socializing effect on the lives of children (Miller, 2003). Signorielli (2001) described television as becoming "the nation's primary story-

teller" which is evidenced by the statistic that children today are born into homes where the television is on for over seven hours a day (Gerbner, 1997).

While adults learn most often from written information rather than from video or auditory sources, children learn most readily from video (Walma van der Molen & van der Voort, 2000). Infants as young as one year of age replicate the emotions of people around them by observing their actions and reactions, even if the actions they observe are on television (Mumme & Fernald, 2003).

Cultivation theory conjectures that consistent exposure to stereotyped images will influence viewers' perceptions of society over time. Cultivation theory also proposes that the more time spent watching television, the more social norms and behaviors will be modified and adjusted to remain consistent with the values observed. Television delivers a new perception of 'the real world' its own set of values, portrayals and ideologies (Gerbner et al., 2002). "The accumulated experience [of media exposure] contributes to the cultivation of a child's values, beliefs, dreams, and expectations, which shape the adult identity a child will carry and modify through his or her life" (Swindler, 1986, p. 311). Holladay (2002) held that the media is responsible for cultivating some of our views on aging and stated that, "Through exposure to elderly television and movie characters, we may develop conceptions of what later life might hold for aging individuals and ourselves" (p. 681).

Gerbner (1997) found that watching television was not associated with any positive images of older people and that heavy television viewers held negative stereotypes such as believing older people are in worse physical and financial shape than before, that they are not sexually active or good at getting things done, and that they are

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Gerbner (1997) found that watching television was not associated with any positive images of older people and that heavy television viewers held negative stereotypes such as believing older people are in worse physical and financial shape than before, that they are not sexually active or good at getting things done, and that they are

close-minded. This finding as well as the many other negative stereotypes held by children, adolescents, and adults can be attributed to the negative portrayals of these characters in the media, especially television and films. Social learning theory and cultivation theory help to make sense of how portrayals, messages, and attitudes in the media can effect perceptions of reality and cultivate attitudes and prejudices.

Research Questions

The purpose of this thesis is to look at the portrayals of older people that exist in media most viewed by children. There is a scarcity of studies on older characters in films, and children's media has also hardly been studied in regard to portrayals of the elderly. This thesis will be an extension of the study by Robinson et al. (2007) on Disney animated films, and will follow the same methodology and analyze the same characteristics, but will look at Disney non-animated films from the past two decades. This is a descriptive study to show what exists in regard to portrayals of older people in Disney non-animated family films, which will be referred to as 'live-action films'. No attempt is made to determine the effects these films have on children and their perceptions of older characters or what kind of meaning they derive from such portrayals. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How many older major and minor characters appear in Disney live action films from the 1990s and 2000s?

RQ2: How are older major and minor characters represented in terms of gender and race?

RQ3: What are the primary roles (i.e. parent, grandparent, boss, friend, etc.) of older major and minor characters in Disney live action films?

RQ4: How many incidental older characters are found and what is their overall portrayal?

RQ5: What personality traits do the older major and minor characters possess?

RQ6: What physical characteristics do older major and minor characters possess?

RQ7: What stereotypes do older major and minor characters embody?

RQ8: Is the overall portrayal of older major and minor characters in Disney live action films positive or negative, and do the characters' gender and race influence the portrayals?

RQ9: Does the overall portrayal of older major and minor characters vary between the two decades?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Sample

"For more than 70 years, Disney has been engaging children and adults alike with clean, wholesome entertainment" (Mullan, 2008). Disney is known for its family friendly values and its appeal is largely due to its target audience of children, or at least children at heart. "Disney has created a mythic image of all Disney productions as wholesome, family entertainment for 'children of all ages'" and is "hailed as a purveyor of society's dominant 'family' values" (O'Brien, 1996, p. 155, 179). In conjunction with this image, the American family is Disney's target audience (Downey, 1996).

The sample for this research project consists of the top 30 grossing Disney live-action (non-animated) films for the 1990s and 30 live-action films from 2000 to 2008 that have been released in theaters. Only 30 films fit the criteria during the eight-year time frame from 2000 to 2008 and though more films are available from the 1990s, in order to compare decades equally, only the top 30 grossing films from the 1990s were coded (see *Appendix F*).

All of the films in the sample were theatrical releases. Sequels were excluded from the sample so that characters in the films were not coded multiple times. IMAX productions, and films void of humans were excluded from the sample due to the absence of human characters available to code. Films that had fictional characters as major characters were excluded (i.e. Muppet movies and *The Country Bears).* A coding system was not developed for speaking, human-like characters that were not human and those films were therefore excluded. Films with animals as major characters were included in the study and the humans in those films were coded, even if the animals played a

dominant role. Remakes from films produced prior to 1990 were included in this study (i.e. *Flubber*, *Freaky Friday*, *The Parent Trap*, etc.).

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl released in 2003 and the sequels to that initial success were the first Disney live-action films rated PG-13. Touchstone pictures, another label created by Disney, is often the outlet that enables Disney to release more mature content in films that are not associated with the Disney name. Because of Disney rating its films G and PG, we can assume that, though the audience often extends beyond childhood ages, Disney live action films released under the Disney name are targeted to a younger audience. Because of this younger target audience, this study does not compare its results of older people found to U.S. demographics.

There are a number of different Disney production companies including Walt Disney Pictures, Touchstone, Buena Vista Motion Pictures Group, and Hollywood Pictures. Since the success of the Disney-branded PG-13 rated *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* in 2003, Disney has moved more toward Disney-branded films and away from Touchstone films while dissolving the Buena Vista brand name entirely in 2007. This study will be limited to films released under the Walt Disney name as the main producer.

The top 60 grossing films from the 1990s and 2000s were chosen based on their total lifetime domestic gross and thus reflect popularity in the theaters, but also success in home video/DVD sales. The figures available do not allow us to distinguish between DVD sales and theater releases, therefore the total lifetime domestic gross is the number used in this study to determine its success. The list of Disney films and the total lifetime

domestic gross was determined by consulting various movie and box office websites that track domestic box office grosses, including www.ultimatedisney.com, home.disney.go.com/movies/index, www.wikipedia.org, www.boxofficemojo.com, and www.movieweb.com (see *Appendix F)*.

The two decades chosen were selected because of their current appeal to the American public. These films are currently being repeatedly viewed by children across the world and have been for the past 18 years (Lin, 2001). Also, Disney's continued financial success is largely due to the increasingly successful home viewing market it has created (Brockus, 2004; Dundes, 2001).

Measurement and Coding Instrument

A coding sheet (see *Appendix E*) was devised to closely track information about older characters. The operational definitions and information used to create the coding sheet were taken from similar content analysis studies (Bishop & Krause, 1984; Robinson & Anderson, 2006; Robinson et al. 2007).

Older characters were defined by those 55 years of age and older and were identified based on the evidence of the following characteristics: an appearance of retirement, extensive gray hair, wrinkled skin, extensive loss of hair or balding, a cracking voice, use of an aid such as a cane or a wheelchair, the parent of someone who is middle-aged or older, or evidence of grandchildren or great-grandchildren (Bishop & Krause, 1984; Bramlett-Solomon & Subramanian, 1999; Gantz et al. 1980; Peterson, 1992; Robinson, 1998; Robinson & Anderson, 2006; Robinson et al. 2007; Swayne & Greco, 1987). Only specific mention of age was a sufficient condition for classification as

"older" or "elderly" without other characteristics being present. The only exception to this was when characters who appeared young or middle aged were said to be much older because of some type of magic (for example: ghosts in *The Haunted Mansion*, elves in *The Santa Clause*, and characters who do not age in *Tuck Everlasting*). Specific mention of age was not sufficient when characters were depicted as younger because it was not possible to observe physical stereotypes.

Only human characters were coded. When a ghost, Martian, or other unusual character that was played by a human in a film fit multiple characteristics of an old person, he or she was coded as such (i.e. *My Favorite Martian* and *Angels in the Outfield*). Zombies (*The Haunted Mansion*) and skeletal figures (*Pirates of the Caribbean*) were not coded because they did not have enough human characteristics to make an accurate analysis.

