From Disney to Disaster: The Disney Corporation's Involvement in the Creation of Celebrity Trainwrecks

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Spring 2021
WMNST 492W: Senior Capstone Seminar
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INTRODUCTION

The popularized phrase “celebrity trainwreck” has taken off in the last ten years, and the phrase actively evokes specified images (Doyle, 2017). These images usually depict young women hounded by paparazzi cameras that are most likely drunk or high and half naked after a wild night of partying (Doyle, 2017). These girls then become the emblem of celebrity, bad girl femininity (Doyle, 2017; Kiefer, 2016). The trainwreck is *always* a woman and is usually subject to extra attention in the limelight (Doyle, 2017). Trainwrecks are in demand; almost everything they do becomes front page news, especially if their actions are seen as scandalous, defamatory, or insane. The exponential growth of the internet in the early 2000s created new avenues of interest in celebrity life, including that of social media, gossip blogs, online tabloids, and collections of paparazzi snapshots (Hamad & Taylor, 2015; Mercer, 2013). What resulted was 24/7 media access into the trainwreck’s life and their long line of outrageous, commiserable actions (Doyle, 2017).

Kristy Fairclough coined the term trainwreck in 2008 as a way to describe young, wild female celebrities who exemplify the ‘good girl gone bad’ image (Fairclough, 2008; Goodin-Smith, 2014). While the coining of the term is rather recent, the trainwreck image itself is not; in their book titled *Trainwreck*, Jude Ellison Doyle postulates that the trainwreck classification dates back to feminism’s first wave with Mary Wollstonecraft (Anand, 2018; Doyle, 2017). Since then, each era of American society appears to have had its own trainwreck, from Judy Garland to Sylvia Plath, to Whitney Houston, to Amy Winehouse, and to Paris Hilton, among so many others (Doyle, 2017; Felsenthal, 2016). The thread connecting all of those

women is patterns of erratic behavior which denotes drug use, adultery, plastic surgery, leaked sex tapes, or a variety of toxic combinations (Doyle, 2017).

More recently, however, the trainwreck image has aligned more closely with that presented by Fairclough in which the trainwreck becomes an end point for former beloved child stars like Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, Amanda Bynes, and Miley Cyrus (Fairclough, 2008; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Opplinger, 2019). The route of former child stars to contemporary celebrity trainwrecks mirrors the good girl gone bad allegory (Goodin-Smith, 2014). In this case, the trainwreck's childhood and adolescent persona epitomizes innocence, purity, and 'good' American girlhood (Deere, 2010; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Lopez, 2016). This is critical because the 'persona' of female child stars is largely crafted by media powerhouses and production companies (Blue, 2013; Robinson, 2008; Wolska, 2011). The attitudes and temperament of the characters the girls are playing become subconsciously attributed to the actress herself which proves to be a problem in regard to the construction of the trainwreck (Meyer, 2007; Walters, 2017; Woodiwiss, 2014).

Anything that falls outside of the constricting bounds of innocence, purity, and 'good' American girlhood are seen as deviant and wrong, and the more 'deviant' these behaviors get, the closer a girl comes to being labeled as a trainwreck (Doyle, 2017). Here, the contention over the trainwreck label is illuminated; behaviors, actions, and attitudes that even slightly rebel against the manufactured chastity of girlhood- especially the fabricated girlhood of former female child stars- are seen as obscene, indecent, and immoral (Blue, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Lopez, 2016).

While the avenue from former female child star to celebrity trainwreck appears to be plagued with numerous types of scandalous behavior, sex is the number one culprit behind the trainwreck label (Doyle, 2017). The ambiguity behind 'sex' allows

for a wider range of sexually-linked demeanors to induce the transition into trainwreck stardom. In relation to sex, it is here where the trainwreck ideology becomes intertwined with feminist and postfeminist philosophy, and this will be further elaborated on under the first research question (Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Levy, 2005; Gill, 2007). Furthermore, the warped intentions of postfeminism are widely seen in media practices, especially those constructed by the Walt Disney corporation- both of which allow the trainwreck label to persist in society (Doyle, 2017; Giroux & Pollock, 2010).

The mark of the trainwreck serves as a caution warning, alerting society that someone who was formerly favored and desirable is now a bad girl who's not living up to acceptable standards (Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014). Similarly, the trainwreck epithet indicates that one's previous role model status has been revoked (Fairclough, 2008; Goodin-Smith, 2014). Contextually, "acceptable standards" establish guidelines and criteria that mandate a hyper-perfect femininity chock-full of normative beauty standards, virginal innocence, declarations of female submission, and prescriptions for gender roles (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Vares & Jackson, 2015). Correspondingly, these acceptable standards are formulated and perpetuated by the patriarchy which seeks to preserve male dominance and existing gender imbalances that keep women subordinated (Higgins, 2018; Lopez, 2016).

Limiting gender roles, antipodal views on sex, and the infiltration of postfeminism in mainstream media are some associated mechanisms that assist in the breeding of trainwrecks (Doyle, 2017; Fairclough, 2008; Goodin-Smith, 2014). In recent years, child actors are those who are seemingly most likely to involuntarily enter trainwreck circles as they age (Blue, 2017; Doyle, 2017). As for these former child stars, prior Disney Channel starlets- like Miley Cyrus, Demi Lovato, and Bella

Thorne- are the women escalating into trainwreck ranks (Blue, 2013; Blue, 2017; Oswald, 2019; Vares & Jackson, 2015). In this paper, I will use feminist theory to analyze the connection between Disney culture and contemporary celebrity "trainwrecks." Throughout the paper I will answer two specific research questions: 1) how do polarizing attitudes about sex, sexuality, and sensuality create standards for young women, and how does this affect the young girls who consume Disney media? And 2) how does Disney culture perpetuate gendered patterns of behavior and standards of femininity in both its media and in the stars it creates?

Research Question 1: HOW DO POLARIZING ATTITUDES TOWARD SEX AND SEXUALITY CREATE STANDARDS FOR YOUNG WOMEN? HOW DOES THIS AFFECT YOUNG GIRLS WHO CONSUME DISNEY CHANNEL MEDIA?

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

The American obsession with purity culture and the virginal status of young women creates a good girl/bad girl dichotomy that inherently reflects and upholds gender expectations and stereotypes (Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Lopez, 2016; Vares & Jackson, 2015). This first research question will address the polarizing attitudes about sex and sexuality, and how, particularly, these attitudes and debates emerge from confusion between postfeminism and authentic feminism. My second research question will expand upon the polarizing attitudes on sex/sexuality and relate these attitudes to Disney-mandated gender roles for young girls.

Under this first research question that primarily discusses sex, I will outline a brief synopsis of the good/bad girl dichotomy, an overview of the postfeminist philosophy that guides conflicting attitudes toward sex, how those attitudes are

applied to celebrity feminism, how those attitudes and the philosophy of celebrity feminism is applied to former Disney child stars *and* celebrity trainwrecks, and, finally, how all of this affects young girls who consume Disney media which will be explained in relation to the framing of slut discourses.

To begin, good girls are those that abstain from sex and anything erotic or raunchy in nature (Jackson & Lyons, 2013; Vares & Jackson, 2015). At the same time, the good girl is still expected to conform to feminine ideals of attractiveness and inherent sex appeal (Doyle, 2017; Jackson & Lyons, 2013; Vares & Jackson, 2015). Here, it is already becoming apparent that attitudes toward sex are antipodal based on the perplexing paradigm that presents itself when adhering to good girl prescriptions that declare girls *should* be sexy but shoud not *act* on being sexy. Alleged bad girls also have sex appeal, but they use it and or capitalize on it, which the patriarchy deems as wrong (Doyle, 2017). The conflicting messages about sex and displayed sexuality create unachievable gendered standards for young women (Miriam, 2012). From this unattainable standard, women are placed in the center of a patriarchy-entrenched, postfeminist argument that champions chastity while simultaneously promoting the idea that women must sexualize themselves to succeed (Miriam, 2012; Jolles, 2012; Levy, 2005; Goodin-Smith, 2014).

CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW OF POSTFEMINIST PHILOSOPHY

Before completely diving into attitudes about sex and sexuality, it's necessary for me to introduce postfeminist thought and how it's intertwined with the media, celebrities, and, subsequently, contemporary trainwrecks. The media continually portrays feminism as an antiquated ideal since media depictions- whether it be television shows, movies, red carpet talks, news stories, etc- align with the chief

hallmarks of postfeminism that adamantly declare gender equality has since been achieved (Gill, 2007). Postfeminism has capitalized on the growing number of women who have power and are visible in society, and, as a result, many people have mistaken these futile instances of representation as *true* equality (Gill, 2007; Zarrow, 1988). The fight for bona fide rights and opportunities is the origin of feminist thought and practice; this battle for gender equality still persists today and is arguably more necessary than ever in the face of postfeminism (McRobbie, 2007; Ross, 2010; Zarrow, 1988).

Postfeminism takes on many different faces and has a variety of objectives (Genz, 2006; Gill, 2007). Since postfeminist theory and its intent could be its own capstone project, for the sake of this paper's limited scope, I will be primarily focusing on postfeminism's support for self-objectification and hypersexuality. I will also address how postfeminist individualism is bound to hypersexuality, and how, together, they create breeding grounds for the contemporary celebrity trainwreck. The fusion of postfeminist hypersexuality and individualism in instances of celebrity feminism conclusively results in mixed messages about sex and sexuality (Keller & Ringrose, 2015). Additionally, the Disney corporation perpetuates postfeminist messaging in its media, especially within the media targeted to young girls (Deere, 2010; Griffin, 2000; Walters, 2017). The mixed messages that emerge lead to polarizing debates that subsequently mandate intensified control over girls' sexuality (Keller & Ringrose, 2015; Vares & Jackson, 2015; Goodin-Smith, 2014). In the following paragraphs of this overview section, I will illustrate how postfeminist hypersexualization and individualism manifest.

POSTFEMINIST HYPERSEXUALIZATION

In a postfeminist world, female self-objectification is meant to be a tool of empowerment as women overtly sexualize themselves (McRobbie, 2007; Levy, 2005; Goodin-Smith, 2014). Hypersexualization of oneself is seen as the only feasible pathway to success, attention, being taken seriously, and breaking down gendered power imbalances (Doyle, 2017). Essentially, postfeminism posits that overt sexualization and raunchy behavior are women's tickets to freedom, a freedom that exists without a hierarchical organization of gender (Goodin-Smith, 2014; Levy, 2005). In actuality, most feminist scholars argue that these attitudes regarding hypersexualization and ‘freedom’ veritably reify the patriarchal stance that women are inferior and exclusively sexual objects to substantiate male desire (Gill, 2007; Genz, 2006; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Levy, 2005; Snyder, 2008; Vares & Jackson, 2015).

