BIENVENIDA A DISNEY PRINCESS ELENA: EXPLORING RACE, AGE, AND GENDER IN DISNEY'S *ELENA OF AVALOR*

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Working at the intersection of Media Studies, Latina/o Studies, and Girls' Studies, this dissertation explores Disney's contemporary construction of Latinidad by focusing on *Elena of Avalor*, Disney's first Latina princess. Situated against the backdrop of contemporary postfeminist and neoliberal discourses of girls, this dissertation examines Disney's engagement with these discourses as they move from their previously binary approach of black/white representations. Through a multi-method project, consisting of three case studies, I interrogate a mediated Latina girlhood at three different nodes: production, text, and audiences. My analysis is inspired by the circuit of culture approach (Du Gay et al., 1997) and what media studies scholar Douglas Kellner refers to as the tripartite approach to media/cultural studies (Kellner, 1995). I understand the production, text, and audience components of this dissertation as equally significant processes that must be studied together in order to unearth the significance of this cultural text in relation to Latina girlhoods. More specifically, my dissertation investigates the following questions: Does Disney's construction of *Elena of Avalor* fit with their ambivalent inclusion of Latinidad and if so how?; and is Elena a consistent figure of girl power?

Disney, a global purveyor of media content and one of the top transnational media conglomerates, functions in a demographic reality in which the 2000 U.S. Census revealed that Latinxs are the largest minority in the nation. Disney's acknowledgement of these findings is heterogeneous in that they continue to produce ethnically specific characters and narratives while simultaneously courting a broad range of global audiences through tenuous ethnic ambiguity. Their newest princess, which Disney introduces as proudly Latina, embodies elements of the specific as well as of the ambiguous ethnic. This project examines the limits and possibilities of this intrinsically contradictory strategy to representation of ethnicity by analyzing the production

of the text along with Disney's previous engagements with race and ethnicity in general and Latin American-ness and US Latinidad in particular; discursively analyzing three key episodes in the first season; and interrogating how Disneyland includes and situates Elena and her fans at the park.

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On the day princess Elena made her debut at Disney's Magic Kingdom Park in August of 2016, Jenna Ortega (13), who voices Elena's sister, Isabel, explained that "this is something that us young Latinas have been waiting for for a long time, so to be able to witness that in person was a dream come true" (Mauney, 2016).

To further echo this statement, Craig Gerber (creator of the series), mentioned that "It was very important for us that in creating Disney's first Latina princess that we create a fairy tale that was very relatable, that was based on authentic culture that Latino audiences could watch and feel like they were represented" (Mauney, 2106).

Across generations and genders, and imaginations and identities, **princesses have performed cultural work, that is, transmitting the culturally constructed values, principles, attitudes, products, symbols, and practices**- language, dress, rituals, social habits, songs, etc.- of distinct princess cultures (Hains, 2015, p. XIV).

I begin my dissertation with the above quotes to highlight the significance of *Elena of Avalor* as a cultural product. Currently, in the year 2019, mediated versions of girlhood abound in mainstream popular culture. Some versions portray girls as victims, while others portray them as powerful and agential beings (Driscoll, 2002). More recently, audiences are beginning to see more nuanced representations that integrate the two, even in animated form. As a cultural product, *Elena of Avalor* is particularly significant because, as Gerber's quote above indicates, she is hailed as Disney's first Latina princess. Disney uses the animated princess as both a

symbol of girl power *and* Latinidad. At a time when underrepresented groups of people in the U.S. yearn for mainstream media to highlight their identities, popular culture provides representations of current ideologies. Mainstream media representations seldom showcase the actual racial/ethnic composition of the nation, but rather highlight the interests of majority groups. As a response to recent demographic trends, and an awareness of increasing brown populations, mainstream producers have sought to provide representations that seemingly counter previous stereotypical tendencies or overall omissions. Disney, a global media giant operating under the profit motive, decided to step in with an animated Latina teenage princess in 2016, providing both a representation of girlhood and Latinidad. This dissertation addresses the flexible, ambiguous, and specific construction of an animated commodified Latinidad created by Disney as they pursue profit maximization and economic risk aversion. As Latinx populations continue to gain more purchasing power and mainstream culture acknowledges this group of people, Disney rolled out *Elena of Avalor* to cater to us, through a flexible, ambiguous, and supposedly specific Latinidad all in one.

On July 22, 2016, Disney Junior released the first episode of *Elena of Avalor*, an animated series following the adventures of Disney's first (teenage) Latina princess. Disney executives describe Elena as a Latina princess, while the creative team says she is "inspired by Latin American cultures" (McDermott, 2016). For the purposes of this project, it is essential to note how Disney goes back and forth between Latin America and Latinidad, conflating the two. Although not a full-length feature film (which upset some Latinx audiences) like most of the other Disney princesses, *Elena*, the series, is still being praised after its release, and the ratings continue to skyrocket (e.g. Common Sense Media, 2018; Headline Planet, 2016a; Headline Planet 2016b, T.V. News Desk, 2016; Whyte, 2018). On February 13, 2017, before the second

season had even debuted, Disney Channel announced that it had renewed Elena for a third season (Swift, 2017), an uncommon strategy for Disney Junior series. According to *Animation Magazine*, "Among Hispanic viewers, the series premiere was the No. 1 TV telecast of 3Q 2016 to-date among the targeted Girls 2-11 (5.2 rating), Girls 6-8 (7.4 rating) and Girls 6-11 (6.0 rating) demographics" (Milligan, 2016). *Elena of Avalor*'s fanbase spans widely across Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube, crossing ethnic and racial boundaries, despite not being a full length feature film.

Elena of Avalor debuted five months after Disney launched its "Dream Big, Princess" campaign, which seeks to "inspire girls and kids around the world to realize their full potential and dream big" (Espstein, 2016). This campaign consists of commercials, posters, and initiatives that showcase girls and Disney princesses playing extreme sports, getting dirty (literally), and taking on STEM roles. Further, the campaign often highlights phenotypically non-white girls, which is non-continuous in relation to the Disney princess franchise. Disney princesses, the most well-known of the mediated princess narratives, have existed for over eighty years, receiving their fair share of criticism from mothers, scholars, educators, and girls themselves (e.g. Bell, 1995; Breaux, 2010; Forman-Brunell & Hains, 2013; Gehlawat, 2010; Hains, 2014; Lacroix, 2004; McGladrey, 2013; Wasko & Meehan, 2001; Whelan, 2012). The Disney Princess franchise, otherwise known as the Disney Princess line, is one of the most lucrative components of the company (Hains, 2014) and offers contradictory girlhood discourses in animated form. Most of the criticism directed at the Disney princesses throughout the years focuses on the princesses' lack of empowerment, their helplessness and dependence on men, and the limited representation of different body types. Disney's new initiatives, however, showcase princesses as brave, fearless, and often without a love interest - though their body shapes remain very much

the same. Though the "Dream Big, Princess" campaign is the paradigm of Disney's new initiatives, Disney princesses have actually been in the process of morphing for twenty years as Disney attempts to abandon the passive princesses like *Snow White* (1937- the first Disney princess) for more neoliberal, post-feminist "girl power" representations of animated girlhood. Rapunzel (*Tangled*, 2010), Merida (*Brave*, 2012), Elsa (*Frozen*, 2013), and Moana (*Moana*, 2016) are the most recent animated Disney princesses (in full-length feature films) who showcase their agency by seemingly rescuing themselves, albeit often relying on the help of a strong man or demigod to assist them in achieving their goals. Additionally, out of the four mentioned above, only one is non-white.

Disney debuted *Elena of Avalor*, its first Latina princess, at the tail-end of 2016, coinciding with the aforementioned Disney animated feature films and during a moment of prominent girl presence in the media. This moment was also marked by an increased awareness of postfeminism, popular feminism, and neoliberal feminism in academia (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019). Disney has not only attempted to back away from passive princesses/heroines, but has also actively tried to expand their audience market by including the Latinx demographic (often through ethnically ambiguous characters) (Valdivia, 2008b, c, 2011, forthcoming). As Disney continues to play with race and ethnicity and provides more skin tones for their princesses and characters, we must remember that Disney is a capitalist enterprise driven by the profit motive, being one of the largest entertainment companies in the world, with expansion central to their mission. As such, Disney strives to attract a growing number of viewers. One element of their growth strategy is to reach out to a diverse range of audiences nationally and transnationally, whether from different racial backgrounds and/or interested in seeing more powerful representations of girlhood.

Elena forms part of Disney's multiple strategies to increase revenue and expand their audience base through the representation of a "progressive," non-white princess. Advertised as a born leader responsible for saving her kingdom, she rescues her sister from elves, repeatedly saves her family from magic spells, leads the way in archaeological digs, helps coach a basketball ('olaball') team, and fences disguised as a man in order to prove she is a worthy female ruler, among other quests. The series is action-packed and frequently showcases Elena engaging in tremendous physical feats. As she exerts physical agency, she also consistently puts her family first and teaches her younger sister family values as they face their many challenges, frequently incorporating Spanish words or references to her supposed pan-Latinidad throughout the narratives. As media scholars have argued: representation matters, whether it be animated or live-action. Media representations influence the world beyond the screen, from politics to how people understand their very own identities (Hall, 1997). They transcend images and script writing, and become tools for understanding the world. As the first Latina princess, *Elena of Avalor* is a significant cultural text that demands scholarly attention.

This dissertation focuses on a specific text created by the Walt Disney Company as a site of analysis for a multi-layered project consisting of three case studies interrogating animated Latina girlhood. By focusing on *Elena of Avalor,* I question mediated Latina girlhoods and the spaces they occupy in our culture. My analysis is inspired by the circuit of culture approach (Du Gay et al., 1997) and what media studies scholar Douglas Kellner refers to as the tripartite approach to media/cultural studies (Kellner, 1995). More specifically, my dissertation investigates the following questions: **(1) does Disney's construction of *Elena of Avalor* fit with their ambivalent inclusion of Latinidad and if so how? and (2) is *Elena* a consistent figure of girl power?** By engaging these questions, through a multi-method approach, my dissertation

provides three case studies contributing to the emerging subfield of Latina girls media studies. Through the three case studies, this dissertation outlines Disney's most recent production of racialized gender targeted at pre-tween girls. Mainstream popular culture showcases our society's values and desires via mediated fictional situations, and this dissertation examines how "authentic" Latina girl subjectivities are produced and disseminated to young girls through Disney's *Elena of Avalor*, while also investigating how the discourses come to life through the character's presence in other synergized locations, such as Corporate Social Responsibility Reports and the Disneyland theme park. At issue here is the notion of "authenticity" because it is used by Disney as a concept to attract audiences, but it is a fantastical universe that is being offered as authentic. My case studies examine how Disney highlights Elena's authenticity as a brand (Banet-Weiser, 2012) in order to "demarcate the difference between in-group and out-group status" (Valdivia, 2020).

Disney as Backdrop. Given that this dissertation interrogates a Disney animated text, and its multiple synergized iterations, I must first set the stage by providing a brief overview of relevant Disney information. Disney, one of the top transnational media conglomerates, acknowledges the findings of the 2000 U.S. Census, which revealed that Latinxs are the largest minority in the nation. Disney's acknowledgement of these findings is heterogeneous in that they continue to produce supposedly ethnically specific characters and narratives while simultaneously courting a broad range of global audiences through tenuous ethnic ambiguity. Their newest and proudly animated Latina princess embodies elements of the specific as well as of the ambiguous ethnic. This dissertation examines the limits and possibilities of this intrinsically contradictory strategy to representation of ethnicity, and the section that follows

briefly outlines Disney's representational practices, their engagement with Latin America and Latinidad, their (gendered) princess discourses, and the history of their theme parks.

The power of Disney can be seen around the world as Disney continues to extend its global reach. Central to their attempts to extend the conglomerate's global influence, lie attempts to invest in audiences of color within the United States and globally. Throughout the years, Disney has sought to "communicate an unambiguous ideology" (Wasko, 2001b, p.33) via their products, whether they be films or the experiences provided by their resorts or multiple parks around the globe. Regardless of how many countries Disney films and television shows are exported to, the making of the mediated products occur in the United States. As noted by Wasko et al. (2001a), the majority of the participants in the study they conducted around the world agreed that Disney promotes a vision of American culture that is different from that of other cultures. It is important to ask what falls under this vision of American culture, especially as the demographic composition of this country continues to shift and Disney continues to attempt to diversify their products and audiences for the sake of profit. Is the diversification of Disney a direct result of the changing demographics of this nation in an attempt to promote a newer vision of American culture? It appears that Disney is still in the process of figuring out how to cater to youth (and families) of color through multimediality, while still remaining consumable for white audiences. Notably, almost all of Disney's new releases featuring darker characters are animated. This could be indicative of a trend where Disney tests out their diversity moves first via their fantastical, animated content.

Given that The Walt Disney Company is a global purveyor of content and constantly vying for the position of largest media conglomerate in the world (Le, 2015; Milord, 2013; O'Reily, 2016; Webpage FX, 2017), the significance of Disney's programming continues to

attract scholarly attention worldwide. Since Bob Iger took over Disney as chairman and chief executive officer in 2005, the company has pushed forcefully to expand globally even further than Eisner did as CEO before Iger. With this global expansion has come the release of more non-white characters to appeal to different demographics around the world through Disney fantasy tales. Wasko (2017), reminds us that "Disney fantasies are offered as commodities, produced and manufactured in accordance with definite commercial parameters" (p.23). These "fantasies" help shape realities for certain groups of people. Given that Disney is associated with ideas of purity, magic, childhood, happiness, and innocence, these ideas often go unquestioned (Giroux & Pollock, 2010).

In terms of Disney's nonwhite characters, analysis of Disney's representation of Latinidad is mostly written by Angharad N. Valdivia (2008b, 2008c, 2011) in relation to girlhood. Brayton (2011) explores the inclusion of *Handy Manny* within the Disney Junior lineup, and Chavez and Kiley (2016) provide an insightful approach to Disney, Latino children, and television labor. In her previous work on the Disney channel, Valdivia (2008c) finds that the channel is unique in a myriad of ways, including its previous status as a "noncommercial" channel and its strong push to appeal to the tween demographic through series like *Lizzie McGuire* and films like *The Cheetah Girls* (2003, 2006, 2008). Although *Lizzie McGuire* (2001-2004) is no longer in production, other series such as *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007-2012*)* quickly took its place in bolstering Disney's efforts to appeal to tweens/teens of color, specifically Latinx youth. Through her analysis, Valdivia finds that Disney ultimately ends up using difference very carefully so as to not alienate white viewers and still appeal to a G-rated audience seeking a happy ending. These findings apply to the Disney Chanel's live-action series, *Stuck in the Middle* (2016-2018), which showcases a Latinx family navigating life with seven

children. Disney Channel's Latinx universe, as exemplified by the series, incorporates overly used Latinx tropes, such as hyperfertility, quinceañeras, and spitfires, but also presents yet another example of what is becoming a secondary trope, the overly successful STEM-savvy tween played by Ortega/Harley. In this dissertation, I extend Valdivia's findings about live-action content to Disney animation, where Disney is making the greatest strides in terms of representing non-white characters.

Disney's animated representational shifts are not just racial/ethnic, but are also exemplified through the topics their narratives address. Since 2010, Disney animated films have included *Arjun: The Warrior Prince* (2012), *Zootopia* (2016), *Moana* (2016), *Cars 3* (2017), *Coco* (November, 2017), and new versions of *Mulan* and *Aladdin*, both 2019 releases. These films not only feature non-white characters, but they also address topics that had not been addressed by Disney in previous years. *Zootopia*, for instance, address issues of prejudice and racism through the animal characters, though many critics have found the narrative problematic. *Cars 3* features a lead Latina anthropomorphic race car character, voiced by Cristela Alonso, who showcases her Latinidad through her slight accent and her family story about success (and meritocracy) in this country. The Latinidad in *Cars 3*, however, can very easily go unnoticed. Most recently, *Coco* (2017) provides a specific (Mexican), and quite successful, representation of non-white characters through a full-length animated feature film, though the focus is not on girlhood and the story does not address U.S. Latinidad, but rather showcases the story of a family living in rural Mexico (and later in the land of the dead).

Since 2010 (and even a bit earlier), Disney and Disney Junior animated television series have also expanded the breadth and depth of their characters. *Handy Manny* (2006-2013), *Doc McStuffins* (2012-present), *Sofia the First* (2012-2018), and *Elena of Avalor* (2016-present) are

four examples of this expansion through animated series. *Handy Manny* was pitched by Disney as "edutainment" and according to Brayton (2011), the series "portrays Latina/os as valuable and congenial to the multicultural community" (p.336). Manny represents a hard-working model minority invested in helping his community through repairs of local infrastructures. *Doc McStuffins*, although not a Latina character, perfectly exemplifies Disney's efforts to shift their narratives towards a more all-encompassing path. Created and produced by Chris Nee, openly gay screenwriter, producer, and activist, the series tackles issues about childhood cancer, adoption, and same-sex parents (issues not often address through animated series). Doc is an elementary school-aged African-American girl who "fixes" her stuffed animals, emulating the ways in which her mother, an M.D., treats her patients. Her father is a stay-at-home dad who always appears to be one step ahead of the game when it comes to making dinner and planning extracurricular events, thus the show rejects traditional gender roles through the portrayal of her parents.

We must not forget that Disney's appeal hinges on an idea that the brand and what it stands for are universal, despite the fact that the company is American. Even with the newer, darker, characters, the company represents the U.S. In this sense, the company is promoting U.S. values and ideas as universal, although they use transnational talent, transnational locations, and borrow from stories and legends outside of the U.S. Wasko warns that "we also need to remember that this 'universality' is not necessarily automatic or natural. It has been and continues to be deliberately manufactured and carefully controlled" (p.24), something which viewers often fail to remember. As a conclusion to her chapter, Wasko notes that "Disney's power is related to the ability to define childhood and family life, as well as its control over

widely popular and successful media and entertainment franchises. It is an active player in the concentrated media business and thus is active in shaping our cultural universe" (p.24).

Disney's conglomerate monopoly. Currently, The Walt Disney Company not only continues to produce Disney films at a rapid rate, but also owns companies, television channels, film studios, and the rights to characters, ideas, and various types of intellectual property. Some brands/companies owned by Disney are: Vice, Pixar, LucasFilm, Marvel, The Muppets, Maker, A&E, Touchstone Pictures, ABC, Hollywood Records, ESPN, Lifetime Channel, History Channel, and Twenty-First Century Fox. With its most recent purchase of 21st Century Fox (2017) and its recent purchases of Marvel Entertainment (2009) and LucasFilm (2012), Disney's massive ownership allows it to remain at the forefront of Hollywood narrative, and retain its place as a major player among rapidly expanding media giants. A recent (summer of 2018) perusal of virtual Disney news items yielded the three most prominent themes as follows: 1) earnings, acquisitions, and partnerships, 2) Disney theme park attractions and additions, and 3) Disney hidden controversies. Of the three themes highlighted throughout my search, the first was by far the most prominent. Some examples from the news hits were in relation to Disney's attempts to purchase 21st Century Fox (Donaldson, 2018; Fox, 2018), Disney's supposed attempts to purchase Sky, Disney's partnership with McDonald's (Ellingson, 2018), the rumors that Disney could purchase Netflix (Haskell, 2018; Liberto, 2018; Sarkar, 2018), and the rise in Disney earnings after the ESPN streaming service emerged (Salinas, 2018; Wang, 2018). Rumors about Disney's new streaming service have been solidified, and Disney will begin to remove their films from Netflix in 2019 (Castillo, 2017). In fact, in November of 2018, after Disney officially gave a name to their new streaming service, Disney+ (a name reminiscent of their ESPN+ streaming service) Disney stock jumped almost 3% (Disis, 2018). Disney's global

presence and influence is undeniable, and the company continues investing in attempts to grow their global presence.

Internationally, The Walt Disney Company stands for U.S. mainstream media, and because of this, Disney has a strong influence in shaping understandings of what "America" means. Disney is able to achieve this through many platforms (ABC, ESPN, Lifetime, and even 21st Century Fox), and via their synergy across those platforms. As Meehan (2005) explains "Transindustrial conglomeration presents a unique opportunity to use each project to feed every operation. Called synergy, this practice has been championed by Michael Eisner, the current CEO of the Disney Company" (p.123). Although Eisner is no longer the CEO (he served as CEO from 1984-2005), it was not until the 1980s, that Disney's synergistic practices began to unfold at an unprecedented rate, both vertically and horizontally (Meehan, 2005). Eisner came in with an aggressive growth plan, and one of his goals was to develop and deploy the animated characters broadly across platforms. Through horizontal integration, a company competes in multiple product markets in order to achieve synergy across businesses. Through vertical integration, a company competes in one product market, along different points of the supply chain. Disney was, and continues to be, successful at both of these.

Synergistic corporate strategies aim to have the whole of the company be worth more than the sum of its parts. For example, The Walt Disney Company should expect that their theme parks be worth more as a part of the Disney family, and not independent of that family. Further, as Disney begins to acquire more companies/channels, its hope is that they become stronger because they are working together now, under the name and brand of Disney (The Great Courses, 2015). Disney is unique when it comes to synergy in that it has key characters, known worldwide, who bring their brand together. Once the company and the brand name started to

gain recognition, Walt famously said “I hope that we never lose sight of one thing, that it was all started by a mouse” (Colt, 2015). This quote lives on through brochures, commercials, and even at multiple locations throughout the theme parks. Eisner helped keep Walt’s hope alive; as mentioned earlier, he helped promote the idea to share the Disney characters across different businesses in order to enhance the value of their theme parks, television shows, stores, ice shows, etc.

Robert Iger, the current Disney CEO (2005-present) took a slightly different strategy. He began leveraging characters as he bought Pixar, Marvel, LucasFilm, and deployed them across multiple businesses. In other words, Iger expands Disney through intellectual property purchases that can, in turn, increase synergistic possibilities. Although the LucasFilm production company was famous and quite powerful before Disney purchased it, when we take into consideration corporate strategies, the decision to sell LucasFilm seems wise. After all, businesses and companies tend to gain more power if they belong to a larger, more prominent family. In the case of Disney, production companies like Pixar, for example, would not be worth as much if they stood alone, and Disney is now able to reap the benefits of owning characters like Woody and Buzz Lightyear. The U.S. theme park locations recently added a Toy Story Land (2018) and Star Wars Galaxy’s Edge (2019). Powerful corporations always ask themselves if the whole is greater than the sum of their parts, and Disney’s answer is typically “yes.”

The scholarship on Disney is vast (e.g. Blue, 2017, 2018; Bryman, 2004; Dorfman & Mattelart, 1991; Giroux, 1999; Sammond, 2005; Smoodin, 1994; The Project on Disney, 1995; Wasko & Meehan, 2001; Wasko, 2017) and tackles issues from political economy to audience effects and theme park attractions. Authors like Wasko (e.g. 2001, 2017), not only trace the depth and scope of the Disney corporation, but also the universality of the brand and the name.

In 2001, Wasko and Philips conducted a global analysis of Disney audiences, which traced different aspects of the Disney corporation as they were perceived by groups of audiences around the world. Publicly examining Disney, however, is no simple feat. Scholars like Dorfman and Mattelart (1971), took a stab at the Disney corporation, in particular Donald Duck, through their text *Para Leer al Pato Donald/How to Read Donald Duck*, an in-depth analysis of Disney Donald Duck comic books, and concluded that Disney promoted ideals of consumerism, capitalism, and imperialism. Not only was Disney quick to react to this text, but even locals and military officials in Chile, where the book was published, took to the streets and publicly burned the text. To this day, the text is difficult to access in the United States.

To further echo the statement of the dangers of publicly exposing Disney, it is worth mentioning Giroux and Pollock's work (1999). In *The Mouse that Roared*, Giroux and Pollock warned of the dangers of Disney and how these dangers were particularly more prominent for children, who were more often the direct consumers of Disney's content. Giroux argues that although Disney purports to disseminate positive messages about race, gender, and democracy, Disney's main goal is to convert children and their families "from a democracy of citizens to a democracy of consumers" (p.162). As was the case with Dorfman and Mattelart in Chile, Giroux received numerous complaints from people expressing their frustrations at the criticisms aimed at such an innocent and pure company. However, the criticisms (two of which were mentioned above) do not seem that far-fetched particularly when you look at them alongside a statement Michael Eisner made in 1981, through an internal company memo. When asked about the accuracy and specificity of Disney's films, Eisner replied by saying that "We have no obligation to make history. We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement.

To make money is our only objective" (Cox, 2000). "We" is in reference to Disney, and his point does not get any clearer than that.

Disney animation: girls, princesses, and non-white characters. This section explores Disney's animated representations. Many of the criticisms posed by the above scholars are related to issues of representation. As it pertains to my dissertation, exploring the animated representational strategies employed by Disney significantly contributes to Girls' Media Studies, as it expands the literature to include more explorations of issues affecting a younger demographic of girls, especially issues dealing with race/ethnicity. The literature on teenage and tween girls' relationship(s) to Disney is much more extensive than the research pertaining to younger groups of girls. Researchers like Blue (2012, 2017) McGladrey (2013), and Kennedy (2017), among others, have looked into how the Disney Channel and Disney products construct girlhood, but their focus is on tween and teenage girls. It must be noted that animated cartoons are a large part of the Disney empire, and animated series and films greatly influence and shape children's understandings of the world (Aubrey & Harrison, 2014). As children and young adults develop their ways of thinking, the stories they watch on television, including animated cartoons, inform their relations to the world around them (Greenberg, 1982; Roberts, 2004; Swan, Meskill, & DeMaio, 1998). For example, for children who have never met or been around a Pacific Islander, watching a film such as *Moana* could prove to be the only type of information they ever receive about this group of people. As the nation's demographics continue to diversify, the representations found via animated cartoons do not seem to align with the ever-changing racial demographics of our country.

As I have prominently explored in this introduction, the Walt Disney Company extends its influence broadly, and since the transition into ownership by various investors "the corporate

name was more deliberately treated as a brand name. This practice suggests that the presence of the word 'Disney' is sufficient to produce routine, unthinking consumption…" (Wasko, 2001a, p. 17). This routine consumption is central to the work at hand in that it details quite vividly the ways in which Disney allows certain ideologies to emerge worldwide, particularly ideologies about girlhood and race under the Disney brand.