Once an older character was determined to be older, his or her role (major, minor, or incidental) was identified. A major character was one who was important or central to the plot. A major character was generally on the screen for a significant amount of time and had extensive dialogue. A minor character was somewhat relevant to the plot, was found in more than one scene and had more than one line. Incidental characters are those characters who were drawn into the plot and become part of the action, even the character only has one line or is identified in one scene. All other characters including extras or background characters who are not drawn into the plot were not coded for.

Characters dressed up as an older person or in the form of an older person were included as an older character. The older character they portrayed was classified as major, minor, or incidental depending on their screen time and significance to the plot.

For example, in *Hocus Pocus*, the three witches who were major characters were depicted as old hags in the opening scene. Because the old "version" of them was only depicted in one scene they were coded as incidental characters. Situations like this also occurred in *The Santa Clause*, *Enchanted*, *The Kid*, and *Mr. Magoo*.

Chronological age, defined as young-old (55-64), middle-old (65-74), and old-old (75+), was coded as well as "social age" (Miller, Miller, McKibbin, & Pettys, 1999). Social age is classified as either middle-aged or elderly and has no relation to chronological age (Signorielli, 2004). The greatest indicator of determining middle-aged vs. elderly was work status. Characters identified as middle-aged were those who were portrayed in working or volunteering situations and who possessed three or fewer of the characteristics identifying older characters. Because retirement is often associated with age and the elderly, elderly characters were identified as those portrayed as retired and/or possessing several characteristics that identify older characters.

Other variables coded included the level of activity of the character (very active, active, inactive), health status (good, minor limitations, poor), and primary role of the character. These primary roles include worker, boss, parent, grandparent, friend, villain, spouse, other and operational definitions are provided in *Appendix A*. Physical portrayal was coded according to various characteristics such as wrinkles, attractiveness, hair color, facial hair type and color, baldness, teeth (or lack thereof), glasses, and use of a physical aid such as a cane, wheelchair, or hearing aide. Physical portrayal in regard to body type were also noted as very thin, thin, average, overweight, or obese. Operational definitions for physical traits are found in *Appendix B*. Personality descriptions such as forgetful, angry/grumpy/stern, humorous, helpless, lonely/recluse, intelligent/wise, sad,

senile/crazy, friendly, nosey, happy/content, loving/caring, eccentric, overly affectionate, object of ridicule, or evil/sinister were coded. The operational definitions for these personality traits are included in *Appendix B* and were taken from the previous study on older characters in Disney animated films as this study is adding to that research and expanding the data to include live-action films (Robinson & Anderson, 2006; Robinson et al., 2007).

After both physical and personality characteristics were identified, each character was identified as either consistent or not consistent with each of the following positive and negative stereotypes: *Golden Ager*, *John Wayne Conservative*, *Perfect Grandparent*, *Activist*, *Small Town Neighbor*, *Liberal Matriarch/Patriarch*, *Shrew/Curmudgeon*, *Despondent*, *Vulnerable*, *Severely Impaired*, *Recluse*, *Mildly Impaired*, *Self-Centered*, and *Elitist* (Schmidt & Boland, 1986; Hummert et al., 1994). These stereotypes and their accompanying characteristics (see *Appendix D*) are used in this paper to help identify whether older characters are negatively or positively portrayed (see *Appendix E*). A final evaluation was then made of the character's overall portrayal (positive or negative) after considering all personality and physical traits and the negative or positive stereotypes associated with each character.

Two independent coders who received over 20 hours of training coded nine randomly selected movies (15% of the sample). The coders discussed any disagreements, resolved them, and established intercoder reliability through Holsti's formula (1969). The two coders used Holsti's formula to calculate agreement on the identification of characters (98% agreement), role (98% agreement), chronological age (88% agreement), race (97% agreement), health status (97% agreement), selection of stereotypes (92%

agreement), and overall portrayal of characters (95% agreement). After reliability was established, one of the coders then watched and coded the remaining 51 films.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Research Question 1: Older Major and Minor Characters

Research question one asked how many older major and minor characters appeared in Disney live action films from the 1990s and 2000s. Of the 60 films coded, 37 major and minor older characters were identified in the 1990s, and an additional 32 older characters from the 2000s for a total of 69 major and minor older characters. A total of 88 incidental characters were identified from the two decades analyzed. Twenty-three (38%) of the films contained zero major or minor older characters. Ten of those films were from the 1990s and the remaining 13 were from the 2000s. However, when incidental characters were included, only 15% ($n = 9$) of the films in the sample contained no older major minor, or incidental characters. There were four films from the 1990s with no major, minor, or incidental older characters (*Mighty Joe Young*, *James and the Giant Peach*, *The Jungle Book*, and *Jungle 2 Jungle*) and five films from the 2000s that had no older characters (*The Pacifier*, *Bridge to Terabithia*, *Ice Princess*, *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, and *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen*).

Approximately 45% of the films *(n = 27)* had between two and three older major, minor, or incidental characters while 27% had four or more older characters (see Table 1). The three films with the greatest number of total major, minor, and incidental older characters were all from the 2000s. *Invincible* had nine older characters (two minor and seven incidental), *Around the World in 80 Days* had eight older characters (one major, one minor, and six incidental), and *The Rookie* had seven older characters (two major, three minor, and two incidental).

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Table 1

Older Characters per Film

Number of older characters	Number of films	Percentage
0	9	15%
1	8	13%
2	14	23%
3	13	22%
4	8	13%
5	3	5%
6	2	3%
7	1	2%
8	1	2%
9	1	2%
Total	60	100%

Among the older major and minor characters identified, 38% *(n = 26)* were major characters while 62% *(n = 43)* were minor characters. Only five films (8%) had two major characters in them, while 16 films (27%) had one older character and 39 (65%) had zero older major characters. No film was found to have more than two major characters that could be classified as older. Older characters with minor roles had similar ratios; 50% *(n = 30)* of the films found no minor characters, while 32% *(n = 19)* had one, 15% *(n = 9)* had two minor characters, and 3% *(n = 2)* had three minor characters.

Among these older characters, 64% *(n* = 44) were identified as "young-old" (ages 55-56), 33% *(n* = 23) were identified as "old" (ages 65-75) and only 3% (*n* = 2) were identified as "old-old" (ages 75 and over). These two "old-old" characters were Mrs. McCracken from *That Darn Cat!,* and the old hag from *Enchanted*. This proportion of characters over the age of 75 (3%) contrasts sharply to the U.S demographics where 36% of the population over the age of 55 is 75 and older.

Research Question 2: Gender and Race

The second research question addressed the issue of gender and race and how older characters are represented in relation to these variables. Among the 69 major and minor characters coded, 57 (83%) were male, leaving only 12 (17%) female (see Table 2). These findings contrast sharply to the most recent census taken on older people in the United States (Smith, 2003). The U.S. Census Bureau from 2002 found that among people ages 55 and over, women made up 55% of the population, and that with an increase in age, that percentage grows.

Table 2

Older Characters and Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage
Male	57	83%
Female	12	17%

When compared with the U.S. Census, race is also seriously misrepresented in the films coded. From the 60 films studied, approximately 90% *(n = 62)* of all major and minor older characters were white, while 9% *(n = 6)* of characters were black and 1% (*n = 1*) were classified as "other" (see Table 3). The U.S. Census from 2000 shows that minorities make up 40% of the United States population over the age of 55. Though the only minority accounted for were blacks, the study found 9% in this category, in contrast to the 15% that exist among the older population in the United States. There were no Asian or Hispanic characters identified among the sample. In 2000, Asians made up 15% of the older population in the United States, while Hispanics accounted for 10%.