POSTFEMINIST HYPERSEXUALIZATION & INDIVIDUALISM

Postfeminist hypersexualization is also increasingly tied to individualism, another hallmark of the philosophy (Gill, 2007; Miriam, 2012; Jolles, 2012). This individualism reinforces the importance of making right choices. In turn, the individualistic nature of postfeminism repositions the blame for making wrong, unacceptable choices and places it on the individual woman instead of on the underlying, institutional power imbalances (Jolles, 2012). Determinately, the complex coalescing of postfeminist self-objectification and postfeminist individualism make it seem that young women are *actively choosing* to hypersexualize themselves (Miriam, 2012; Jolles, 2012; Levy, 2005). Here, both the individualistic nature and

postfeminism's assertion that equality has been actualized ultimately prevent people from discussing the patriarchy's involvement in influencing women's choices (Jolles, 2012).

POSTFEMINISM AND THE PATHWAYS TO CELEBRITY FEMINISM

Postfeminist individualism and the importance of 'making right choices' are highlighted in the mainstream media and in celebrity feminism (Jolles, 2012; Hamad & Taylor, 2015). High profile female celebrities are the perfect vessel to spread postfeminism's message because they are visible in society, viewed as successful, and seen as an emblem of viable feminine progress (Mercer, 2013; Vares & Jackson, 2015). While many female celebrities have publicly endorsed feminism, actual feminist scholars- like Angela McRobbie (2007), Rosalind Gill (2007), Stephanie Genz (2006), and Anthea Taylor (2014)- argue that the feminism performed by blockbuster celebrities is antithetical to legitimate feminist philosophy because of the way contemporary society is imbued with postfeminist apathies, paradoxes, and contentions.

Celebrity feminism is closely aligned with postfeminist attributes that make hollow, meaningless claims that have little to no real world value and application. (Vares & Jackson, 2015; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003). The actions of self proclaimed celebrity feminists are also largely categorized as raunchy and bawdy, so the aspect of postfeminism that celebrity feminists most frequently emulate is that of hypersexual, self-objectification (Levy, 2005). This is not to say that erotically scandalous or sexual female celebrities should be blamed for the paradigm they perpetuate (Doyle, 2017). Rather, the central theme here is that the brand of feminism largely endorsed by mainstream celebrities is a distinctly postfeminist

viewpoint (Doyle, 2017; Sørenssen, 2016). As Stephanie Genz postulates in her 2006 article on the politics of postfeminism, “postfeminist politics adopts a ‘Third Way perspective’ to reconcile a number of conflicting concerns, from feminist calls for female equality and theoretical debates on anti-essentialism to the consumerist demands of capitalist society” (Genz, 2006, pg 1). Genz’s quote illuminates the complex philosophy behind postfeminism and how it’s problematic nature regards feminism as something that has already been accomplished. Postfeminism warps societal understanding of feminism and is not built on decades of feminist scholarship and activism that emerged out the first three waves (Gill, 2007; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003).

The conflation of postfeminism with celebrity messaging results in a seemingly irreconcilable paradigm in which women are harassed, mocked, and threatened over the choices they make (Keller & Ringrose, 2015; Jolles, 2012). Based on these trademarks of postfeminist philosophy and the perplexing synthesis of both feminist and postfeminist thought in modern society, it’s easy to see how so many women- and young girls especially- are lead to self-objectification and hypersexualization (Keller & Ringrose, 2015; Levy, 2005; Miriam, 2012; Goodin-Smith, 2014). In cases of former female child stars, self-objectification is almost always invoked as a way to separate their adulthood from their popularized childhood self (Doyle, 2017).

Postfeminism and celebrity feminism’s application to child stars

While all female celebrities- and arguably all women- are subject to societal questioning about the integrity of their choices, former female child stars are especially exposed to scrutiny and persecution for the choices they make as they

age (Blue, 2017; Jolles, 2012; Opplinger, 2019). As I briefly explained in the trainwreck introduction, the fundamental reason behind the exacerbated surveillance and harassment of former female child stars is sex (Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014). The decision to publicly embody sexuality and sensualness is a transparent distinction from the former female child star's Hollywood persona that symbolized an asexual, girlhood purity and innocence (Blue, 2017; Lopez, 2016). To further apply postfeminist philosophy to this phenomenon, the former child star's decision to engage in risqué, raunchy behaviors is actively viewed as *her own choice* and not at all related to gendered power imbalances or the patriarchy (Deere, 2010; Jolles, 2012; Levy, 2005; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003).

Surveillance

Former female Disney child stars prove to be a special area of focus when examining the surveillance and scrutiny placed on female celebrities, former child stars, and women in general (Blue, 2013; Blue, 2017, Goodin-Smith, 2014). Because of Disney's implicit endorsement of postfeminist philosophy and their roots in conservative, American values, the transition from female child star to adult woman is even more intensely surveyed and dissected (Blue, 2017; Doyle, 2017; Griffin, 2000; Walters, 2017). Based on these women's aforementioned ties to Disney and childhood media, they are increasingly connected to both the children and parents of the children viewing Disney childhood media (e.g. Disney Channel original television shows and movies). Even as the celebrity ages out of the Disney ranks, she is still largely described as a role model and is specifically branded as a former child star. It can be nearly impossible to separate from the Disney image- an image that is characterized by purity, innocence, textbook feminine performance, and its

connections to childhood and American children. On account of the arduous trek of transitioning from Disney star to adult entertainer, these former tween Disney divas are further pushed to hypersexualization of themselves as a means to effectively detach from the girlish innocence of their childhood celebrity personas (Goodin-Smith, 2014; Lopez, 2016; Vares & Jackson, 2015).

Public response

The transition to hypersexualization and the move away from Disney ideals evokes widespread public response (Goodin-Smith, 2014; Waymer, VanSlette, & Cherry, 2015). Within this public response, the good girl/bad girl dichotomy emerges and is invigorated (Vares & Jackson, 2015). The self-objectification and raunchy behavior of a former Disney child star is a radical change from their cutesy characters in children's media (Doyle, 2017; Giroux & Pollock, 2010; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Levy, 2005). In so, sexualization is immediately delineated as bad, slutty, and wrong, and anyone engaging in sexual or sensual behaviors is branded as a bad girl (Doyle, 2017; Vares & Jackson, 2015).

The outcry that results from the obliteration of virginal femininity is then exacerbated by the coalescing of Disney characters and real-life personhood that exists with Disney female child stars; this particular coalescing will be further addressed under the second research question (Walters, 2017). To give a brief explanation, the grouping of Miley Cyrus and her Disney persona Hannah Montana as the same person exceedingly worsened the negative public responses to a number of Miley's well known "scandals": the 2008 *Vanity Fair* photoshoot where her back was exposed to the camera, pole dancing at the 2009 Teen Choice Awards, the leaked video of her hitting a bong at her 18th birthday party in 2010, an array of

exposed sexually-suggestive photos spanning from 2008 to 2011, the 2010 release of “Can’t be Tamed” which depicted Miley as a sensually dark fallen angel, her 2013 VMA performance where she made sexual gestures on stage and on fellow performer Robin Thicke, and her 2013 release of the “Wrecking Ball” music video where she swung naked on a literal wrecking ball and sang a ballad about the downfall of her public relationship with Liam Hemsworth (Goodin-Smith, 2014; Doyle, 2017; Lopez, 2016; Mapes, 2011; Sabate et al, 2017; Spanos, 2017; Walters, 2017).

Circling back: Bridging public outcry and Miley’s trainwreck behavior

All of these Miley “scandals” erupted in widespread debates about the good girl/bad girl binary, and, based on her defamatory actions, American parents labeled her as a slut and a bad girl (Blue, 2013; Keller, 2013; Sabate et al, 2017; Vares & Jackson, 2015). The debates and public outcry that emerge are a result of manipulative media practices- that includes Disney media, news media, tabloids, gossip blogs, etc- that highlight the bad or scandalous behaviors of former Disney starlets (Doyle, 2017; Lopez, 2016; Waymer, VanSlette, & Cherry, 2015). By spotlighting their unseemly, inappropriate actions, “pop culture claim makers persuade audiences to panic or stress” over not only the degrading conduct, but, more importantly, how their scandalous decorum affects young girls who consume Disney media and view former Disney stars as prime role models (Lopez, 2016, pg. 20). The moral panic that detonates must first have a societal reaction to exist, and media and pop culture outlets largely influence which scandalous events result in a severe societal reaction (Lopez, 2016; Sabate et al, 2017). The materializing backlash promotes the polarizing categorization in the good girl/bad girl binary, ultimately furthering the ‘slut’ classification of former Disney child stars.

In the case of Miley's 2013 VMA performance where she famously wore a teddy bear onesie and twerked on the stage and on Robin Thicke, the event was viewed as so shocking, so astounding, so deviant, and so wrong that media outlets- and pop culture in general- forced us to pay attention to- and, in turn, criticize- these "deviant" actions so that they wouldn't infect chaste American girlhood (Lopez, 2016; Vares & Jackson, 2015). This event is one of Miley Cyrus's most remembered "trainwreck-esque" events, and one of the moments that evoked the most severe outcry (Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Lopez, 2016).

For adolescent fans and parents alike, the 2013 VMA performance was the final straw that sent Miley Cyrus into full blown trainwreck categorization (Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Sabate et al, 2017; Vares & Jackson, 2015). Unlike all her "scandals" that occurred beforehand, this one did not result in a quick apology trying to clean up her actions (Sabate et al, 2017; Vares & Jackson, 2015). This time, Miley seemed to embrace the publicity and used it to her benefit as she attempted to distance herself from her Disney Channel Hannah Montana persona once and for all (Waymer, VanSlette, & Cherry, 2015).