Disney has a history of portraying its heroines and princesses as passive and mostly white since the inception of their animated films and television series in the 1930s. The animated representational practices employed by Disney, however, do not begin or end with the princess culture. Disney as a cultural phenomenon has gained attention from fanatics, film critics, and scholars alike. Starting in the early 2000s, Disney studies have exploded and have taken on the form of rhetorical, feminist, Marxist, psycholanalytical, critical, and other such analytical methods that allow for the exploration of social issues (Jackson, 1993; Wasko, 2001; Watts, 1997). Much of the existing literature, which focuses on racial issues within Disney, explores the problems surrounding the fact that most of the Disney animated characters throughout the history of the company's existence are white, with non-white representations being relegated to archaic stereotypes (Wasko, 2001b). In recent years, and since the beginning of the inception of the literature cited above, there has been an increase in heroines and princesses who are more active and diverse. In 2009, *The Princess and the Frog* became the first Disney animated film to feature a Black princess, albeit audiences were only able to see the Black princess for one-fourth of the film because Tiana (the princess) turns into a frog and spends the majority of the film attempting to turn back into a human. It is possible to count with our hands the few Disney princesses/heroines who are of color, or supposedly non-white, although a large amount of them

claim (through executive producers and the like) to be ethnically-ambiguous or belong to make-believe kingdoms with no claim or ties to any real lands (Sieczkowski, 2012).

When it comes to non-white princesses or lead female heroines, films like *The Princess and the Frog* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* gained much scholarly attention after their release (Breaux, 2010; Gehlawat, 2010; Lacroix, 2004) as researchers attempted to explain that these representations were still highly racist and problematic. For example, Breaux (2010) explains that even though *The Princess and the Frog* takes place in New Orleans during the Jim Crowe era, there is no mention of this throughout any of the film, as issues of race and segregation are whitewashed in typical Disney fashion. Although *The Princess and the Frog* is an animated Disney film from 2009, the same type of whitewashing still exists in more recent examples, like that of *Moana* (2016), for which audiences have been very vocal in expressing their resistance and opposition to - even going as far as to create a Moana syllabus to be used in classrooms nationwide (Miyashiro, 2016).

The princess culture plays a large part in Disney's influence on young girls. Princess discourses abound in U.S. mainstream popular culture, and the Disney Princess line, without a doubt, is the most successful and popular. Disney's princess franchise earns billions for the corporation (Giroux, 1999), and Disney continues to create princess stories. The stories turn into films or television series, which then turn into merchandise like books, toys, Halloween costumes, ice shows, dance party shows, tiaras, gowns, etc., all of which convey a particular kind of girlhood. Disney secures a large claim on the princess narrative, mostly because Disney brought the narrative to life in animated form.

Whelan (2012), among others, traces the first Disney princess narratives and distinguishes between the first wave of princesses (*Snow White*, *Cinderella,* and *Sleeping*

Beauty) and the second wave (*The Little Mermaid*, *Aladdin*, *Mulan*, *Beauty and the Beast*). In this work, Whelan wonders if a feminist progressive princess is at all possible (p.28). Similar to finding(s) surrounding postfeminist representations, most Disney princesses still remain glued to traditional heteronormative narratives of romance, despite their engagement in more seemingly progressive journeys. Whether or not progressive feminist princesses are at all possible is a question that many scholars, teachers, parents, and children have sought to answer. It continues to be a prominent question as heroines and princesses like Sofia from *Sofia the First,* Lilo from *Lilo and Stich,* and Moana (all seemingly powerful representations of teenagers and young girls) appear on screens and on merchandise across the nation. Even though recent films like *Brave* (2012) and *Frozen* (2013) appear to be indicative of superficial changes, the archetype of the submissive princess still exists and has a long history. Overall, when it comes to a consensus about the "princess culture," there is not a clear-cut answer. While some scholars acknowledge that we can clearly see progress within the princess narrative, others believe that this "progress" is merely a veil for a continuity of traditional narratives.

In their study on Disney audiences, Wasko and Philips (2001) addressed questions of female representations and most of the participants referenced the Disney princesses. Overall, they found that many of their respondents were not in agreement with Disney's depictions of animated women/female protagonists. Although some respondents recognized the nuanced ways in which heroines were depicted, they resisted these new readings of the heroines as independent. The authors note that "instead, they deconstructed the apparently progressive message of Esmeralda's or Pocahontas' independence to discover the same old sexism lurking underneath as a latent message. These resisters read against the grain, not to produce an oppositional reading, but rather to uncover an oppressive subtext" (p. 333). As is the case with Disney and beyond,

these types of readers and readings are prevalent in Girls' Media Studies, and continue to emerge even with newer and seemingly more progressive representations of girls, princesses, and heroines. With all the new representations available, these types of critical or oppositional readings may initially become obfuscated by the uproar and hype surrounding (for example) the new Pacific Islander or Latina Disney princesses.

Although (seemingly) more progressive princess representations exist (even princesses who are not interested in finding a male partner), many people believe that Disney's new line of princesses are still in need of much more improvement, particularly due to the limited constructions of female bodies presented by Disney princesses (Bell, 1995; McGladrey, 2013). In her piece on the construction of the female body in Disney's animated works, Bell (1995) finds that some of the key aesthetic features used when portraying princesses or heroines are small waists, slender legs and arms, and an ability to move gracefully. Eighteen years later, McGladrey (2013) similarly concluded that her tween participants found that the "just-right ideal" body was represented through Disney girls (not limited to animated girls) and the participants associated this type of body with a "normal girl" body. While Disney's representations of girls, heroines, and princesses is limited when it comes to race, the representations are also limited when it comes to a variety of physical attributes, different body types, and different abilities. These representational strategies continue to gain attention from scholars in different disciplines, especially as issues dealing with body image disorders continue to plague girls around the world.

Perhaps Disney princesses and heroines are still only represented as slender or the "right kind" of curvy, but a clear change within Disney is the darker skin tones, which Disney is including within the repertoire of their animated characters. What does this shift mean? *Elena of*

Avalor, for example, proves to be a rich text to examine as a part of Disney's new representational strategies. The princess has been hailed by Disney and Disney Jr. as the first Latina princess (Amatangelo, 2016; Umstead, 2016; Wagmeister, 2016). Overall, the series has been received mostly favorably since its debut in July of 2016 by audiences on social media platforms and through most media outlets, although there are some who mourn the fact that the princess did not receive a full-length feature film. Prior to the Disney controversies surrounding the ethnicity of Sofia from *Sofia the First* (2012-present) and the debut of the first Latina princess (Elena), Disney animation had dabbled in representing other ethnicities, cultures, and races through their main characters on and off. As previously mentioned, *The Princess and the Frog* brought to life the first African-American princess in 2009, but even before that, *Lilo and Stitch* presented two Hawaiian sisters as central characters in the 2002 science-fiction inspired animated film. The *Lilo and Stitch* films (there is also a sequel and a television series spinoff) represent a new darkening that came about after *Pocahontas*, *Aladdin*, *Mulan*, and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame (*the second wave of princesses discussed above). Within this new animated darkening of Disney, we have films such as *Jungle Book* (2016), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009), *Arjun: The Warrior Prince* (2012), *Zootopia* (2016), and most recently *Moana* (2016), with *Elena of Avalor* forming part of this tradition. Again, I would like to highlight that this seemingly new darkening comes in animated form, perhaps due to the fact that it makes more economic risk averse sense to roll out these characters through fantastical locations in a cartoon world.

Before this new darkening of Disney via animated series and films, Disney had made quite a few attempts to target audiences of color through non-animated characters, though often through ambiguous racial representations. Some examples include Gabriella in the *High School*

Musical films and Miranda in *Lizzie McGuire* (both the television series and the movies). Valdivia (2008c) draws on her previous work about the different stages of representation in the United States and extends it to the representational practices found within Disney by exploring *Johnny Tsunami*, *Lizzie McGuire*, and *The Cheetah Girls*. She describes the fourth stage of representation as one "of ambiguity and hybridity, which represents both an acknowledgement of the lack of purity at the levels of culture, the body, blood, and DNA, as well as an effort to reach as many segments of the audience as possible with one economical image" (p.272). By providing images that are ambiguously brown, Disney can appeal to a variety of non-white consumers, while still remaining ambiguous enough so as to not distance the white consumers. How do we define the stage following the fourth stage of ambiguity that Valdivia describes? Does this stage exist, and is it currently present in Disney animation? Is Disney transitioning into a new stage through the inception of their new darker characters and their ties to specific cultures? The examples of *Elena of Avalor*, *Moana*, and *Coco* seem to indicate that this is the case, especially when looking at the lineup of future Disney full length feature films, two of which will be produced by Lin-Manuel Miranda (creator and former star of *Hamilton, the Musical*), but further explorations of texts such as these are crucial for expanding the scholarly literature related to the study of Disney and girls and the media, especially as girls from younger age groups engage with Disney so frequently.

Disney's engagement with Latin America. In 1941, Walt headed to South America for a research trip. Unlike his then current experience in Los Angeles, where he was despised by most of the Disney union members, South America was much more welcoming. As part of the Good Neighbor policy, which sought to strengthen ties between North and South America, the government commissioned Walt to conduct research in South America in order to produce two

films that would appeal to Latin American populations and express sentiments of friendship. The government hoped that Disney would represent Latin American people and culture as friendly and non-threatening, in order to secure them as allies. In 1943, at the premier of *Saludos Amigos* (the first of the two Latin American Disney films) at the Hollywood bowl, audiences were surrounded by mariachis, sombreros, and vibrant colors (Cerejido, 2017). *The Three Caballeros* (1944), premiered shortly after, very similarly, mostly relying on Mexican artifacts as markers of Latinidad. Moreover, both films conflated the various regions in Latin America in order to create one unified consumable vision of the entire region. For example, when Disney showcased Mexico through these endeavors, audiences saw mariachis, sarapes, piñatas, and heard a heavy accent. This is almost identical to Disney's Christmas/Navidad display, at their California Adventure theme park (this parade is highlighted in the conclusion of the dissertation).

As part of Disney's quest to represent Latin America and aid in the U.S. government's quest to forge solid ties with this region, the company reproduced frequently used tropes that flattened the many differences amongst Latin American regions, including histories, languages, traditions, etc, often relying on Mexican markers. This flattening is often accompanied by the "outsider/insider" dichotomy, whereby the person or region outside of the U.S. functions as the eternal outsider, often closer to nature and more primitive than the modern U.S. Disney has a long history of othering (Valdivia, 2017) non-white animated characters through strategic representational choices in television and films (Breaux, 2010; Gehlawat, 2010; Lacroix, 2004; Wasko, 2001; Whelan, 2012), and these early films are only two examples of many in which Disney represents Latin America and/or Latinas by relying on archaic tropes. The strategies used in "othering" make it easier for white audiences to consume these texts, especially if they fall in line with representations (or tropes) that they are already familiar with. These strategies will

continue to emerge throughout the dissertation, as I call attention to Disney's current strategies within *Elena of Avalor*.

Although the two Disney films mentioned above were created in an attempt to win the favor of Latin America during a time of strife in the U.S., the stereotypical representations offered by the texts were not readily accepted by everyone. The U.S. government, during the early 40s, was hopeful that Disney, visionary and creator of dreams, would help strengthen relationships between them and Latin America through animated representations. Regardless of whether or not the films successfully achieved what the government hoped they would, this marked one of the first attempts on behalf of Disney to represent their neighbors down south. Valdivia (forthcoming) reminds us that when exploring the relationships between Disney and Latin America we ought to understand that "there is a long history, that this history flattens difference, and that this history is more influenced by geopolitics and economic issues rather than by ground level issues and narratives occurring within Latin America and US Latinidad" (p.20). The following section shifts gears to provide an overview of U.S. Disney theme parks.

Disney Theme Parks. Given that this dissertation will contain an ethnographic study (Ch. 5) situated at the Disneyland theme park, it would be remiss not to include a small portion grounding the project in the significance of Disney theme parks. Although Walt Disney did not initially set out to create theme parks, they are part of his synergistic legacy and the Disney universe, responsible for generating a significant amount of the conglomerate's revenue. Shortly after Walt's research trips to South America, and amidst the ongoing tensions at the studio in relation to a strike and Walt's open accusations of Communism, Walt embarked on a train tour in Illinois. Upon his arrival from the Illinois train tour, he put together his own large-scale model train. In 1951, when Salvador Dali visited Walt in California, he was mesmerized by Walt's train

village and realized that Walt's fascination with, and dedication to, the train could be channeled into something else, something much larger. He took note of how carefully Walt created the village, everything from the tunnels to the curves on the tracks, and pointed out this careful creativity and precision to Walt (Colt, 2015). It is unclear whether or not Walt's initial idea to build Disneyland came about after Dali's visit or was already in place and was only strengthened by Dali, but what is evident is that Walt began the planning and plotting shortly after Dali's visit to California in 1951.

Early in 1952, Walt began liquidating his assets at a quick rate and had sold the rights to his own name. Shortly thereafter, he started a new company for a new enterprise, an enterprise that he remained relatively quiet about in the beginning. Later that year, Walt's plans had outgrown his initial vision so much that he outgrew his studio. Initially called "Mickey Mouse Village," Walt hoped that his theme park would appeal to entire families, not just children, a vision that remains central to the corporation at large to this day. He sought to distance his park from carnivals, particularly by allowing the park guests to enter a live, three-dimensional adventure.

Mid 1950s America found itself with extra amounts of disposable income, and families began to plan more leisure activities revolving around travel and entertainment. Through the creation of the Disneyland park in California, Walt was able to provide families with both of these pleasures. In order to draw in as many crowds as possible before the grand opening, Walt sought out various forms of advertising through synergistic practices and even created a Disneyland television series, called *Disneyland* (1954). The objective of this show was to provide in-depth information about the park in order to attract audiences. On July 17, 1955, Disneyland opened its doors, and the line to enter the park was backed up for seven miles. As

with most grand feats, there were hiccups along the way and issues with rides, theme park guests, hot temperatures, etc. However, the guests continued to pour in, and even political leaders from around the world made sure to visit the park within the first year of its opening.

Since 1955, the Disney parks have gained popularity domestically and abroad. Some of the most popular locations are the two parks in the U.S (California and Florida), Disneyland Paris (1992), Hong Kong Disneyland (2005), and Tokyo Disneyland (1983), with Disneyland Paris (otherwise known as EuroDisney), constantly ranking as the top attraction in Paris (Packman & Casmir, 1999), although it is not actually located *in* Paris. Disney parks are carefully crafted in order to showcase the town-squares, Main Street, and quaint shops that line the entrance, in order to allow guests to partake in a unique vision of America's collective memory. While this vision is not shared by all "Americans," it is the vision that is showcased at the parks. Even though parks outside of the United States have made slight modifications through glocalization, Main Street and the majority of the landmark constructions at the parks remain the same throughout. Baudrillard (1994) and Eco (1996), among others, argue that Disney crafts a particular kind of reality through their parks, the layout, and the experiences they provide park guests. Disney employs different signifiers that attempt to represent moments, memories, and things that do not exist, referred to by Baudrillard as "hyper-reality" (I will expand on this further in chapter five).

The research on theme parks, and Disney parks, continues to blossom, and one of the areas of research within this sector concerns the labor performed at the parks. Disney is known by many as a magical entity, a producer and creator of dreams. As such, the work of the employees at Disney is often invisiblized and disguised as magic (Bryman, 2004). The Project on Disney (1995), notes that through their parks, Disney "marshals the creative and emotional

energies of its workers and creates a situation in which they are always performing for the company" (p.113). Disney parks, forming an integral part of the corporation's image, strategically position their employees as extensions of the company altogether. As Blue (2017) expands on her operationalization of "corporate imagination," she contends that "conglomerates such as the Walt Disney Company clearly foster particular working cultures and discourses that can constrain how and what meanings are made within and beyond the organization" (p. 12). I draw on her work, and the above referenced literature concerning theme parks and Disney parks, to interrogate how Elena's positioning at the park, along with her interaction with the park guests, fosters discourses about Latinidad and girlhood.

Disney theme parks rely on the performative and emotional labor that their characters engage in. One of the largest appeals of the park, particularly for younger demographics, is the ability to interact with characters from movies and television series, along with the classic Disney characters such as Minnie Mouse, Mickey Mouse, Pluto, and the crew. The costumed employees are not the only ones that partake in the process of performative labor, however. Every single employee at the Disney theme parks performs specific roles as part of the magical world of Disney, even the employees at Starbucks. In fact, Disney employees are not referred to as employees, but as "cast members" (O'Connell, 2014), and they operate under strict rules and guidelines (including, but not limited to, how to smile, point, and wave). In fact, every Disney cast member (including those that work at the Disney resorts) must always carry with them their "tell-a-cast" booklet, which contains the most important rules and the answers to frequently asked questions. I draw on Bryman's (2004) work to operationalize performative labor in relation to Disney. He explains that when employing this term, he means "the rendering of work by managements and employees alike as akin to a theatrical performance in which the workplace

is construed as similar to a stage" (p. 103). For the Disney "cast members," their work is theatre, and this dissertation concludes with an investigation of the particular performative labor (along with the positioning) of Elena, and interrogates how it works to challenge or reproduce certain ideologies within the larger cultural context during which the trip was taken (July 2018).

Theoretical Framework

As an intersectional media studies project, this dissertation draws on a combination of feminist theoretical perspectives against the backdrop of contemporary postfeminism, situated within Cultural Studies. As my project focuses on a Disney text aimed at young girls in a postfeminist moment, I theorize the company's mediated productions in relation to postfeminist discourses and discourses of girlhood, keeping in mind that the company is driven by the profit motive and may not have the best interest of the girls. I draw on Hall's work on representation, discourse, and power, taking a constructivist approach. As such, I understand representation to mean the representation of the world to others through spoken language and visual discourses that are interpreted in a variety of ways by active audience members (Hall, 1997). As an active audience member myself, I will bring in my own positionality to interpret my texts and therefore keep in mind the different readings that can take place when consuming a text. By considering these multiple and sometimes contested meanings, my dissertation is guided by cultural approaches to issues of representation. Drawing from Cultural Studies, my dissertation focuses on the interactions between textual productions, the text itself, reception of the text, and the social context under which the text operates. My Cultural Studies framework includes girls studies and childhood studies, especially the feminist iterations.

Through his work in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997), Hall contends that objects acquire their meanings through the ways in which they are represented. He explains that producing and communicating meaning uses "some element to

stand for or represent what we want to say, to express or communicate a thought, concept, idea or feeling" (p.4). To put it simply, Hall notes that representation is an attempt to present the world to other people (p.15). My dissertation draws on Hall's vision of representational analysis to interrogate the intersectional, generational, and racial aspects of a Disney animated text. Hall notes that the media have the power to shape how we talk about the world; they reinforce people's preexisting schemas and often even create them. In this way, I use Hall's representational analysis to examine how animated representations of Latinidad operate at the level of production, text, and audiences.

This dissertation relies on the concept of discourse, specifically how Hall employs it as he examines mediated texts. Hall, drawing on Foucault's discursive approach to representation, situates discourse within power structures. Discourse is historically specific, and therefore the power it relies upon is specific to the historical time period under which it operates. Hall contends that neither himself nor Foucault use the word discourse to explain linguistic concepts. Rather, discourse as Hall explains it from Foucault's standpoint, is "a group of statements which provide a language for talking about-a way of representing knowledge about- a particular topic at a particular historical moment…Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language" (Hall, 1997, p. 44). Discourse, as mentioned above, is situated within and relies upon power structures. According to Foucault (1980), power is found in the social/political institutions that inform the stories that are told, how the media function, who they highlight, etc. In this sense, media often generate particular discourses about girls, Latinas and non-Latinas alike. When thinking of power, in line with both Stuart Hall and Foucault, scholars have to understand the conditions under which the specific text they are examining was produced (Hall, 1997).

Through this framework, my dissertation analyzes discourses about Latina girlhoods at the intersections of race and ethnicity, age, and contemporary discourses of femininity.

By analyzing my texts through a feminist theoretical perspective, I prioritize media content that privileges women (girls), analyzing social constructions of gender, and focusing on the relationships between feminist discourses and representations of gender, namely at the pre-tween level. More specifically, by drawing on feminist girls' media scholarship, I am focusing on media content featuring girls and directed toward girls. Additionally, this dissertation explores media content relating to Latinas and Latinidad. This dissertation understands and calls attention to intersecting elements of identity, such as class, race, age, and gender as presented through the texts analyzed. Further, in relation to age, this dissertation's focus on a pre-tween generational category, positions the research within the purview of childhood studies.

As I situate this dissertation against the backdrop of contemporary postfeminism, I draw on Tasker & Negra (2007) to operationalize this term. My dissertation understands postfeminism as constructed through popular culture as a surface-level praising of feminism and simultaneous rejection of it (McRobbie, 2009). Post-feminism often highlights themes of self-discipline, individualism, and empowerment, while constructing it as other in order to ease the rejection of feminism as an antiquated concept (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Gill & Scharff (2011) outline the many ways in which post-feminism is related to neoliberalism and contend that they both highlight women and girls' individualism, while asking them to "work on and transform the self…and to present all their actions as freely chosen" (p.7). Indeed, postfeminist "culture's centralization of an affluent elite certainly entails an emphatic individualism, but this formulation tends to confuse self-interest with individuality and elevates consumption as a strategy" (Tasker & Negra, 2007), which seeks to fulfill voids caused by dissatisfactions by creating the figure of a

woman/girl who is a powerful consumer. Drawing on Kennedy (2017), who argues that the tween princess emerges at the intersection of postfeminism and neoliberalism, I further argue that *Elena of Avalor* not only promotes post-feminism as the "authentic" version of femininity (as Kennedy argues in her piece), but also promotes a cultural "authenticity" through the same text. Kennedy further argues that "tweenhood—and in particular, the figure of the *princess*— are sites onto which this cultural investment in authenticity has been projected" (p.4). This dissertation explores both the construction of the "authentic" postfeminist self and the "authentic" cultural other via *Elena of Avalor*. Like Kennedy, who draws on the work of Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012), I operationalize Disney's use of "authenticity" as a construct.

As a final portion of my theoretical framework, my dissertation draws from Latina/o Media Studies, especially the research focusing on Latinas and the Latina body. Media Studies and Latina/o Studies intersect at numerous junctures. Issues of hybridity, representation, identity formation, tropes, and the Latina body abound within the subfield of Latina/o Media Studies. Latinas are often understood as hybrid beings who experience unique situations as transnational subjects (Valdivia, 2004). Through this approach, identities are dynamic and fluid, with varying degrees of agency. My dissertation highlights the intersections between Latinidad, age, and girlhood as presented through the discourses in *Elena of Avalor*, a television series which forms part of Disney's privileged global patriarchy. Within the Disney company "dominant global forces at work are capitalist, masculine white, western, middle-class, heterosexual, urban, and highly mobile" (Hawthorne, 2002). As a company producing media content for girls, who has started to incorporate animated Latina girlhood, Disney must be theorized in relation to contemporary discourses of Latinidad and postfeminist girlhood, while acknowledging that the

company's incorporation of Latina girlhood privileges white patriarchy and a global media conglomeration.

Chapter Breakdown

The first chapter of this dissertation consisted of the above introduction. The second chapter contains a review of the relevant literatures informing this project. The third chapter, "A Latina Princess Ready to Rule: The (Ethnic) Production of *Elena of Avalor*," is the first node of my circuit of culture approach. This is the first case study of my dissertation, where I interrogate Disney's construction of their authentic ethnic category in relation to Latina bodies. This case study outlines the creative process behind Elena's inception, including the *Sofia the First* Latinidad controversy. The chapter then delineates how I operationalize production and the literature I draw on in order to examine the production aspects of *Elena of Avalor*. Finally, the chapter outlines three salient themes that come up through a reading of the production practices behind *Elena of Avalor*.

The fourth chapter, "Exploring Disney's New Latina Leader: A Discursive Analysis of *Elena of Avalor*," deploys a textual analysis over three purposefully selected holiday episodes (episodes 9, 12, and 19) that are the three main holidays through which mainstream popular culture represents Latinxs.

The fifth chapter, "Fantasy Faire Courtyard Encounter: Disneyland's Engagement with *Elena of Avalor*," consists of a modified situated ethnographic study at the Disneyland theme park, where I engaged in a three-stage process, including a physical visit to the theme park and digital data gathering.

Finally, the sixth chapter, my conclusion, summarizes the study and offers insight into the limitations of the project, along with suggestions for future research. After the case studies, I am able to speak back to the literature and to Disney's claims that they have rolled out their first

Latina princess. Given Disney's internally contradictory approach to ethnicity in general and Latinidad in particular, not surprisingly this dissertation finds this to be the case in the marketing of *Elena of Avalor*. Along with a summary of the arguments posed in this dissertation, and an explanation of the many contributions it makes, this chapter looks ahead to the future and the creation of Latina girls media studies.

Through an interdisciplinary media studies approach that combines production studies, representation, and audience research, this dissertation explores Disney's *Elena of Avalor* by interrogating the production and creation of the text, analyzing key episodes, and ethnographically examining the placement of and engagement with the character of Elena at the Disneyland theme park in Anaheim, California. The figure below visually outlines the various, inextricably entwined, components that my dissertation tackles, paving the way for the following chapter containing the literature review.