Table 3

Older Characters and Race

Race	Number	Percentage
White	62	90%
Black	6	9%
Other	1	1%

Research Question 3: Primary Roles

Research question three asks what the primary roles are of the major and minor characters identified among the Disney live action films. These roles included those of parent, grandparent, boss, friend, worker, villain, indeterminate, or other (see Table 4). The most predominant role was that of friend with 29% of all characters *(n = 20)* sharing this primary role. The role of boss was associated with 23% of the characters *(n = 16)*

while 16% *(n* = 11) of characters were parents. Approximately 12% *(n* = 8) of all older

major and minor characters were villains. Of these villains, six played major roles, these

include Cruella Deville from *101 Dalmatians*, Ma and Pa from *That Darn Cat!,* Barbosa

from *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Ramsley from *The Haunted Mansion*, and Lord Kelvin

from *Around the World in 80 Days*. A small number of older characters *(n* = 6, 9%)

played roles of grandparents. Of these six, only two held major roles, that of Clarisse in

The Princess Diaries, and Grandpa in *Freaky Friday*. The remaining older characters had

the primary roles of worker (n=5, 7%), other (n=3, 4%). The three characters with the

primary role of "other" were Mr. Magoo from *Mr. Magoo*, Doc Robinson from *Tom and

Huck*, and a Coach from *Air Bud*. The primary role of these characters did not match any

of the previous titles.

Table 4

Primary Roles of Older Major and Minor Characters

Primary Role of Older Character	Number of Characters with Role	Percentage
Friend	20	29%
Boss	16	23%
Parent	11	16%
Villain	8	12%
Grandparent	6	9%
Worker	5	7%
Other	3	4%

Research Question 4: Incidental Characters

Research question four addresses incidental older characters identified and what their overall portrayal was. There were 88 incidental characters coded from the 60 films watched. Theses 88 characters account for 56% of all older characters coded (see Table 5). Because such a majority of older characters identified in Disney live action films are incidental characters, most older characters are of limited significance to the plot. There were 36 incidental older characters (41%) from the 30 films from the 1990s and 52 incidental characters (59%) identified from the 2000s. The majority of older incidental characters were portrayed in a positive light with 54% *(n = 49)* having positive stereotypes, while 25% *(n = 23)* of the incidental characters were identified as having a negative portrayal and 21% *(n = 19)* were neutral. Neutral was often used as the classification when there were an equal number of conflicting positive and negative stereotypes.

Table 5

Role of Older Characters

Role	Number	Percentage
Major	26	17%
Minor	43	27%
Incidental	88	56%

Research Question 5: Personality Traits

Personality traits of older major and minor characters were addressed in the fifth research question and though both positive and negative traits were found among the characters, the two most prevalent personality traits were positive (see Table 6). The personality trait "friendly" was possessed by 54% *(n = 37)* of the major and minor older characters and "intelligent" was possessed by 52% *(n = 36)* of the characters coded. Other prominent personality traits included "angry/stern" (32%, *n* = 22), "happy" (26%, *n* = 18), "loving" (26%, *n* = 18), "evil" (12%, *n* = 8), and "ridiculed" (10%, *n* = 7). The personality traits included as "other" were mostly negative. Doc Robinson in *Tom and Huck* was described as "greedy", Martin in *My Favorite Martian* best fit the personality trait of "goofy" and Mr. Magoo in *Mr. Magoo* was identified with the trait "absent-minded." The one exception to these "other" traits was Clarisse in *The Princess Diaries* who was described by coders as "polite and regal"

Table 6

Personality Traits of Older Major and Minor Characters

Trait	Number of Characters	Percentage
Friendly	37	54%
Intelligent	36	52%
Angry/Stern	22	32%
Happy	18	26%
Loving	18	26%
Evil/Sinister	8	12%

Ridiculed	7	10%
Humorous	6	9%
Forgetful	5	7%
Helpless	4	6%
Eccentric	4	6%
Nosey	3	4%
Lonely/Recluse	3	4%
Senile	2	3%
Macho/Sexy	2	3%
Overly Affectionate	1	1%
Sad	0	0%
Dirty old man/woman	0	0%

Chi-squares were run for a relation between all personality traits and gender and no significant findings were discovered except for two. The relationship between gender and loving was significant with 50% *(n = 6)* of all female older major and minor characters possessing this trait (X2 = 4.308, *df* = 1, p < .05). Only 21% *(n = 12)* of all male older characters were found possessing the personality trait of 'loving'. However, because there was such a huge discrepancy between the number of male and female older characters, 67% of characters coded as "loving" were male.

The other personality trait with a significant correlation to gender was 'evil' with 33% *(n = 4)* of all female older major and minor characters possessing this trait (X2 = 6.698, *df* = 1, p < .01). In comparison, only 7% *(n = 4)* of all older male major and minor

characters were identified as evil. The "evil" female characters include Ma from *That Darn Cat!*, the old hag from *Enchanted*, Cruella Deville from *101 Dalmatians*, and Beatrice from *George of the Jungle*.

Research Question 6: Physical Characteristics

The physical characteristics of older major and minor characters, as addressed in research question six, were mostly positive in their reflection on older people. Of the 69 older major and minor characters, 94% *(n = 65)* had a health status that was considered "good" while only 4% *(n = 3)* of characters had "minor limitations" and 2% *(n = 1)* had a health status considered "poor" (see Table 7). The activity level for the older characters was also very positive with 17% *(n = 12)* being "very active", 81% *(n = 56)* as "active", and only 2% *(n = 1)* being "inactive" (see Table 8). The only character classified as "inactive" was also the only character with "poor" health status and that was Mrs. McCracken from *That Darn Cat!*. The activity level and good health of the majority of older characters is evidenced in the high proportion of older major and minor characters (87%, *n = 60*) who were identified as having a social age of "middle-aged". Only 13% *(n = 9)* of older characters were defined as elderly in regard to their social age. Social age was determined based on whether the character was in the work force and/or continuing to live an active lifestyle or retired and leading a more relaxed lifestyle.

Table 7

Health Status of Older Characters

Health Status	Number	Percentage
Good	65	94%
Minor Limitations	3	4%
Poor	1	2%

Table 8

Activity Level of Older Characters

Activity Level	Number	Percentage
Very Active	12	17%
Active	56	81%
Inactive	1	2%

These findings of portrayals of considerable good health and activity level are consistent with the findings that few older characters relied on physical aids. Only 13% *(n = 9)* of all older characters wore glasses, and only 4% *(n = 3)* had physical aids. These physical aids were a hearing aid worn by Mrs. McCracken in *That Darn Cat!*, an eye patch worn by George Michaels in *Snow Dogs*, and Barbosa's wooden leg *in Pirates of the Caribbean*.

The majority (86%, *n = 59*) of the major and minor older characters coded were defined as "moderate looking", while only 7% *(n = 5)* were considered "attractive" and the remaining 7% *(n = 5)* considered "ugly" (see Table 9). Body image of older

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characters was varied among the sample with 26% (18%) of older characters being "thin", 45% *(n = 31)* "average", 25% *(n = 17)* overweight, and only 4% *(n = 3)* obese (see Table 10). All 3 characters classified as "obese" were male. No older major or minor characters were identified as "very thin".

Table 9

Attractiveness of Older Characters

Attractiveness	Number	Percentage
Attractive	5	7%
Moderate Looking	59	86%
Ugly	5	7%

Table 10

Body Image of Older Characters

Body Image	Number	Percentage
Very Thin	0	0%
Thin	18	26%
Average	31	45%
Overweight	17	25%
Obese	3	4%

Many of the older characters' physical characteristics were not classified as either positive or negative, but rather a natural occurrence of aging. These characteristics

include gray or white hair color that existed among 86% *(n = 59)* of the older major and minor characters and the 67% *(n = 38)* of older male characters that were bald or balding. Of those who had facial hair, 73% had gray or white facial hair. Also, 78% *(n = 54)* of all older characters had limited wrinkles, leaving only 22% *(n = 15)* with extensive wrinkles.

Some of the more negative physical characteristics associated with old age were identified in the older major and minor characters. Six percent *(n = 4)* of the older characters were "toothless or missing teeth" and the same percentage was described as "hunched over." Of the 12 female older characters, four (33%) were described as having "sagging breasts". Also, of the 26 (46%) male characters who had facial hair, either a moustache, a beard, or both, 35% *(n = 9)* of them had facial hair that was considered "unkempt".