The vast public outburst regarding her VMA performance led to a monumental increase in hyper-scrutiny of Miley's sexualized acts (Blue, 2013; Goodin-Smith, 2014). In turn, this led to her being a projection of parent's 'worst fears' for their daughters: a slut, a fool, an embarrassment, and a blatant sexual object (Vares & Jackson, 2015). I will now share a longer quote by Kim Keller from a 2013 blog post titled *Dear Daughter, Let Miley Cyrus be a Lesson to You.* "Yes, this is what happens when you constantly hear everything you do is awesome. This is what happens when people fawn over your every Tweet and Instagram photo. This is what happens when no responsible adult has ever said the word 'no,' made you change your

clothes before leaving the house, or never spanked your butt for deliberate defiance. If you ever even consider doing something like that, I promise you that I will run up and twerk so you will see how ridiculous twerking looks. I will duct tape your mouth shut so your tongue doesn't hang out like an overheated hound dog. I will smack any male whom you decide to smash against his pelvis – after I first knock you on your butt for forgetting how a lady acts in public. You probably know girls who will emulate this behavior at the next school dance. Don't do it with them. You are far too valuable to sell yourself so cheaply. Walk away. Let the boys gawk and know in your heart that they see only a body that can be used for their pleasure and then forgotten. Dear daughter, I am going to fight or die trying to keep you from becoming like the Miley Cyruses of the world. You can thank me later" (Keller, 2013, pg 1). While there is *so* much problematic influence to unpack in this quote, it's clear that the utter contempt Keller holds for Miley Cyrus and her 'immoral actions' is being projected onto her daughter and onto other young girls, as well. The big takeaway here is that, for parents, the immediate reaction to scandalous, trainwreck-like behavior is to control *how* their children perceive it in order to alleviate the risk their children will imitate the trainwreck's behaviors. Here, it is also brought to light how Miley Cyrus' previous Disney roots shape and intensify the parental outcry.

To continue on theme of parental outcry, as Carla Lopez theorizes in her 2016 Master's thesis, "A culture that becomes so inundated with celebrity scandals and deviant transgressions eventually leads to parents and social control agencies becoming concerned with the well-being of young females and their behaviors" (Lopez, 2016, pg. 34). The parental objection to Cyrus' behaviors was not the first of its kind, and the entire situation eerily resembled the uproar that ensued during Britney Spears' fast tracked trainwreck meltdown through the early 2000s (Doyle,

2017). As the quote from Kim Keller illustrates, the difference that occurred with Miley Cyrus' sex-related trainwreck disaster was the way parents framed the slut narrative (Sørenssen, 2016; Vares & Jackson, 2015).

While the term 'slut' has- and continues to- suggest an unfavorable connotation, the increased use of 'slut' to describe Miley Cyrus' actions resulted in two distinct transformations regarding both former Disney stars as trainwrecks and the young girls who consume Disney media (Goodin-Smith, 2014; Vares & Jackson, 2015). First, the differentiation in slut rhetoric arguably expanded the trainwreck classification, ultimately making it easier for celebrities to be delineated as such (Doyle, 2017; Lopez, 2016; Vares & Jackson, 2015). This shift manifested in former Disney Channel starlets turned trainwrecks, Demi Lovato and Bella Thorne, which will be further elaborated on at the end of the paper.

Secondly, the increased use of 'slut' as an insult and insinuation of bad girl femininity subsequently expanded the slut classification used by adolescent girls (Vares & Jackson, 2015). While Vares & Jackson's study found that young girls rejected the falsehood of postfeminist-championed "sexually empowered freedom", the girls did so by mimicking their parents and invoking the word "slut" (Vares & Jackson, 2016, pg. 557). When study participants were asked to explain their reasoning for calling Miley Cyrus a slut, the tween girls overwhelmingly cited 'sexualized clothing' and dress as the basis for the slut label. These findings vary from early 2000s tween perception of the word slut which was predominantly categorized by rampant sexual behavior and explicit actions, as opposed to 'sexualized' clothing (Westcott, 2011; Vares & Jackson, 2015). The tweens' shifting understandings and implications of the word slut signal a turning point within postfeminism (Lopez, 2016; McRobbie, 2007; Vares & Jackson, 2015). This

deviation portends that girlhood identities are more policed and criticized as being overtly sexual, even when there is nothing explicitly sexual about their behaviors, actions, and- apparently- clothing (Vares & Jackson, 2015). Ultimately, the subsequent switch in slut classifications contributes to polarizing ideas about sex that, in turn, further divide the good girl/bad girl dichotomy, advance postfeminist philosophy, and, subsequently, aid in the creation of more trainwrecks.

Furthermore, branding Miley as both a slut and a bad girl meant that the tween girls shouldn't look up to her or follow in her footsteps (Vares & Jackson, 2015). Resultantly, tween girls who continued to associate with Miley- despite her popularized slut classification- were subject to social consequences that ranged from isolation to full-fledged bullying and slut-shaming (Vares & Jackson, 2015). Essentially, rather than emulating the sexualized or 'slutty' behavior of tween stars, tween girls are internalizing the criticisms the stars are subject to.

In their internalization of the debates about good versus bad girl femininity, tween girls parcel out shame, disgust, and an overall lack of patience for 'bad girl' behaviors; this furthers the pressure to conform to the chaste innocence of good girl femininity (Sørenssen, 2016; Vares & Jackson, 2015). Additionally, if tween girls don't outly condemn the bad, slutty celebrity (e.g. Miley Cyrus) as gross, a slut, or a bad role model, then they are likely to be ostracized by their peers (Vares & Jackson, 2015). On the same note, the girls that fail to castigate the slutty celebrity are also more likely to be branded as slutty or out of control just by association with- or lack of denunciation of- the celebrity at hand. This conclusively furthers the legitimacy of both the good girl/bad girl binary and the ways in which society, the media, and purity culture influence young girls to adopt a virginal image (Vares & Jackson, 2015).

In this case, the vagenuess surrounding sex allows for an array of alleged ‘sexually-linked’ behaviors to influence concern over good girl versus bad girl femininity; this mirrors the sentiment I mentioned in the introduction in which the ambiguity behind ‘sex’ induces the transition to trainwreck ranks (Vares & Jackson, 2015). Again, this reflects shifting attitudes regarding the word ‘slut’ and ‘sexual’ behaviors (Doyle, 2017; Westcott, 2011; Vares & Jackson, 2015).

In conclusion for this first research question, the discussion of the good girl/bad girl dichotomy spotlights the polarizing attitudes about sex in American culture (Keifer, 2016; Fairclough, 2008; Goodin-Smith, 2014). Primarily, the existing obsession with safeguarding good girl femininity mirrors conservative beliefs about sex that champion virginity, innocence, and purity culture (Gill, 2007; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Meyer, 2007; Woodiwiss, 2014). Any deviation from the saintly feminine narrative illuminates the binary that then depicts girls as slutty, rebellious, and apathetic which also increases public criticism and attention- subsequently leading to the trainwreck classification (Fairclough, 2008; Lopez, 2016). Conservative beliefs about sex and sexual display sustain parental outcry, and, since Disney is largely tied to traditional sensibility, the prior Disney status of popular trainwrecks exacerbates the uproar (Blue, 2013; Giroux & Pollock, 2010; Griffin, 2000). Disney’s specified relation to conservatism and traditional sensibility will be thoroughly explained under the next research question. Within the good girl versus bad girl debate, bad girl femininity is, in part, constructed and bolstered by postfeminist attitudes toward sex that promote self-objectification (Gill, 2007; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003; Meyer, 2007; Levy, 2005). Bad girl femininity is principally viewed as a fundamental aspect of the trainwreck, and ‘sex’ is usually the leading culprit in bad girl hedonism’s fabrication (Doyle, 2017; Vares & Jackson, 2015).

RESEARCH QUESTION 2: HOW DOES DISNEY CULTURE PERPETUATE GENDERED PATTERNS OF BEHAVIOR AND STANDARDS OF FEMININITY IN BOTH ITS MEDIA AND IN THE STARS IT CREATES?

OVERVIEW OF DISNEY HISTORY

DISNEY AS A MICROCOSM FOR CONSERVATIVE AMERICAN

Throughout history, Disney has carved out a name for themselves in the entertainment industry by being a media space free from the rife eroticism and displays of rampant sexuality that seeped into cultural trends (Griffin, 2000). Disney Channel media has been no exception to this rule and has subsequently fashioned tween girls at the forefront of their purity displays (Blue, 2017). Since the mass media company's humble beginnings in 1923, Disney has maintained an 'asexual mystique,' which Sean Griffin defines as a curtain camouflaging any overt intimate or sexual behaviors (D23 Staff, 2019; Griffin 2000). Any depicted intimacy was a quick kiss and was only a small moment of the scene since there were other characters and commotion in the background as a distraction (Griffin, 2000). While any intimacy that was displayed was heterosexual, characters in well-known heterosexual couples- like Mickey and Minnie Mouse or Donald and Daisy Duck- never had children. Any children that were shown were the nephews and nieces of main characters, further obscuring the normalcy of sex. Disney's constriction of sexuality was tightened in the late 1980s and early '90s as a result of the AIDS epidemic which ushered in a brisk return to heteronormative, conservative family values.

The Walt Disney company has consistently poised themselves as a metonym for America: clean cut, industrious, virtuous, and the happiest place on earth (Goodin-Smith, 2014). Disney is presented as an upstanding moral organization that represents purity and wholesomeness, buttressed by conservative,

all-American values and the perfection-infused, white-picket-fence imagery of the nuclear family unit. Sean Griffin describes this code of conduct as “values which uphold the heterosexual patriarchal family unit in a nostalgic remembrance of some bygone era of small town Midwestern Protestant ideals” (Griffin, 2000, pg. xii). In this, Disney defines sexuality- both heterosexuality and homosexuality- by delineating normal and acceptable from irregular and deviant. Like their fellow mass media corporations, up until the 2010s Disney has exclusively portrayed heterosexual representations (Rude, 2019).

Of these straight relationships, the majority- if not all- have upheld the status quo and had been predominantly characterized by gender stereotypes and typical representations of masculinity and femininity (Rude, 2019). The heterosexual exemplar promoted by Disney is reproduced through specific representations of the body (Griffin, 2000). The element of social control and regulation of the body shows that the body itself is a socially or culturally constructed object (Butler, 1990). Bodies, or people, that fail to attune themselves to conventional presentations and attributes are therefore subjected to persuasive control mechanisms that seek to reconcile their gendered bodies. As Judith Lorber and Patricia Yancey Martin build on the theory of Judith Butler, they assert that the social construction of the body relies on traditional signifiers of gender to transform and then conform to cultural scripts for femininity and masculinity (Lorber & Martin, 2011; Butler, 1990). Here, femininity is evidently aligned with beauty ideals and domesticism, while masculinity is aligned with strength and dominance in the outside world. In sum, the Disney corporation’s close association to standard American attitudes and beliefs acts as a way to reproduce societal binaries. The nature of these opposing binaries then separate straightness from queerness, men from women, and normality from aberration; these

bilateral categorizations then, in turn, classify one side as right and the other as wrong.