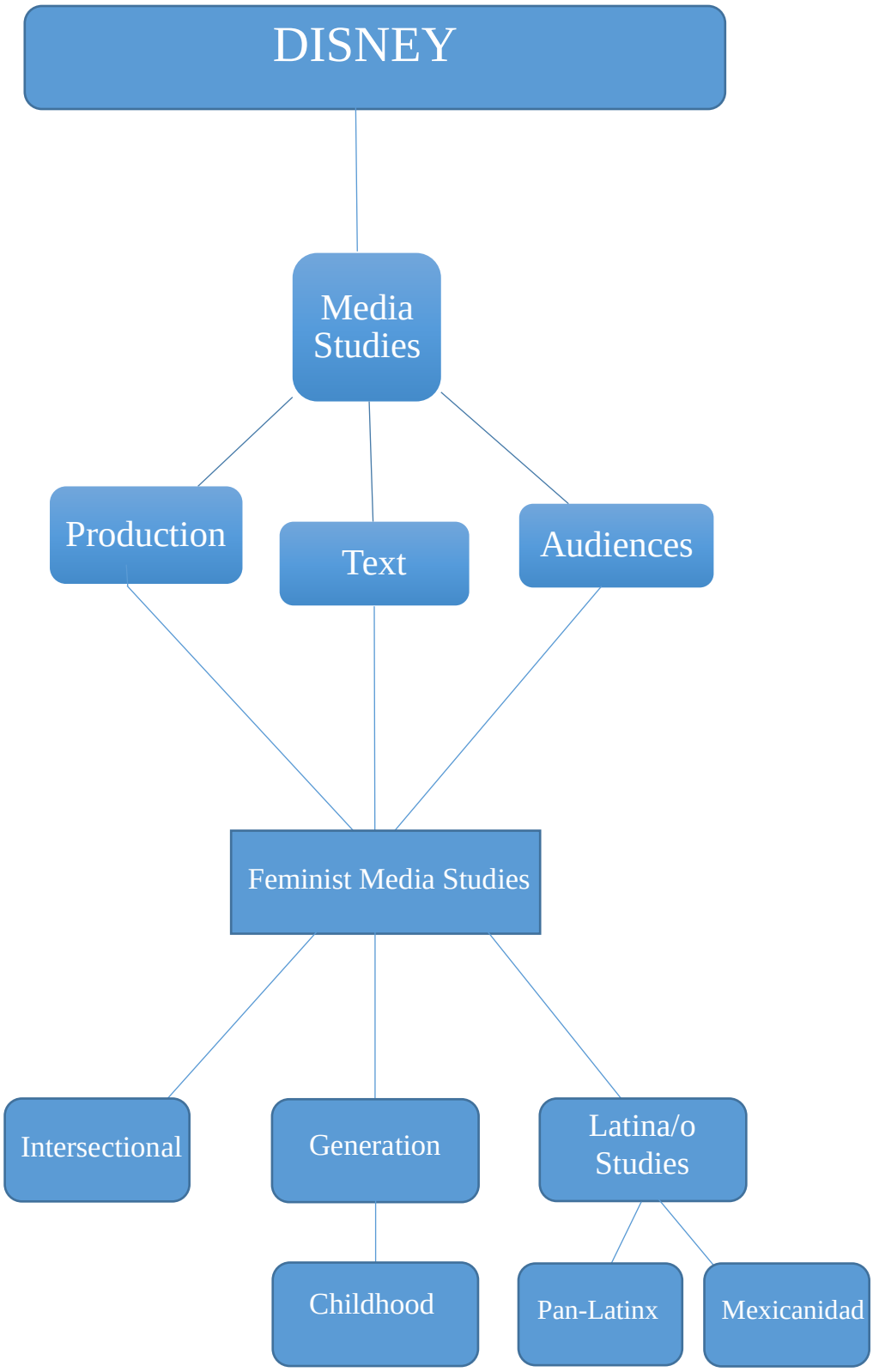

Figure 1: Visual representation of dissertation components

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review maps the intersections of (1) feminist media studies; (2) Latina/o media studies; (3) girls' media studies; (4) neoliberalism, postfeminism, and girlhood; and (5) the predominant research approaches for studying children and the media. My research draws from Latina/o Media Studies to understand how Latina girls are constructed through synergized representations and how theme park audiences and cast members engage with these representations in the flesh. Further, it explores whether or not Elena is a consistent figure of girl power. Media Studies has explored the relationship between Latinxs and the media through hybridity (Rinderle, 2005; Molina-Guzmán, 2006, 2010; Molina-Gumán & Valdivia, 2004), issues of representation (e.g. Aparicio, 2003; Báez, 2007a, 2007b, 2008; Beltrán, 2002; Cepeda, 2015; Dávila, 2001, 2014; Molina-Guzmán, 2006, 2010, 2013; Valdivia, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2010), identity formation through the media (e.g. Mastro, 2003; Moran & Chung, 2008), and prevalent stereotypes and their consequences among Latinxs (e.g. Cortés, 2000; Casas Peréz, 2005; Mastro & Behm-Morawitz, 2005). Within these studies, some have specifically focused on issues of gender and ethnicity in mainstream media (e.g. Aparicio, 2003; Báez, 2018; Beltrán, 2002; Cepeda, 2015; Mendible, 2007; Negrón-Mutaner, 2017; Paredez, 2002; Molina-Guzmán, 2006, 2010, 2013; Valdivia, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2010), calling attention to the Latina body as site of analysis.

My research also draws on Girls' Media Studies. Research within Latina/o Media Studies seldom focuses on young girls or girls in general, so the intersections between Girls' Media Studies and Latina/o Media Studies are few, which is why my study substantially contributes to Latina girls' media studies. The existing scholarly work about girls and the media tends to focus on a white, Western, middle-class, normatively-gendered, heterosexual girl as subject of study.

With the exception of a few scholars, (e.g. Vargas, 2009; Valdivia, 2008, 2011) Latina girls have not formed part of the research agenda within the intersections of Girlhood and Media Studies.

The only book specifically focusing on Latina girls and the media is Lucila Vargas' 2009 ethnographic examination of migrant Latina teens' relationships to and with popular culture, *Latina Teens, Migration, and Popular Culture*. Although other scholars, such as Angharad N. Valdivia, explore these issues through articles and book chapters, there is yet to be another full-length book investigating the relationship between Latina girls and the media. Through *Latina Girls: Voices of adolescent strength in the United States* (2006) and *Respect Yourself, protect yourself: Latina girls and sexual identity* (2012), we receive different accounts and perspectives about unique situations that Latina girls face in this nation. *Once Upon a Quinceañera: Coming of Age in the U.S.A.* (2008) by Julia Alvarez also presents similar issues, specifically focusing on quinceañeras. Although these texts are rich, as most ethnographies tend to be, the focus on media within these is minimal.

Latinx children face various challenges coming of age in this nation. Research shows that some of these children/youth face deportation, food insecurity, high obesity and diabetes rates, and high dropout rates (e.g. Fry & Passel, 2009; Krogstad, 2016; Office of Adolescent Health, 2016; Street & Washington, 2009; Wiltz, 2005). Girls, in particular, deal with challenges facing Latinx teenage parenthood. According to the Pew Research Center (2013), "…young Hispanic females have the highest rates of teen parenthood of any major racial or ethnic group in the country." (Street & Washington, 2013). Although the numbers have been in flux and the percentages sometimes decline, Latinas currently have the highest teen pregnancy rates, at 26%,

followed by African-American teenage females at 22% (Street & Washington, 2013)[1]. Given these numbers, the current social climate towards race, and the fluctuating role that girls play in our nation, research focusing on Latina girls has never been more necessary.

The last twenty years have witnessed the rapid blossoming of Girls' Media Studies within Media Studies. Most of the Girlhood Studies literature focuses on adolescent girls, with a recent (late 1990s) interest in the tween girl market as well within feminist media studies. The research begins with adult women, then extends to teenage girls, with a 1990s burgeoning focus on the tween demographic. As Kennedy (2017) contends in her work on tween fairytales, the popular culture tween girl becomes the ideal subject of neoliberalism. She further notes that "the emergence of contemporary tweenhood coincided with a period of ambiguity surrounding feminism's status recognized by feminists in both academia and popular discourses" (p. 2). However, scholars have focused very minimally on pre-tween girlhoods and their relationship to the media. Scholars and marketing experts alike recognize that girls generate a significant amount of revenue (Durham, 2003) and the same can be said about the Latinx demographic, in particular Latinx pre-tween children, and their increasing purchasing power.

Most of the existing literature within Girls' Media Studies focuses little attention on subaltern girlhoods (e.g.Driver, 2007; Gaunt, 2006; Hasinoff 2015; Kearney, 2006, 2011; Keys, 2016; Mazzarella, 2005; Pike, 2015; Projansky, 2014; Valdivia, 2008, 2011; Vargas, 2009; Zaslow, 2009). However, some scholars continue to push for the inclusion of marginalized girlhoods (e.g. Berliner, forthcoming; Driver, 2007; Gaunt, 2006; Taft, 2010; Valdivia, 2001, 2008), and I situate my dissertation project within this group of scholars. This project extends

[1] To be fair, the U.S. also has the highest teenage pregnancy rates, across all ethnicities and socio-economic classes, of all industrialized countries.

Girls Studies by focusing on younger girls, through Children and Media research. Within this area of research, the literature pertaining to television rarely disaggregates for gender. Although the research on children as a whole tends to focus on issues concerning health, education, and violence, there are media specific studies that focus on the relationship between children and television, but children are studied as one category.

There are studies that examine gender representations on television (e.g. Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Baker & Raney, 2007; Banet-Weiser, 2004; Bell, 1995; Blue, 2013; Lemish, 2010; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). When research focuses on the younger demographic of children and/or animated media effects on children, this category is treated as a whole, without differentiating between young girls and boys. Moreover, most of the research in the area of Children and the Media falls under the umbrella of effects scholarship wherein gender is treated as a variable. There is also a considerable amount of work on representations of children in the media (e.g. Ariès, 1962; Avery & Reynolds, 2000; Higgonet, 1998; Zelizer, 1985), some of this which delves into issues of race in mediated texts aimed at children and featuring children (e.g. Dean, 2000, Martin, 1998; Stivens, 2010; Valdivia, 2008a, 2008b, 2011; Warrier, 2008). My dissertation adds to this expansion by exploring the representational practices found in Disney's first Latina princess.

Feminist media studies and girls. In the introduction to the second volume of *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls' Media Culture* (2018), Blue and Kearney explain that "studies of girls and girlhood discourses necessarily engage with concepts of age and gender, but these identifiers must be understood also in relation to race, ethnicity, ability, socio-economic class status, religion, sexuality, and nationality, whenever possible" (p.3). My dissertation explores these intersections by examining Disney's first Latina princess. Feminist media theory

provides an "unconditional focus on analyzing gender as a mechanism that structures material and symbolic worlds and our experiences of them" (Zoonen, 1994, p. 33). In this way, Feminist Media Studies analyzes how this structuring takes place through and with the help of media, while carefully focusing on issues of power. I do not seek to provide a clear-cut definition for Feminist Media Studies in this work, but rather to "promote recognition that feminist studies of the media represent an open, dynamic and contested field of inquiry" (p. 6), one in which pre-tween girls play a key role, although this role is not often highlighted.

As tween and pre-tween popular cultures continue to expand drastically, feminist media scholars continue to raise concerns about popular culture's relations to neoliberal and postfeminist frameworks, most notably through narratives and characters that foreground beauty, consumerism, individuality, and authenticity (Rottenberg, 2014). Media, after all, provide spaces for feminist discourses to emerge and thrive. Following Kennedy's (2017) lead, I wish to highlight the significance of both neoliberalism and postfeminism as terms that help outline the increasing expansion of tween (and pre-tween) popular culture. Although I devote an entire section to neoliberalism and postfeminism later in this literature review, I wish to call attention to these concepts early on. In a response to what some would explain as a "growing sense of exhaustion" (Kennedy, 2017, p.2) with the two terms, Kennedy encourages us not to take these terms for granted as they "allow us to make sense of the ideological work of tween culture's fairy tale narratives in the retelling of feminism's history and the construction of feminist identities" (p. 2). Moreover, postfeminism and neoliberalism are deeply embedded in the texts of both tween and pre-tween popular culture, particularly through their focus on an ideal, postfeminist girl subject who embodies an "authentic" can-do spirit.

Tasker and Negra (2007) interrogate the visibility of feminism in popular culture, explaining that postfeminism sees feminism as a notion of the past, whose issues we have collectively been able to overcome. Postfeminism posits feminism as an antiquated notion that should not be addressed, as we are living in a more progressive time, devoid of antifeminist issues. Tasker and Negra note the limits of postfeminism feature avoidances of issues of race, class, and sexuality. They conclude that post-feminist discourses often rely on notions of self-empowerment and thus concord with neoliberal ways of thinking.

This section seeks to highlight a younger subset of girls within feminist media scholarship. Dafna Lemish posits that feminist theory

> "can offer the field of children and media significant and original perspectives, at least in the following four domains: First, a mapping of gender segregation of children's leisure culture and an explanation of the mechanism driving this segregation; second, a theoretical understanding of gender as a form of social construction rather than a biological fact; third, a particular view on the form and role of methodology in the study of children and media; and fourth, a model of engaged scholarship that is attempting to advance progressive social change" (Lemish, 2013, p. 68).

Lemish contends that feminist theory is dedicated to bettering the human condition and must therefore be central to studying children and their relationship to the media, as she believes this relationship should be something which society should continually strive to improve. I take this as an inspiration to contribute to the intersections of the inclusion of girls and Latinidad to Feminist Studies, Feminist Media Studies, Girlhood Studies, and Girls' Media Studies, especially fleshing out a focus on the younger demographic.

Scholars who study younger populations of girls within the field of Feminist Media Studies draw on a range of foundational authors. The scholarship regarding the study of girls is indebted to the work started by the feminist sociologist Angela McRobbie "who in the late 1970s launched the field of Girls' Studies by insisting on attention to sex and gender in analyses of adolescence and youth culture" (Kearney, 2006, p.4). However, there were scholars who preceded McRobbie in the study of girls. Nonetheless, McRobbie's intervention directed the attention of cultural studies scholars to the study of girls. As McRobbie works her way through the intricacies of subcultures, she explains that the subordination of female youth in male subcultures is tied to the secondary role girls play in their patriarchal society (e.g. McRobbie 1982, 1984, 1999). McRobbie argues that the main question is not necessarily the absence of girls in these subcultures, but the many ways in which these girls form their own types of cultures as a result of not being included in male subcultures. This question could easily be applied to many of the concepts and arguments that emerge within Girlhood Studies and Girl's Media Studies, as girls play an integral role in society, yet are not always at the forefront of research - even when they have found multiple ways to develop their own unique practices and when they compose a profitable segment of the audience. These questions about subcultures could be extended to subaltern populations of girls, like Latina girls, who are not absent, but could very well be engaging in unique practices as a cause of their exclusion(s) from mainstream media representation.

A sign of institutionalization of girlhood studies was marked by the introduction *Girlhood Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* (2008), which aims is to define and map "what girlhood means, what it encompasses in different interconnected cultures in the twenty-first century and how we might research the field" (Mitchell et al. 2008, p. ix). The inaugural

International Girls' Studies Association [IGSA] Conference in 2016 further reified the field's existence. Numerous edited collections, encyclopedias, and books focusing on girlhood attest to the vibrant field, but there is still room for growth, particularly in relation to issues of diversity and difference within younger groups of girls.

One of the expansions that has emerged within Girls' Studies is the pursuit of Girls' Media Studies. As Kearney (2011) points out: "since the turn of the twenty-first century, Girls' Media Studies has developed into a legitimate area of critical inquiry all its own…" (p.2). Through Girls' Media Studies, media are often explored from a cultural studies lens, and media texts are understood as "complex (and contested) artifacts of ideologies that operate to shape their symbolic form and content" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 66). Drawing on Hall's work on hegemony and ideology, a vast amount of the literature on girls and the media analyzes not only texts, but also how girl viewers have responded to different texts, whether these texts are meant to represent them or not. Many studies highlight the fact that girl viewers often express negotiated or oppositional readings of texts, rather than dominant readings (Hall, 1980). As an extension of this already rich subfield, Latina girls' media studies creates avenues for the exploration of Latina girlhoods, their mediation, and mediatization.

Latina/o media studies. The relationship between Latinx populations and the media has been taken up by scholars such as Valdivia (2010). In "Latina Media Studies," Valdivia (2018) signals this area as a prominent feminist endeavor. As she outlines the trajectory of Latina Media Studies, she focuses on the pattern common within new areas of study that highlighting marginalized populations:

> "After omission—which is seldom total, as marginalized populations sign in through absence, their implicit presence a backdrop against which theories implying purity and

> practices perpetuating homogeneity can be inscribed—there is the tokenistic special sidebar in chapter 8, the conference panel scheduled early Sunday morning.… Eventually the presence of one scholar in an occasional department translates into steady presence in conferences and publications, collaborations, and networking. After that, communication journals allow for a "special issue" on Latinos, and later Latino studies journals publish a special issue on the media. As well, more regular inclusion in journals, presses willing to publish this research (for instance the University of Arizona Press, New York University Press, the University of Texas Press) and eventually book series in either Latina/o studies (Rutgers University Press) or critical Latina/o media studies (University of Florida Press) open a space for the circulation of Latina media studies" (Valdivia, 2018, p.101).

I highlight the pattern above to call attention to the fact that these areas of study are not new, and the scholarship is interdisciplinary, intersectional, and often transnational.

Many shows illustrate the increased presence of Latinas on the television screen, such as *Modern Family*, *Devious Maids*, *Telenovela*, *One Day at a Time*, and *Jane the Virgin* featuring lead Latina characters. The robust body of scholarship on Latinidad and media representations documents this growth. Negrón-Mutaner (2014) draws on findings from *The Latino Media Gap* report to highlight the "status of US Latinos in movies, television, radio, and the Internet" (p. 2). She argues that although the numbers of Latinxs on the screen have increased within the last few decades, "numbers, of course, do not tell the whole story" (p. 2). Her analysis highlights the types of roles Latinxs play on the screen; these appear to be the same stereotypes as before. Research on Latinas in popular culture abounds (e.g. Aparicio, 1997; Báez, 2007, 2008, 2018; Beltrán, 2002, 2004, 2009; Cepeda, 2015, 2017; Mendible, 2007; Molina Guzmán, 2005, 2007, 2010, 2018; Valdivia, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2010). The literature focuses on spectacular bodies,

particularly the "hypervisibility of Latinidad as central to the future growth of global cultural industries" (Molina-Guzmán, 2010) and general narratives of Latinidad, which include prominent mediated representational practices (Aparicio, 1997; Valdivia, 2000, 2007, 2008, 2010).

In a capitalist economy, sheer purchasing power should make a difference, but it has not generated equality or equity in media representation, suggesting that the inclusion of ethnic representations is ruled by an ideology stronger than capitalism. As Cepeda (2015) explains,"… the increase in Latino numbers and buying power rendered the Latina/o market more legible to mainstream media outlets and therefore ripe for increased media attention across all formats" (p. 5). Some could even assume that "liberal racial thinking would tell us that racially based stereotypes would lessen, as racial 'minorities' are everywhere present," (Dávila, 2014, p. 12). However, race-based stereotypes remain prominent and often lurk under representations that seem to indicate progress. Media scholars must engage with instances when audiences are presented with images and situations that seem to rupture the stereotypical norm to see if this translates into a transformative cultural and political climate indicative of a post-racial moment. Valdivia (2005) argues that Latina/os are "a metaphor for or a window to the ravages of globalization and the erosion of democratic rights and citizenship status" (p. 307). She presents a call to action to analyze "progressive" Latina representations to seek out the "gains in visibility against the costs, displacements, and erasures within that visibility" (p. 308).

Girls and the media. The scholarship on girlhood has focused extensively on a specific type of girl: the adolescent girl. Dating back to the sixteenth century, girlhood discourses came into existence and this category of life (girl) gained new meaning in the Western hemisphere. De Ras (1999) traces the development of the concept of girlhood in her work on female youth, when

she explains how the sixteenth century witnessed the creation of a new word "describing youngsters of the female sex" (p.152). As opposed to words like "daughter" or "virgin," the word "meisje" or "girl" functions as "an autonomous category" (p.152). The development of this new category allowed girls to have their own identity, rather than identities bound to their relationship to men, albeit this category functions as a transition category in a quest to arrive at womanhood. Girlhood, however, is a complex category that does not always begin with menarche and end with marriage (De Ras, 1999) and includes many phases in between. The media serve to reinforce and introduce concepts about girlhood, at various stages, to their audiences through multiple platforms. The portrayal of girlhood throughout the years has attracted scholarly attention from various fields, and since the mid-1990s, the growth in research on girls and their relationship to the media is interdisciplinary.

Scholars and marketing experts alike recognize that girls generate a significant amount of revenue. Girls have become a target audience through the inexorable commodification of activities, bodies, and cultures in our neo-liberal moment, as their coming of age translates into increased purchasing power as well as influence on family spending. Sarah Banet-Weiser (2007), for example, recognizes how Nickelodeon capitalized on the purchasing power of teenage girls through television series like *Clarissa Explains it All*, where the lead female teenage character is portrayed as strong, creative, and smart. Through this type of representation of girls, the television cable network was able to attract a large teenage female audience. Many of the strategies that Banet-Weiser finds in her work, continue today in media aiming to attract young female audiences.

Girls and girlhood are much more than a generation or temporal category. "Girling," as a verb and a practice, is also a component of postfeminism. The girl market means tapping into a

sector where “girls ages 8 to 14 account for some $48 billion in annual spending” (Durham, 2003, p.25), but the “girling” of older women is also a prevalent aspect of postfeminism, specifically found through the efforts of women who engage in acts that enable them to appear younger in order to fit in with the ideal post-feminist image. Through “girling,” consumption is marketed as a priority for both girls and women. Although Kearney (2006), like many others, uses the term “girl” to refer to girls between the ages of twelve and twenty-one because they form a part of a “semidependent status, living with or financially dependent on their parents” (p.5), this dissertation focuses on girls as young as five - especially those consuming cartoons.

Girls ages five to ten should be studied, especially because this age group is exposed to media every day and also has a significant amount of purchasing power, particularly through their parents. Research has shown that animated cartoons have varied effects on young children (Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Barker & Raney, 2007; Keys, 2016; Klein & Shiffman, 2009), and the exploration of this age group ought to include a variety of methods that are not limited to effects research and include texts that are not limited to cartoons. Particularly fascinating and problematic is the fact that most of the literature to date, which focuses on children as consumers of cartoons, does not make a distinction between young girls and young boys.

As Girls’ Media Studies continues to grow, numerous scholars have started to shift their attention from the normative version of girlhood previously discussed (Driver, 2007; Gaunt, 2006; Hasinoff 2015; Kearney, 2006, 2011; Keys, 2016; Mazzarella, 2005; Pike, 2015; Projansky, 2014; Valdivia, 2008, 2011; Vargas, 2009; Zaslow, 2009), and this dissertation contributes to the expansion of the literature in that direction. According to Gaye Tuchman, (1978), symbolic annihilation explains that the under-representations or negative representations of certain groups of people often lead to dire health, educational, and political effects. Symbolic

annihilation applies to women, and even more so to women of color. Furthermore, young girls of color are triply underrepresented and/or represented in ways that differ drastically from the ways in which young, white girlhood is represented in the media. Kearney (2006) points out that young girls are "doubly deprivileged as a result of (their) age and sex" (p.12). When you add Latinidad and pre-tween aged girls, it becomes triple and quadruple the lack of privilege and underrepresentation.

Valdivia (2011) notes that Latina girls are often represented as bridge characters, which mainstream media construct as ambiguously ethnic in order to appeal to teen/younger children of color while still appealing to white audiences. Valdivia (2009) also finds that the "ambiguous" and "hybrid" look often available via mediated representations is prevalent through doll lines such as *American Girl*, *Dora the Explorer*, and the *Bratz* collection. Drawing on Formanek-Brunnel (1998), Valdivia posits that dolls "represent a range of social agendas and business attitudes set in a social context" (p.75). Furthermore, mediated doll lines also embody traits often found in boy toys (like independence and individualism). When these studies were published, Disney characters, such as *Elena of Avalor*, were not available. I investigate how this series contributes to and/or extends the aforementioned representations. *Elena of Avalor* calls on young girls to "lead" and "embrace their curious spirit" by asking questions about the world (Girl Scouts and Disney, 2017). This new type of Disney role model falls within the mediated doll traits of independence and individualism mentioned by Valdivia (2009), and present in "girl power" discourses. Latina girl media visibility increased in the past decade, in animated and non-animated forms, inside and outside of the Disney family. However, there has not been a corresponding increase in scholarly attention toward this trend.

Scholarship surrounding representations of girls in U.S. media includes analyses of gender, sexuality, and adolescence. During the rise of post-feminism in the late 1990s, many feminist scholars critiqued representations of girls in the media. Television series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Gilmore Girls* (2000-2007), offered opportunities for critiques and analyses of female-centered television series on primetime slots. For example, Gamber (2008) examined the role of feminism within the portrayal of Rory in *Gilmore Girls*. Bavidge (2004), on the other hand, focuses on teen heroines and takes an in-depth look at the ways in which *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* destabilizes the "familiar generic signifiers of feminine weakness and victimhood perpetuated by horror and melodrama film and TV targeted at teenage audiences" (p. 42). With these two examples, it is important to note that they are representative of much of the early work done in the terrain of representation, which focused on programs that portrayed a homogenous girlhood. Scholars like Banet-Weiser (2007) and Valdivia (2008, 2011), however, focused on Disney and Nickelodeon's deployment of race and ethnicity, while also calling attention to the limits of the diversity goals employed by these companies.

Latina girls are present in U.S. popular culture and some scholars have noticed (e.g. Beltrán, 2004; Fregoso, 1994; Mayer, 2003; Tapia, 2005; Vargas, 2009). Existing social science research on Latina girls mainly focuses on health issues and disparities (Valdivia, 2008), while Latina/o Studies research aims to carve out new types of studies in relation to young Latina girls. For example, Latina/o Media Studies scholarship has focused on studies dealing with pregnancy representations in ad campaigns, the representations of *Dora the Explorer* and Josefina from the *American Girl* doll line, and some of the cultural representations of Latina girls that exist in the media today. Current research aims to study "how Latina girls interpret popular culture and

negotiate their identity as hybrid individuals caught between two or more cultures" (Valdivia, 2008, p.87).

Neoliberalism, Postfeminism, and Girlhood. Thus far, this dissertation has addressed neoliberalism and postefeminism, and how the two contribute to current discourses on girlhoods in this nation. Starting in the late 1980s, neoliberalism,[2] coupled with postfeminist discourses in the U.S., created a moment where sexualized, young, powerful, and feminine girls (and women) are privileged over other girls (and women). Harris (2004) argues that girls are constructed as a "vanguard of new subjectivity" (p. 8) and as the modern subjects who exert self-regulation and discipline as a way to model the future of the Western world. Within these discourses, girls are hailed as powerful/agential consumers, who must maintain a strict level of self-surveillance/self-disciplining in order to function as "model" citizens. One of the most prominent neoliberal tensions in general is that we have to control and discipline our bodies in order to prove that we are good citizens, but we must lose control in relation to consumption. This applies to discourses surrounding women and/or girls. My dissertation explores postfeminism as a mainstream strategy used to displace and postpone feminist goals. I also draw on post-racial approaches to the body, which like postfeminism, serve to once more halt social justice demands in favor of market driven profit through commodification of bodies.

[2] Like postfeminism, neoliberalism does not have a straightforward definition. My work understands neoliberalism as a shift within capitalitalism, periodized by the Reagen/Thatcher moment, where the state stepped in on capital's behalf. Further, when the state passes neoliberal policies, it paves the way for capital at the expense of laborers. Under neoliberalism, individuals are supposed to take care of themselves and alleviate any issues through the marketplace. In this sense, privatization is justified by emphasizing personal responsibility (e.g. people should work rather than receive welfare), although this personal responsibility does not take into account systemic imbalances.