Research Question 7: Stereotypes

Research question seven addressed the stereotyping of older characters. The various stereotypes described in the literature review were embodied by many of the older major and minor characters and the majority of them were positive (see Table 11). Approximately 58% of characters *(n = 40)* were only identified with one or more positive stereotype, 26% *(n = 18)* of older characters had at least one positive and one negative stereotype, and only 16% *(n = 11)* of older characters embodied negative stereotypes exclusively.

The stereotype of *Perfect Grandparent* was embodied by 49% *(n = 34)* of the characters coded, even though only 9% *(n = 6)* of characters were actually identified as a grandparent being their primary role. The definition of the *Perfect Grandparent*

stereotype is: wise, kind, supportive, understanding, happy, and family-oriented. This definition can help resolve the discrepancy because of its association to certain personality traits more than to a primary role. A combined total of 54% of characters held either the role of friend, parent, or grandparent and 54% of characters were also identified as having "friendly" as one of their personality traits.

The following two most prominent stereotypes personified by major and minor characters were that of *John Wayne Conservative* (30%, *n* = 21), and *Golden Ager* (26%, *n* = 18). Both of these stereotypes are considered positive. The most prominent negative stereotypes embodied by older characters were that of *Elitist*, *Self-centered*, and *Mildly Impaired*. None of the characters embodied the stereotypes of *Despondent*, or *Activist*.

Table 11

Stereotypes of Older Major and Minor Characters

Stereotype	Number of Characters Consistent	Percentage
Perfect Grandparent	34	49%
John Wayne Conservative	21	30%
Golden Ager	18	26%
Elitist	10	15%
Self-centered	10	15%
Mildly Impaired	6	10%
Shrew/Curmudgeon	5	7%
Small Town Neighbor	3	4%

Vulnerable	2	3%
Liberal Matriarch/Patriarch	2	3%
Recluse	1	1%
Severely Impaired	1	1%
Despondent	0	0%
Activist	0	0%

Research Question 8: Overall Portrayal

The personality traits, physical characteristics and stereotypes from research question seven were used to evaluate the overall portrayal of each older character as addressed in research question eight. This question also addresses the issues of gender and race and their influence in negative or positive portrayals. The majority (64%, $n =$ 44) of major and minor older characters in Disney live action films from the 1990s and 2000s had overall positive portrayals. Approximately 22% *(n =*15) of older major and minor characters were portrayed negatively and only 14% *(n =* 10) were identified as neutral in their portrayal (see Table 12).

Table 12

Overall Portrayal of Major and Minor Older Characters

Overall Portrayal	Number of Characters	Percentage
Positive	44	64%
Negative	15	22%
Neutral	10	14%

When chi-squares were run, no significance was found between gender and overall portrayal of characters. Male older characters were portrayed positively in 67% of the older characters coded, while only 50% of female older characters were portrayed positively. An even greater contrast is found when looking at negative portrayals of men compared with women. Approximately 18% of male characters had an overall negative portrayal in contrast to 42% of female characters who had an overall negative image. Of all the characters portrayed positively, 86% were male, leaving only 14% of the older characters portrayed positively female. These results are skewed because 83% percent of the older major and minor characters coded were male.

There was no significance found between race and overall portrayal when chi-squares were run. Significance was difficult to determine due to the small proportion of minorities that had roles as major or minor older characters. However, of the six black characters coded, five were portrayed positively, while one was identified as "neutral". The one older character classified as "other" was Madame Zeroni, a Native American in the film *Holes*. Her overall portrayal was "neutral".

There was no significant difference between the two decades in the overall portrayal of older characters as research question nine addresses. The 1990s and the 2000s each had 22 older characters whose overall portrayal was positive. There were more major and minor characters coded in the 1990s, which explains why 60% of all negatively portrayed characters and 60% of all neutrally portrayed characters are from that decade. Among the characters from the 1990s, 60% had overall positive portrayals, 24% had negative portrayals, and 16% had neutral portrayals. Sixty-nine percent of older

major and minor characters from Disney live action films in the 2000s had an overall positive portrayal while 19% had negative portrayals, and 12% had neutral overall portrayals.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

"Through exposure to elderly television and movie characters, we may develop conceptions of what later life might hold for aging individuals and ourselves" (Holladay, 2002, p. 681). In various studies, children have described older peoples sick, tired, ugly, dirty, and wrinkled (Jantz et al., 1976; Seefeldt et al., 1977; Seefeldt, 1984). Cultivation theory and social learning theory suggest that these negative stereotypes are attributed in part to negative portrayals in the media.

A number of studies have identified the negative stereotypes of older people that are prevalent in the media. This study, which focused on analyzing popular Disney live-action films, found a preponderance of positive stereotypes associated with older people. While the marginalization of female characters and minorities, as well as the lack of major roles cannot go without notice, the overall personality traits, physical characteristics, and stereotypes of the older characters depicted in the 60 Disney films analyzed were positive.

An underrepresentation of older characters in the media has been identified in relation to U.S. demographics in many studies (Krueger, 2001; Bramlett-Solomon & Subramanian, 1999; Gerbner et al., 2002, Lauzen & Dozier; Robinson, 2006). The aim of this study was not to compare demographics because many of the live action Disney films were geared toward a young audience. However, it is significant to note that even though 69 major and minor older characters were found, which averages to a little more than one older characters per film, 38% of films had no major or minor older characters. The number of older major and minor characters in Disney live-action films from the past two decades was less than the number of older characters found in Disney animated films

in the previous study done by Robinson et al. (2007). Using the same operational definitions and coding scheme, the Robinson et al. identified 93 older characters (2.74 older characters per film), while this study identified an average of 1.15 older characters per film. In Robinson et al.'s (2007) study, older characters were identified in all but one of the Disney films (3% of the sample), while the current study found that about 38% (n=23) of Disney live-action films from the 1990s and 2000s contained zero older major or minor characters. That is a large number of films with no characters of significance representing the older population.

The films with the largest number of older characters were those that seemed suited toward a mature audience. These films were those with no children in lead roles and often based on true stories. *Invincible*, *The Rookie*, *Around the World in 80 Days* had the highest number of older characters and differed drastically in content to films such as *Jungle 2 Jungle*, *The Lizzie McGuire Movie*, *Ice Princess*, and *Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen*, which had no older characters and a very young cast.

There was a higher proportion (62%) of minor characters to major characters. Once again, because the target audience for these films is predominantly children, is the films do not make an attempt to mimic real world demographics or situations. This study is not a documentary and it is therefore difficult to determine how misrepresented older characters are even though it is easy to ascertain that they generally play less significant roles. This finding closely parallels the findings from the Robinson et al. study (2007) where 61% of older characters were featured in minor roles. When incidental roles were included in the totals, the percentage of major and minor roles decreased dramatically. Incidental characters accounted for 56% of all older characters, which indicates that the

majority of older characters depicted have an almost insignificant role in the plot of the film. This finding confirms previous research that has found that when elderly characters are portrayed, they occupy relatively small and unimportant roles (Robinson et al., 1995, Swayne & Greco, 1987). This study also confirms that older characters in the media can still be referred to as "the invisible generation" (Robinson & Skill, 1995).

The most negative finding of this study was the underrepresentation of female older characters and older minorities. Past studies have concluded that older men are consistently represented more than older women in the media (Baker & Goggin, 1994; Ganahl, Prinsen, & Netzley, 2003; Gerbner, 1997). This study confirms what past studies have found with 83% of all older characters being male. This huge underrepresentation of women is very significant and much more disparate than other studies. The Robinson et al. study (2007) also found an unequal representation of older male characters (67%) to older female characters (33%). Only 10% of all older major and minor characters were classified as racial minorities (90% of those "minorities" were black) which shows an extreme underrepresentation. This underrepresentation was even more extreme than what was found in the study on Disney animated films where 83% of all characters were identified as Caucasian. Other studies have also concluded that older racial minorities are underrepresented, marginalized, or not portrayed at all in all forms of media (Baker & Goggin, 1994; Roy & Harwood, 1997; Towbin et al., 2003).