DISNEY CHANNEL'S INFLUENCE

In order to sustain their position at the top of the media industry and as one of the world's most ferocious capitalist machines, in 2002 the Disney corporation produced a legendary shift by removing nightly adult programs and made Disney Channel the only channel in the world with shows exclusively for children and teens (Kid Nation, 2013). The materializing change arose out of pressure to find new economic markets in the late '90s and early 2000s (Griffin, 2000; Hodel, 2017). Disney faced a slow decade in terms of popularity and monetary gain following the extravagant successes of the '80s and '90s slew of family-centric animated movies like *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast (1991),* and *Aladdin* (1992). This pivot explicitly outlines an era that emerged in the early 2000s and lasted until around 2012 in which Disney specifically targeted 'tween' audiences aged approximately eight to thirteen years old (Hodel, 2017). The fixation on tween viewers pointedly focused on tween girls, and this will be further outlined in a later section.

Nonetheless, the distinct market shift heralded a new generation of media giant status for the Disney corporation and launched the careers of some of American pop culture's most notable icons (e.g. Miley Cyrus, Selena Gomez, Demi Lovato, and Zendaya) (Hodel, 2017). The new Disney Channel (post 2002) presented fashion-forward tween girls as main characters in popular television shows like *Lizzie McGuire* (2001-2004), *That's So Raven* (2003-2007), *Hannah Montana* (2006-2011), and *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007-2012) among others

(Hodel, 2017; Blue, 2013, Blue, 2017). The unprecedented success of *Hannah Montana* in particular led Disney to perpetuate fashion-centric, young, female characters that embodied themes of girl power, empowerment, and togetherness (Beail & Lupo, 2018).

Although the 2000s are largely dictated as part of the postfeminist world, the attention toward tween girls and self expressive fashions emanated from third wave feminism and the riot grrrl movements of the ‘90s that curated an avant garde and colorful-yet-punk aesthetic (Simionato, 2015; Walters, 2017). Additionally, the third wave’s new attitudes toward feminism and the preeminence of personal narratives still ultimately permeated Disney Channel’s creation of TV characters, even though Disney media of this time was largely driven by a postfeminist, singular view of woman- or girlhood (Snyder, 2008; Walters, 2017).

FUSION OF ACTOR AND THEIR ACCOMPANYING DISNEY PERSONA

Unparalleled success of shows like *That’s So Raven* and *Hannah Montana* also bolstered the career of their main stars, Raven Symone and Miley Cyrus, respectively (Carol, 2020; Dodd, 2020). However, the fame that resulted produced a strange phenomenon in the postfeminist era in which the image of a character and the actual personality and livelihood of the actor playing the character were coalesced into a singular unit (Walters, 2017). While this seems like a contradiction of postfeminism and its attentiveness toward individualism, the commodification of girls that burgeoned out of this era is tied to postfeminism’s new attitudes on girls’ ability in a neoliberal, capitalist 21st century (Hodel, 2017; Rogers, 2017). This viewpoint positions its attentiveness on the agency and ability of young girls as they

are fashioned as capable consumers in a society primarily fueled by money and consumption (Hodel, 2017).

As Morgan Blue states in an article about the plight of Miley Cyrus and Hannah Montana, “Disney must, therefore, be understood in relation to discourses of postfeminist culture and girlhood, but with a clear understanding of how the company’s use of girls might privilege masculinist commercial media conglomeration” (Blue, 2013, pg. 663). In the context of Blue’s quote, the ‘masculinist commercial media conglomeration’ references the patriarchy and, more specifically, how Disney continually upholds paternalist and patriarchal attitudes of male superiority. Male supremacy is then used as validation for both female inferiority and the alleged need to ‘teach’ women of their inherent inferiority and how to behave.

As a media giant with far-reaching power in regard to the shaping of young minds, Disney must be understood as an *active* mediator in the perpetuation of gendered standards and imbalances (Blue, 2013; Griffin, 2000). The above quote from Blue exemplifies the problematic nature of postfeminism’s newfound attachment to tween girls, specifically because the bond’s foundation is entrenched in patriarchal systems and attitudes (Blue, 2013). Therefore, this pseudo-sincerity toward young tween girls cannot be understood as true ability or agency. Rather, like postfeminism does, it assumes the painstaking work of feminism is over and grants hollow promises without proof of how these promises and expectations will be fulfilled.

Like their characters on their respective shows, Miley and Raven appear to be empowered and entitled to a future of endless opportunities, but their talents and resourcefulness are evidently tied to the advancement of systems like capitalism and

the patriarchy (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Blue, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Lopez, 2016). As they age, they are left cornered in a system that has failed them, as they are left with no equitable opportunities, despite the assurance Disney drilled in their heads.

Moreover, the growing advancement of social media and the endurance of online tabloids and gossip blogs in the early 2000s created 24/7 access to celebrity life. This phenomenon was translated to teen audiences through popular teen magazines like teen vogue, tiger beat, j14- all of which exacerbated the cohesion between actor and character (Kaiser Foundation, 2004; Mercer, 2013; Vares & Jackson, 2015). The grouping of actor and character as a lone unit allowed Disney to commodify both the television characters and the young girls playing them in order to maximize profits and sustain Disney's reputation as a media powerhouse (Walters, 2017).

As the lines between the public and private lives of tween Disney Channel actors were blurred, this noteworthy coalescing and commodification placed the tween actors under another layer of Disney control that was ultimately used as a means to exploit them in a literal and figurative sense (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Lawson, 2015; Walters, 2017). In a literal understanding, the bodies of the teen stars like Raven Symone and Miley Cyrus were used to rack up economic profits for the Disney corporation (Walters, 2017; Hodel, 2017). Figuratively, these girls suffered at the hands of Disney's manipulation as Disney enforced stricter controls over the images of gender and femininity the girls presented in public, non-work-affiliated life (Goodin-Smith, 2014; Hodel, 2017). These are factors that sooner or later contribute to the onset of the trainwreck image as the girls shed the restrictive, Disney-regulated, narrowly normative brand of femininity that sends them from the ranks of Disney teen-stardom and into adulthood (Doyle, 2017). Determinately, the

profit of Disney Channel shows of the 2000s and increased visibility of celebrities assisted in the fabrication of a singular unit between actor and person (Blue, 2013; Walter, 2017). This consolidation intensified economic commodification of the girls and also placed them under draconian standards of femininity and performance of the female gender.

MILEY CYRUS AND THE FUSION OF AUTHENTIC PERSONHOOD AND DISNEY PERSONA

Arguably, the coalescing of character and real life personality manifested the strongest in Miley Cyrus out of any other Disney Channel celebrity of the time (Blue, 2013; Blue, 2017). When Miley Cyrus first moved to Los Angeles from Tennessee in 2005 at the age of 12, she described herself as a devout Christian and was a member of the Southern Baptist Church (Sabate et al., 2017; Winifred, 2020). As she transitioned into celebrity status, she maintained her Christian beliefs and relationship with God, frequently citing Jesus 'as the one who saved her' (Winifred, 2020). Her virginal status was intermittently discussed when she wore a purity ring in 2007 and 2008, and, at the time, she said she felt many other girls her age were 'falling' [out of virginity] and if they could commit to abstinence, then 'that's great' (McKay, 2008).

Early in her career as *Hannah Montana,* Evangelicals were instantly drawn to her and her religious roots and positioned Miley as a positive role model for their children based on her commitment to faith and conservative values (Sabate et al., 2017). In this case, conservative values are indicative of wider societal messages about purity, abstinence, self-valuation and its link to the body and sex, and female submission to men. For Evangelicals, Miley was a different breed of child star, and they were willing to spend money to support her career and engage their children

with her media and personality. The huge economic boom Disney saw from 2006-2008 was due large in part to Evangelical infatuation with Miley Cyrus and Hannah Montana (Sabate et al., 2017).

As a way to continue reaping the benefits of Evangelicals' close relationship with the starlet, Disney put Miley- and Hannah- on a shorter leash in order to control her image both as Hannah Montana on Disney television and as Miley Cyrus, the teenage girl existing off the screen- ultimately strengthening the integral association of Miley and Hannah as one commodity (Sabate et al., 2017). This image control was regulated by pristine and unblemished displays of femininity and accuentation of purity and virginity. This illustrates how, simultaneously, Disney culture perpetuated gendered standards of behavior in its media and its stars and also how conservative attitudes toward sex and sexuality created a code for young girls which addresses both of my research questions. A tangled web of expectations and implications of post-feminism, capitalism, targeted consumerism, and the steadfast rigidity of traditional gender norms was enforced on Miley Cyrus by the Disney corporation. Miley was so lauded and glorified by audiences because of her immaculate performances of the female gender that were nearly perfectly aligned with conventional gender prescriptions.

DISNEY PROMOTES AN EXEMPLAR OF GENDERED PERFORMANCE

Disney television shows and movies have long since been archetypal models for behavior, including that of relationship scripts and gender performance (Hodel, 2017). Since its origin in 1983, Disney Channel media has depicted almost entirely traditional standards and patterns of gendered behavior (Kid Nation; 2013; Bickford, 2015). Gender stereotyping is still widely visible in Disney media, and these

manipulative media practices are allegedly used as a means for young audiences to connect with the messages being presented (Wolska 2011; Hodel, 2017).

OVERVIEW OF GENDER ROLES

Gender roles are socially shaped constructs used by society to represent and assign meanings within a larger, gendered system. (Lopez, 2016). As a whole, gender roles reinforce a patriarchal hierarchy that designates social standing for men and women, they are tools used for social control, and they apply sanctions to those who violate norms in gendered behavior and gender performativity (Lopez, 2016; Giroux & Pollock, 2010). Since Disney acts as a sort of microcosm to American society, male and female characters in Disney media mimic more widespread gender sequences that pervade nearly every level of social order (Stover, 2013; Sharman & Sattar, 2018). Disney media is then used as a benchmark for children and young teenage consumers to compare their own societal position to in the categories of gender roles, gender performance, and relationships. Therefore, the stereotyping in Disney television and movies fortify how both boys and girls *should* behave (Hodel, 2017).

CULTURAL SCRIPTS AND STANDARDS FOR FEMININITY

Main female characters in Disney Channel television shows epitomize traditional femininity and the ‘girly-girl’ image (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Blue, 2013). In this, Disney also produces scripts for girlhood that are viewed, internalized, and- as Disney and the rest of the patriarchy intend- emulated by young girls watching these TV shows (Blue, 2013). Shifts in Disney Channel production and targeted marketing in the early 2000s led to a record number of tween and young teenage girls acting as

main characters in television shows (Blue 2017; Hodel, 2017). The growing number of young girls in prominent television roles gave way to changing perceptions about the ability of girls aged eight to sixteen (Hodel, 2017; Opplinger, 2019; Goodin-Smith, 2014).