Discourses of empowerment reveal that "post-feminism is white and middle class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self" (Negra & Tasker, 2007, p.2). As such, feminist concerns are actually silenced within the confines of post-feminism. A central post-feminist theme is the value placed on youth, and as such, it appears that the young (often teenage) girl becomes the central figure or symbol for post-feminism (young, white, middle class, straight, often blonde, physically fit, abled-bodied, "powerful," etc.). A brief explanation of postfeminism's origins aids in understanding its purchase for the study of girls and the media. Gill (2007) discusses three ways in which postfeminism has been conceptualized since its inception and her third definition contends that post-feminism is a reaction to feminist movements, specifically those related to second wave feminism. What she labels as more than a backlash becomes "a sensibility," one which must take seriously the role of "post-feminist media culture (as)…our *critical object*" (p. 254). Gill invites us to analyze mediated representations of gender by exploring common tropes and interrogating their meanings in our culture. Outlining the relationships between postfeminism, popular, feminism, and neoliberal feminism, Gill (2019) coins the notion of a "sensibility" as a way to understand the contradictions inherent in the representations of women in the media post the 1990s. Gill explains that "the notion of a sensibility was designed to be used *empirically* as a way of analyzing popular culture. It called attention to postfeminism as a circulating set of ideas, images and meanings" (Banet-Weiser et al., 2019, p.3). Gill's notion of the postfeminist sensibility informs my readings of *Elena of Avalor*. McRobbie (2009) also explores postfeminism in such a way that showcases how essential it is to analyze the role of media. She posits that within post-feminist discourses, girlhood is produced (often times via mediated representations) in such a way that it seems to be progressive, but is actually tied to traditional

gendered notions of femininity, and is therefore not truly progressive, but instead functioning under a guise of progress. Banet-Weiser et al., referenced above, develop three central themes dissecting the intersections of neoliberal, popular, and postfeminism. They call their second theme "media and capitalism" explaining that all three of these feminisms "depend on and validate media platforms and organisations as well neoliberal capitalism" (p. 2). Specifically Banet-Weiser's popular feminism asserts that feminism has now become an ever-present brand, available via all media platforms.

Working within the understanding that postfeminism positions feminism as a notion of the past, McRobbie (2009) explores how young women enact femininity in the labor market in order to contribute to their success and autonomy, and finds that the success stands in stark contrast to the role(s) that women occupied prior to civil rights movements. In this way, the advancements are seen as a way to repudiate the term "feminism" because it can appear that our society finds itself in moments of equal opportunity. Incorporating girlhood into the discussion of post-feminism McRobbie explains that "the production of girlhood now comprises a constant stream of incitements and enticements to engage a range of specified practices which are understood to be both progressive but also consummately feminine" (p.57), highlighting the value attributed to performing a girlhood that falls in line with a heteronormative and feminine girlhood. Postfeminist discourses begin with women, but extend to teenagers, tweens, and even pre-tween girls.

The postfeminist discourse surrounding girlhood can be further examined by drawing on the work of scholars like Harris (2004) and her concept of the "can-do" girl, along with Gill's visibility of feminism within post-feminism (2015) and McRobbie (2009) and Projansky's (2007) explorations of postfeminism and girls' media representations. Harris extends McRobbie

and Gill by exploring the representations of the "can-do" girl as a model of success, a girl who is empowered and who serves as the new face of girlhood. She distinguishes between the "can-do" girl and the "at-risk" girl by noting that the "can-do" subject becomes a beacon of hope for the neoliberal future, while the "at-risk" subject acts as a symbol for oppressive social systems. The can-do girl exerts responsibility and looks after her economic development all on her own. Harris' work strengthens the previous claims about postfeminism and its relationship to girlhood: postfeminism positions girls as powerful agents, while exploiting their consumption through these same discourses of power. Harris ties postfeminism to our neoliberal moment by explaining that it is not systemic constraints but "good choices, effort, and ambition alone that are responsible for success that has come to separate the can-dos from the at-risks" (p.16).

In an attempt to move beyond the "can-do" and "at-risk" binary, Projansky (2007) asks Girls' Studies scholars to "focus attention on the inextricable combination of disruption and containment, and of at-risk and can-do, in the contemporary popular discursive construction of girlhood" (p.69). She urges feminist media Girls' Studies scholars to think outside of the binary of "feminist" or "anti-feminist" when it comes to exploring media representations. Postfeminist discourses mostly focus on women, particularly successful women who perform paid labor. Some scholars, like McRobbie, Projansky, Kennedy, and Valdivia, outline the ways in which girlhood fits into postfeminist and neoliberal discourses. Projansky (2014) conceptualizes "spectacular" girlhoods as Molina-Guzmán (2010) theorizes spectacular Latinas, both of which inform my dissertation.

Research Approaches to Studying Children and the Media. Given that this dissertation explores an animated series primarily aimed at attracting a pre-tween demographic, this section outlines approaches to studying children and their relationship to the media.

Research on children and the media often resides within media effects literature— their identity formations, their eating habits, their relationships to education, their cognitive development, their sexuality, their views about violence, and even their safety (ontological and physical). This project draws on research on children's mediated representations as these are tied to issues of commodification of childhood and markets catering to children as consumers. Cook (2004) illustrates the influence of children on industries: "estimates of the monetary value of the overall children's market (including the "influence" that children exert on household purchases) run into hundreds of billions of dollars annually for the United States alone" (p.2). Although Cook looks specifically at the clothing industry, he explains how the market-culture of childhood is a symbol of the status of capitalism today. Whether we are looking at clothing, the commodification of childhood, or media representations, Childhood Studies only distinguishes between girls and boys on rare occasions.

Children are consuming television at an all-time high, and "Younger children age 2-5 log close to 25 hours of TV time each week, more than 4.5 hours watching their favorite DVDs, about 1.5 hours viewing DVR offerings, more than an hour competing at video games and 45 minutes with the VCR" (The Nielsen Company 2009). The same report found that kids 6-11 years of age log in more than 28 hours a week, mostly via television consumption. A more recent Nielsen report (2015) indicates that with the growing number of media platforms available (e.g. tablets, phones, computers, television sets), children are often consuming mediated texts simultaneously.

Within childhood studies, *The Journal of Children and Media* launched in 2007, indicating the field's presence and salience. A cursory analysis of frequency of topics reveals the following. Of eleven volumes, roughly 35% of the articles deal with issues solely focusing on

girls, and most of these articles focus on issues of representation. Furthermore (and particularly pertinent to my dissertation project) only two articles specifically focus on race while a mere seven others mention it as a subcategory of analysis. In the introduction to the first issue, Lemish (2007) explains that the journal aims to unite scholars across disciplines who are researching children and their relationship to the media. In doing so, this interdisciplinary and multi-method journal does not solely focus on girls or on a specific kind of issue, but provides a platform for exploring the dominant approaches for studying children and their relationship to the media. The journal also reproduces tendencies already mentioned regarding the presence of privileged populations and relative absence of girls as a gender and racialized groups.

Children and the media research deploys "children" as an abstract category without disaggregation between boys and girls. Simone de Beauvoir (1953) explained, women are not born women, but become women through socialization processes. Butler (1990) and numerous other scholars have also explained that gender is learned through society and then performed. We learn how to perform femininity and masculinity from a very early age, often through toys, child's play, and animated television content. Although the performance one enacts is sometimes related to the biological sex one is born with, this is not always the case. Media often help construct and reinforce children's gender identities through their depictions and storylines about gender. Within Girlhood Studies and Girls' Media Studies, scholars often address these findings about gender and apply them to their research. Durham (2008), examines media sexualization specific to gender. Kearney (2011, 2018) in both volumes of *Mediated Girlhoods*, weaves together multi-method case studies, which contribute to the research on discourses of girlhood as circulated through the media. Valdivia (2008, 2009, 2011) addresses gender differences as well, but specifically focuses on Latina girls and their relationship to the media.

Girlhood Studies and Girls' Media Studies approaches help explain gender differences and similarities. However, one component that is missing from the research agenda is the addition of a younger subset of girls. Childhood Studies, on the other hand, focuses on younger children. Often times, the field examines their young subjects in accordance to the effects tradition, which is highly psychological. My dissertation blends these bodies of literatures, addressing gaps in both of these fields. These literatures inform my three case studies in this dissertation (chapters three, four, and five), which interrogate production, text, and audiences. In chapter three, the first case study, I examine Disney's production practices in the construction of the ethnic category in relation to animated Latina bodies. Chapter four deploys a textual analysis over three purposefully selected holiday episodes that comprise the three main holidays through which mainstream popular culture represents Latinxs. Chapter five is a three-part analysis conducted at the Disneyland theme park, including physical and virtual visits to the park, where I interrogate frequency and patterns.

Chapter 3: A Latina Princess Ready to Rule: The (Ethnic) Production of *Elena of Avalor*

Introduction

The 2000 U.S. Census revealed that Latinxs are the largest minority in the nation, and recent reports indicate that the numbers will continue to increase. Disney's acknowledgement of these findings is multiplicitous in that they continue to play with ethnically specific characters and narratives while simultaneously courting a broad range of global audiences through tenuous ethnic ambiguity. Their newest and proudly Latina princess embodies elements of the specific as well as of the ambiguous ethnic, while highlighting her girl power. In this chapter, I examine three salient themes through a reading of *Elena of Avalor*'s production practices. I understand production as a bridge between industry and audiences that acknowledges the power required in making culture. Employing a discursive analysis of Disney's online, social media, and television promotion of *Elena of Avalor*, before and after its debut, I posit that through their construction of an ethnic category in relation to Latina bodies, Disney uses three prominent production practices for *Elena.* First, Disney produces a flexible Latinidad through the series and Disney social media platforms. Second, Disney produces a specific kind of Latinx talent and utilizes the labor of the Latinx actors to promote the series' Latinidad. Finally, Disney produces *Elena* as a way to showcase Disney's corporate social responsibility through *Elena*'s partnership with Girl Scouts U.S.A. and through the new cultural/ethnic component, highlighted in their yearly Corporate Social Responsibility Reports.

Within media studies, "production can be understood as the link between industry studies and audience studies that recognizes the meaning, communities, and above all the power involved in making culture." (Johnson, 2017, p. 149). Working at the intersection of Media Studies, Girls' Studies, and Latina/o Studies, my engagement with production takes into account

the history and importance of the multiple perspectives shaping production practices and focuses on production as the construction of diversity through culture and "authenticity," exemplified by Disney's latest animated princess television series. Girls' Media Studies engages production studies prominently, but these studies mostly rely on technical production aspects (i.e. YouTube video production practices and explorations of girl filmmakers). For instance, both volumes of *Mediated Girlhoods: New Explorations of Girls' Media Culture* (2011, 2018) contain three major sections: representation, reception, and production/technology. The production/technology section in both of the volumes, however, is the shortest and engages more prominently with technology (and how girls use technology to make media). Similarly, in *The Routledge Companion to Latina/o Media* (2017), the editors provide four clearly divided sections, one of which is "Access, Policy, and Production in Latina/o Media." Consisting of six case studies, this section more prominently focuses on media activism, digital storytelling, independent (rather than mainstream) media production, and struggles for Latinx access to media channels. My analysis provides insight into the role that Disney plays in producing animated Latinidad, rather than focusing on the technical/digital aspects of production, what Mayer et al. (2009) call the production of culture and culture of production.

When one hears the word "production" behind-the-scenes footage found in DVDs as well as promotional materials might come to mind. Production, as a set of practices, is multidimensional, vibrant, and comprised of many people, performing various roles. Within media studies, production studies engages ethnographic, critical, material, sociological, feminist, and political-economy methods, that span a variety of disciplines (Mayer et al., 2009). Media producers, in all their different ranks, are culture makers, and their culture-making process is often the aim of production studies scholars. Mayer (2009) notes that production studies scholars

"draw their intellectual impetus from cultural studies to look at the ways that culture both constitutes and reflects the relationship of power" (p.2). Production studies are vast and some prominently highlight the role of audiences as producers. As Johnson (2017) notes "rather than trying to impose a new unifying name on an intellectual endeavor well under way by this point, it may be better to simply embrace the theoretical potential of production study to explain how each link in the industrial chain participates in a production process more broadly and radically conceived" (p. 150). This approach informs my chapter to provide an account of the production of *Elena of Avalor* by highlighting some of the salient "link(s) in the industrial chain."

Inexorably, political economy seeps into my analysis, as its importance is essential for studies of production. The fact that Disney functions as a global entertainment oligopoly, with vertical and horizontal integration, as well as highly developed synergistic and convergence strategies, can only be analyzed through a political economy approach. Thus, this chapter operationalizes production as a process, which "enables us to understand not just distinct media institutions and industry sectors, but also how those forces figure into larger processes of communication, culture, and meaning creation." (Johnson, 2017, p. 151.) I heed Johnson's call to action detailing how "we need to recognize the potential that an emphasis on production offers for seeing the intersections between industry and other cultural fields" (p. 150). By focusing on *Elena of Avalor*, this dissertation highlights how the production process creates intersections between industry and culture, through Disney's mainstream and digital content about the production of the series.

Disney and Production

Disney is one of the largest media conglomerates in the world. The company offers audiences symbols for fantasy, happiness, magic, and love, which have contributed to long-

lasting success and popularity domestically and abroad. In terms of their production practices, Disney insists that their production is "magical," and this notion has various implications. Such an understanding often suggests that their production decisions and methods are not to be understood in a rational way, and therefore ought not to be subjected to rational critique. What is "magical" implicitly cannot be comprehended by others, and therefore cannot be challenged. This "magic," however, is deeply rooted in hegemonic ideals, and invisibilizes material, ideological, and affective labor. Walt Disney prided himself with having an instinctive feel for the hopes and ambitions of ordinary American people, and he focused on meticulously producing quality material that showcased his products' links to ordinary America.[3] After Walt's death, Disney's lawyers advised his brother to create a new management team in order to keep the company afloat. The company then transitioned into the hands of different management teams throughout the years. Every management team, however, attempted to hold on to Walt's vision and the ties to ordinary Americana, in order to continue cultivating ongoing success.

In August of 1984, eighteen years after Walt died, Michael Eisner was elected to lead the Walt Disney Company. Eisner's reign (1984-2005) is known for its aggressive merchandising, product licensing and synergy. Writing in the Eisner era, Tracy (1999) traces the global division of labor within the Walt Disney Company and notes that "Disney generates almost half (46 percent) of its annual $24 billion in sales from films and licensing agreements for product manufacture. Disney is regarded as a leader at cross-promotion of its products to increase profits." (p.379). Disney continues to cross-promote globally and controls its media culture and ideology, while still upholding their link to ordinary America. Disney's ownership of ESPN, for example, includes six cable networks, radio, internet, international networks, dining,

[3] America and American meaning the U.S.

entertainment, retail and more. As Wasko (2017) notes "At the end of 2010, ESPN owned, or had equity interest in or distribution agreements with 46 international sports networks in more than 200 countries" (p. 15). Whether it be via ESPN or Radio Disney, the cross-promotion strategies are carefully orchestrated from the early stages of production up until the second or third release of a film from the vault. These strategies are continuous despite Disney's specific leadership.

Disney's history with their promotion of production often appears to be transparent, or at least that seems to be the aim of the company. Disney produces an aura of transparency, but like everything else Disney, this is a carefully orchestrated and staged mediatized product. According to Sammond (2005), when Disney began television production, their public relations enabled the company to appear to:

> celebrate the productive process behind its commodities rather than masking them. By placing an emphasis on the creative process behind its shorts and features while downplaying the repetitive labor of animation (as well as its extensive operations involving licensed products and the mundane administrative and support services that are part of the industrial operation), the company reinforced an idea of Disney as a sort of magical entertainment factor (p. 319).

Disney's role as a "magical entertainment factor" aims to reproduce a version of the hopes and dreams of America, invisibilizing both labor and conflict. Although Disney's production practices have changed drastically throughout the years (and will continue to do so as new technologies emerge), Disney still invests in showcasing mediatized production strategies. For example, two decades ago, Disney might not have invested in promoting the cultural "research" employed in the makings of their animated films. As Disney incorporates more ethnically and

culturally diverse representations to address the changing demographics, the showcasing of their production strategies becomes more layered, and staged visibilization joins the many other strategies of self-representation so expertly and successfully deployed by Disney.

Disney's history representing Latin America and Latinxs is not new. Historically, Disney has represented Latinidad through the use of archaic tropes like the Latin lover or the spitfire (Ramirez-Berg, 2002). During the Eisner era, Disney began to incorporate more characters of color in various roles (i.e. *Johnny Tsunami*, *The Cheetah Girls*, *Wizards of Waverly Place*). Although these representations provided more color for the Disney screen, Valdivia (2008ab, 2009, 2011) argues that the characters either serve as bridge characters between the White and the Black characters, or they appear as ambiguous ethnic characters with no specific mention or link to a place of origin or culture, in order to allow for multiple types of audiences to identify with the characters. This same type of representation still functions today through series like *Stuck in the Middle* (2016- 2018). Animated series like *Elena of Avalor* (2016- present) and the film *Coco* (2017), appear to provide a rupture in representational practices, with *Coco* being the more specific representation of the two, because they do not rely on ambiguity, but rather highlight the specificity of the supposed Latinidad they represent.

This project explores the extent of this rupture. As a conglomerate, which strives to represent itself as ever-changing and up-to-date on trends and societal issues, catering to Latinxs, along with visibilizing a mediatized version of this process, becomes a central aspect of Disney's production efforts. In what follows, I outline my methodological approach to analyzing the production of the series.

Methodology

Analyzing corporate reports, various Instagram pages, Girls Scouts and Disney YouTube channels, and popular press coverage, since the inception of *Elena of Avalor* in 2016, this chapter utilizes industrial research along with political economy to outline three salient themes that emerged through an analysis of Disney's production of *Elena of Avalor*. Drawing on Foucault's theory of discourse and Stuart Hall's vision of representational analysis, I examine the ways in which a new version of a young Latina is packaged and created for dissemination through Disney's *Elena of Avalor*. This chapter specifically relies on Disney reports, "the-making-of" *Elena of Avalor* videos, and the articulation of their partnership with the Girl Scouts U.S.A, through social media and official Disney pages, in order to trace the importance of Disney's industry component as part of cultural studies. One of the most prominent components that emerged throughout this study was an infographic produced by Disney to explain Elena's background and the inspiration for the series, referred to below as the "*Elena of Avalor* infographic." This chapter thus explores how the Walt Disney Company not only produces *Elena of Avalor* as a cultural text, but how it advertises their production of the series via publicly available reports, social media platforms, and popular press. My methodological approach concerning production studies recognizes the importance of focusing on production in order to unearth the intersections between industry and culture.

I explore the materials analyzed in this chapter in the context of contemporary discourses of Latinidad, girlhood, and postfeminism. Specifically, I focus on the ways in which Disney, Disney employees, and Latinx actors articulate the series' connection to Latinidad. I purposefully selected mediated instances that highlight the company's production strategies (i.e. where Disney explains how the creative team created the mythical land of Avalor and its inhabitants),

specifically those strategies' tied to Latinidad. I did this after my many incidental readings of social media posts referencing the series' ties to Latinidad and after witnessing the Company's direct claims of Elena as their first Latina princess. Part of my methodological process consisted of keeping track of all the Instagram accounts belonging to *Elena of Avalor*'s voice actors, along with the official *Elena of Avalor* Instagram page and hashtag. Additionally, I had Google Alerts set for "*Elena of Avalor*" and would check every alert that was emailed to me. This is how/where I found most of the texts analyzed in this chapter. Others, however, (such as the *Elena* shoutouts by non-*Elena of Avalor* cast members), I came across after seeing them referenced through other actors' accounts, most notably actors from the *Jane the Virgin Cast*.

Following Johnson's (2017) call to expand production studies to encompass different elements, or nodes, in the process, I weave his request "to consider the productivity of fan and amateur hobbyist cultures, to be sure, but also the everyday participation with which we use- and contribute to- Facebook and other media interfaces" (p. 152), into my research for this chapter. I extend his call to include the role of actors performing as fans, a role seldom interrogated through production studies or media studies at large. Oftentimes, their fandom is produced for them as part of their public persona, and thus they accomplish a three-fold goal by promoting the series for their own personal interests (ratings), for the promotion of Latinidad at large, and for the promotion of a specific Disney Latinidad. The labor of the Latinx actors, in these examples, extends to perform a type of cultural ambassador labor on behalf of the Disney corporation, a type of labor which white Disney actors do not engage in, at least not for the purposes of the promotion of *Elena of Avalor*.

I focus on the aforementioned materials as discursive and ideological objects for the purposes of textual analysis. Textual analysis qualitatively focuses "on the underlying

ideological and cultural assumptions of the text" (Fürsich, 2009, p. 240) and aids the researcher in unlocking embedded meanings by allowing us to understand "which gender, class, and ethnic identities in the current cultural sensibilities are encouraged and which ones are excluded" (ibid. p. 241). Following Fürsich's steps for textual analysis, I conducted a detailed reading of all my selected texts, followed by contextualized interpretations. For the video texts, I viewed several of them on multiple occasions when necessary in order to better understand the material and compare it to the other texts (many of which were not audiovisual). In the section that follows, I outline the three most salient themes that emerged throughout my analysis of Disney's production of *Elena of Avalor*.

Analysis

Flexible Latinidad

Previously in this dissertation, I briefly outlined research within Latina/o Studies, Latina/o Media Studies, and the overlaps with Girls' Studies and Girls' Media Studies. As noted, Girls' Studies and Girls' Media Studies still lack a strong focus on subaltern girlhoods, particularly Latinas. Within this gap, the literature is even more limited when it comes to Disney. Many of the findings of ambiguous or subtle Latinidad within the representation literature, can be applied to the Disney canon and their new Latina princess. Within Disney studies, the literature on teenage and tween girls' relationship(s) to the corporation is much more extensive than the research pertaining to younger groups of girls. Blue (2013, 2017) and McGladrey (2014), among others, have explored how the Disney Channel and Disney products construct girlhood, but only a small portion of their work calls attention to non-white girlhoods. Animated content such as *Doc McStuffins* (2012-present), *Vampirina* (2017-present), *Sofia the First* (2012-present), *Handy Manny* (2006-2013) *Moana* (2016), and *Coco* (2017) showcases Disney's

multiracial representations. This chapter investigates the promotion of the flexible Latinidad found within the first animated Disney Latina princess.

Through an exploration of the first salient theme within Disney's production of *Elena of Avalor*, Disney continues to engage with, and fluctuates between specific and ambiguous representations of Latinidad, oftentimes even within the same series and/or narrative. Although *Elena of Avalor* appears to be a specific representation of Latinidad, and Disney finally avows one of their princesses as Latina, this princess and her kingdom still fall within the scope of pan-Latinidad and ambiguous, bridge, representations of Latina girlhood, such as Selena Gomez from *Wizards of Waverly Place* (2007-2012) and Miranda from *Lizzie McGuire* (2001-2004). In order to remain a competitive media giant, Disney implements strategies to maximize their profit by simultaneously reaching out to mass and niche markets, remaining vigilant about not alienating their normative white audiences. Some of these strategies consist of the flattening/dehistoricization of the locations onto which Disney casts its white gaze. This is a broad pattern in U.S. media texts, both in older Disney films and non-Disney productions. For example, *Aladdin* (1992, 2019) has been criticized for being presented in a vague location that draws from a multiplicity of far-east cultures, such as India, China, and Russia, and *Dora the Explorer* (2000-2014) has also been analyzed for the vagueness of its Latinidad, flattening diverse geographies and cultures to appeal to white cultural fantasies. Similar strategies are present in the production of *Elena of Avalor*, which is supposedly "inspired by Latin America.[4]"

Disney's strategies for representing Latinidad often hinge on the talent they employ. For example, Disney often relies on actors who appear ambiguously ethnic and seldom mentions their ethnic background and/or includes barely perceptible Latina/os whose ethnicity is

[4] A statement frequently used by the creative team

ambiguous enough for multiple types of audience identification (Blue, 2017; Valdivia, 2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2011). Through *Elena of Avalor*, Disney is able to use vast Latinidad markers by drawing their inspiration for the images, storylines, and ideas from Chile, Mexico, Argentina, Peru, etc. In this way, at a surface level, the series and the storylines appear to be specific, yet they can appeal to anyone not familiar with the origins of the stories. For example, in season 1, episode four, in a quest to remain young, Chancellor Esteban drinks too much water from the fountain of youth and turns into a baby. As always, Elena saves him and restores him to his normal age. Esteban's story can appeal to most people because aging is a universal concept (everyone ages), regardless of whether you fear or embrace the process. The specificity of the fountain of youth, however, refers to a myth surrounding Ponce de Leon, the Spanish conquistador who is said to have discovered the fountain of youth in Florida. These images and storylines simultaneously draw in a Latinx audience, while remaining familiar and universal enough to the non-Latinx audiences so that they do not feel alienated. After viewing the above episode, I conducted a Google search to see if I could find information for the making of that particular episode. Although I did not find specific information about the creation of that particular episode, I did find a plethora of videos highlighting the creative process for the series in general.

A quick Google search for "Making of *Elena of Avalor*" yields dozens of YouTube and Disney Channel clips dedicated to explaining the inspiration behind the creation of the series, the storyboarding process, and details about some episodes that celebrate "traditional" holidays. In most of these clips, there is some type of mention or reference to Latinidad, Latinx culture/heritage, Hispanic influence, etc. For instance, on October 15, 2017, The *Elena of Avalor* Instagram page dedicated a video post to their celebration of Hispanic heritage month. The post

was captioned “Celebrating #HispanicHeritageMonth with the team that creates #ElenaofAvalor! We’re going behind-the-scenes to see how tradition and culture inspire the show” (ElenaofAvalor, 2017). The video post on Instagram mentions that:

> Our show has delved into Hispanic heritage from Mexico all the way down to the South of Chile. One of the great things about this show has been the research and really taking myths from all over Central and South America and incorporating those myths, legends, and folk tales into the show. From the very first day we were thinking about, you know, how we could make this fairy tale universe feel authentic to Hispanic culture… (ElenaofAvalor, 2017).

The “authenticity” that this creative team claims to implement is a type of fantastic Pan-Latinidad, where they flatten out difference and essentialize Latinidad under the umbrella of “Hispanic culture.” Claims to authenticity pervade ethnic representations, but like most claims to “truth” their actual veracity is highly questionable. Given that Disney claims an “authentic” universe, their selective sampling provides viewers with a world that is in many ways foreign to everyone as few people can be familiar with cultural “myths, legends, and folk tales” from thirty-three countries. In sum, Disney hopes that the audience accepts this universe, regardless of their ethnicity, as they hope with all their products. The creators of the series seek to reach as many segments of the audiences as possible through the creation of this pseudo-authentic implausible universe. In this sense the series is much more *fantastically universal*—as in the production of a universe—than specific.