Despite the deficit of older female and racially diverse characters in Disney live-action films, most of the portrayals of older characters were positive overall. The three most prominent primary roles associated with major and minor characters were that of friend, boss, and parent. All three of these roles signify respect, and usually have positive

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associations with them. The finding that 23% of the characters had the role of "boss" is in contrast to Lauzen and Dozier's study (2005) that found a decrease in characters that held leadership roles and/or occupational power. This study found that older characters were very competent in the work force with such a high percentage of characters holding the position of "boss". Consistent with this finding was the significant number (52%) of characters possessing the personality trait "intelligent" and the high percentage of characters (87%) with a social age of "middle-aged" signifying activity in the work place. One study consistent with these findings found that older characters in television commercials were portrayed in business or outdoor settings more than the home (Roy & Harwood, 1997).

The proportion of older characters whose primary role was identified as "villain" (12%) was similar to that found in the study on older characters in Disney animated films (13%) (Robinson et al., 2007). Even though these portrayals of villains are not dominant, because they are extremely negative they may contribute to the prejudices children have toward older people (Middlecamp & Gross, 2002).

Only four female older characters (33% of all female characters) were identified as a mother or grandmother in their primary role. This finding helps to refute the argument that Disney has imposed a restrictive "motherhood" identity on women through its films(Crafton, 1989).

The two most dominant personality traits found in older characters were positive, that of friendly (54%) and intelligent (52%). The negative personality trait of "angry/stern" was the third most common trait with 32% of characters possessing it. In the Robinson et al. study, "friendly" and "angry/stern" were the two most common

personality traits coded with 25% of its sample possessing them. This study had a higher percentage of positive traits, but also a higher percentage of negative. The higher number of traits coded may be an indication that live-action characters have more complex personalities and roles and therefore more traits are associated with each one. These findings are consistent with Roy and Harwood's content analysis (1997) that found older adults depicted with positive traits such as strong and happy. These positive personality traits can have a positive impact on children and their perception of older people, and could potentially influence the prejudices that currently exist among children toward older people (Isaacs & Bearison, 1986).

One of the more pervading negative characteristics associated with older characters on television, in magazine ads, and other forms of media is that of "senile" (Bramlett-Solomon & Subramanian, 1999; Broussard et al., 1980; Carmichael, 1976; Healy & Ross, 2002). It is important to note that in this study as well as the study on Disney animated films, only 3% of all major and minor characters were identified with this personality trait. This shows that Disney does not necessarily prescribe to some of the more negative stereotypes associated with aging.

An exception to these positive personality traits exhibited in older characters was the trait "evil" and its prevalence in females. A larger proportion of females (33%) were characterized as "evil" than were males (7%). This finding is consistent with numerous studies that have found women to be not only underrepresented, but also portrayed in a more negative light than men (Lauzen & Dozier, 2005, Vernon et al., 1991). A possible direct result of these portrayals was the finding that children are more prejudiced against older women than older men (Isaacs & Bearison, 1986). Not only did this study find that

women older characters are rare, but confirmed that older women "virtually vanish from the screen in major, positive, and powerful roles" (Gerbner, 1997, p. 93).

The physical traits of older characters analyzed in this study were very positive for both males and females. The vast majority (94%) of older major and minor characters had good health and 98% of them fell into the classification of "active" or "very active". This positive image of older characters is consistent with the findings from the study on Disney animated films that reported 73% of its older characters with good health status and 89% as physically active or very active. Other studies have also identified a portrayal of older characters in the media as healthy and active (Bell, 1992; Peterson, 1973; Roy & Harwood, 1997) .

The finding that 93% of the older major and minor characters were either "attractive" or "moderate looking" reflects an overwhelmingly positive portrayal of the physical appearance of older people. This finding contrasts with Baker and Goggin's study that found older people to have a decrease in attractiveness (1994). Signorielli defined older characters as those most likely to be overweight in prime time television. This study found that 29% of major and minor older characters were either overweight or obese. Though this is not a majority, it is not the most positive portrayal of older characters. There were a few characteristics identified among older characters that were classified as negative (sagging breasts, toothless/missing teeth, hunched over, unkept facial hair), however, no more than 13% of older major and minor characters were identified with any one of those negative traits.

Previous studies have shown that children often identify older people with negative physical stereotypes such as wrinkles, use of canes and wheelchairs, and a need

for glasses and hearing aids (Jantz et al., 1976; Seefeldt, 1984; Falchikov, 1990). The use of physical aids was almost nonexistent with only 4% of all older characters having one, and 13% having glasses. The one result somewhat consistent with this assumption was the finding that 22% of older characters had "extensive wrinkles". These findings parallel those from the Robinson et al. study which found that negative characteristics such as the use of physical aids and wrinkles were less common while neutral characteristics such as gray or white hair, baldness, and limited wrinkles were much more common.

The overall physical appearance observed in older characters from Disney live action films from the past two decades was very positive. These findings are in contrast to other studies that have found older people portrayed in the media as weak, sexless, passive, and not in good health (Broussard et al., 1980; Northcott, 1975). No older characters passed away during any of the films (except for the murder of Doc Robinson in *Tom and Huck*) which is in contrast to the observation made by children in Jantz et al.'s study that older people "have heart attacks and die" (1976).

The number of positive stereotypes associated with older major and minor characters far outweighed the negative. The three most prominent stereotypes were positive with *Perfect Grandparent* embodied by 49% of older characters, *John Wayne Conservative* by 30%, and *Golden Ager* embodied by 26% of all major and minor older characters. These numbers are consistent with Miller et al.'s longitudinal study which found that the most commonly used stereotypes over the decades were that of the *Perfect Grandparent*, *Adventurous Golden Ager*, and *Productive Golden Ager* (2004).

When Hummert et al., found both negative and positive stereotypes to be equally distributed among older characters, it was a positive contrast to earlier studies that had

found negative stereotypes to be more prevalent than positive stereotypes (1994). In the present study, each of the negative stereotypes were only identified with 10% or less of older major and minor characters. Previous studies have discovered that people associate negative or positive feelings with the correlating stereotype (Schmidt & Boland, 1986; Hummert et al., 1994). The prevalence of positive stereotypes found in the current study should therefore be associated with positive feelings toward older people by those viewing Disney live action films.

The results of this study found that the overall portrayal of older major and minor characters was very positive. There was a higher proportion of positive older major and minor characters found in Disney live action films (64%) than those found in the study on older characters in Disney animated films (58%). A greater contrast exists in the proportion of negative characters with Disney live action films only having 22% of its characters portrayed negatively while 42% of older characters in Disney animated films fit this classification.

The overall portrayal of incidental characters was slightly less favorable with 54% being positive, 25% negative, and 21% neutral. This slight decrease in positive portrayals and increase in negative could be a result of less screen time and a heavier reliance on physical stereotypes to create an image rather than allowing personalities to develop. Another study looked at animated characters in popular children's television shows and found that 62% of all older characters were portrayed in a positive manner, while 38% were portrayed negatively.

With only 22% of all major and minor older characters depicted with negative stereotypes, Disney live action films portray older people in a much more positive way

than do Disney animated features as well as popular children's animated television shows. As postulated by cultivation theory, the positive portrayal of major, minor, and incidental older characters found in this study can have a potentially positive influence on the perceptions that children and families have of older people as they view these films.

This research has found that older characters are represented in a positive light in popular films geared toward children and families. Previous research has found a preponderance of negative stereotypes when older characters are portrayed and this research shows the contrary. This study adds to the existing body of literature by analyzing a medium and sample that has not yet been studied and in showing that positive stereotypes are found in some of the top grossing films from the past two decades.