The apparent change in ability that resulted is reflective of postfeminist emphasis on the “can do” girl, girl power, and female empowerment; the shifting impressions of girls’ perceived ability permeated everyday life and consequently altered the perceptions of regular American girls (Goodin-Smith, 2014). This new girlhood femininity is constructed by Disney through narrative character representation (Hodel, 2017). Disney Channel’s main characters personify ultra-perfect representations of femininity that are then equated with happiness and success. This caricatured idealization of femininity is presented through gender stereotypes, and it is once again related to Judith Butler’s theory of gender performance in which gender is performed through a repetitive series of stylized acts (Hodel, 2017; Butler, 1990). Gender theorist Kate Bornstein categorizes displays of hyper-femininity as “female drag”, further validating the exaggerated attributes of excessively feminine displays as a caricature (Bornstein, 1994; Marenco, 1994). Bornstein’s theorization of female drag characterizes exactly *how* gender is a performance instead of a fixed point of identity. It also illustrates how hyper-conformity to one gender is viewed as a cartoon-ish and not entirely realistic.

Diverging from main character femininity

While hyperfemininity is reserved for main characters on Disney Channel shows, these main characters typically have a female sidekick or best friend that embodies a contrasting depiction of femininity (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Bickford, 2015).

The dissimilar female representations vary across Disney Channel shows, but the side characters' generally silly behavior and lack of ability to conform to ultra-femininity marks them as a failure, especially in comparison to their best friends who radiate the dazzling delicacy of girlhood (Bickford, 2015). The main character versus best friend dichotomy shows how there are specified distinctions of femininity. In this, one version of femininity is superior and seen as conforming to gender roles while the other fails to meet those standards.

In Hannah *Montana*, deuteragonist Lilly Truscott can always be seen at Miley Stewart's side. Even when Miley is dressed up as Hannah Montana- her pop sensation alter ego- Lilly is still in tow, disguised as Lola Lufnagle, a chic yet campy companion (Blue, 2013; Blue, 2017). In the show, Lilly is loud, takes on the comedic relief archetype- a trope typically reserved for male actors-, is unafraid to embarrass herself, and is generally free of inhibitions- all things Miley Stewart is not. Whether Miley is her regular "girl next door" self or her glitzy superstar persona, she sets up standards of feminine propriety that Lilly cannot achieve (Bickford, 2015). The Lola character is then fabricated by Lilly- with the help of Miley- as a way to try and perform a brand of femininity that resembles the glamorous and *effortless* female coolness of Hannah Montana. Even as Lola, Lilly is still often clumsy, awkward, and unable to do 'basic feminine tasks' like color coordinate an outfit or walk in high heels.

Similarly, in *That's So Raven*, main character Raven Baxter's best friend is Chelsea, a ditzy redhead who is too aloof to recognize her foolishness and goofy behavior. Typically, Chelsea's brainless actions create more obstacles for Raven, but rarely anything arises that cannot be solved in the duration of one episode. The dominance differentials between main characters and their best friends reflects

agency and power of girls. Because main characters conform more closely to gender role expectations, they are granted more dominating power to regulate situations and experiences. In turn, the granted power and freedom allow the main character to exercise agency.

In *Wizards of Waverly Place*, leading character Alex Russo (played by Selena Gomez) is the middle child and only daughter in a family of teenage wizards. Alex's best friend, Harper Finkle, can be seen in almost every episode and is the near polar opposite of Alex. Harper was raised in the circus, has an odd and unique fashion sense which is showcased by her homemade outfits, is an A+ student but has an airhead persona, is obedient, and has a longtime crush on Alex's older, dorkier brother Justin. Alex contrasts this with her sarcastic and joking personality, ability to dress on trend, carefree mentality about both school and wizardry, headstrong personality, and utter annoyance with her brothers, Justin and Max.

The stark differences between Alex and Harper goes one step further into something other Disney Channel shows like *Lizzie McGuire, That's So Raven*, and *Hannah Montana* don't draw attention to: body shape. While Raven and Chelsea have different body types and appearances in *That's So Raven*, Chelsea's thin physique is never explicitly or implicitly presented as *better* than Raven's curvier body. In *Wizards of Waverly Place*, however, Harper's mid-size, more shapely body is a clear distinction from Alex's petite frame- especially when Harper dresses in her signature, costume-like outfits that are decked out in wild patterns and three-dimensional objects. The differentiations between Alex and Harper- and the variances between other female, best friend pairings on Disney Channel- illustrate wider differences in feminine performance. The discrepancies in performance make one seem cool and desirable, and the other is seen as awkward and shameful. On

Disney Channel, the valuation and allurement of cool femininity is only ever seen in main character femininity- never in the gauche, inept best friend. Specifically, Alex and Harper's differences convey messages to the audience about girlhood and beauty standards in which thinness is praised and accepted while mid- and plus-sized girls are viewed as clumsy failures for not adhering to weight-related beauty standards and strictly conventional performances of femininity. Pointedly, the relationship and differences between Alex and Harper are meant to be used as a model for young girls that can then relay underlying themes of societal beauty and body standards.

Alex Russo (Selena Gomez) in *WWP*

vs **Harper Finkle** (Jennifer Stone) in *WWP*

The above sets of photos and this picture to the left of Harper and Alex clearly illustrate the notable differences between the girls' style. Harper's signature avant garde style is seen as goofy and weird which aligns with her eccentric, off-beat personality. While Harper's body is never explicitly mocked or compared to Alex's, it's apparent that the outlandish style and behaviors she engages in are portrayed as a joke to the audience. Based on the existing dichotomy of main and side character femininity, we can see how Alex's effortless femininity is accepted as the standard decorum, especially when contrasted against Harper.

Similar to the way the celebrity trainwreck sends a signal to society about her promiscuous deviance, Harper's kookiness dispatches a memo to young girls about conforming to body standards, beauty ideals, and stylization. This message drives home the importance of being thin and effortlessly chic in regard to feminine gender performance.

Consequently, the main character always exemplifies the correct representations of femininity that coincide with conventional gender norms, and the best friend character personifies failed femininity and is usually left bumbling about (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Bickford, 2015). Essentially, the main character's femininity is seen as superior, even though the best friend is also funny, generally smart, and likeable. While this trend dominated Disney Channel shows of the 2000s, this trope persists in Disney media of the 2010s in shows like *Liv and Maddie* (2013-2017), *K.C. Undercover* (2015-2018), and *Sydney to the Max* (2019-present) (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Fandom Wiki, 2020). Main character femininity is just one example of how Disney creates standards of femininity and patterns of gender expectations for tween girls, and next, I will examine how Disney uses the domestic realm to regulate girlhood identities.

Girlhood, the family, and domestic roles

To continue on the topic of Disney's definitions of femininity and their scripts for American girlhood, Disney Channel aligns girlhood with domesticity and the family (Bickford, 2015). Girlhood is like motherhood in the way that they are both defined by family and interdependence. Exclusive reliance on family justifies the way parents and siblings establish and further delineate a young girl's character and identity. The theme that girls are nothing without their family is seen in almost all of Disney Channel, but it's especially prominent in *Hannah Montana, Wizards of Waverly Place,* and *Good Luck Charlie* (Bickford, 2015, Hodel, 2017, Beail & Lupo, 2018). In each respective show, the main protagonist is a teenage girl whose life is centered around the familial sphere. Even though *Hannah Montana (HM)* and *Wizards of Waverly Place (WWP)* blend family and the home with other obstacles like secretly being an international popstar or having secret, magical powers— the girls' day-to-day lives on the show are still largely governed by familial interactions (Deere, 2010; Hodel, 2017). Additionally, in *HM* and *WWP,* the girls' secret identities are chiefly facilitated through their fathers who then coordinate when the girls are able to exist outside the realm of the home and exhibit their secret talents or adopt their alternate persona. The reliance on and control of the father figure perpetuates paternalist ideology that asserts women- and young girls especially- are unable to maintain control over their own lives or discern when they can engage in certain behaviors or actions (Hodel, 2017).

Also in regard to family, girls are not allowed to achieve familial or home-life balance without the help of male characters who are typically presented as brothers (Hodel, 2017). Even when female protagonists are the older, smarter, or more sensible sibling, their brothers are quick to swoop in and effortlessly solve issues.

This can be seen in the dynamics of character relations like that of Teddy (female protagonist) versus Gabe (younger, sneaky brother) or PJ (older brother lacking common sense) on *Good Luck Charlie,* Avery (cunning middle child) versus Tyler (older, airhead stepbrother) on *Dog with a Blog*, or Miley versus Jackson on *Hannah Montana*- a relationship almost the same as Teddy and PJ's on *Good Luck Charlie*.

The seemingly offhand way male familial counterparts on Disney Channel shows reconcile girls' issues conclusively mimics the policy of gender roles that classifies men as natural problem solvers- even when they aren't very bright- and women as a loose embodiment of the damsel in distress that is critically lacking instrumentality (Hodel, 2017). In so, the alleged inability of a woman to organize her own affairs is then misconstrued as proof of male dominance and female inferiority which definitively continues to elevate the patriarchy as a natural option for societal order. Additionally, the brothers' repetitive mediation of family relations and situations revokes the agency of the female protagonist. Disney Channel's illustration of the *ease* in which a girl's agency is dislodged supports my claim that the agency depicted in Disney media of the '00s and '10s is, in fact, an ingenuine representation of girl power and entirely on brand with postfeminism's hollow claims.

To continue, girls in their respective Disney Channel families are increasingly connected to cultural functions of motherhood in the provided scripts for behavior and attitude (Hodel, 2017; Bickford, 2015). Ideals of innocence and docility permeate the familial relationship archetype to promote the idea that young girls should be caring, loving, and, above all, responsible (Bickford, 2015). Like mothers, young girls are taught to worry about their family. This is an overwhelmingly dominating theme in *Good Luck Charlie* where Teddy- the female protagonist and oldest daughter- is frequently left to manage her younger siblings, stimulate the flow of the

household, and keep her increasingly busy parents on track. In assuming the role as a mini mother, Teddy is not allowed to have angry outbursts, lose track of her responsibility, or be anything but considerate. By imitating the quintessential duties of the perfect mother, Teddy is superbly- and 'correctly'- performing the female gender as she twists herself to comply with the realm of domesticity.