While Disney claims to engage in this culturally and ethnically specific storytelling process through Elena, another similar video from a year prior, titled “Behind the Scenes of *Elena of Avalor*” describes the animation and storyboarding process, along with a short interview

with Aimee Carrero, who voices Elena. Aimee, an actress from the Dominican Republic, explains that she was excited to lend her voice to the animated princess "because I think the story is so universal. Even though she is so unsure of herself sometimes, there is a natural confidence to her" (Animation Magazine, 2016). Although the short video begins with an explanation of the cultural significance of the series, the animators soon explain that this is a universal story with a classic "Disney feel" that can inspire anyone (Animation Magazine, 2016). As Carrero notes, this is supposed to be a universal storyline, that should appeal to various demographics, although it also claims specific ties to one culture in particular. The flexible Latinidad showcased through these videos positions Elena as both culturally specific *and* universal, a two-fold strategy that Disney implements in order to appeal to a niche market without alienating those outside the niche. One can see here how *Elena of Avalor* fits in with Disney's ambivalent inclusion of Latinidad.

Elena of Avalor is constructed through a *fantastical universalism* as she is, according to Disney, an embodiment of thirty-three different countries. Upon researching for "making of *Elena of Avalor*" videos and reports, the below "*Elena of Avalor* infographic" appeared through various marketing efforts. As a close examination of the Disney produced infographic explains, Disney attempts to draw attention to their all-encompassing Latinidad, while borrowing from Mexican culture, but not calling attention to the Mexicanidad inherent in the production of the series. The infographic references a variety of places that they claim inspired *Elena*'s creation. Although they only minimally reference Mexico directly, the infographic highlights "the Mesoamerican pyramids of Teotihuacan" two times and "a Mayan tribe" once (out of eight categories), along with three direct references to Mexico. Below is an image of the infographic produced by Disney:

Figure 2: *Elena of Avalor* Infographic. USA Today report. Source: McDermott. Copyright: Disney 2016

The infographic is supposed to explain where the different elements from the series come from (i.e. what region inspired the creative team). They highlight the flower that Elena wears in her hair as an "Apricot Mallow, which grows in Sonora Baja California in Northwest Mexico," while Mateo's drum is inspired by a Chilean drum used by the "Machi (shaman) in Chile." Machis, however, are women healers in the Mapuche culture, and a male would not use that kind of drum. Further, the drum pictured on the infographic has Mayan symbols. The infographic then moves on to explain one of the most prominent landmarks in the series, the palace. They highlight the "use of wrought iron and tile" and link it to "Caribbean, Spanish colonial, and Mexican architecture." Overall, the visual proves quite messy in its attempts to draw on much of Latin America, and it mostly borrows its inspiration from Mexico, though it tries to hide the direct references to Mexico.

For viewers who are not familiar with the region, the name "Teotihuacan," for example, can serve to mark the series as "authentic." This is reminiscent of Silverman's (2002) analysis of *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000), where she finds that through their full-length animated film, Disney goes to great lengths to "not name the archaeological society in which its action is situated (Inca Peru), although this is readily recognizable to archaeologists…" (p. 298). Sixteen years later, Disney continues to employ similar tactics through *Elena of Avalor*. This Disney series, and the promotion of its creation, strives to create a type of authenticity, an authenticity not directly associated with any country, though very clearly drawing the majority of its inspiration from Mexico. For those of us familiar with Mexican geography, we understand that Teotihuacan is in Mexico, but this may not be obvious to all the people viewing the infographic above.

This strategy is also reminiscent of Valdivia's (forthcoming) finding in *The Gender of Hybridity*, where she interrogates Salma Hayek's self-production of authenticity and highlights her choice of words and location names to mark "her provenance and authenticity" (p. 49). Valdivia notes that in the film *Beatriz at Dinner*, a film where Hayek participated in the script-writing process, Hayek's character (Beatriz), claims to come from Tlaltecuhtli. Beatriz informs John Lithgow's character that her hometown is on the Pacific. Valdivia, however, explains that "Tlaltecuhtli is the name of an Aztec mythical figure, usually represented in birthing position, but is not the name of an actual place, in addition to being a difficult word to pronounce for English speakers" (49). As Disney showcases their inspirations for the series' creation, they similarly bring to the forefront names, locations, and regions, that will reinforce their claims to authenticity and specificity, although this authenticity is more specific to Mexico than any other Spanish-speaking location (as exemplified through the infographic). Further, as was the case

with the Salma Hayek example, Disney incorporates locations and names that are often inaccurate (the Chilean Machi drum) and are difficult to pronounce for non-Spanish speakers (Teotihuacan). These appear to be attempts that highlight the series' authenticity. While they engage these strategies through their description of the creation and production of *Elena of Avalor*, Disney further continues to reinforce the discourse of the Latina as eternal foreigner (e.g. Aparicio, 2003; Flores-González , 2017; Jimenez, 2004; Valdivia, 2010) by drawing on inspiration from Latin America rather than U.S. Latinidad. This type of flexible Latinidad allows for greater creative license to construct ambiguity through the series.

As Disney fluctuates between highlighting the specific and ambiguous elements of *Elena of Avalor*, they engage in tactics commonly used in the media, and throughout Disney as well. Their attempts at remaining ambiguous call upon "universal" storylines that will appeal to as many groups of people as possible. After all, Disney is known for its magic and universality (Wasko, 2017), so it would make sense that they include these elements in their representations of specificity at large. As exemplified through Aimee Carrero's short sound bite in the above YouTube clip for the making of *Elena of Avalor*, some of Disney's greatest ambassadors when it comes to promoting the specific, ambiguous, flexible Elena are the actors/talent themselves, as they contribute to the promotion of the series on both fronts (the promotion of the specificity and the ambiguity), mostly through their social media pages. The following section outlines the second salient theme that emerged through my analysis of the production of *Elena of Avalor*, the role of Latinx actors as they lend their labor and talent for the purposes of promoting the series and its Latinidad.

Latinx Actor Labor

Aimee Carrero is not the only actress to promote *Elena of Avalor*, its specific ties to

Latinidad, and its appeal to universal audiences. Although it is impossible to tell if Disney requires their talent to engage in this type of labor or not, Disney's Latinx talent engages in a specific kind of labor that is not often as visible when it comes to non-Latinx series or films. Additionally, even Latinx actors that do not (for the time being) form part of the Disney universe, lend their labor to promote *Elena of Avalor* and its significance to the Latinx community.

Before *Elena of Avalor*'s debut, the promotion for the actual series and for the production of the series, appeared through commercials, intersititials, and on various Instagram platforms, most notably the Instagram pages of Latinx celebrities. Before the summer of 2016, I noticed a significant amount of Instagram posts about *Elena of Avalor* coming from the cast of *Jane the Virgin*. *Jane the Virgin* is a CW original series featuring an almost all Latinx cast, and I was initially intrigued by what seemed to be promotion for Disney coming from outside of the Disney universe. Soon enough, however, I realized that most of the *Jane the Virgin* cast members voice characters on *Elena of Avalor*, and at this point is when I officially started following all of their Instagram accounts and obtained the data contained in this chapter. Most recently, Gina Rodriguez joined the cast in the made for television Disney channel movie, "Song of the Sirenas," which debuted in September of 2018. Through an examination of a few of the Instagram posts generated by *Jane the Virgin* cast members, it appears that the Latinx talent are promoting their work (for those who voice characters on *Elena*), but they also claim to be invested for the sake of diversifying Latinx representation, particularly through the animated Disney terrain. It is worth mentioning here, however, that none of the non-Latinx cast members of *Jane the Virgin* promoted the *Elena of Avalor* series on their personal Instagram pages. This speaks to broad patterns of unequal distribution of labor, in which White people expect those

from other racial/ethnic backgrounds to individually shoulder the work of advancing their own interests. Although these actors more than likely get paid for their posts, it is telling that the only actors posting about *Elena*'s Latinidad are the Latinx actors.

Gina Rodriguez, who plays the lead character in *Jane the Virgin*, began advertising and praising *Elena of Avalor* well before its debut. Her initial Instagram post contained a picture of the *Elena of Avalor* poster and featured the following statement: "very excited for this project! And feeling really blessed the Latino community has a princess for our little ladies all over the globe (A fierce, strong and intelligent princess)" (Rodriguez, 2016). Her post concludes with an explanation that she is *not* the voice of *Elena*, although some fans had speculated that she was. This speculation is not surprising given that it is common to cast the same handful of Latinx actors across series featuring Latinx populations.

Following in Rodriguez's footsteps, Jenna Ortega posted about *Elena of Avalor* the following day on her personal Instagram page. Ortega is a teenage celebrity (then tween), who stared in Disney Channel's *Stuck in the Middle*, a live-action series about a large Latinx family, and is the voice of Isabel (Elena's younger sister) in *Elena of Avalor*. Ortega also plays young Jane on *Jane the Virgin* and is outspoken about her Puerto Rican/Mexican heritage via her social network pages. Ortega's post concluded with the following remark "this is such huge news for all the little Princesas out there" (Ortega, 2016). It seems that both of these actresses could have been paid to showcase their optimism about the potential and significance of the series, even prior to its debut. Moreover, they stress the importance of this animated princess for Latina girls/princesas.

It is not only the U.S. Latinas, however, who praise and advertise *Elena of Avalor* via their social media platforms. Jaime Camil, a famous telenovela actor in Mexico who has

seemingly crossed over to the United States, is also outspoken about the animated series and its impact. Currently, he plays lead character Rogelio de la Vega in *Jane the Virgin* and has starred in *Chicago* as Billy Fynn. He also voices characters in both *Elena of Avalor* and *Coco,* so his ties to Disney are extensive. Additionally, on his personal Instagram page, Camil often promotes various Disney products and experiences, such as the film *Bambi* and his many Disney theme park visits, particularly by using images of his two children engaging with Disney films, series, and experiences. If Camil had not obtained permission from Disney, or was not being paid by Disney to engage in this labor, Disney would more than likely file a lawsuit over intellectual property after seeing the posts. Therefore, it is safe to assume that not only are these posts pressured, but they are more than likely paid. For example, as a way to promote the "A Day to Remember" Día de los muertos themed episode of *Elena of Avalor*, Camil took to Instagram on October 13, 2016 and published the following text under a picture from the episode: "Don't miss a very special episode of #ElenaofAvalor THIS SUNDAY night on @DisneyJunior AND @Disneychannel simultaneously. #DiaDeLosMuertos feat; the cast of #JanetheVirgin http://www.ew.com/article/2016/10/12/elena-avalor-jane-virgin-episode." (Camil, 2016).

Although it is not uncommon for actors to promote their different projects through their social media pages, this example is important to note because it appears to engage in a type of cross-promotion/synergy within ethnicity rather than within a media conglomerate. Through his use of hashtags, Camil is drawing on #DiaDeLosMuertos and connecting this episode, along with the series, to a specific Latinx holiday. He is also connecting *Jane the Virgin* to *Elena of Avalor* (elena-of-avalor-jane-virgin-episode), and thus reinforcing the finding (which will be explained in more detail later) that Latinx talent is often recycled in the media, sometimes within

media conglomerates and often throughout the media as a whole. Further, their (more than likely) paid labor is also often utilized to promote Latinidad.

Disney excels in these synergistic strategies of production. Like many other mainstream media companies, Disney employs Latinx talent, who have already made a name for themselves through other series, whether on Disney or not, providing the conglomerate with economic risk aversion tools necessary to remain successful. Disney engages in these strategies on different levels and through different platforms, in addition to the promotion of the actors' Latinidad. A perfect example of this are the commercials and interstitials that Disney released in 2017 surrounding Hispanic heritage month. Every one of these promotions that aired during the month of September in 2017 featured a cast member from *Stuck in the Middle*. In this way, Disney very strategically uses its own Latinx labor and other media conglomerate's Latinx talent to perform not only roles on series and films, but also roles as promoters and ambassadors for Disney's Latinidad.

Actors often perform as both talent and fans, what I call managed prosumerism. As they enact both of these roles, they expand their labor capacity. It is unclear how much direct influence Disney has on what the actors decide to publish on their personal social media pages, but it is evident that as workers who form a part of Disney's universe, these actors' posts are probably composed and approved by a Disney team. To be sure, major actor's social media pages are managed, edited, and produced by professionals. Furthermore, this type of support and promotion seems to be much more visible within non-white actors, specifically Latinx actors through the present example of *Elena of Avalor*. Within the cast of *Jane the Virgin,* for example, only the Latinx celebrities promote Latinidad, and in particular the Latinidad found in *Elena of Avalor*.

Disney's engagement with Latinx labor employs multiple synergy opportunities, and in this section of the chapter, I extend Meehan's analysis to include a sixth behavior as part of Disney's synergy practices. In "Transindustrialism and synergy: structural supports for decreasing diversity in commercial culture" Meehan (2005) outlines five synergy behaviors: recirculation, repackaging, reversioning, recycling, and redeployment. I extend Meehan's work by proposing a sixth behavior under the Disney synergy universe: repromotion, the inclusion of the Latinx actors' labor performances via their social media platforms. This sixth behavior exploits the ethnic actors' labor within ethnic content synergy. Different from Meehan's "recycling," repromotion does not include high costs, even if the actors are being paid by Disney to generate these posts. Regardless of whether or not there is an agreement with Disney to generate these posts, Latinx actors engage in a unique type of labor in the production and promotion of *Elena of Avalor*, and this labor is most often found through their "personal" social media pages. If we take a look at the example of Gina Rodriguez, who was posting about the significance of the series two years prior to forming part of the *Elena of Avalor* cast, I argue that this was part of Disney's long-term strategy, a strategy that they continue to work on as they attempt to find new ways to reach their Latinx audiences. Another part of this strategy is the articulation of Elena as part of the company's corporate social responsibility. In the following section, I outline the third salient theme in my analysis of the production of *Elena of Avalor*: Disney's efforts to tie this series to their Corporate Social Responsibility.

Disney's Corporate Social Responsibility & *Elena of Avalor*

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies form a core component of neoliberal discourse, and Disney implements these strategies on multiple levels. Although not fully addressing the cultural elements inherent in these strategies, CSR literature exists mostly as

popular business press literature. In this section, I outline Disney's CSR efforts in general and in relation to *Elena of Avalor* and Latinidad in particular. In her chapter on Disney TV and girl's citizenship, Blue (2017) contends that "International media companies, charitable organizations, and advocacy groups increasingly use images of girls as cultural and political symbols…The Walt Disney Company requires a certain level of civic engagement of its talent…" (p.115). This chapter extends Blue's work by focusing on the CSR production elements in relation to the animated representation of *Elena of Avalor*. By doing so, I extend what Chávez & Kiley (2016) and Blue (2017, 2018) have identified as Disney's efforts to strengthen their CSR by bringing animated culture and ethnic production to the Disney CSR equation.

Disney's promotional work serves to uphold the image and name of the company around the world. Critics point out that Disney's interest in making profit far exceeds their interest in philanthropy. The corporation's ultimate concern is not about cultural or civic responsibility, but rather their first responsibility is to their shareholders (Wasko, 2017). This is hardly surprising given that Disney is a capitalist enterprise. However, within the last two decades Disney, like many other corporations, has increasingly articulated their image and brand to CSR. Through an exploration of "citizenship," Ouellette (2017) traces "the surge of media devoted to transforming individuals into more enterprising, responsible, self-reliant, and marketable versions of themselves" (p. 38). As many corporations pursue "good citizenship," Ouellette (ibid) notes that this "does not contradict the aims of the consumer economy, but is folded into them" (p.38). As the practice of citizenship becomes more consumer oriented, we must examine how Disney narrates their citizenship efforts.

While their many CSR efforts have tangible social and philanthropic effects, they also help bolster the promotion of Disney's image as a wholesome, family-oriented, and benevolent

media giant. This public relations outcome redounds positively to the company which implicitly, although difficult to document, potentially leads to increases in the company's revenues. In 2012, for example, Disney took the first steps towards their CSR project to prevent childhood obesity by removing "unhealthy" commercials from their advertising lineup. In response to the question of whether or not the company would initially lose a significant amount of revenue by letting go of advertisers like Capri Sun and Kraft Lunchables, Robert Iger, the Disney CEO, admitted that "this is not altruistic. This is about smart business" (Coscarelli, 2012). Again, this is not surprising given that Disney is a capitalist enterprise. What is unusual, is the naked admission that CSRs are about increasing the profit line. Indeed, Iger followed the statement by explaining that the initial revenue loss would turn into much more profit for Disney in the long run.

Iger's explanation solidifies the fact that beyond Disney's goodwill practices of Corporate Social Responsibility, lie profit-based motives. As Micheletti & Stolle (2012) explain, the term "citizenship is expanded beyond obeying laws, serving one's country, voting in elections, and keeping an eye on government" (p. 91). The authors contend that corporations have taken on new understandings of "citizenship" and incorporated them into their daily practices, often times as a means of cultivating a revenue-generating image. In 2011, The Walt Disney Company explained that their success hinged upon an embedded citizenship "in our everyday actions and decisions. It's good for our planet and our people, and it makes sound business sense" (The Walt Disney Company, 2011). In other words, Disney's CSR strategies are a win-win for the company. Media giants like Disney own a wealth of research about audience behavior, most of which they are not eager to make public. This research enables them to roll out CSR efforts that serve as branding messages, which engage children and parents alike.

In Disney's 2017 Corporate Social Responsibility Update, for example, there is a section

entitled “Inspiring Futures.” This section details how Disney inspires kids around the world to create better futures for themselves. The first example they highlight is the “Dream Big, Princess” campaign, which they claim encourages “kids everywhere to dream big by highlighting inspiring moments from Disney princess stories” (The Walt Disney Company, 2018). The #DreamBigPprincess photography contest, for example, urged girls to share photos of themselves engaging in empowering moments, and the majority of the examples that Disney showcased are of girls dressed as Disney princesses, thus allowing Disney to recirculate their stories/brands. Below is the image used in the 2017 CSR Report:

Figure 3: Inspiring Futures. Image captured from Disney’s 2017 *Corporate Social Responsibility Update*. Copyright: Disney 2017.

Since 2008, Disney has published yearly Corporate Social Responsibility updates, sometimes titled “Citizenship Reports,” “Citizenship Performance Summary,” “Corporate Citizenship Report,” or “Corporate Social Responsibility Update.” These yearly reports aim to provide the same type of information for stakeholders, customers, or anyone interested in

Disney's citizenship efforts. Primarily, these reports inform the stakeholders and board of directors. In 2014, more than half of the Walt Disney Company Board of Directors were linked to companies that could influence Disney's business models, thus showcasing a perfect example of interlocking directorates (Dreier, 1982). These companies include, but are not limited to: Twitter, McDonald's, Facebook, Starbucks, and Apple (Wasko, 2017). The CSR documents range from 24-100 pages in length, feature vibrant colors, beautiful graphics, the newest Disney animated characters, and always commence with a message from a Disney executive, usually Robert Iger. In the 2017 Disney CSR report, Christine M. McCarthy, Senior Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, begins her message by recalling the Walt Disney legacy and the company's commitment to be an ethical corporation. A few lines thereafter she moves on to note that:

> …consumers look at several other factors when making purchasing decisions, including things like how companies treat their employees, what efforts they make to conserve energy and water and reduce waste, and their commitment to continued improvement when it comes to good corporate citizenship and effective social responsibility (The Walt Disney Company, 2018, p. 2).

Throughout the eleven Disney CSR reports currently available online, the Company is not shy in acknowledging that these reports help generate revenue and, as McCarthy put it, "consumers look at several factors when making purchasing decisions." Profit is always at the forefront of Disney incentives. In their piece on Disney, Latino Children, and Television Labor, Chávez and Kiley (2016) remind their readers that we must consider "CSR efforts first and foremost as rhetorical tools that are designed to advance the goals of the corporation. CSR portfolios are based on the premise that shareholders benefit and bottom-line incentives grow when

corporations engage in prosocial efforts…" (p.2624.). An overwhelming majority of the reports before 2016 even start with the line "Dear Stakeholders," though the 2017 report does not address anyone in particular.

The 2017 "Corporate Social Responsibility Update" is 24 pages in length, and includes Disney's performance targets (environment, volunteer, and healthy living), international labor standards practices, workplace practices, philanthropy projects, and a very small portion on "engaging our talent" (p. 11) to bolster diversity. Traditionally, citizenship and corporate social responsibility reports at large highlight environmental concerns, ethical consumption practices, and volunteer hours. It is not uncommon to see pictures of executives or volunteers building wells in other countries or reading to what is implicitly a young cancer patient. Disney, however, recently started incorporating a small portion describing their commitment to "diversity." Usually this consists of the "diversity" heading, and a paragraph or two detailing their most recent forays in making the Disney universe a more diverse place, both on and off-screen. The 2008 report, for example, examines how they are using "diversity" in their programming to "reflect the world in which today's children are growing up" (p.18). The report highlights the series/movies, which feature "diverse" characters, and concludes by providing links to access additional Disney diversity reports, but these links are now defunct.

In their 2017 Corporate Social Responsibility Update, Disney devotes one-third of a page (out of a twenty-four page document) to outline their current engagements with diversity. Their diversity efforts consist of engaging "diverse communities" and "diverse talent," and the small section uses Elena as a visual for their diversity efforts. The graphic stresses that the diversity exists in front of and behind the camera. Further, the graphic highlights the role of Silvia Olivas as "Head Writer and Co-Executive Producer," whom audiences are supposed to understand is a

non-white person by merely reading her name. Silvia Olivas is typically highlighted during the "making of" videos where they stress the series' authenticity. There is usually at least one sound bite of her explaining the show's authenticity and/or diversity in these videos. The "Engaging Our Talent" section concludes by briefly highlighting the "authentic" storylines in *Moana* and *Coco*. Although this section may appear to be short in length, previous reports include smaller "diversity" summaries or none at all. The entire section from the 2017 report is included in the figure below:

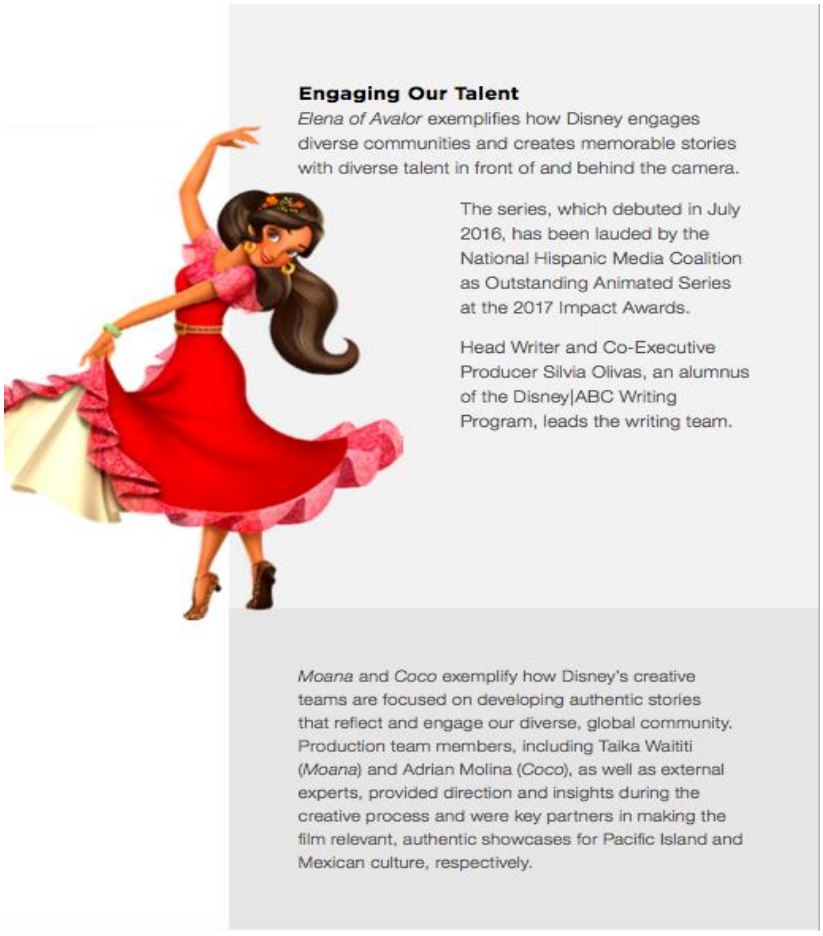

Figure 4: Engaging our Talent. Image Captured from Disney's 2017 *Corporate Social Responsibility Update*. Copyright: Disney 2017.

Disney is expanding what has traditionally been understood as Corporate Social Responsibility or Corporate Citizenship by including elements that focus on ethnic and cultural

acknowledgement/inclusion, though they strategically include these efforts very lightly, commodifying a slight engagement with diversity as do corporations when reporting to the public on how they are contributing as responsible global citizens. Disney relies on animated productions like *Coco* and *Elena of Avalor* to illustrate their engagement with mindful citizenship. At no point do they include live-action characters to outline their citizenship efforts. *Elena of Avalor*, in particular, functions in a variety of ways. Not only does Disney use the series and the image of a dancing Elena (dancing flamenco, no less) in their yearly citizenship/corporate social responsibility reports, but they also utilize her as a role model through their partnership with Girl Scouts U.S.A., a way for them to position Elena not only as a symbol of Latinidad, but also as a symbol of girl power.

Disney rolled out the #LeadLikeElena hashtag in 2016 as part of their partnership with Girl Scouts U.S.A. Disney is known for forging connections with organizations and companies, but they are always careful about what these connections symbolize. I consider the Girl Scouts U.S.A partnership broadly within Disney's Corporate Social Responsibility efforts, particularly the new branch that focuses on gender, cultural, and ethnic diversity. Through this partnership, Disney is fulfilling their commitment to increase diversity, while showcasing their ties to an organization that is highly infused with philanthropy, altruism, and liberal gender practices. It is no coincidence that Disney uses their first and only Latina princess to serve as the image bridging the corporation with Girl Scouts U.S.A. Elena is advertised as a fearless leader, an example of a model neoliberal citizen, and thus the branding of Elena fits perfectly with Girl Scouts U.S.A.