This research is consistent with previous studies because of its findings that female older characters as well as older characters of different races are extremely underrepresented. This adds to the literature in confirming previous conclusions. The medium looked at in this study compared to others in previous studies study has found much more positive portrayals of older characters However, this study also shows where popular media is continuing to fall behind in adequately representing the older population and therefore giving children and families an accurate representation of reality.

CHAPTER SIX: LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study was limited in the variables it studied because it was a continuation of the study done on Disney animated films (Robinson et al., 2007). It followed the methodology of this study closely so that a comparison could be made between Disney animated films and Disney live action films. Over the course of this study, there were many things observed by the researcher that could have been studied in further depth or that was a limitation and might have skewed the results.

One of the greatest limitations of this study is the small number of female characters and the small number of minorities coded. These small numbers made it difficult to draw conclusions as to the portrayal of women and different races. A greater sample size, the inclusion of more decades of films, or coding incidental characters in terms of gender and race might help create a more accurate description of the portrayal and representation of females and minorities among older characters in film. If more females were to be coded in a future study, the differences between females and males and their specific personality traits, physical characteristics, and stereotypes would be of great significance to research.

A limitation with the stereotypes was the unequal number of positive stereotypes to negative stereotypes. There were eight possible negative stereotypes that an older character could possess and only six positive. It is possible that because there were more negative stereotypes to choose from, that more negative characteristics were accounted for and could have therefore skewed the results. The research for this study was based on the stereotypes taken from previous studies and therefore not easily manipulated, but future studies might account for this discrepancy to avoid an inequality.

Another limitation in this study was the stereotype of *Perfect Grandparent*. Only 6 older characters (9%) had the primary role of grandparent despite the prevalence of the *Perfect Grandparent* stereotype (49%). The defining characteristics of *Perfect Grandparent* are: wise, kind, supportive, understanding, happy, and family oriented. When a character exhibited a number of these traits, he or she was identified as a *Perfect Grandparent* regardless of whether or not the older character was a grandparent. Future research could look further into this anomaly and perhaps help establish another stereotype that could accommodate characters who possess these qualities, but not the grandchildren.

The potential for future research in this area of study is virtually endless. There is a paucity of research on films geared toward children and families, their content, and their effects their audience. A study that focuses just on top grossing films targeted toward a child audience could help identify exactly what stereotypes children are viewing in popular films, not just Disney productions.

This is the first study analyzing Disney live actions films. Where numerous studies have studied the stereotyping, messages sent, and effects of Disney animated films, research exploring the vast world of Disney live action films has been untapped. The portrayal of families, gender, smoking and alcohol use, etc. are all topics researched in Disney animated films that could add a lot to the body of literature if analyzed in live action films.

A future study that would help to fill in some of the gaps from this study would be to analyze incidental and background characters and their physical stereotypes. For this study, incidental characters were only determined as either positive or negative in their

portrayal. While coding, it appeared that characters with shorter screen times relied more heavily on stereotypical representations than characters that had more screen time and thus more of an opportunity to develop their personalities in the film. Perhaps in this future study only physical characteristics of incidental characters would be coded because the personality traits would be hard to identify with incidental characters who do not add significantly to the plot.

Another potential future study expanding on this thesis would be to divide the sample of Disney live action movies into two groups: those geared toward younger children and those geared toward older audiences. The films that were based on true stories or older in content seemed to have a greater number of older characters. In these films geared toward more mature audiences, it seemed that a greater effort was made to create a more demographically accurate portrayal of the world than those that were primarily targeted toward children.

A study specifically targeting Disney villains is another future research project with a lot of potential. The Robinson et al. study identified a large number of villains, but no study has analyzed the portrayal of villains specifically. The study could identify how many villains are older and which villains fit into traditional "villain" stereotypes. This study showed that there were a number of older characters depicted as villains, but most Disney films have at least one villain. This preponderance of villains should be taken into consideration before assumptions are made that villains are always depicted as older people.

Though this study looked at the difference between the two most recent decades, there are so many live action films that Disney has produced in the past 70 years and

many of them are still being watched today (*Mary Poppins, Old Yeller, The Parent Trap*). A longitudinal study of older characters and their portrayal in Disney live action films is another future project with a lot of potential. The Robinson et al. study identified trends in the portrayal of older characters in Disney animated films throughout the years and a longitudinal study of live action films could help identify whether Disney has made progress throughout the years of if older characters have always been portrayed in a predominantly positive way.

Social learning theory is defined as children imitating the behaviors they see on television as much as the behaviors they observe in parents, siblings, and friends (Bandura & Walters, 1963). This theory was used in this study to explain the effect stereotypes of older people in the media might have on children, but a study that looks at behaviors toward older people in the media (how younger characters respond to older characters) could better show what behaviors children might be imitating in their own lives. This type of a study could be conducted with any sample of films targeted to a younger audience.

One challenge in this study was determining overall positive or negative portrayals when all personality traits, physical characteristics, and stereotypes were taken into consideration. It was common to find positive physical stereotypes on villains or negative physical stereotypes on an older character with rewarding personality traits. A study separating physical stereotypes from personality stereotypes might provide greater insight into what specific stereotypes are pervading the media and which, among those, are the most powerful in determining overall perception.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

"Young people use various forms of media to negotiate who they are and what the world is like" (Drotner, 2001, p. 301). "The Disney Corporation is a major contributor to most avenues of children's media" (Tanner et al., 2003, p. 356). These two statements explain the potential impact Disney films have in the socializing of children. Though this study does not aim to prove the effects various stereotypes have on their audience, both positive and negative portrayals of older characters in Disney live action films do cultivate and understanding and conception of the world to those who view them (Bandura, 1994). According to this study, if Disney live action films are any indicator of how young people view the world, their perception of older people would be quite positive. The most glaring misconception young people might have is that older people are not predominantly Caucasian males. As children and adolescents have already been found to be more prejudiced against older women than men, a lack of older female characters does not help in the changing of this perception (Gerbner, 1997; Isaacs & Bearison, 1986).

Palmore (1990) identified an effect of negative stereotyping as a disruption of the socialization of young people with respect to the elderly. This has been evidenced in various studies identifying the negative perceptions that children have of the older people. Children as young as three years old were found to be scared of the idea of growing old (Rich, Myrick, & Campbell, 1984). Isaacs and Bearison (1986) discovered that by the time children enter elementary school, negative stereotypes about older people have already started to develop.

This study had a majority of positive portrayals that could potentially play a significant role in reversing these negative perceptions. The majority of older characters in Disney live action films were identified with the personality traits of "friendly" and "intelligent," the primary roles of "friend" and "boss", were considered "active" or "very active" and in good health, and the three most common stereotypes among older characters were that of *Perfect Grandparent*, *John Wayne Conservative*, and *Golden Ager*. These positive portrayals in all areas are in sharp contrast to many previous studies conducted concerning the portrayal of older characters in the media.

Disney animated films had a number of positive characteristics among the older characters identified, but negative stereotypes were still consistent, especially in the role of villain. This study concludes the Disney live action films portray older characters in a more positive light than animated films.

Cultivation theory postulates that children who spend a substantial amount of time watching television are more influenced by the reality that television depicts, no mater how accurate it is. If children interpret their social reality based on the media they watch, including Disney live action films, then this research gives hope that children will begin to view older people in a more positive light as they are portrayed in these films.