The alignment of Disney Channel girls with domesticity reflects widespread societal ideals about the valuation of women in a postfeminist world; women are still fashioned as secondary to men and also as the only suitable gender to assume caregiver roles (Bickford, 2015; Opplinger, 2019). Therefore, as Disney media mimics societal standards, they are *teaching* young girls about their place in society- a place that is 'necessarily' inferior and first and foremost in the home (Bickford, 2015). In this context, women's 'necessary' place in society refers to a biological one in that women's roles as mothers, baby carriers, and homemakers are necessarily required for the sustenance of both the human race and- as the patriarchy argues- for societal order.

The biological significance of women's bodies acts as another method to revoke bodily autonomy; the motherhood scripts that are imposed on the bodies of young tween girls also work to reinforce the 'pure' or 'right' kind of sexual activity women- and girls- should be partaking in (Bickford, 2015; Jolles, 2012; Vares & Jackson, 2015). As I clarified in research question one, the apparent need to maintain social order through female sexuality is a control mechanism used to influence conformity to female gender norms (Doyle, 2017; Vares & Jackson, 2015).

Additionally, when coupled with the neoliberal, postfeminist attentiveness to choice, larger societal systems pressure women into making the 'right' choice to adhere to female gender prescriptions that comply with motherhood and domesticity

(Jolles, 2012; Negra, 2009). The pressure into a choice is indicative of the complex and confusing entanglement that is espoused in choice rhetoric under dominating institutions of capitalism and the patriarchy (Burns, 2015). In turn, the choice rhetoric heightens the focus on postfeminist individualism in which society is *convinced* individual women are responsible for their own choices and, in regard to domesticity, for the sustenance of the human race (Jolles, 2012; Bickford, 2015). Additionally, postfeminism's emphasis on individualism means that when a woman makes the 'wrong' choice (a choice that does not coincide with forceful, oppressive gender roles), then it is her own fault (Jolles, 2012; Negra, 2009). The scripts for motherhood intensify the 'right' choices about sex which further divides the good girl from the bad girl in their respective two-fold dichotomy (Vares & Jackson, 2015; Burns, 2015). This individualism then excuses and even validates the backlash that particular women receive for their 'wrong' choice and inability to conform to societal expectations of feminine performance.

DISNEY CHANNEL GIRLS AND RACE

Besides scripts for motherhood, the model of girlhood championed by Disney Channel is largely white and affluent (Hodel, 2017). The 2000s media forcibly introduced a "colorblind" grade of racism and imitated the more extensive message of post-racial theory that posits that race is no longer a dynamic factor of identity; Disney Channel media was no exception (Blue, 2017; Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Larson, 2019). Arguably, Raven Symone's character on *That's So Raven,* Raven Baxter, is one of the most intersectional representations of girlhood ever depicted on Disney Channel as a Black, curvier teenage girl. However, Raven's character is still dominated by racial stereotypes about Black women and girls (Bell, 2015; Bernstein,

2011). Some brief examples of Raven's racial stereotyping in *TSR* include her apprehension for the outdoors, her greed or love of money and shopping, her "blackcent" (AAVE accent), her aggression, and her outspoken tendencies.

These racial stereotypes subsequently reproduce adverse binaries of whiteness and Blackness- in which Black is inferior- through the various yet distinct representations of Black and white girlhood. After *TSR,* Disney Channel did not have another lead Black character on a television show until Zendaya co-starred on *Shake it Up* from 2010-2013 (Shahidi, 2017; Turner, 2012). *Shake it Up* and *TSR* further duplicate these binaries because it positions Black girls (Zendaya and Raven, respectively) in close relation to their white best friends where the differences can then be closely dissected and evaluated. After *Shake it Up,* only three Disney Channel shows have since had a Black girl as a central protagonist: *A.N.T. Farm* (2011-2014) starring China Anne McClain, *K.C. Undercover* (2015-2018) which also starred Zendaya, and *Raven's Home* (2017-present), a spinoff of Disney Channel's original Black family sitcom *That's So Raven* which stars and is executive-produced by Raven Symone (Bergado, 2017; "Black Girl Nerds", 2017; Haring, 2020; Martinez, 2020).

Colorblind racism is still an evident problem on Disney Channel. Shows like *K.C. Undercover* cross "the Huxtables with *The Incredibles*", as the show's main family- the Coopers- exist in a seemingly post-racial world free of any negative stereotypes or racial barriers (Beail & Lupo, 2018). Although Zendaya pushed for more diversity behind the scenes of her second Disney Channel show, *K.C. Undercover* still largely ignores race and certainly does not alert the viewers of any racial tensions or concerns (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Larson, 2019; Shahidi, 2017). While Disney's newer and ongoing show *Raven's Home* has begun to tackle more

race-related themes, racial stereotypes and tropes are still notably employed; however, based on its recent nature, feminist and or racial scholarship on the show's content is basically nonexistent (Anderson, 2017).

These unnuanced, tokenized depictions of race align with postfeminist attitudes that similarly express the idea that gender inequality is an issue that has been 'solved' (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Bonilla-Silva, 2009). Like accurate racial discourse, feminism in a postfeminist era is therefore not needed (McRobbie, 2007). This racialized construction of girlhood that overlooks race as an integral component of identity has real-life implications for young girls of color- chiefly because it fails to acknowledge institutional obstacles of racism (Beail & Lupo, 2018). Furthermore, white women and women of color experience gender and discrimination in drastically different ways due to their relationships to white men, and both groups of women- or girls- are used to substantiate male power in different ways (Hodel, 2017; Hurtado, 1989).

DISNEY XD: PROBLEMATIC, MORE RECENT SCRIPTS FOR BOYHOOD

While, historically, Disney Channel has cultivated right and wrong ideas of girlhood, they have more recently worked to construct scripts for boyhood which are arguably more problematic than the girlhood templates (Hodel, 2017). The Disney XD channel was launched in 2009 as a spinoff of regular Disney Channel (Fandom Wiki, 2019). The force behind Disney XD's creation originated from yet another desire to 'tap into new markets' and revitalize the modern spending power of boys aged 6 to 14- the key demographic targeted by this new channel (Barnes, 2009). Although the channel's creator describes XD's content as boyish "purposeless fun", Disney XD's allure stems from promises of action, aggression, high energy, male

camaraderie and dominance, and roughness that wouldn't be displayed on the traditional Disney Channel (Barnes, 2009; Hodel, 2017). These shows also mainly include male-dominated casts and story lines. Some Disney XD programs that follow these patterns include *Zeke and Luther* (2009-2012), *Pair of Kings* (2010-2013), *Kickin' It* (2011-2015), *Mighty Med* (2013-2015), and *Kirby Buckets* (2014-2017) (Fandom Wiki, 2019).

In addition, Christina Hodel argues in her doctoral dissertation that Disney XD creates media texts that aim to teach male assertion and how to navigate the newly empowered young girl (Hodel, 2017). Like in traditional Disney Channel shows, shows on Disney XD involving the family often depict male characters dismantling the agency and individual power of their sisters. Male awareness of young girls' lack of cognitive abilities are a way for them to further rebuke their sense of agency.

From my own viewing experience as a child and tween in the late 2000s and early 2010s, the women and girls on Disney XD shows are generally snarky and abrasive; a key example of this archetypal behavior can be seen in the Ginger character on *Zeke and Luther* which was one of the spinoff channel's first successes. Ginger is Zeke's little sister and the main antagonist of the show (Lowry, 2009). She typically mandates the show's subplot, as she is nearly always in a scheme to make money or expose Zeke and Luther as outright stupid. Her acuminated brain power and perceptibility is a distinct difference from the airheadedness of Zeke and Luther, but instead of being positively painted for being smart, Ginger's categorized as manipulative, cunning, and deviously Machiavellian. The behavior and attributes of Ginger- and other girls on Disney XD- alert the audience that they're the antagonist and the one that threatens the derelict freedoms of male protagonists.

The allegedly inherent annoying nature of female characters on Disney XD corroborates their downfall; essentially, male characters are legitimately justified in asserting their dominance over girls and nullifying their agency (Hodel, 2017). Disney XD acts as a playbook for honing male strength and awareness which then leads to undermining female competence. Through boy and girl character relations, Disney XD- and the Disney corporation as a 'masculinist media giant'- is continually demonstrating how boys and girls should behave. This behavior is organized in a hierarchy in which males are consistently granted the opportunity to predicate their supremacy over women. It's clear that gendered power imbalances emerge early in childhood, and Disney media is quick to authorize these inequalities.

EXAMPLE OF DISNEY & THE SURVEILLANCE OF THOSE WHO BREAK GENDER ROLES

On top of internalization of gender stereotypes, Disney Channel media encourages the harassment and mocking of those who try and resist the rigidity of conventional gender roles. While there are a myriad of examples of this throughout Disney Channel television shows of the 2000s, the example I will be focusing on comes from the "Pin Pals" (S4 E2; aired February 24, 2006) episode of *That's So Raven* (Correll, 2006; Hodel, 2017).

In the episode, Raven's dad, Victor, excitedly gets a new pair of jeans and spends the day flaunting them around the house, all the while being ignorant to the fact they are women's jeans (Correll, 2006). Raven and her brother are mortified that their father is wearing ladies' jeans, and he becomes the subject of their laughter and mocking for the rest of the day. At the end of the episode, Victor tries to wear the jeans out of the house, but his kids quickly stop him and force him to change. In this example, Victor did not conform to standard, adult male gender norms that demand

they wear clothing that's explicitly for men, and, as a result, he faced mockery and taunting.

At first, Victor was breaking gender stereotypes by wearing clothes that weren't made for men, but in the end, he conformed to gender scripts by changing into men's jeans before leaving the house (Correll, 2006). Additionally, Victor's actions were under surveillance from his children all throughout the day (Hodel, 2017); the act of surveillance in regard to gender acts as a way to police gender performance and ensure someone is living up to their expectations regarding role and appearance as a man or woman, ultimately reproducing divisive gendered categories (Shepherd, 2016). As a whole, Disney media portrays clichéd, conventional examples of gendered behavior, and this behavior is then viewed as *the* archetypal norm by those who consume the media. The gender stereotypes impact the gender performance of Disney characters which conclusively leads to either praise for fulfilling or conforming to gender norms or mockery for failing to meet gendered expectations.

Transitioning from Disney's enforced gender roles to trainwreck applications: An analysis of former Disney stars transition into adulthood

Now that I have outlined Disney's role in mediating gender roles and gender performance, I will further explain how postfeminist philosophy and standards of gendered behavior create entangled paradigms for former Disney channel stars, ultimately leading them to trainwreck-like behaviors. Here, the trainwreck categorization emerges as one of the only viable options for former Disney actresses (Blue, 2017; Parales, 2019).