The collaboration with Girl Scouts has provided mutually beneficial opportunities for profit and increased audience for Disney and membership for Girls Scouts. For example, in

October of 2016, Disney introduced their #LeadLikeElena contest urging viewers to upload a photo of themselves showcasing how they "lead like Elena" onto Twitter, Instagram, or Facebook for a chance to be featured "on-air." (The Walt Disney Company, 2017). Disney created this hashtag and the contest in partnership with Girl Scouts U.S.A to provide a space for young girls to associate themselves with Elena's leadership, and therefore align themselves with the television program and character, by tagging moments in which they were fearless leaders, thus connecting to other girls through moments of bravery and girl power, under the name of *Elena of Avalor*. However, most of the contest rules are vague and the winners are not easy to find online. For example, the contest rules explain that an "entry should show how the child is a leader like Elena" and one of the criteria used for judging is "personality," though this category is not defined. Moreover, most current attempts to find contest details explain that "this contest has ended" and provide no further information detailing who the winners were, what their air-time entailed, and what their photographs showcased. Disney does, however, readily provide a ten-page document with the contest rules, entitled "#LeadLikeElena Contest: Official Rules."[5]

A quick search for the #LeadLikeElena hashtag on Instagram yields eight public posts, only two of which feature actual girls, as opposed to animated images of Elena. This does not necessarily mean that only eight girls tagged their images. There could be a wealth of girls tagging images with the #LeadlikeElena hashtag, but I can only access the posts that are public through my personal Instagram account. The #LeadLikeElena movement was also advertised through Disney/Girl Scouts U.S.A commercials and interstitials, where they (primarily) featured non-white girl scouts engaging in activities that they claimed were inspired by Elena. One of the

[5] In April of 2018, contest rules could be found at http://cdnvideo.dolimg.com/cdn_assets/190a6dc4322a1a3d4e97a0e1197f1b9cde0e180e.pdf

videos “Lead Like Elena: Girl Scouts Maria and Alexa- Be Inspired | Disney Junior”[6] features two young girls, who we quickly find out are cousins. These two girls explain how they lead like Elena by “inspiring other girls” and putting their ideas into action by connecting with other young children. Alexa notes that “we were inspired by Elena a lot because she helps her town kind of like us, just like leading other people to do something that they have never done to make the world a better place” (DisneyJunior, 2017). An image of Maria and Alexa is found below:

Figure 5: Girl Scouts Alexa and Maria in Disney Junior’s “Lead Like Elena” commercial. Source: Disney Junior YouTube channel. Copyright: Disney Junior 2017.

Through these commercials, interstitials, advertisements at large, and the #LeadLikeElena movement, Disney is using Elena and young girls of color to promote how they are making “the world a better place.” Although Girl Scouts is a collective, these actions are primarily individualized in that Disney singles out either individual action or actions carried out

[6] All “Lead Like Elena” videos used for this research were gathered from Disney Junior’s YouTube page. Maria and Alexa video retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qfjgHs9FYYk.

by two or three girls. As such, Disney's partnership with Girl Scouts promotes a neoliberal and individual ideology suggesting that systemic issues can be altered through single actions, like planting a tree or having a bake sale.

Disney's creation of the Elena hashtag came about at the same time that they introduced their Leadership Guide. The cover of the twelve-page leadership pamphlet reads "Girl Scouts of the USA and Disney Channel share everyday ways to boost girls' leadership skills" (Girl Scouts & Disney, 2017). The guide is advertised as Disney's official leadership guide and according to Sylvia Acevedo, GSUSA interim CEO, "the guide can be used as a resource for parents and caregivers to engage and develop their girls' everyday leadership skills" (Wajda, 2016). Created as a tool for teachers, parents, and/or caregivers, this document is available in both English and Spanish, and is divided into modules according to grade. Each module contains different age-specific themes and concludes with an activity. The cover of the guide is included below:

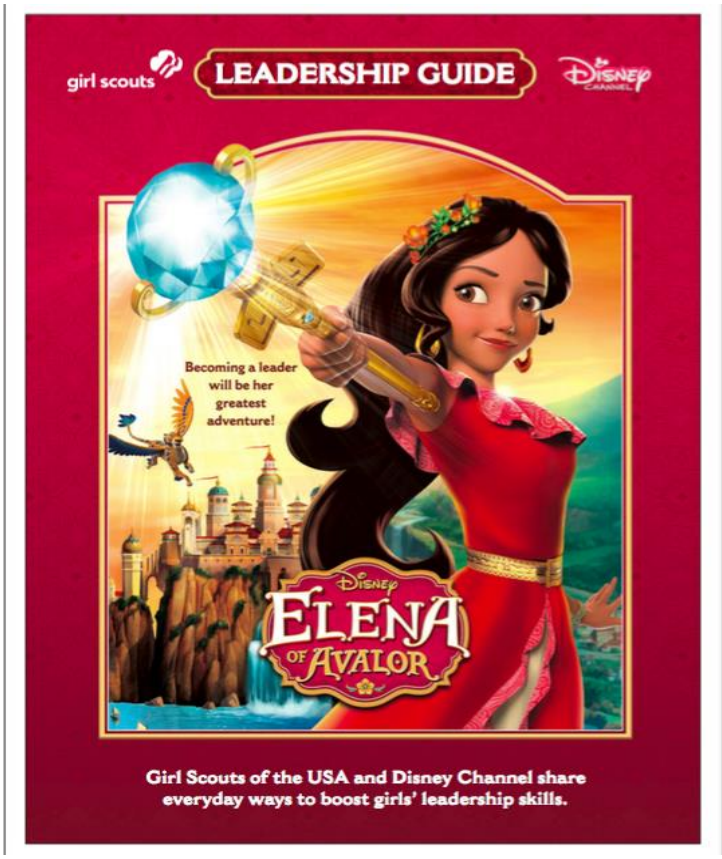

Figure 6: Girl Scouts/Disney Leadership Guide Cover. Copyright: Disney 2017.

Created as a guide to help "boost girls' leadership skills," this document serves as a critical example of Disney's Corporate Social Responsibility efforts, particularly because Disney positioned their Latina princess as the spokesperson for a philanthropic organization, which often foregrounds girl power narratives.

"Do Good Turn," and Consumers

The Disney citizenship/CSR reports are created with consumers and shareholders in mind. Although production is often thought of as taking place in studios separate from consumers and audiences, the many processes taking place under the name of production cannot function without awareness or understanding of audiences. Production and consumption are anything *but* isolated. Johnson (2017) outlines three recommendations for theorizing production,

and his first recommendation is that production studies "should not be limited to any one specific industry sector, set of labor categories, or professional identities" (p. 151). He proposes that instead we interrogate "the way that production is limited and policed in discourse and practice to think about a broader set of productive relations through which meaning, identity, and culture are generated" (Ibid.). This chapter takes up that challenge by engaging with various productive relations, as Johnson suggests. I look at the intersection of different industry sectors, keeping in mind the wide range of strategies Disney uses to try to reach out to a growing segment of the "diverse" audience.

Ouellette (2012) notes that through the "Do Good Turn," consumers/viewers "are increasingly expected to use the resources coordinated by television (and its tie-in websites) to modify their lifestyles, support causes, build communities, consume ethnically, and perform volunteerism" (p.57). Just as is the case with the "Lead Like Elena" YouTube video, producers expect the consumers to be inspired by the young girls' leadership skills and implement these tactics into their everyday lives. Moreover, through their partnership with Girl Scouts U.S.A, Disney is making it easy for their audiences to "support causes." The "cause" here is Girl Scouts U.S.A. Drawing on Ouellette's work, Blue (2017) argues that "Disney Channel and its affiliated websites and partner organizations thus employ images of girls and discourses of girlhood in pursuit of a 'do-good' reputation" (p. 116), which is exactly what is occurring through Disney's partnership with Girls Scouts and their use of Elena as a marker for this partnership. I draw on both Blue and Ouellette and argue that Disney also includes animated representations with CSR to further drive their "do-good" reputation in order to increase profit and revenues, while simultaneously reaching out to viewers of color, particularly Latinxs.

CSRs should not be taken at face value. The motives and driving forces behind

corporations' CSR engagements are, first and foremost, financial and profit-driven. Blue (2017) perfectly summarizes this notion, specifically when it comes to Disney: "evading critical awareness and political action that might otherwise contradict the capitalist motives of the conglomerate has become the norm within the context of neoliberalism" (p.122). Blue adds that Disney's CSR efforts "draw attention away from the environmental damage and depletion of resources endemic to material production by such global conglomerates. They also ignore the possible consequences of perpetuating inhumane, normative, hegemonic, institutionalized ideologies, discourses, and inequalities in the pursuit of capital" (p.118). To this last statement I would like to add that Disney's CSR illusion of progressive ideologies as part of their reports, exemplified through their multicultural animated characters, attempts to contradict the "possible consequences" posed by their practices.

Conclusion

Disney continues to aggressively seek out the Latinx market, as this population continues to boom. The company does this through their inclusion of Latinidad in their production and narratives. This chapter explored the production of *Elena of Avalor*, through an analysis tracing three salient themes of the production practices behind *Elena of Avalor*. My discursive analysis of Disney's online, social media, and television promotion of *Elena of Avalor* (before and after its debut) suggests that Disney utilizes three prominent production strategies. First, Disney produces a flexible Latinidad through *Elena of Avalor*, the series, and various Disney social media platforms. This flexible Latinidad refuses to call out Mexico, but is primarily situated within Mexican narratives (not to be confused with Mexican-American). Latinidad is often constructed this way in the media, by relying on Latin American references harking back to Spain. Second, Disney produces a specific kind of Latinx talent and engages the labor of Latinx

actors to repromote the series, its Latinidad, and its *fantastic universality* through managed prosumerism. Finally, Disney produces Elena, the character, as a tool for showcasing their corporate social responsibility. They do this through Elena's partnership with Girl Scouts U.S.A. and the new cultural/ethnic element in their yearly Cultural Social Responsibility Reports, both of which highlight ethnic culture *and* girl power simultaneously. Aside from the three production themes, this production analysis posits that Disney relies on economic risk aversion strategies, which consist of interlocking directorates. Moreover, Disney capitalizes on cross-ethnic labor. The following chapter will extend this analysis by focusing on three key episodes of the first season of the series (2016-2017), highlighting their links to the production practices and themes found in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Exploring Disney's New Latina Leader: A Discursive Analysis of *Elena of Avalor*, the Series

Introduction

Elena of Avalor, the newest member of the Disney princess franchise, provides a Disney animated series featuring a version of Latina girlhood. Working at the intersections of Media Studies, Latina/o Studies, and Girlhood Studies, this chapter investigates the discursive construction of *Elena of Avalor* through an analysis of three key episodes in the first season of the series (2016-2017). Although *Elena of Avalor* is not a full-length feature film, the show's ratings continue to impress (Headline Planet, 2016a; Headline Planet, 2016b; T.V. News Desk, 2016). While the success of the series is not the focus of this chapter, high ratings contribute to audiences' cultural universes and to young girls' understandings of Latinidad, through the medium of television and transmediated Disney apps. Viewership is spread out over time in a television series as opposed to full-length animated feature films. The show's success and its "authentic" plot have received such recognition that the series is set to deliver episodes for two more seasons, and has even been signed on for another TV movie (Whyte, 2018). Whereas the story behind the creation of *Elena* could be understood as unique and genuine, given that it is Disney, it is also a strategy to secure a large Latinx audience and to represent diversity sensitivity. Although audiences and scholars cannot be privy to Disney's internal marketing strategies, we know narratively that *Elena of Avalor* owes her existence to Sofia, from Disney Junior's *Sofia the First*, and we suspect that economically, Elena makes sound profit and economic risk averse sense in that it will appeal across a broad demographic swath.

Shortly after *Sofia the First* debuted on Disney Junior in 2012, Latinx audiences were thrilled to hear from the show's executive producer that the princess was Latina, as many

suspected. Days after the executive producer spoke out, however, other Disney executives stepped in and gave the official statement that Sofia was not Latina. General Manager of Disney Junior Worldwide, Nancy Kanter, explained that their characters are not intended to reflect or represent any specific culture or ethnicity because they all belong to fantasy locations (Rodriguez, 2013). Through a half-hearted apology, she laid to rest claims that Sofia was Latina. Of course, Disney films and television series locations are often inspired by real places, and often even take place in actual locations. Kanter, however, made it a point to explain that the creation of Sofia was inspired and based on a mixture of many nations, positioning Sofia within the realm of Disney hybrid and ambiguously ethnic representations (Valdivia 2008b; 2008c; 2011). This situation and the responses to Sofia's ethnicity, suggest that Disney narrates the creation of their animated characters as a post-racial and post-nation production process. The disavowal of Sofia's Latinidad took place in 2012 and undeniably composed the backdrop to *Elena of Avalor*'s creation and royal debut. Indeed, given Disney's approach to developing franchises long ahead of their release, it is possible that the controversy was planned to increase attention and coverage of the "truly" Latina princess release.

Through the storyline, Elena literally came out of Sofia's amulet. Furthermore, Elena "came out" as Latina through Disney executives (including Nancy Kanter), the producer and creator of the series, and through her fans (Bruner, 2016; Del Barco, 2016; Garcia, 2016; McDermott, 2016; Williams, 2016; Wajda, 2016). Ratings of the series indicate that her Latinidad is well-received. As Petski (2017) notes in her Disney channel report about the renewal of the series for the third season: "When it premiered in July 2016, *Elena of Avalor* quickly became television's No. 1 series for Girls age 2-11 in the U.S. It also ranks No. 1 in its time slot among kids in the UK, Spain, and Portugal." Despite Elena's transnational success, we

need to remember what the conversation surrounding an ethnically specific Disney animated character looked like only four years prior. It seems a bit idealistic to think that the company's position changed so drastically, within a four-year time period because it typically takes two years to create and pitch the idea of an animated series (especially with trailers and posters). What Disney gained in that time was considerable data on the potential audience of a Latina princess without committing itself to the representation of Latinidad. Elena is the result of avowed and disavowed dedication to the construction of an animated Latina character, and, as such, deserves careful analysis. The remainder of this chapter will (1) briefly outline the theoretical framework driving the analysis of the text; (2) explain the sample and method for analyzing the mediated texts; and (3) provide an analysis of three key episodes from the first season of the series.

Theoretical Framework

Drawing on a combination of Feminist Media Studies and Cultural Studies, this chapter focuses on a Disney text in a postfeminist moment. The company's mediated production of postfeminist discourses of girlhood in combination with the profit motive and economic risk aversion does not foreground the interests of girls. As Gill (2016) notes, the visibility of girls and feminism does not mean that feminist ideas and women's and girls' interests and issues are foregrounded in contemporary postfeminist neoliberal popular culture. Indeed, girls studies media scholars admonish us to take into account girls' active responses to post-feminist renditions of their cultural production (Brady, 2016; Keller & Rose, 2015; Kennedy, 2014, 2018). Considering multiple and sometimes contested meanings, by analyzing the texts through a feminist-inspired girls studies theoretical perspective, this chapter prioritizes media content that privileges or foregrounds girls. As a core element, this chapter explores media content relating

to Latinas and Latinidad. Finally, this chapter provides an intersectional analysis that combines class, race, nation, age, and gender.

This project is situated against the backdrop of contemporary postfeminism. Tasker & Negra (2007) note that "definitive conceptualizations of postfeminism are as elusive as references to postfeminism are pervasive" As previously mentioned in the literature review, an internal contradiction within post-feminism is that women/girls are supposed to exercise and perform control over their bodies while simultaneously losing control when engaging with the marketplace. We shall see elements of this contradiction in *Elena*. As well, we can find in Elena the following three signifiers of the visibility yet weightlessness of feminism in contemporary popular culture, especially that targeted at girls, as identified by Gill (2015, p. 623):

> First, it is conveyed through a warm and enthusiastic embrace of all things female—by "championing" women and "celebrating" their "intelligence," "beauty," and "confidence." The tonal quality of the magazine leaves a positive glow, as feminism becomes a "cheer word"—unimpeachable, but also devoid of substance; we are simply informed that it is "having a moment." –you go girl!" Secondly, feminism is signified in what has been described as a distinctly postfeminist fashion through an attitudinal pose of assertiveness and defiance. –I am not afraid to call myself a feminist. Thirdly, the use of a lexicon and iconography borrowed from activist feminism, yet put to work in the service of ideas and perspectives that apparently offer little or no real challenge to gender power relations—again a distinctively postfeminist move—articulation of girly details and feminist fist that makes it post-feminist.

Just as there are tropes to signify a feminism that is beyond light but altogether weightless (Gill, 2015), tropes to represent Latinidad as beyond light, abound in mediated

representations produced in Hollywood, including those produced by Disney (Betancourt, 2018; Chavez & Kiley, 2016; Eagan, 2017; Sheppard, 2016; Valdivia, 2008c). For Disney and other entertainment companies, the two most prominent "ethnic" celebrations attributed to Latinxs are quinceañeras and Day of the Dead. Their reiteration serves to flatten differences between Latinxs and Latin Americans. Día de los Muertos, for example, is not commonly celebrated by Caribbean Latinxs, and the alfeñiques, a type of paper mache figure, used to decorate the altars to the dead are particular to specific regions of Mexico. Similarly, the quinceañera tradition originated in Mexico and is mostly celebrated by people of Mexican descent. Quinceañeras celebrate a girl's fifteenth birthday, ostensibly, but are more of a coming of age ceremony which can sometimes be as lavish as a large wedding. Both of these celebrations have come to signify Latinidad in mainstream U.S. popular culture. Additionally, within the U.S. Latinxs are seen as predominantly Roman Catholic, which others them in relation to dominant Protestant whiteness. Another celebration used to represent Latinxs is Christmas, sometimes called by its Spanish name, Navidad. By kicking off the first season of *Elena of Avalor* with these episodes,[7] Disney continues to reproduce tropes of Latinidad and joins a cultural commonsense about the traditions of "authentic Hispanic culture."[8]

This chapter examines the representational practices found in *Elena of Avalor*, paying particular attention to the text's effort to speak to racial and gender elements as part of the Disney princess culture. This approach is guided by cultural studies, which views media texts as,

[7] It is worth mentioning that the first episode of the second season of *Elena of Avalor* was a special Día de los Muertos themed episode, debuting on October 14, 2017. Further, Season 2, episode 19 (November 24 2018), entitled "Snow Place Like Home" was a *Navidad* themed episode as well.

[8] This statement frequently comes up in interviews and reports with the creators and producers of the series.

"complex (and contested) artifacts of ideologies that operate to shape their symbolic form and content" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 66). By drawing on cultural studies, this chapter is also intersectionally examines elements within *Elena of Avalor* that include race, gender, nation, and age.

Methodology

I draw on cultural studies and intersectionality to interpret how race/ethnicity shapes the representations in three key episodes in the first season of the series. Hall (1997) contends that media create representations, which serve as dominant ideologies that lead to meaning-making. Within animated programming, representations impart certain understandings about different groups of people, and my aim through this analysis is to provide a specific example of how the representations in three key instances throughout the first season of this series highlight certain themes in their portrayal of Latinidad. My analysis begins with an in-depth reading of the text, accompanied by my contextualized interpretations. Although I have already watched every episode of the series, including the two one-hour made-for-television movies, I watched three particular episodes in the first season (including the commercials aired during the episode), multiple times for the purposes of this analysis. The first viewing did not consist of any note-taking, but solely relied on watching the episode to establish my understanding of the storyline. The second viewing consisted of noting general representational cues, like the appearance of certain characters and how they advanced the plot. The third and fourth viewings consisted of noting detailed information, such as overall messages, cultural markers, cultural cues, relationships to other characters, settings, dialogue, tropes, etc. I viewed certain scenes and commercials additional times in order to transcribe the dialogue and better analyze certain

representations. Following the last viewings, I compared my notes throughout in order to unearth the themes that emerged.

I analyzed the following three episodes: episode 9- *A Day to Remember* (Day of the Dead theme); episode 12- *Navidad* (Christmas theme); and episode 19- *My Fair Naomi* (Quinceañera theme). I selected these episodes due to the frequent use of these themes in mainstream portrayals of Latinxs through the media. The Day of the Dead trope refers to a Mexican holiday that celebrates the lives of loved ones by honoring them with altars (among other things). As well as appearing in relation to ambiguous Disney Latinas, such as Miranda in *Lizzie McGuire* (Valdivia 2008c), the trope lends itself to visually rich animations used in portrayals featuring Latinx children. 20th Century Fox's *The Book of Life* (2014) and Disney Pixar's *Coco* (2017) are just two recent examples of the prominent and over-used Día de los Muertos trope within full-length animated feature films. For an adult example, the opening scene of *Spectre* (2015) provides a long and spectacular view of a Day of the Dead celebration and chase in the Zocalo, at the center of Mexico City. In fact, along with *Coco* and *Spectre*, there are many other films that represent Hollywood's "obsession" with this holiday: *Once Upon a Time in Mexico* (2003), and *Corpse Bride* (2015) (Romero Garcia, 2015). To be sure, these are just the movies that focus on this holiday. There are dozens others that include Dia de los Muertos as a way to signify Latinidad, usually through Mexicanidad.

The Navidad (Christmas) theme, although not as common as the Día de los Muertos narrative, has become more popular within Disney portrayals of Latinidad (i.e. *Stuck in the Middle* Navidad special). The most common occurrence during Navidad mediated instances is the celebration of the posada, the re-enactment of Mary and Joseph's journey to find shelter before Jesus' arrival. Although posadas are most traditionally celebrated in Mexico, the media

tend to highlight them as a central part of Navidad episodes. Disney, in particular, does this on the screen, dating back to their *Las Posadas* (1945) segment, as well as live at their U.S. theme park locations (more thorough discussion of this to come in the conclusion). Both Día de los Muertos and Navidad tend to associate Latinidad with religiosity, in particular a pagan Catholicism.

Finally, the quinceañera trope is all too common when representing Latina girls, even the ones that often appear to be ethnically ambiguous (Valdivia, 2008c, 2011). *Lizzie McGuire*, *The Wizards of Waverly Place*, *The Fosters*, *Stuck in the Middle*, *Dora the Explorer*, *One Day at a Time* and *Jane the Virgin* (just to name a few) all featured young Latina characters who at one point in the series celebrate this coming of age event. Many other movies, such as *McFarland USA* (2015) and *Crazy/Beautiful* (2001) also use quinceañeras to signify Latinidad as a cohesive thread juxtaposing the family and tradition centered Latinxs in relation to the implicitly atomized and unhappy Anglo protagonists. The cultural tradition functions as a salve to heal emotionally injured Anglos on their way back to normalcy. This Latina cultural rite resonated enough with mainstream media that in 2016 TLC even devoted an entire reality television series to exploring a variety of quinceañeras. *Sweet Fifteen: Quinceañeras*, follows Latina girls all over the nation as they prepare for this rite of passage. In fact, quinceañeras compose a sub-genre within Latina Chick lit, with one of the best sellers, *Once Upon a Quinceañera* (2007), penned by famed Latina author Julia Alvarez. Here, as with the other two celebrations/holidays, Disney stays within accepted tropes of Latinidad.

Analysis

Although *Elena of Avalor* continues to be praised in the marketplace, Latina audiences remain ambivalent about Disney's choice to situate the Latina princess debut in the small rather

than film screens, a sentiment conveyed to me by a scholar following a recent presentation on Elena at the FLOW conference in Austin, Texas (2018). The scholar noted that Elena is on the small screen, and that is a representation of the undervaluation of Latina culture and audiences. This comment is reminiscent of similar sentiments expressed via online blogs, particularly by self-identified Latinas. This yearning for representation in animated form has been fulfilled through *Elena of Avalor*, but audiences still experience frustrations with the nature of the series, and one of the most common frustrations expressed is the fact that Elena is not on the big screen. Nonetheless, *Elena* has been nominated for various awards, including its win at the 2018 Daytime Emmy Awards for the category of "Outstanding Casting for an Animated Series or Special." At the same awards show, *Elena* was also nominated for "Outstanding Writing in an Animated Program" and "Outstanding Music Direction and Composition" (Heller, 2018). Although it did not win the last two awards, the series continues to be recognized prominently, despite some audience frustrations.

Four months after the debut of *Elena of Avalor*, Disney premiered a television movie to provide the backstory for this new Latina Disney princess. *Elena and the Secret of Avalor* premiered on November 20, 2016 on the Disney channel and Disney Junior. Data on its popularity illustrate its success. For example, *Elena of Avalor* ranked "as 2016's #1 cable TV telecast among kids 2-11 (Live +3 data, 2.245 million). The simulcast was also the #2 telecast in total viewers (4.4 million) and adults 18-49 (1.4 million) across all kid-targeted TV networks" (T.V. News Desk, 2016). The same report further illustrates that "among Hispanic viewers, the simulcast ranks as the #1 TV telecast among Girls 2-5 (6.2 rating) and Girls 2-11 (4.2 rating), 4Q2016 to-date" (T.V. News Desk, 2016). As a result of the success of the first television movie, and the series at large, Disney Channel created another *Elena of Avalor* made-for-

television movie, *Song of the Sirenas*. This movie debuted on September 21, 2018 with guest voices from Gina Rodriguez, Edward James Olmos, Rita Moreno, Rosario Dawson, and Prince Royce (Whyte, 2018). As with the tropes, Disney is also continuous in casting established talent to voice the characters in the *Elena* franchise. Ratings and information on viewership for this movie are not yet available. However, different from the first made-for-television *Elena* movie, *Song of the Sirenas* is a sixty-minute movie that consistently showcases *Elena*, as opposed to the first movie, which focused mostly on *Sofia*.

The series is an opportunity to showcase Disney's version of Latinidad as well as to add a Latina princess to the Disney princess pantheon. For example, the original made-for-television movie did not feature Elena until thirty-nine minutes into the movie (out of a little over an hour). Instead, the movie highlighted Sofia. Given that *Elena of Avalor* is a spin-off of *Sofia the First*, her back story relies on that of the young princess Sofia. Since Elena literally came out of the amulet that Sofia wears in all the episodes, Sofia's helped Elena to break the spell that trapped her in the amulet. Indeed, one could argue that Sofia/Elena represents a new form of a television franchise, one that is spread out over time in relation to a theme- Latinidad [and its avowal and disavowal]. In the five form typology of synergy outlined by Meehan (2005), and highlighted in the previous chapter of this dissertation, Sofia to Elena qualify as a form of "redeployment" whereby "the symbolic universe encapsulated in an artifact…is both dependent but removed from the original" (p. 125). An image of Sofia and Elena (from the made for television movie) is found below:

Figure 7: Sofia and Elena in *Elena and the Secret of Avalor*. Copyright: Disney Junior 2016.

Viewers can access *Elena of Avalor* episodes through the Disney Junior channel and online via the Disney channel website, YouTube, Disney Now app, and the Disney LOL app. Elena's description on these sites and apps usually reveals that she is a teenager with powers, who is now in charge of ruling her kingdom of Avalor after years of being trapped inside an amulet. Through the multiple challenges and adventures she encounters, she must learn to rule her kingdom. Thus far, she is proving to be a great leader and role model, further highlighting her girl power. For instance, within the first few episodes, she saves the kingdom of Avalor from the eruption of a magical rock and attends a royal retreat where she helps the other members of the retreat work better with King Hector (the self-appointed ruler of the retreat).