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Definitions of Character Roles

Role	Operational Definition
Worker/Boss	Person is working in a place of business in which he/she is helping customers or serving others–the Boss may own the business or have employees working under him/her
Teacher/Instructor	Person is teaching and has direct responsibility for student
Grandparent	Person shown in a family situation in which he/she is the parent of a middle-aged person who is the parent of small children or teens
Villain	An evil character in an episode who is the enemy of the hero or main character
Parent	Person shown in a family situation in which he/she is the parent of a middle-aged child
Mayor	Person who is the head of the government in a city or town

Definitions of Character Personality Traits

Personality Trait	Stereotype	Operational Definition
Angry	Shrew/Curmudgeon	Person who is annoyed or irritated
Eccentric	Liberal Matriarch/Patriarch	Unconventional person, someone that is "over the top" in the way they act or react to situations
Evil	Shrew/Curmudgeon	Deliberately causing harm or pain–very unpleasant
Forgetful	Mildly Impaired	Forgetting small things like a person's name, an appointment, or to take medication
Friendly	Perfect Grandparent	Caring about the well being of another person
Grumpy	Shrew/Curmudgeon	Grouchy–Person who is bad-tempered or complains
Happy	Perfect Grandparent	Showing contentment or joy
Helpful	Perfect Grandparent	Provides assistance, information, or aid to others
Helpless	Mildly Impaired	Unable to manage without help from others
Humorous	Perfect Grandparent	A person with a humorous role or the one responsible for making a scene funny
Intelligent	Sage	Aware, knowledgeable, and informed
Mean	Shrew/Curmudgeon	Person who is cruel, unkind, or uncaring
Nosey	Nosey Neighbor	Too curious about other people's business
Overly Affectionate	Perfect Grandparent	A person whose affections are to the extreme– repeatedly kissing, hugging, or touching in a caring loving manner
Senile/Crazy	Severely Impaired	Confused or mentally unaware or surroundings– Erratic or unusual in behavior
Object of ridicule	Vulnerable	The person being made fun of
Overly Conservative	John Wayne Conservative	Believes in traditional values and against change
Uncooperative	Shrew/Curmudgeon	Unhelpful, stubborn, or obstinate
Wise	Sage	Person who is knowledgeable about many subjects and able to make sensible decisions and judgments on the basis of knowledge and experience

Appendix C

Definitions of Character Physical Characteristics

Physical Characteristics	Stereotype	Operational Definition
Activity/Healthy	Perfect Grandparent	Person participates in activities that require physical strength (e.g., exercising, jogging, playing golf)
Bald/Balding	General Trait	Person is shown without hair or losing hair–part of the normal aging process
Gray Hair	General Trait	Hair is gray or silver in color–part of the normal aging process
Loss of Hearing	General Trait	Not being able to hear well–may require a hearing aid
Loss of Sight	General Trait	Not being able to see well–may require glasses
Overweight	Mildly Impaired	Person shown exceeding the normal weight for his/her age, height, and build
Sick	Severely Impaired	Person is in poor health–shown in bed or hospital
Slow Moving	Mildly Impaired	Person moves slower than what would be considered a normal pace
Toothless	Mildly Impaired	Person is shown without teeth or with dentures
Ugly	Mildly Impaired	Person is not physically appealing–especially in face
Use of Physical Aid	Mildly Impaired	Person requires assistance from a wheelchair, cane, walker, hearing aid, or other aid
Wrinkles	General Trait	Lines or creases in the skin of a person's face–part of the normal aging process

Definitions of Stereotypes

Positive Stereotypes

Golden Ager: active, adventurous, healthy, lively, sociable, sexual, wealthy, independent, capable, and successful

Perfect Grandparent: wise, kind, supportive, understanding, happy, and family-oriented

John Wayne Conservative: patriotic, retired, mellow, conservative, nostalgic, and religious

Activist: political, sexual, and health-conscious

Liberal Matriarch/Patriarch: liberal, mellow, and wealthy

Small Town Neighbor: emotional, frugal, old-fashioned, and conservative

Negative Stereotypes

Shrew/Curmudgeon: greedy, stubborn, prejudiced, complaining, nosey, inflexible, demanding, and/or a hypochondriac

Despondent: lonely, neglected, sad, tired, and fragile

Vulnerable: afraid, victimized, bored, or sedentary

Severely Impaired: senile, slow-moving, slow-thinking, poor, sexless, sick, feeble, incoherent, and/or inarticulate

Recluse: quiet, timid, dependent, and forgetful

Mildly Impaired: forgetful, poor, lonely, slow moving, or rambling

Self-centered: stubborn, humorless, jealous, miserly, greedy, nosey, and selfish

Elitist: demanding, prejudiced, wary, snobbish, and naïve

Coding Sheet

Movie_____   **Decade**_____

Character Name_____

Identification of older character (check all that apply)

_____appearance of retirement   _____extensive gray hair

_____wrinkles   _____extensive loss of hair/balding

_____cracking voice   _____use of an aid (cane/wheelchair)

_____parent of son/daughter who is middle-aged or older

_____evidence of grandchildren/great-grandchildren

Chronological age

_____young old (55-64)   _____middle old (65-74)   _____old old (75+)

Social age (based on previous characteristics and working vs. retired)

_____middle age   _____elderly

Gender_____male   _____female

Race

_____W   _____B   _____H   _____A   _____other_____   _____indeterminate

Role of character   _____major   _____minor

Activity level   _____very active   _____active   _____inactive

Health status   _____good   _____minor limitations _____poor

Primary role   _____husband/wife   _____parent   _____grandparent

                _____friend   _____worker   _____boss

                _____villain   _____indeterminate   _____other_____

Body image   _____very thin   _____thin   _____average

                _____overweight   _____obese   _____indeterminate

Physical Description

_____wrinkled	_____limited wrinkles	_____indeterminate
_____ugly	_____moderate looking	_____attractive
_____gray/white hair	_____dark hair	_____indeterminate
_____bald/balding	_____full hair	_____indeterminate
_____facial hair (beard/mustache)_____gray/white		_____neat ____unkept
_____toothless/missing teeth	_____has teeth	_____indeterminate
_____glasses	_____hearing aide	_____other_____
_____sagging breasts	_____hunched over	
_____use of a physical aid_____		_____other_____

Personality description

_____object of ridicule	_____intelligent/wise	_____happy/content
_____sad	_____angry/grumpy/stern	_____loving/caring
_____humorous	_____nosey	_____lonely/recluse
_____senile/crazy	_____eccentric	_____friendly
_____overly affectionate	_____sexy/macho	_____forgetful
_____helpless	_____dirty old man/woman	_____other_____

Stereotypes present
Activist (political, sexual, health-conscious)
          _____consistent   _____not consistent

Liberal matriarch/patriarch (liberal, mellow, wealthy)
          _____consistent   _____not consistent

Golden ager (active, adventurous, healthy, lively, health0conscious, well-traveled, productive, liberal, future oriented, sociable)
          _____consistent   _____not consistent

John Wayne conservative (patriotic, retired, conservative, nostalgic, old-fashioned, religious, tough, proud, wealthy)
          _____consistent   _____not consistent

Perfect grandparent (intelligent, kind, loving, family-oriented, generous, happy, grateful, supportive, understanding, interesting)
_____consistent_____not consistent

Small town neighbor (emotional, old-fashioned, conservative)
_____consistent   _____not consistent

Shrew/curmudgeon (greedy, stubborn, prejudiced, complaining, nosey, inflexible, demanding, hypochondriac)
_____consistent   _____not consistent

Despondent (lonely, neglected, sad, tired, fragile)
_____consistent   _____not consistent

Vulnerable (afraid, victimized, bored, sedentary)
_____consistent   _____not consistent

Severely impaired (senile, slow-moving, slow-thinking, poor, sexless, sick, feeble, incoherent, inarticulate)
_____consistent   _____not consistent

Recluse (quiet, timid, dependent, forgetful)
_____consistent   _____not consistent

Mildly impaired (forgetful, poor, lonely, slow moving, rambling)
_____consistent   _____not consistent

Self-centered (stubborn, humorless, jealous, miserly, greedy, nosey selfish)
_____consistent   _____not consistent

Elitist (demanding, prejudiced, wary, snobbish, naïve)
_____consistent   _____not consistent

Overall evaluation (based on stereotypes)