A girl's post-Disney Channel success is individualized (Beail & Lupo, 2018). Here, the postfeminist, neoliberal emphasis on individual choice once again resurfaces (Jolles, 2012; Beail & Lupo, 2018). In this case, choice rhetoric and individualism are applied to empowerment, and former female child stars' prosperity after Disney are tied to the choices they make regarding their *own* ability (Beail & Lupo, 2018). Since- as postfeminism declares- equality has already been achieved, the only barrier to advancement in a post-child-star career is one's perception of their competency (Deere, 2010). This harmful ideology makes it seem as if one's success is entirely based on choosing to believe in yourself and your capability which ultimately intensifies the value placed on individual choice.

The differentiation between male and female actors on Disney Channel proves to be a facilitating agent of scandalous, trainwreck-esque behaviors (Blue, 2017; Giroux & Pollock, 2010; Doyle, 2017). This variation is seemingly copied as the stars age, and Disney's male actors are afforded other luxuries their female counterparts are not (Hodel, 2017; Lopez, 2016). One of the most critical gender imbalances manifests in the career transition from Disney child or teen star into an adult entertainer with a sophisticated and serious career (Blue, 2017; Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014).

ORIGINAL DISNEY CHANNEL'S FAMOUS STARS

Prominent A-listers Justin Timberlake and Ryan Gosling started their careers on Disney Channel's Mickey Mouse Club in the early '90s- a humble start that is largely forgotten (Busis & Bacle, 2018; Griffin, 2000). Both men have soared to Hollywood's heights as a 10-time Grammy Award winner and an Oscar-nominated, decorated actor, respectively (Busis & Bacle, 2018; Joest, 2019). Fellow Mickey

Mouse Club stars Christina Aguilera and Britney Spears certainly landed among the '90s and '00s most iconic pop sensations, but their fame came at a price that consisted of censure, surveillance, and their fair share of "scandals" ((Busis & Bacle, 2018; Doyle, 2017). Today, Aguilera has been largely absent from the modern celebrity cannon, and Britney Spears has evolved into one of the most prominent trainwrecks of all time (Doyle, 2017; Fairclough, 2008; Mercer, 2013).

Albeit one of the rebranded Disney Channel's first leading lads, the former *Even Stevens* (2000-2003) protagonist, Shia LaBeouf, seemingly effortlessly transitioned into Hollywood's upper echelon, landing roles in the *Transformers* franchise and *Indiana Jones Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* in the 2000s and early 2010s (Bakkila, 2019). For Shia, alcoholism, arrests, aggression, stints in rehab, and other patterns of erratic behavior beleaguered the 2010s (Busis & Bacle, 2018). However, this constellation of scandals never branded him as a trainwreck (Doyle, 2017).

More recently, he has reentered the film arena with movies like *Peanut Butter Falcon* (2019), *Honey Boy* (2019)- a semi-autobiographical film written by LaBeouf, *The Tax Collector* (2020), and *Pieces of a Woman* (2020) (Wagmeister & Davis, 2020). This return to the limelight has not been without complications, as both his ex-girlfriend FKA Twigs and the pop singer Sia accused LaBeouf of abuse at the end of 2020. Even with these accusations in a post '*MeToo'* era, he has not been blacklisted, continues to have a career, and still resists the trainwreck label (Doyle, 2017; Wagmeister & Davis, 2020).

Alongside LaBeouf, other prominent Disney Channel male stars of the '00s- like Zac Efron, Cole Sprouse, and Nick Jonas- easily dropped the Disney star classification and evolved into noteworthy celebrities with acclaimed careers (Busis

& Bacle, 2018). All things considered, this path has not been the same for Disney Channel's female stars, as many of them- like Bella Thorne, Demi Lovato, Raven Symone, Ashley Tisdale, and Emily Osment among others- have cited trouble finding roles outside Disney and being taken seriously as adult stars (Bakkila, 2019; Blue, 2017; Fisher, 2016).

DISNEY CHANNEL WOMEN AFTER DISNEY CHANNEL

There are two main pathways that emerge for women that were former Disney Channel child actors: 1) hypersexual yourself to be taken seriously or 2) fade into the background of prior celebrities (Blue, 2017; Doyle, 2017). This paragraph will explore the women who aged out of the Disney system and seemed to disappear from the celebrity echelons. Beloved Disney Channel starlet Ashley Tisdale soared to tween celebrity status after her side part as Maddie on *The Suite Life of Zack and Cody* and her memorable, leading role as Sharpay in the *High School Musical* franchise (Sims, 2020). Since leaving Disney Channel in the early 2010s, Tisdale's only substantial gig has been producing the sitcom *Young & Hungry* which starred fellow Disney Channel actress Emily Osment. *Good Luck Charlie's* leading lady Brigit Mendler abandoned the Disney ranks soon after her popular sitcom ended (Norton, 2021). Currently, Mendler is a PhD candidate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and is also a Harvard alumna. Jennifer Stone, the actress who played Harper on *Wizards of Waverly Place*, only landed two lead roles after leaving Disney Channel; both roles failed to gain attention and were from much lesser known production companies (Burke, 2018). Stone now works as an emergency room registered nurse in New York and has focused her efforts on COVID-19 prevention (Ramos, 2020). With the presented cases of Tisdale, Mendler, and Stone, it's clear that, even though

these women may be vastly successful, they have relatively distanced themselves from the limelight after their residencies on Disney Channel (Blue, 2017). Based on their apparent exit of mainstream celebrity status, society views these women as empowered and respectable for making the choice to leave Disney Channel *and* not publicly sexualize themselves (Doyle, 2017; Fairclough, 2008).

As for the trainwrecks, because they are still perceived as a central component of society, they are viewed as critically making that choice (Doyle, 2017; Jolles, 2012; Vares & Jackson, 2015). While the bulk of this paper has focused on Miley Cyrus' journey to trainwreck status and the 'choices' that brought her there, she is not the only Disney Channel celebrity to age into trainwreck ranks (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Blue, 2017). Since Miley, Disney Channel leads Demi Lovato and, more recently, Bella Thorne, have escalated into celebrity trainwrecks (Young, 2018). Both of their trainwreck journeys were marked by choices- primarily about sex and displays of sexuality- in which the descent to trainwreck status was viewed as *their* choice. Like with Miley Cyrus before them, the transition to the trainwreck image is not curated by an individual girl's choices about sex (Vares & Jackson, 2015). Rather, the transition is outstandingly tied to the manipulative media practices of the masculinist Disney corporation, and, specifically, how they uphold the patriarchy and endorse postfeminist philosophy (Blue, 2017; Deere, 2010; Walters, 2017).

DISNEY TRAINWRECKS AFTER MILEY CYRUS

While I wish I could thoroughly explain Demi Lovato's and Bella Thorne's journeys to trainwreck denomination as assiduously as I did Miley Cyrus', in this section I will only be briefly focusing on Thorne. Primarily, Bella Thorne's story illustrates the control mechanisms Disney placed on her and how this still affects her

career, mental health, and identity nearly nine years after her Disney Channel sitcom, *Shake it Up*, ended (White, 2021).

Before landing her breakout role as CeCe on *Shake it Up* (2010-2013), Thorne was a child actor from a struggling family; the weekly pay from the Disney Channel sitcom alleviated the risk of homelessness and hunger for herself, her widowed mother, and younger siblings. When speaking of her time on Disney Channel, Thorne states she felt as if she was living a lie because of the gilded, chaste standard of femininity Disney forced her to endorse (Oswald, 2020; White, 2021). Like with other Disney divas before her, this required femininity was forcefully imparted on both Thorne's *Shake it Up* character and on herself in real life, so much so that she claims Disney threatened to fire her over wearing a bikini to the beach in 2012 (Blue, 2017; Walters, 2017; White, 2021). No matter what she did to try and conform to Disney's narrowly-defined definition of acceptable femininity, she came up short and was consequently chastised by the Disney corporation, mainstream media, and parents of children consuming Disney Channel media (Walters, 2017; White, 2021).

As with Miley and the rest of the child star trainwrecks before them, Bella Thorne's transition from former Disney darling to average teenage girl was not met without criticism and a fair share of scandals (Blue, 2017; Doyle, 2017; Oswald, 2020; White, 2021). In the wake of *Shake it Up*'s success, Thorne was already beginning to be labeled as a 'good girl gone bad' and was nicknamed a "Lindsay Lohan in training" for wearing allegedly provocative clothing (White, 2021). Thorne's most prominent, distinctly-trainwreck moment was the decision to share her own nude photos online after being blackmailed by a hacker (Oswald, 2020; White, 2021). The uproar that resulted from this decision directly cuts back to my first

research question regarding polarizing attitudes toward sex. Some young women lauded Thorne for empowering herself and combating the commodified objectification of women's bodies, especially from celebrity nude hackers; this reaction is a postfeminist viewpoint that feminist scholars like Ariel Levy (2005), Rosalind Gill (2007), Kristy Fairclough (2008), and Oona Goodin-Smith (2014) have analyzed, ultimately showing how the view of self-objectification has been warped into a 'girl power' theme (White, 2021). Others, however, did not view Thorne's actions as respectable and, instead, categorized them as defamatory and contemptible (Oswald, 2020; White, 2021). Also, the group that sustained the backlash against Bella Thorne's actions explicitly viewed the actions as *her* active choice. Based on the emphasis of choice rhetoric, this viewpoint is also postfeminist but in a different way than the self-objectification take (Gill, 2007; Hall & Rodriguez, 2003; Jolles, 2012). The polarizing postfeminist paradigm that emerges is continually sustained by Disney Channel media through their strict enforcement of purity ideals, their policing of traditional gender roles, and their persistent construction of contemporary celebrity trainwrecks (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Blue, 2013; Blue, 2017; Deere, 2010; Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Lopez, 2016; Vares & Jackson, 2015).

In the case of Bella Thorne- and in most cases- choice rhetoric wrongfully emphasizes a woman's individual choices instead of illuminating the power structures that influence and inhibit a woman's experiences, especially the lived experiences of former Disney starlets (Jolles, 2012; Miriam, 2012). Since the end of *Shake it Up,* Thorne has publicly spoken about her mental health struggles, pansexual identity, tough transition after Disney Channel, and her life as a survivor of extensive sexual abuse (White, 2021). Within these categories, choice is clearly not

a determining factor, and the use of choice is entirely problematic (Jolles, 2012; Miriam, 2012; Levy, 2005). Despite this, the trainwreck label is increasingly imparted on Bella Thorne based on a number of her actions including the following: her public relationship fallouts with celebrities like rap singer Mod Sun and female YouTube star Tana Mongeau, her transition into directing and acting roles for adult films, and her highly controversial creation of an Only Fans account- a site commonly used by sex workers to share photos and videos- in which she broke platform records for daily profits (Oswald, 2020; White, 2021).