Through the narrative, Disney advertises the fact that Elena is a leader and a role model for girls to follow (Amatangelo, 2016). Disney, in this sense, constructs Elena as a member of the third stage of spunky can-do Disney princesses, far from first stage princesses, the more passive and traditional Cinderella and Snow White. Elena exhibits no interest in a quest to find a

romantic partner. She busies herself with developing leadership skills and performing feats that fall in line with "girl power" narratives. As part of this leadership branding, Disney created the hashtag #leadlikeelena. Articulating this princess to Girl Scouts U.S.A. allows young girls to associate themselves with Elena's leadership by tagging moments in which they were fearless leaders (something explored more thoroughly in the previous chapter). Both the setting of this princess within the spunky present day heroines and the strong Latinx influence within the narrative point towards Disney's relatively new strategies for engaging with tween and pre-tween girls, especially through the representation of Latinidad that hopefully engages white and non-white viewers (specifically girls).

Disney signifies Latinidad within the series through a combination of mainstream media tactics such as episodes teeming with Spanish words, Latinx cultural references, a strong accent found in most of the older characters, particular colors, recognizable "Latin" music, and even a variety of Spanish names. Although since the nineteen fifties Disney characters often have been given Spanish names through the translation process (Tribilín for Goofy, Margarita for Daisy, and Mimí for Minnie), they are not given these names in the English/original version of the product (Wasko, 2001b). The characters of *Elena of Avalor*, however, are different when it comes to naming practices. Names such as Elena, Isabel, Francisco, Mateo, Armando, Luna, Doña Carmen and Doña Paloma, are said in Spanish, and even have letters only found in the Spanish alphabet. Although these names are not pronounced consistently (especially Elena) throughout the series, the names and the Spanish phrases, such as "pastel de tres leches," "tamales calientes," "buñuelos," "calabaza en tacha," "abuelos," "volar," "malvados," and many others, mark this series as unusual, though not entirely unique, when it comes to Disney representations. In *The Three Caballeros* (1945) Donald also encountered characters who spoke

the occasional word in Spanish. It must be noted that here as before, Disney remains continuous with other popular culture representations of Latinidad. Nickelodeon's *Dora the Explorer* also used a few Spanish words to signify Latinidad and authenticity. Based on the salience of these three celebrations turned into tropes, the following analysis will focus on three episodes of the first season of the series: (1) *A Day to Remember*; (2) *Navidad*; and (3) *My Fair Naomi*.

A Day to Remember

A Day to Remember premiered on October 16, 2016 and was the ninth episode of the *Elena of Avalor* series. This episode allows Elena to prove she is worthy of her leadership role by serving as a bridge between the mortal and the spirit world. In this episode, she encounters a ghost who is trying to keep her restaurant from closing. Leading up to this episode, Disney Junior showcased at least five different commercials glorifying this *Elena* episode as a celebration of Latinx heritage through the focus on Día de los Muertos. Celebrities and fans expressed their excitement for this episode through social networks as well. The episode itself was part of Disney Channel's "Monstober," which featured Halloween-themed movies, episodes, and commercials. *A Day to Remember* was the only episode out of the Monstober lineup, however, to feature such prominent markers of any culture—meaning that in the absence of othering signifiers these other episodes represented mainstream U.S. culture. Other episodes included The Mickey Mouse Club House's *Mickey's Monster Musical*, Doc McStuffin's *Hallie Halloween*, and Sofia the First's *The Little Witch*. None of these episodes contained specific ties to a marked culture, race, or ethnicity, except for *A Day to Remember*, where the ties were not only explicit throughout the episode but advertised prominently well before it premiered.

During the thirty-minute episode, there were two long commercials (one during each commercial break) that specifically addressed Latinx traditions and culture. The first of these

commercials focused on the Día de los Muertos altars and provided a brief background and history about the tradition, specifically making connections to Mexico. The other commercial consisted of a spotlight of Jenna Ortega, a thirteen-year-old actress and voice of Isabel, Elena's sister, and her family. Ortega is of Mexican and Puerto Rican descent and quite vocal on social media about the pride she has in her heritage. As discussed in the previous chapter, Jenna Ortega's social media is more than likely managed, and as such, the pride in her heritage stands out as performative. Through Ortega's commercial, audiences are able to see her family, how they make food, what types of food they make at home, and how they like to spend time together. Of interest here are the focus on family and the fact that every member of her family talks about how important it is for them to be prideful of their Latinx heritage and how it forms such a central part of who they are. Most Disney spotlights do not focus on heritage or culture, but rather focus on what the actors and their families like to do for fun and where they travel. Coupled with the Día de los Muertos episode, this spotlight on Jenna's family and the Día de Los Muertos altar commercial reinforce Disney's attempts to cater and reach out to their Latinx market. These commercial spotlights represent a form of what McAllister and Giglio (2005) observe as a type of "commodity flow" of U.S. children's television programming in that "corporate-brand images build into the genre a relatively coherent selling ethos" (p. 26). The commodified Latinidad through the actors, the cultures, and the *Elena* episode construct a coherent selling ethos. The cultural spotlights, strategically positioned within the day of the dead episode, blur the distinction between the content of the series and the promotional elements.

A Day to Remember was often advertised not only through the Disney Channel, but also on celebrity social networks through celebrity guest voices.[9] Jaime Camil and Ivonne Coll, who star in the CW series *Jane the Virgin* (*JTV*) along with Jenna Ortega, lent their voices to this episode through two new characters, and prior to the debut they advertised the episode on social media. *JTV* is another prominent television series featuring an almost all Latinx cast and a character who only communicates in Spanish (abuela Alba- Ivonne Coll). The ratings for this Day of the Dead episode also speak to how successful the implementation of the Latinx culture proved to be for audiences across the nation. According to a report on Headline Planet based on the the L+SD data, this episode "drew 1.38 million total viewers. The number tops the 1.23 million mark garnered by the previous episode, which aired on 9/30…" (Cantor, 2016).

From the first scene of this episode, it is clear that Día de los Muertos is a momentous occasion not only for Elena, but for the rest of Avalor. Elena wears an ornate dress with a skeleton outline painted on it, and the rest of the characters wear this same type of attire. In other words, clothing featuring skeleton outlines prominently, is something that is widely available on the marketplace around Halloween as an indication of the absorption and commodification of Latinidad into a U.S. holiday. An image from this episode is found below:

[9] A more in-depth analysis of this is showcased through the previous chapter's exploration of the Latinx actors' labor practices.

Figure 8: Elena and her family in *A Day to Remember*. Copyright: Disney Junior 2016.

However, this exuberant attire is not all that common in Latinx cultures, especially as an all-day event. This sartorial statement, a commodified cooptation of a holiday, becomes the ground from where Elena begins to talk about the reasons they celebrate Día de los Muertos and why it is important to honor dead loved ones. As is common with most *Elena of Avalor* episodes, there is a significant focus on food, all of which is mentioned and referenced in Spanish. For this episode, the family focuses on making *calabaza en tacha*, a traditional Mexican candied pumpkin dessert. Both the calabaza and the *pan de muerto* (the traditional day of the day bread) become central elements in the episode as Elena not only helps in making the *calabaza* but must also set out to find *pan de muerto* for her parents' altar that evening. Although the attire may seem to be a bit over the top, the reference and inclusion of the *pan de muerto*, the food, the altar, and the significance of these paint a layered and (what appears to be) quite specific representation of this holiday, though never referencing its specific ties to Mexico rather than Latinidad at large.

The two central conflicts that occur throughout this episode, which Elena must work to solve, both deal with issues involving the dead. The first instance involves her sister Isabel having a hard time facing the death of her parents through a celebration to honor the dead. The second instance involves a woman, Doña Angelica, who has come back from the dead in order to request Elena's assistance in helping keep her business open and unite her family again. Through her encounter with Doña Angelica (voiced by Ivonne Coll), Elena realizes that she has been granted the ability to see the dead people of Avalor on this special day, a theme that emerges through the subsequent Day of the Dead Episodes in the series[10]. Doña Angelica comes to Avalor to ask Elena for help with her family business. Elena replies to this request by asking Doña Angelica "So, you want me to convince two complete strangers to not sell their restaurant because their grandmother's ghost told me to?" (Cardenas & Gerber 2016). Despite being hesitant, and rational, at first, Elena decides to help and ultimately brings the family together and prevents the restaurant from closing. Elena ventures into Avalor to meet Doña Angelica's grandchildren (Julio is voiced by Jaime Camil), who explain that the restaurant is failing because they cannot cook the same recipes that Doña Angelica used to cook. Both Julio and Carmen, the grandchildren, are phenotypically darker than Elena. Although Elena is tan and her brown skin is much darker than most Disney princesses, Julio and Carmen are much darker and could be read as having African descent. Since Elena is royal and Carmen and Julio live in the town of Avalor, this difference in skin tone could be interpreted as a class marker, a skin color trope commonly used in the media when assigning non-White people to different class hierarchies. A common media practice when representing Latinxs on the screen is to cast people with lighter skin tones as royals or wealthy and those who are darker as working class, indigenous, or of African

[10] As of May 2019, the series has showcased three Día de los Muertos themed episodes.

descent (Molina-Guzmán, 2013). Additionally, Elena is wearing her royal red dress (the Día de los Muertos version with the skeleton outline), while Julio and Carmen are wearing simple white clothes. Carmen has a yellow shawl around her dress, and Julio is wearing a black vest over his white clothing. Sartorially as well as through skin color, Elena is constructed as a more privileged member of Avalor society, which, of course, is obvious since she is the ruling monarch.

Through her efforts to communicate with the dead, Elena helps Carmen and Julio find the lost recipe book. In the last scenes at the restaurant the audience sees a delicious plate of paella (a Spanish dish) along with the verbal promise of future mole, pozole, and traditional Mexican dishes, which will help attract customers once again and prevent the family from having to sell the restaurant to a man who will turn it into a bank. In this episode, Elena is able to function as a hero within the frame of Latinidad and Latinx traditions, mostly food related. She is able to prevent a family business from being turned into a bank — a symbol of capitalism and corporate greed. Before Elena leaves the village in order to make it back to her Día de los Muertos celebration back at the castle, Carmen gives her the *pan de muerto* she needs for the celebration, and in turn, helps her out as well.

Mariachis greet Elena on her way back to the castle. Mariachis, a musical form indigenous to Mexico and thus a classic marker of Mexicanidad, are common in the musical numbers of this series and even through the incorporation of the princess at the Disney theme park locations. At the castle, everyone is curious about Isabel's whereabouts because they thought she was with Elena. Elena finds her and realizes she is sad because this day reminds her too much of her parents' passing. Isabel had initially lied and said she could not celebrate because her outfit/costume was torn. But when Elena comes to Isabel's room she reveals the real

reason(s) she does not want to join in the celebrations. Elena helps her understand that the wonderful times they spent with their mother and father will never go away. Elena adds that if they keep their memories alive, it is as if their parents are always with them. Elena convinces Isabel to join the celebration, and in the final scenes of the episode Isabel hugs *Elena* while the ghosts of their parents look on longingly from above. As is the case with the rest of the episodes in this series thus far, Elena is embraced as the hero, the one who solved her family and Avalor's problems by using her leadership, intellect, wit, courage, and compassion. Elena leads in a way not common to the first few waves of Disney princesses and heroines, and she does this through an animated series teeming with Latinidad, represented through food, clothing, traditions, accents, names, and music. In this way, Elena is perfectly positioned to carry forward Disney's new quest to expand their fan base through (1) more powerful girl representations and (2) more ethnically diverse representations. This episode provides a very specific representation of Latinidad, focusing on a well-known, and highly stereotypical, celebration while simultaneously adding specific layered elements of the celebration.

Navidad

The eleventh episode of the *Elena* series debuted on December 9, 2016. Two years later, the ratings for this episode are not yet available as were those for the previous episode.[11] As was the case with the *A Day to Remember* episode, the *Navidad* episode centers around the celebration of a holiday. The people of Avalor celebrate Navidad, which is the Spanish word for Christmas, in a variety of ways. Almost all of them verbally explain that they tie their celebrations to their culture, and all but one of the families present here is Latinx (or Avaloran). The only way in which characters refer to Christmas in this episode is by saying "Navidad." Not

[11] This is most likely due to the fact that this episode was not as much of a success.

once does anyone say the word "Christmas." In this sense, the creators of the series assume that their audience has insight and/or knowledge about what the term means or that other signifiers of Christmas are so strong that they need not translate that one keyword. Either they assume that their audience possesses this knowledge, or they include this word for pedagogical language acquisition purposes, a theme that comes up through an exploration of Elena's incorporation in the Disney theme park universe. The inclusion of Spanish (and the lack of translation) further hints at the series' efforts to promote the authenticity of their narrative through their use of language.

When you view the episode with Spanish audio, however, they do not call it "Navidad." Instead, they refer to the event as "fiestas," thus removing the cultural and religious specificity of the actual word that is present when viewing the episode in English. "Fiestas," however, is not typically used to refer to, or replace, "Christmas" in the Spanish speaking world. "Fiestas" simply means "parties." This is a bit of a perplexing choice of translation. "Fiestas" could be understood more as an equivalent for "Holiday" instead of the more specific "Christmas," though that translation is still not fully accurate.

Again, within this episode, food becomes an important topic of conversation, especially as the characters get ready to throw their respective Navidad parties. In the first scene of this episode, Elena is dressed in bright colors and brings *buñuelos* (a fried dough dessert popular in some parts of Latin America) for everyone to eat, reminding them that it is almost Navidad, a holiday which she says is very special to her. As with previous episodes, there is reference to a type of food, which further serves as a marker of Latinidad, especially because the names of the

foods are said in Spanish. Elena also explains that there will be a piñata[12] per castle tradition. The incorporation of the piñata continues the Latinx references and themes though uses this artifact decontextualized from its more frequent birthday association. One could say that this represents a flattening of difference at the level of party practices— any party practice can be present in a variety of different parties. In fact, party practices in every culture are specific to particular types of parties. For example, it would be quite unusual to have a creche at a birthday party.

During the Navidad episode, a variety of "guests" show up because all the people of Avalor want to invite Elena and her family to celebrate with them. During a musical mariachi number, the guests all explain to Elena how they celebrate the holiday in a piece entitled "This is What We Do to Celebrate Navidad." The image below highlights the final scene from this number:

Figure 9: The musical number "This is What We do to Celebrate Navidad" in the *Navidad* episode. Copyright: Disney Junior 2016.

[12] a papier-mâché decoration stuffed with toys, candies, and an assortment of treats, typically broken during parties to reveal the surprises inside—often associated with Mexico, but very common around the world

As beautiful and lively as the number proves to be, Elena remains a bit overwhelmed, trying to decide where she plans on spending Navidad. She finally has a brilliant idea to invite them all to Castillo Park so that they can celebrate together and combine their traditions in one location. The word "castillo" means castle, and again, we have a reminder through the name of the park that we are situated in a Latinx wonderland, where all the Latinx traditions will come together in one, homogenous celebration.

The following portion of the episode takes place in Castillo Park, where the visitors are preparing their celebrations. Soon enough, though, the visitors start having problems with their set up, the animals for the nativity scene, and an overall sense of rivalry amongst themselves. Driven by profit, Doña Paloma (one of the antagonists of the series) suggests that the visitors make a parade so they can honor their traditions separately by displaying them on a float to be seen by all of Avalor. Of course, she suggests that everyone buy the supplies needed for the floats from her shop, overcharges the customers, and suggests that they return multiple times to buy various items. As soon as Elena notices the situation, it is too late. The Castillo Park scene culminates with a disastrous event, where the accidental lighting of a Christmas tree starts a fire, which burns all of the floats. Not only is Elena the one to put out the fire, metaphorically and literally, but she is also determined to bring everyone together after they all express how upset they are with one another. Everyone decides to leave, and Elena is left wondering what she can do to remedy the situation.

Once Elena finds out what happened at Castillo Park, she sadly approaches Doña Paloma and explains that "the holidays are about who you spend them with." Elena, being the morally sound middle ground, attempts to reason with Doña Paloma about the importance of "Navidad." As soon as she leaves Doña's house, she realizes that she must have a *parranda* in order to make

the situation better. Elena clarifies to another character in the series that a *parranda* is very similar to a posada, where you go around from house to house singing Christmas carols and picking up people at each stop. Again, this episode assumes that audiences are familiar with the idea of a posada, and for those who are not, the episode serves a pedagogical function and as a marker of the series' authenticity. The word "parranda" means different things throughout Latin America. In Mexico, it is often used to simply mean a large party, and in Puerto Rico (where it seems to be the series is drawing its definition from) it refers to musical festivities during the days leading up to Christmas. Again, through the use of a Spanish word, with multiple meanings in different Spanish-speaking locations, the series is creating one version of Latinidad to encompass the different lived experiences within an ever-growing population. The series draws on myths from Argentina, uses Mexican food, employs Puerto Rican terminology, and even incorporates Spanish dishes to create a pan-Latinidad, though it is often inspired by Mexico.

Elena, who is at the center of this pan-Latinidad, stands in stark contrast to the competitive and malicious capitalist character of Doña Paloma. Elena functions as the hero who is able to unite the village once more, and fight against capitalism and consumerism, much like in the previous episode where she fought against turning the family-owned restaurant into a bank. By organizing the *parranda*, Elena is able to unite everyone in Avalor through a culturally specific tradition. The last scenes of the episode feature the entire village singing, dancing, and laughing together to the sound of mariachis, guitars, and "Latin[13]" beats. The last scene of the episode shows Elena hugging Isabel in front of the *Nochebuenas* (poinsettias) in the castle. This image, which lasts about five seconds, seeks to interpellate audiences to affective identification

[13] The word "Latin" in quotes signifies identifiably Latin yet ambiguously coded elements of music, clothing and food. Otherwise I identify the origin, or at least, the stereotypical and implicit origin.

with the importance of family, friends, and love during the holiday seasons. Once more, we see Elena functioning as the fearless leader (showcasing her "girl power"). Just like the previous episode, *Navidad* is teeming with elements of Latinidad from different countries and regions, allowing this episode to serve the purposes of flattening Latinidad while simultaneously bringing in some specific elements that can be recognized as authentic to particular nations.

My Fair Naomi

My Fair Naomi, the eighteenth episode of *Elena of Avalor*'s first season, premiered on May 6, 2017. *My Fair Naomi* aired after the *King of the Carnaval* episode, which centered around a festival taking place in Avalor. The festival resembled Rio de Janeiro's Carnival, and the characters dressed in vibrant colors as they prepared for and hosted a large parade. Following this vibrantly colored and festive episode, the kingdom of Avalor prepares once again to host another large party, but this time the party is for Naomi. Naomi Turner, Elena's best friend and a member of Avalor's Grand Council, is a central character in the series. She physically stands out in relation to the other characters because she is fair-skinned, has blonde hair, and blue eyes. The other characters it the series have darker skin complexions, dark eyes, and dark hair. Other than her parents, who appear a few times throughout the series, Naomi is the only character, thus far, with these phenotypic features. The series clearly positions Naomi as an outsider of Avalor in the sixteenth episode, where the audience meets her parents and finds out their family is from Norberg (a kingdom that resembles Norway). Although referring to contemporary popular cinema, through an analysis of Disney's hybrid live-action and animated *Enchanted*, Tasker (2011), highlights how "such fictional, yet plausibly named magical kingdoms, are a common feature of Hollywood's princess preoccupation" (p. 67). A kingdom by the name of Norberg, serves as a stand-in for what one would typically consider a non-Latinx universe, reminiscent of

Norway, which also carries the coding of pure whiteness. Through this quinceañera-themed episode, we find out that Naomi's sixteenth birthday is fast approaching, and of course, Elena is determined to help her celebrate this event.

As Elena, Naomi, and a few castle guests sit around the dinner table one evening, they find out that Naomi never had a quinceañera. The guests appear to be shocked, as if someone from Norberg would be expected to have such a celebration. Through a short monologue, Elena explains that a quinceañera is an Avaloran tradition, and Naomi expresses her yearning to be Avaloran, at least for a day. This is a theme that often comes up in other episodes: Naomi's desire to be an Avaloran. At this point, Elena decides that even though Naomi is turning sixteen, and not fifteen (which is when a quinceañera is celebrated), she is going to throw her a quinceañera to make up for the fact that she did not have one the previous year. Other than the fact that it is an Avaloran tradition and that it requires a great deal of planning, the remainder of the episode does not provide any further explanations about the celebration, its origin, or its significance. As the episode unfolds and Naomi continues to prepare for the grand party, the central plot deals with Naomi getting so wrapped up in making the celebration perfect that she forgets what the party was supposed to be about- friends, family, and fun. Here, she turns into the stereotypical bridezilla. She kicks out Elena and her friends from her court of honor (a group of the quinceañeras' closest friends, who dance the main waltz with her), and even hires professionals to join her in the dance and replace her friends. This behavior is not typical of Naomi, who usually functions as the light-hearted and kind character.

Elena, with the help of her grandmother, resolves the situation by reminding Naomi that quinceañeras are about being with your friends and celebrating among loved ones. It takes but a few minutes for Naomi to realize that she owes some apologies to her loved ones. With the help

of Elena, Naomi is able to realize that a quinceañera celebration, and being an Avaloran, mean that family and friends come first. Just as is the case with the other episodes of this season, and the series as a whole, Elena deals with the central dilemma and allows the episode to have a happy ending by fulfilling her predetermined heroic role. The following is an image from this episode:

Figure 10: Elena and Naomi in the *My Fair Naomi* episode. Copyright: Disney Junior 2016.

In comparison to the two former episodes, *My Fair Naomi* does not focus as much on the actual meaning or significance behind the quinceañera celebration. In both *A Day to Remember* and *Navidad*, Elena explains to other characters in the series what the celebrations mean. In *A Day to Remember*, the explanations are lengthy and offered throughout the entire episode (and even during the commercials). Even before the conclusion of the episode, Elena gives Isabel a detailed explanation of the importance of the holiday as they remember their deceased parents. *My Fair Naomi*, however, does not provide an explanation for the significance of the celebration. In fact, one of the most challenging decisions Naomi has to make during the preparation is her

color scheme for the big day. She finally settles on a pink and blue dress to wear, and the rest of the court wears the same colors, thus shying away from the typical vibrant colors (usually red) used to represent Latinidad (Molina-Guzmán & Valdivia, 2004, Ramirez-Berg, 2002). Interesting to note is also the fact that the celebration is for Naomi and not Elena, though the latter would have been expected given that most series that feature a quinceañera celebration honor a Latina girl. Perhaps one of the reasons why there was not much of an explanation behind the celebration was the fact that the person celebrating her quinceañera was not an Avaloran (which could be interpreted as Latina). The inclusive spirit shown by Elena sharing this cherished tradition with Naomi represents Elena's leadership through inclusion skills. Quinceañera as a trope seldom is fully contextualized and explained. Perhaps because it is a coming of age practice for girls, even though it appears often in Disney, it is not treated with the pedagogical detail of a more generic—read, less gendered—celebration. Perhaps quinceañera has reached the level of generalizability that means it can be a Latina event that could/can be celebrated by anyone.

Although it is not very common for non-Latinas to celebrate this occasion, the series showcases a situation where a non-Avaloran not only celebrates her quinceañera but is encouraged to do so by the people of Avalor. A similar instance, though non-animated, takes place in the film *McFarland, U.S.A.* (2015), which centers on a white family who recently moved to a predominately Latinx neighborhood in McFarland, California. As is the case with Naomi's situation, when the people in McFarland find out that Julie (one of the Anglo daughters) recently turned fifteen, they decide to throw her a quinceañera. The party itself is a success and the White family (that is their last name), share their happiness with all who helped organize the event. Following the party, though, some of the boys offer to take Julie on a "traditional"

quinceañera parade around town, where their car is attacked by a group of young men in another car. Although Julie only receives a small scrape on her knee, the White family is quite shaken up by the event, and that is the last we hear about the quinceañera in *McFarland, U.S.A.* What begins as a unifying celebration, ends slightly tragically. Nonetheless, the quinceañera contributes toward a Latinx-Anglo unity resolution of the plot in McFarland. So although that quinceañera had a less than immediate happy ending, it served the function of bringing Mexican Americans and Anglos together, much like Elena strives for in Avalor. *Elena of Avalor*'s quinceañera episode, however, is much easier to consume as a children-oriented Disney creation. Its immediate positive outcome accords with the structure of a children's television series where the plot resolution comes at the end of every episode.

The quinceañera episode does not contain as many ties to Latinidad as the other two episodes analyzed, which could also lead to easier consumption by non-Latinx audiences. The episode briefly mentions that the celebration is an Avaloran tradition, and other than that, there are no other details about what the celebration means or why it is important. In the concluding scenes, Elena, along with her grandmother, save the day and Naomi has a successful quinceañera. Naomi, the only central character in this series who is not an Avaloran, celebrates a coming of age event typical in *some* Latin American countries, without the knowledge about what the event symbolizes or why it is important. As far as the viewers know, Naomi does not understand that this is a coming of age event. What audiences do know is that she understands the importance of family and friends, but Naomi is usually one of the most grounded characters, and it is implied throughout almost all the other episodes that she actually knows very well how important these two elements are. Therefore, what Naomi appears to have learned from Elena and her grandmother, are things which she already knew, but just needed to be reminded of. She

did not learn anything of substance in relation to the origins and/or meaning of a quinceañera celebration. Through this watered-down representation of a quinceañera, Disney is able to attract Latina audiences, while remaining not too culturally different and thus safe for non-Latinx audiences to consume. This is a bit different from the feature film *McFarland, U.S.A.*, which was partly designed to revive Kevin Costner's career, and thus foregrounds his patriarchal story. Disney showcases a non-Latina (non-Avaloran) celebrating a special event for *some* Latinas without truly understanding what the event even means. In this way, Disney demonstrates that it also engages in ambiguous and non-specific cultural representations within the same series, thus achieving a strategic combination of specificity and ambiguity within the world of Avalor, what Joseph (2018) calls "strategic ambiguity" through their back and forth pattern within one series.

Conclusion

In 2012, Disney executives were quick to explain that Sofia from *Sofia the First* was inspired by a mixture of cultures but was not specific to any location or region. This strategy positioned her as a hybrid and ambiguous animated subject. The explanations about Sofia's background came quickly after rumors surfaced that Sofia was Disney's first Latina princess. Disney executives provided numerous statements explaining that their characters reside in fictional lands and are not rooted in real-world cultures or ethnicities. However, as I write this, I can easily count with both hands the many characters and stories that exist and take place in specific locations (animated and non-animated), such as *Aladdin* (1992, 2019), *Pocahontas (1995)*, *Mulan (1998)*, *The Princess and the Frog (2009)*, and *Ratatouille (2007)*. This denial of ethnic or racial specificity, however, has long been a Disney strategy, along with casting ethnically mixed actors to play non-White characters (in live action scenarios).