_____positive   _____negative   _____neutral

Appendix F

List of Films

<u>**1990s**</u>

The Santa Clause (1994)	$144,833,357
101 Dalmatians (1996)	$136,189,485
George of the Jungle (1997)	$105,263,257
Inspector Gadget (1999)	$97,403,112
Flubber (1997)	$92,977,226
Cool Runnings (1993)	$68,856,263
The Parent Trap (1998)	$66,308,518
Jungle 2 Jungle (1997)	$59,927,616
Honey, I Blew Up the Kid (1992)	$58,662,452
The Three Musketeers (1993)	$53,898,845
The Mighty Ducks (1992)	$50,752,337
Mighty Joe Young (1998)	$50,632,037
Angels in the Outfield (1994)	$50,236,831
The Rocketeer (1991)	$46,704,056
The Jungle Book (1994)	$43,229,904
Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey (1993)	$41,833,324
Man of the House (1995)	$40,070,995
Hocus Pocus (1993)	$39,514,713
My Favorite Martian (1999)	$36,850,101
White Fang (1991)	$34,793,160
Blank Check (1994)	$30,577,969

James and the Giant Peach (1996)	$28,946,127
First Kid (1996)	$26,491,793
Operation Dumbo Drop (1995)	$24,670,346
The Adventures of Huck Finn (1993)	$24,103,594
Tom and Huck (1995)	$23,920,048
Air Bud (1997)	$23,144,499
Mr. Magoo (1997)	$21,437,192
Iron Will (1994)	$21,006,361
That Darn Cat! (1997)	$18,310,610

2000s

Pirates of the Caribbean (2003)	$305,413,918
The Chronicles of Narnia (2005)	$291,710,957
National Treasure (2004)	$173,008,894
Enchanted (2007)	$127,393,667
Remember the Titans (2000)	$115,654,751
The Pacifier (2005)	$113,086,868
Freaky Friday (2003)	$110,230,332
The Princess Diaries (2001)	$108,248,956
The Game Plan (2007)	$90,636, 983
High School Musical 3 (2008)	$89,695,501
Bridge To Terabithia (2007)	$82,272,442
Eight Below (2006)	$81,612,565
Snow Dogs (2002)	$81,172,560

The Rookie (2002)	$75,600,072
The Haunted Mansion (2003)	$75,847,266
The Kid (2000)	$69,691,949
Holes (2003)	$67,406,573
Herbie: Fully Loaded (2005)	$66,023,816
Miracle (2004)	$64,378,093
Sky High (2005)	$63,946,815
The Shaggy Dog (2006)	$61,123,569
Invincible (2006)	$57,806,952
The Lizzie McGuire Movie (2003)	$42,734,455
Glory Road (2006)	$42,647,449
Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen (2004)	$29,331,068
Ice Princess (2005)	$24,402,491
Around the World in 80 Days (2004)	$24,008,137
Tuck Everlasting (2002)	$19,161,999
Max Keeble's Big Move (2001)	$17,294,293
The Greatest Game Ever Played (2005)	$15,337,393

Major, Minor, and Incidental Movie Characters

1990s

The Santa Clause
Major: Scott Calvin
Minor: None
Incid.:   Judge
             Boss
             Original Santa

101 Dalmatians
Major: Cruella Deville
Minor: Nanny
Incid.:   Chauffeur
             Policeman

George of the Jungle
Major: Beatrice
Minor: Arthur
             Mr. Kwame
Incid.:   None

Inspector Gadget
Major: None
Minor: Police chief
Incid.:   Brenda's dad
             Security guard

Flubber
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   Mr. Seldon
             Secretary

Cool Runnings
Major: None
Minor: Mr. Coolidge
             Junior's dad
Incid.:   None

The Parent Trap
Major: None
Minor: Grandpa
             Marva Kulp
Incid.:   Vicki
             Meredith's dad

Jungle 2 Jungle
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   None

Honey, I Blew up the Kid
Major: None
Minor: Mr. Sterling
Incid.:   Man in Las Vegas

The Three Musketeers
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   sword teacher

The Mighty Ducks
Major: None
Minor: Mr. Ducksworth
             Hans
Incid.:   Judge

Mighty Joe Young
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   None

Angels in the Outfield
Major: Al
Minor: Owner
Incid.:   None

The Rocketeer
Major: Peevy
Minor: Malcolm
Incid.:   None

The Jungle Book
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   None

Homeward Bound
Major: None
Minor: "Stranger"
Incid.:   Teacher
             Minister
             Grandma

Man of the House
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   Narcotics Dealer

Hocus Pocus
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   School Teacher
             Devil
             Devil's wife
             Witch 1
             Witch 2
             Witch 3

My Favorite Martian
Major: Martin
Minor: Martian
             Boss
Incid.:   Man at Fountain

White Fang
Major: Skunker
Minor: None
Incid.:   None

Blank Check
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   Bank Teller
             Man selling home
             Woman selling

James and the Giant Peach
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   None

First Kid
Major: None
Minor: Wilkes
Incid.:   Speet

Operation Dumbo Drop
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.:   Chief of village
             Y'bham

The Adventures of Huck Finn
Major: The King
Minor: None
Incid.:   Widow
             Policeman
             Dr. Robinson
             Mr. Wilks

Tom and Huck
Major: None
Minor: Doc Robinson
Incid.: Widow

Air Bud
Major: None
Minor: Coach
         Arthur Cheney
         Judge
Incid.: Referee

Mr. Magoo
Major: Mr. Magoo
Minor: Austin Cloquet
Incid.: "Old Lady"

Iron Will
Major: Mr. Harper
         Angus
Minor: Louis Fontaine
Incid.: None

That Darn Cat
Major: Pa
         Ma
Minor: Mrs. McCracken
Incid.: None

2000s
Pirates of the Caribbean
Major: Mr. Swan
         Barbosa
Minor: None
Incid.: Mr. Cotton

The Chronicles of Narnia
Major: None
Minor: Professor
         Father Christmas
Incid.: None

National Treasure
Major: Dad Gates
Minor: Grandpa Gates
Incid.: None

Enchanted
Major: None
Minor: Old Hag
Incid.: Old Man

Remember the Titans
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: Doc
         A. D. Watson
         Executive director

The Pacifier
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: None

Freaky Friday
Major: Grandpa
Minor: None
Incid.: Detention Lady
         Chinese lady

The Princess Diaries
Major: Queen
         Joe
Minor: None
Incid.: Baron
         Woman at ball
         Willie Brown
         Dignitary at party

The Game Plan
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: News reporter 1
         News reporter 2

High School Musical 3
Major: None
Minor: Mr. Darbus
Incid.: None

Bridge to Terabithia
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: None

Eight Below
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: Commander

Snow Dogs
Major: Thunder Jack
Minor: George Michaels
         Mom
Incid.: Ernie
         Arthur
         Race official

The Rookie
Major: Dad/Grandpa
         Frank
Minor: Mom/Grandma
         Brooks
         Henry
Incid.: Minors Coach
         Majors Coach

The Haunted Mansion
Major: Ramsley
Minor: Ezra
Incid.: None

The Kid
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: Dad
         Old Russell
         Bob
         Wedding lady

Holes
Major: None
Minor: Madame Zeroni
         Stanley Yelnats
Incid.: Warden's Dad
         Judge

Herbie: Fully Loaded
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: Jimmy Dean
         Crazy Dave
         Newscaster

Miracle
Major: Walter
Minor: Doc
Incid.: Newscaster

Sky High
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: Nurse

The Shaggy Dog
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: Mr. Strictland
         Lady with walker
         Lady in restaurant

Invincible
Major: None
Minor: Dad
         Assistant Coach
Incid.: Principal
         Guy at bar
         Neighbor
         Janitor
         Assistant coach 2
         Guy at Restaurant
         Owner

The Lizzie McGuire Movie
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: None

Glory Road
Major: Ross Moore
Minor: Coach Rupp
Incid.: Janitor
         Wade
         Journalist

Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: None

Ice Princess
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: None

Around the World in 80 Days
Major: Lord Kelvin
Minor: General Fang
Incid.: Valet
         Lord Solsby
         Mr. Rose
         Chinese mom
         Chinese dad
         Queen

Tuck Everlasting
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: Old Man

Max Keeble's Big Move
Major: None
Minor: None
Incid.: Janitor

The Greatest Game Ever Played
Major: None
Minor: Mr. Campbell
Incid.: Mr. Watson
         President Taft
         Neville
         Mr. Comstock