Despite the trainwreck label, Bella Thorne cites how much *better* she feels to be honest and authentic to herself (White, 2021). Even though many people criticize her actions on a widespread basis, Thorne states that she has grown closer with her fan base as a result of her outspoken nature on issues like queer visibility, domestic violence, and sexual assault. Bella Thorne's story not only shows how Disney is the first to essentially regulate a girl's potential trainwreck identity, but also how stars have, in part, come to embrace their trainwreck branding (Blue, 2017; Waymer, Vanslette, & Cherry, 2015; White, 2021).

CLOSING REMARKS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

In conclusion, the varying, gendered degrees of trainwreck classification- or lack of- reflect larger themes regarding the way Disney culture perpetuates gendered patterns of behavior and establishes standards of feminine propriety (Blue, 2017; Doyle, 2017; Hodel, 2017). On the same note, the numerous ways trainwreck femininity is connected to Disney media practices is entirely intertwined with polarizing attitudes toward sex and gendered patterns of behavior.

In regard to gender, Disney Channel's male stars concretize heroic, masculine values of strength, resiliency, and superiority which, in turn, grants them access to lucrative careers and propels them to preeminence (Blue, 2013; Blue, 2017; Lopez, 2016). On the other hand, female Disney stars are typically given one of two options: fade into the background or become a trainwreck celebrity, both of which arise out of failure to successfully separate from their idyllic and chaste Disney personas (Beail & Lupo, 2018; Doyle, 2017; Vares & Jackson, 2015). The commodification of these young female celebrities and the confining standards of femininity they are placed under ultimately inhibit their transition into a 'normal' celebrity adulthood (Goodin-Smith, 2014; Hodel, 2017).

Instead of easily transitioning into robust solo careers like their male counterparts, the postfeminist attempt to subvert the male gaze and its emphasis on self-objectification pushes these young women into hypersexualization and raunchy behavior in pursuit of empowerment and success (Goodin-Smith, 2014; Genz, 2006; Levy, 2005). Their sexualized behavior is usually the first type of demeanor that places them in trainwreck ranks which was the case for both Miley Cyrus and Bella Thorne (Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Vares & Jackson, 2015; White, 2021).

Today, both Cyrus and Thorne have transitioned into popular celebrities, despite their trainwreck status (Joest, 2019; White, 2021). Currently, Cyrus has undergone a serious rebrand, as she embraces her carefree, wild persona and translated that into success as a breakout, contemporary rock and roll artist (Miller, 2020). The rock and roll image Cyrus adopted has been healing for her after her Wrecking Ball and *Bangerz* era meltdowns of the mid 2010s, her struggle with alcoholism and sobriety, and her public relationship scrutiny with Liam Hemsworth and Kaitlynn Carter (Miller, 2020; Preston, 2020; Vares & Jackson, 2015). Chiefly,

the ability to maintain powerful celebrity status despite being trainwrecks is a relatively new phenomenon, and Cyrus and Thorne have both proved that it is possible, even with excessive public criticism (Doyle, 2017; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Hamad & Taylor, 2015; Preston, 2020; White, 2021).

The continuous preeminence of Miley Cyrus and Bella Thorne is an anomaly in trainwreck culture (Doyle, 2017). The trainwreck status- which is brought on by oppressive media practices, the intensity of childhood fame, and public surveillance- leads women into other harmful activities; Jude Doyle radically posits that this is intentionally done as a way to continually condemn bad girl femininity and push the trainwreck out of society's vantage point (Doyle, 2017; Fairclough, 2008; Vares & Jackson, 2015). Historically, trainwreck status has led to exacerbated mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, and even death (Doyle, 2017; Fairclough, 2008). This is illustrated in Lindsay Lohan's various stints in rehab, Britney Spears' psychiatric conservatorship, Miley Cyrus' struggle with alcohol abuse, Bella Thorne's fight with mental health concerns and eating disorders, and Demi Lovato's battle with drugs and her public overdose; the one thread all of these trainwrecks have in common is there celebrity roots in Disney media (Busis & Bacle, 2018; Doyle, 2017; Fairclough, 2008; Gonzalez, 2019; Goodin-Smith, 2014; Sabate et al, 2017; Vares & Jackson, 2015).

CONCLUSION

The course of this research paper has addressed Disney's connection to contemporary trainwreck culture by showing how polarizing attitudes toward sex and strict enforcement of gender roles are intertwined with one another and also related

to Disney Channel messaging. The Disney corporation's adherence to an asexual mystique that champions virginal innocence leads young girls on Disney Channel into a complex and highly scrutinized transition into teenage-hood and adulthood.

The combination of polarizing attitudes toward sex and Disney's dated, patriarchal idealizations of femininity create a volatile combination that leads to the trainwreck branding of former Disney starlets. The conservative attitudes toward femininity, polarizing attitudes about sex, and the repeated emphasis on purity do not breed female celebrity superstars with prosperous, mainstream careers- not in a culture where 'sex sells' and certainly not in a hegemonic, patriarchal culture that has warped feminist ideals to convince young girls that objectifiying themselves is the *only* pathway to success. Trainwrecks must drastically separate themselves from the disney caricature of perfect femininity in order to prove they're able to be successful as adults. In turn, we see how hypersexualization is the most commonly invoked tactic to transform a former female child star's brand of femininity since overt sexualization is a clear demarcation from the seemingly asexual mystique of both Disney media and of childhood. Disney's implicit endorsement of postfeminist philosophy can be seen in the way they uphold the patriarchy, enforce gendered patterns of behavior, emphasize individual choice, and continue to promote polarizing attitudes toward sex in which women either remain chaste and pure or resort to hypersexual self-objectification.

Disney's involvement in trainwreck celebrity fabrication cannot be ignored (Giroux & Pollock, 2010; Deere, 2010; Doyle, 2017; Lopez, 2016). It requires critical media intervention that utilizes feminist scholarship to evaluate the gender differences that pervade society in general, celebrity culture, Disney media, and former Disney stars. While I am not going to produce a tangential rant that spews

paternalistic intervention practices, it is necessary to address that some trainwreck women *need* protection from the results of the trainwreck image, an image that is due large in part to masculinist media practices like those Disney engages in (Blue, 2017; Giroux & Pollock, 2010; Walters, 2017; Wolska, 2011).

As Jude Doyle depicts, most trainwrecks die as trainwrecks and never get the chance to redeem themselves or be free of rampant censure (Doyle, 2017; Fairclough, 2008). In cases like Britney Spears, the psychiatric conservatorship she is under revokes all of her agency and places it in the hands of someone viewed as more stable, more responsible, and more equipped to make better choices for her: her father (Puente, 2021). Other, non-Disney affiliated trainwrecks like Amanda Bynes- who was also a former child star of the 2000s but was on the Nickelodeon network- fare similar fates as Britney in regard to psychiatric conservatorship (Opplinger, 2019). Additionally, Disney-star-turned-trainwreck Demi Lovato has faced serious health consequences as a result of her Disney-induced trainwreck and consistent battle with drug usage. In sum, attention geared toward the protection of women can help spotlight the harm done at the hands of media giants- like Disney- that impact a woman's identity and overall health (Blue, 2017).

2020 and 2021 even more so have been monumental years in making strides against trainwreck classification and the limitations it creates. Britney Spears' life has been put on display in the past few months as she fights for her rights under her psychiatric conservatorship (Brodksy, 2021). Changing sentiments have recently emerged, and Britney's beloved, pop icon status seems to be slowly returning as people evaluate the harm she faced, the way the patriarchy and gender discrimination were involved in her strategized downfall, how she is not an anomaly, and how pop culture and media powerhouses were increasingly intertwined with her

descent from good girl femininity to clinically insane bad girl hedonism (Brodsky, 2021; Doyle, 2017; Vares & Jackson, 2015). Also, trainwreck Disney stars like Miley Cyrus and Bella Thorne being able to reobtain or maintain celebrity status despite the trainwreck classification also show how shifting ideologies of the late 2010s have lessened the impact of the trainwreck classification (Busis & Bacle, 2018; White, 2021).

Moving on to my personal final remarks, in the course of this research, I discovered that there were a myriad of interconnected facets that breed trainwrecks which has been clearly depicted in research like that of Kristy Fairclough (2008), Jude Ellison S. Doyle (2017), Morgan Genevieve Blue (2013 and 2017), Carla Lopez (2016), Oona Goodin-Smith (2014), Patricia Opplinger (2019), and Tiina Vares and Sue Jackson (2015), among a number of others. In the beginning, I never imagined that factors like economic commodification or even Disney's implicit endorsement of postfeminist, conservative ideology would influence the Disney to trainwreck pipeline. No matter what connections I examined, it consistently appeared that the Disney corporation was increasingly tied to the fabrication of the trainwreck in modern culture, even though the trainwreck image existed before Disney was created (Doyle, 2017; Griffin, 2000).

While I did expand upon a number of connections, there is a substantial amount of scholarship that is left out of the scope of this paper. For future research, it would be beneficial to compare and contrast the early 2000s Disney trainwrecks like Lindsay Lohan and even Britney Spears to the late 2000s and 2010s trainwrecks like Miley Cyrus, Bella Thorne, and Demi Lovato. Building on that, there were a number of prominent Disney Channel female stars who engaged in their fair share of scandals that I was not able to include, like Vanessa Hudgens and Selena Gomez.

Additionally, a full evaluation and cataloguing of former Disney starlets' trainwreck-esque behaviors would be helpful in showing similarities, especially those that exist across decades; it would also hone my argument that the Disney corporation is increasingly tied to trainwreck fabrication.

Building on the type of behaviors, it would also be interesting to look at how many former Disney Channel stars have adopted a queer sexual identity and to see if this has any link to the policing of sexuality and the enforcement of strictly heterosexual desire; this idea stems from the fact several former Disney Chanel starlets have had intimate relationships with women or have actually come out as queer, including Raven Symone, Lindsay Lohan, Miley Cyrus, and Bella Thorne. Most recently, former Disney Channel stars Rowan Blanchard and Zendaya have publicly 'not limited' their sexuality to heterosexual.

Moreover, as I mentioned above, there seem to be shifting perceptions of trainwreck behaviors and of trainwrecks themselves. For further research, I would like to continue to evaluate this changing paradigm and how trainwreck classification will play out in future Disney Channel girls.

I learned so much about myself and my academic journey while writing this paper and enjoyed gaining so much knowledge about this topic. To whoever made it this far into the paper and to Dr. Jill Wood for her continued guidance and support throughout this process, thank you!

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