Disney plays an intricate balancing game when catering to white audiences that they want to retain as well as non-white audiences because they often employ layered representational strategies, while continuing to remain safe for the consumption of their white audiences (Wasko, 2001; Wasko, Phillips, and Meehan, 2001). In Valdivia's forthcoming work about the gender of hybridity, she brings Disney into the conversation and specifically focuses on *Moana* (2016) in the beginning of her Disney chapter. She explains that the film "…in terms of cultural politics and histories of representation, represents yet another Disney effort at utopian inclusion/co-optation of the global within its hugely profitable princess franchise, representing hybridity in terms of Disney iconography, and incorporating a wide range of hugely talented hybrid cultural workers" (Valdivia, p. 2, forthcoming). Through this chapter's examination of three key *Elena of Avalor* episodes, I make a similar argument about Disney's efforts of inclusion within its princess franchise. Part of these efforts rely on the incorporation of post-feminist "girl power" discourses, through the neoliberal assemblages of girls via the princess franchise.

Four years after the Sofia controversy, Disney introduced *Elena of Avalor* and proudly claimed her as the first Latina princess, often fluctuating between calling her a Latina and saying that her creation was inspired by Latin America. *Elena of Avalor* is actually a spin-off of *Sofia the First*, but this series has the full approval of Disney executives, including Nancy Kanter (who in 2012 clearly explained that Disney animated characters solely reside in make-believe locations), in naming her ties to Latinx cultures. Elena's skin is darker than most Disney princesses (not including Moana or Tiana), throughout the episodes the characters are constantly saying Spanish words and phrases, the series often showcases Latin American (mostly Mexican) dishes, the musical numbers usually consist of mariachis, and the characters wear vibrantly colored outfits. Additionally, the fantastical and mythical kingdom of Avalor highlights Mexico

without naming it. Many of the magical stories are based on indigenous myths and traditions, as detailed through the previous chapter. Disney deploys markers, which typically represent Latinxs on the screen to cautiously represent Latinx animated characters in their newest animated television series. Through the representation of Elena in the three episodes analyzed in this chapter, a strategy emerges wherein Disney employs diversity representational tactics to attract viewers of color (in this case Latinxs), but does so through common themes and tropes, so as to not alienate their non-Latinx viewers, thus positioning this series within their historically ambivalent inclusion of Latinidad. At the time during the Elena series when it seems as though the tropes are becoming more and more specific (especially after the *King of the Carnival* episode), Disney begins to shy away from these and provides an easily digestible (non-specific) representation for non-Latinx audiences. Although Disney proudly markets their Día de los Muertos episode by pointing out the ties to Latin American cultures, they do little to explain the significance behind the quinceañera episode. Disney is strategic in how it employs these markers of difference, and part of the strategy, within the storyline of the series, seems to involve balancing the overt Latinidad so that it remains consumable for non-Latinx audiences. Disney executives hail Elena as an "authentic" representation of Latinx cultures, but what does that authenticity mean, how are they narrating authenticity, and who is it attempting to attract?

Through their discursive construction of the first Latina princess, Disney provides a character that is embraced by young Latina girls and consumed by non-Latina girls as well. Girls of different ethnicities wear the Elena costume and purchase the Elena merchandise. Traditionally, Latin American regions have been portrayed through popular culture as different, tropical, vibrant, and musical. Disney embraces all of these markers and expands them to children's television to introduce the first Latina princess. With her olive skin, bright red dress,

small waist, and handy guitar (traditional mediated markers of Latinidad), Elena is the embodiment of a non-threatening Latinindad in animated form. Although Disney has previously found itself amidst controversies over their representations of non-white characters, it appears that Elena occupies an in-between position that has yet to stir too much trouble. Not only is she non-threatening, but she perfectly embodies Disney's attempts to expand their princess brand to include brave and spunky princesses who are not interested in finding love, another link to the series' endeavors to provide a postfeminist animated discourse. The three episodes analyzed in this chapter consist of three of the most popular themes used to represent a non-threatening Latinidad on the screen- Día de los Muertos, quinceañeras, and Navidad. It is no surprise that Disney incorporated these themes into the *Elena* narrative. The three episodes are indicative of the balancing game Disney plays with their white and non-white audiences. Disney continues to experiment with ways to continue catering to various target audiences through "universal" storylines. These universal storylines, as exemplified through *Elena of Avalor*, are more easily tamed and incorporated in fantastical lands, where Latinidad does not pose an actual threat.

Chapter 5: Fantasy Faire Courtyard Encounter: A Situated Ethnography of Disneyland's Engagement with *Elena of Avalor*

Introduction

"Tengo una sobrina que le encanta todo lo de Elena. Pasan su programa alla en el Netflix de Sonora en español. Dice Ximena que le encanta porque es la primera princesa Mexicana. Voy a tener que llamarle a Ximena por el FaceTime para que vea que si habla Español tambien aqui en Disneylandia."

"I have a niece who loves everything about Elena. They show the series in Spanish on the Netflix in Sonora. Ximena says that she loves her because she is the first Mexican princess. I am going to have to call Ximena on FaceTime so she can see that she also speaks Spanish here in Disneyland."

As I waited in line for *Elena of Avalor* to make her first appearance on July 22, 2018, at Disneyland's Fantasy Faire Courtyard, I met a family of three young adults from Sonora, Mexico. The group consisted of two sisters and their brother, all somewhere in their early to mid-twenties. As we waited in line to interact with Elena at her designated location beside the purple umbrella by the Royal Hall, we chatted about the theme park, Elena, and Mexico. The above quote came about after one of the sisters explained to me why it was important for them to see Elena on this trip. Immediately after she overheard Elena speaking to other park guests in Spanish, she was overwhelmed with excitement. Although throughout her account she made sure to tell me various times that she was waiting so that she could take a picture for her cousin, Ximena, I had a feeling that she was quite eager to see Elena herself. As she talked about Elena's bravery, the series' uniqueness, and the importance of a "princesa Mexicana,[14]" I could see that Elena held a special significance for her as well, not just for Ximena.

[14] Mexican princess

Although the sister's fandom could prove a compelling site of study, the aspect of this interaction, which stood out to me the most, was the sister's use of the term "princesa Mexicana." According to this Disney guest,[15] Elena is Disney's first Mexican princess, and during my two days at the theme park, many guests echoed these sentiments. In what follows, I outline the results of Disney's efforts to control the identity and the lived transactional space of the production of the princess at their Disneyland theme park location. I understand the princess at the park as a Disney commodity. We need to ask ourselves how Disney, as a corporation, exerts agency over the meaning of the princess, or her story, at the theme parks. As with the zones previously analyzed, the theme park location allows for the audiences to have direct interaction with Disney commodities. However, the situation at the park is dynamic and relational. What does this mean for Disney as they attempt to control their products and their meanings in the park? What specific strategies are they implementing to gain the results they seek, in a setting where audiences can interact with characters in real time?

One of the most outstanding markers of Elena's success and its foregrounding as a cultural product was the debut of the Disney princess at Orlando's Magic Kingdom park in August of 2016, just weeks after the debut of the animated televisions series. Placing Elena in the theme park after her presence on the small screen is a form of recirculation, as per the synergy typology developed by Meehan (2005, p. 124). Unique to this situation is that Elena's placement and debut at the park took place before Disney could gather solid data on the reception of the princess on the small screen. Her royal debut at Disneyworld's Magic Kingdom featured appearances by Cinderella and Girl Scouts U.S.A., thus linking the character to Disney princess

[15] For the purposes of this chapter, I will use Disney terminology to refer to the people attending the park. I will either use "guest" or "Disney guest."

history and to a mainstream can-do girl organization that highlights girl power. Elena's theme park debut took place at the Cinderella Castle stage, which is reserved for prominent Disney events. The live debut featured Craig Gerber, the executive producer and creator of *Elena of Avalor* and *Sofia the First*, who mentioned that "It was very important for us that in creating Disney's first Latina princess that we create a fairy tale that was very relatable, that was based on authentic culture, that Latino audiences could watch and feel like they were represented" (Mauney, 2106). An image from Elena's debut at the park is included below:

Figure 11: *Elena of Avalor'*s royal welcome at Disneyworld's Magic Kingdom Park in Orlando, FL. Source: https://www.wdwinfo.com

Claims of authenticity abound in Disney's promotion of *Elena of Avalor*, though as Dávila (2001) finds, this is a common way to market ethnicity in general and Latinidad in particular in the U.S. To further echo Gerber's performance of deep investment in the Latinx cultural component to his newest Disney princess, Jenna Ortega (13), who voices Elena's sister,

also explained that "this is something that us Latinas have been waiting for for a long time, so to be able to witness that in person was a dream come true" (Mauney, 2016). Ortega thus connects Elena to Latinidad across generations. Not only did both Gerber and Ortega, who are part of the creation and development of the series, make it clear that ties to the Latinx culture are present, but the Senior Vice President of Walt Disney World Parks, Jim McPhee took an extra step toward Latinidad. McPhee gave a speech about the importance of Elena where he introduced himself in Spanish and English and used a few Spanish phrases throughout his talk, thus articulating yet another major element of Latinidad in mainstream culture—the use and reliance on Spanish and sometimes the inability to learn English. The use of Spanish also often becomes a strategy to highlight authenticity. Through performances such as these and the narrative elements of leadership outlined below, Disney is attempting to reach out to girls of color (specifically Latinas) as well as sending out a message that they are transforming their princesses and heroines into leaders and role models to emulate, with the new Latina princess at the forefront of this change.

The theme park portion of my situated ethnographic study took place during July 21 and July 22, 2018 at Disneyland in Anaheim, California for a total of twenty-five and a half hours. My ethnographic approach consists of three stages, of which the theme park visit was the second and, arguably, the most important. The first and third stages consisted of gathering data via the Disneyland mobile application before and after my experience at the park. Since Elena's royal debut at the Disneyworld park in 2016, the Disneyland and Disneyworld apps show Elena appearing at both U.S. locations, during peak seasons, usually for five minute intervals three to

six times a day[16]. At the California parks, following her "royal debut," Elena mostly made her appearances at Disney's California Adventure Park.[17] Starting in the spring of 2018, however, Elena moved to the Fantasyland portion of Disneyland's Magic Kingdom park, a location reserved for prominent princesses.[18] The transitions and movements of this princess around the parks since her debut at Disney World in 2016 are more than likely due to data gathering and research conducted by Disney. Grounded in Suchar's (1997) methodological approach to photodocumentation, and drawing on Valdivia's (2008, 2011) work on mediated Latina girlhood, this situated ethnography, blends photodocumentation and participant observation to create a three stage research methodology. Disney theme parks, nationally and internationally, promote a particular version of "America." While historically foregrounding whiteness, the Disney universe, including the parks, has recently responded to undeniable, and impossible to ignore, ethnic diversity. My ethnography interrogates how the California theme park incorporates their latest Latina tween girl princess into the Disney park landscape. The remainder of this chapter will (1) outline the framework and theoretical grounding of this ethnographic study; (2) describe my unique methodological approach; and (3) provide the three themes that emerged through my ethnographic analysis (for each theme I will first describe my findings and then move on the analysis before introducing the following theme).

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[16] As of March 2019 this has changed at the Florida location (Disney World). Elena now appears prominently *inside* the Royal Hall. She is a set Hall character from 9 A.M.- 9:30 P.M. I recently conducted research at this location and my findings will be included in forthcoming versions of this project.

[17] Most character interactions happen at Disneyland's Magic Kingdom. California Adventure is known for providing less character interactions and focusing more on older demographics (e.g. through their selection of adult beverages).

[18] During the Christmas holiday season (2018-2019) Elena moved to Disney's California Adventure Park for the "¡Viva Navidad!" Street Party parade (November 9, 2018- January 8, 2019). After the holiday season, she returned to the Magic Kingdom's Fantasy Faire.

Framework and Theoretical Grounding

Disney theme parks are strategic about their layout and organization. From the early stages of Walt's quest to create a real-life fantasy universe, he was meticulous about where he wanted to place certain elements, characters, and rides in order to create a certain feel for the park guests (Colt, 2015). Baudrillard (1994) and Eco (1996), among others, argue that Disney parks in particular craft a specific kind of reality through their landscape, the layout, and the experiences they provide park guests. Of course, none of these realities are coincidental, and they are occasionally rebuilt, sometimes responding to guest requests for inclusivity, but most often taking into account national and global trends. Disney employs different signifiers to represent moments, experiences, memories, and things that do not exist, referred to by Baudrillard as "hyper-reality." Disney parks also provide simulacra experiences, where the original loses its meaning because the Disney symbology substitutes the reality. Baudrillard (1994) outlines third order simulations and explains that "Disneyland is there to conceal the fact that it is the "real" country, all of the "real" America, which *is* Disneyland…Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation." (p.25). It is the very notion that this land is imaginary, which allows it to remain so successful, as it works to represent the lived realities of various populations, fantastical and non-fantastical.

King and O'Boyle (2010) explain that "theme parks, through their use of simulacra and hyper-reality, provide "cultural mind maps" (p.6), and these "mind maps" often serve to reinforce hegemony domestically and abroad. The "mind maps" also physically manifest themselves through the actual maps of the Disney parks. For scholars interrogating Disney's practices, it is essential to pay particular attention to where Disney situates certain characters or

products. From the opening day of the Disneyland theme park in Anaheim in July of 1955, the park experience relied on the use of maps to navigate the terrain. These maps are always colorful and clearly show the borders between the different sections/themes of the park: Mainstreet U.S.A. (the only way in and out of the park), Adventureland, New Orleans Square, Critter Country, Frontierland, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland, and Mickey's Toontown.

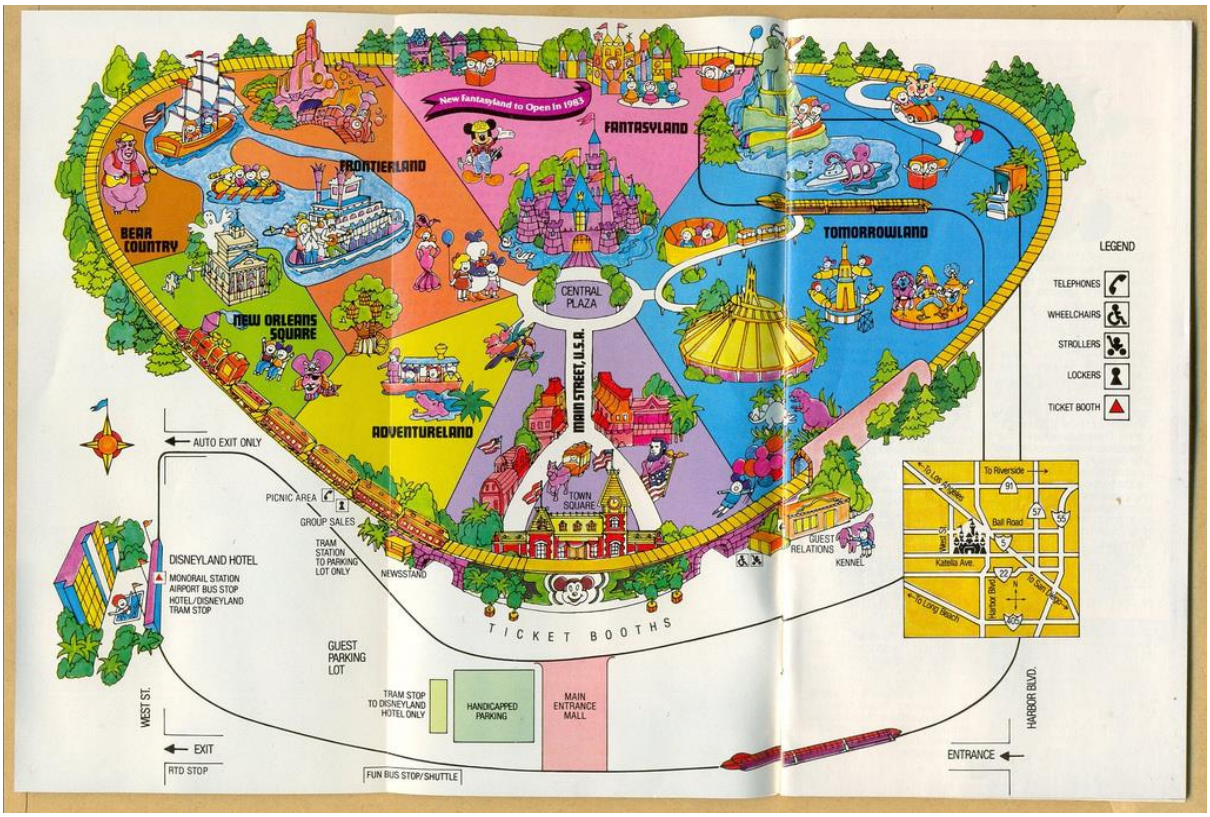

Figure 12: A Map of Disneyland from 1982. Source: Public Flickr account: https://www.flickr.com/photos/paulwrightuk/7857935238

Figure 13: A Map of Disneyland from summer of 2018. Source: my personal Disneyland mobile application.

A brief glance at the above maps demonstrates how Disneyland expanded between 1982 and 2018, but beyond the expansions and additions (i.e. Mickey's Toontown north of Fantasyland), the core elements of Disneyland remain the same. Main Street U.S.A, in particular, has hardly changed, and still continues to be the only way in and out of the park—perhaps a way

to reinforce the idealistic vision of "America" before going into the park and before stepping out into the world beyond the park premises. Main Street serves as a reminder that Disney is a contained and sanitized version of America, "a symbol of a less-troubled bygone era" (Neuman, 2008, p. 85). While the layout of the parks remains consistent and predictable, digital technologies enable Disney and its visitors to manage the park experience in an enhanced manner.

Since 2013, the official Disneyland/Disney World mobile apps[19] allow guests (and future guests) to do such things as order food at the park, access dining reservations, track characters, see wait times for lines, purchase overly priced photos, and acquire fastpasses.[20] Park guests can easily access "attractions" on the app and select categories like "characters," "restrooms," "shops," and "entertainment." By selecting "characters," park guests are able to see a list of all the characters who will be at Disneyland that day.[21] Once you select your character, the app provides the location(s) and the times of the appearances, along with a quick biography of the character. Currently, through a comparative analysis of the princesses on the Disneyland app, Elena's character description/biography is the only one that mentions "tradition" and "culture." In this way, the app's features function as an extension of the park's reinforcement of hegemony. Through the small description of Elena, and her role within the Disney universe, the park others her (Valdivia, 2017), particularly in comparison to the other princesses that circulate the park, for whom culture and tradition are not mentioned. The image of Elena's description on the Disneyland app is found below[22]:

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[19] The official name of the app is "My Disney Experience Mobile App"
[20] Fastpasses for rides can be reserved up to 60 days before your visit to the park.
[21] This feature does not allow you to access characters and character locations beyond that day or to search for the characters' appearances on previous days.
[22] This description remains the same as of June 2019 and is the same for both theme parks.

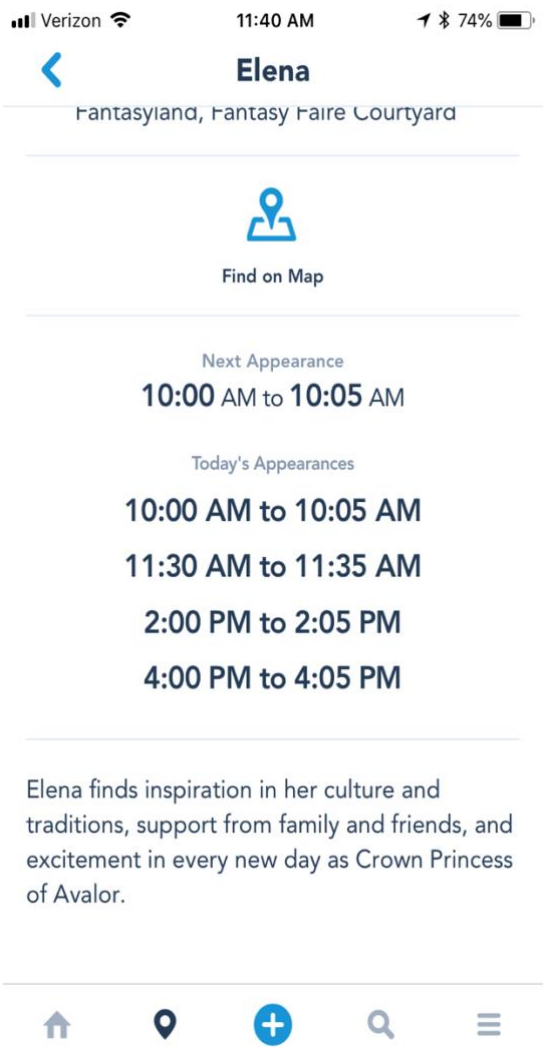

Figure 14: Elena of Avalor's appearances on June 24, 2018. Source: my personal Disneyland mobile application.

As a point of comparison, an image of Rapunzel's description on the Disneyland app is found below. Rapunzel (*Tangled*, 2010), is part of Disney's most recent batch of princesses, who showcase a different type of agency than that exerted by the earlier princesses (i.e. *Snow White* 1937). Further, Rapunzel's appearances at Magic Kingdom in Anaheim are often quite similar to Elena's. Through the image below, one can see the difference in character descriptions:

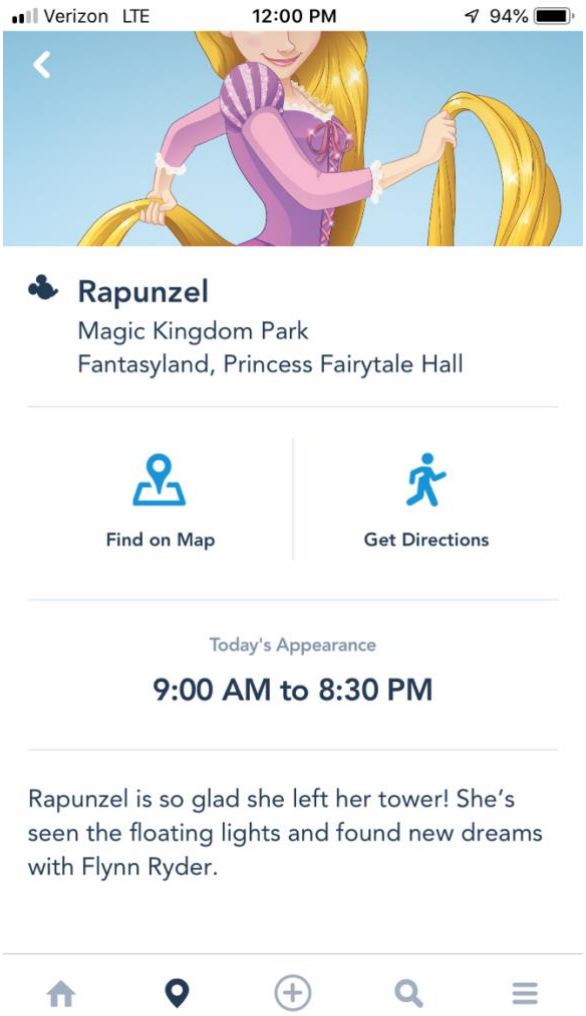

Figure 15: Rapunzel's appearances on June 24, 2018. Source: my personal Disneyland mobile application.

Both in person and through the Disneyland mobile application, Elena highlights her "culture" and "traditions" unlike other Disney princesses at the park.

Methodology

This chapter offers what I call a "modified situated ethnography" that occurred via three stages that informed one another and overlapped throughout. For this type of study, at a theme park setting, a traditional Melanoski (1961) type of ethnographic approach would not prove as effective given that people do not live in Disneyland, and they usually visit the theme park one

day at a time (although there are exceptions for season pass holders). This chapter blends a classic type of ethnographic approach (e.g. Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Geertz, 1988) with digital ethnography (e.g. Hine, 2015; Pink et al., 2016; Zorn & Underberg, 2013) to create a unique method where I visited, and interrogated, the park virtually and physically, paying careful attention to both frequency and patterns. Overall, the community at a theme park is not stable and would not allow for appropriate data collection via a traditional ethnographic lens. Further, in order to provide a robust analysis, I incorporated the digital components before and after my physical theme park visit. With the arrival of electronic mediation at the park, the relationship of space and time, as they cohere via ethnographic subjects, changes. The Melanoskian world, and its terms, has changed. Additionally, I argue that my two-day experience at the Disneyland theme park was representative of what a typical park guest would encounter given the lack of stability afforded through a theme park experience— most people travel to the park for a day or two at a time and what they experience the next time they go (maybe years later) could be entirely different. Therefore, the method I describe below proved to be the most useful given my site and my subjects.

I understand the Disneyland theme park, and its multiple digital iterations, as my text(s), blending distinct methodologies, paying particular attention to how guests interact with the park, Elena, and online systems simultaneously, I focused on how the park digitally incorporates Elena into the virtual park experience. I draw on theories of participant observation (Geertz, 1973) and photodocumentation (McCarthy et al., 2015; Suchar, 1989, 1997), with a particular emphasis on what Suchar calls “shooting scripts” to guide my photography at the park. Suchar contends that “shooting scripts provide the flexibility needed for a sociological discovery process that draws from field observations to visually ground abstractive and conceptual development” (Suchar,

1997, p.35). In addition to Suchar's photodocumentation, I draw on Jillian Rose' work on visual methodologies (2016). I took pictures to serve as markers and reminders of instances at the park. My modified approach and my particular use of images to understand meanings created at the park, operate particularly well at a theme park setting where audiences seek out characters and experiences both virtually and in real time, thus participating in a much more plural and fluid situation, where park guests often interact with the app prior to their park visit *and* in real time.

The traditional theme park experience has changed through digital technology inclusion, most of which is managed through a mobile app. Disneyland and Disneyworld have their own apps, as do many other theme parks. As previously mentioned, the application helps predict flow, crowds, and tells you when and where to meet your favorite characters (among many other things). Now at the Disneyland theme park, the park can assume, or at least predict, a level of intentionality in relation to the park guests. They can also predict this intentionality in relation to the characters. Due to the success of the Disneyland app (Cain, 2017), a new (yet different) Disney app launched in July of 2018 (Disneyland Resort, 2018), the new Play Disney Parks mobile app. Through the app, by partaking in the games available at certain lines, park guests are able to earn and collect achievements and rewards. The slogan "wait time becomes play time" promises to convert the mundane waiting experiences into interactive moments where guests can virtually engage with people all around the park. Disney is not only careful and strategic about the experiences they provide, virtually and in the flesh, but they are also careful about tracking their guests via their mediated technologies. Since downloading the Disneyland mobile app and engaging in email conversations with the resort (explained below), I have received various emails with questionnaires about my identity and my relationship to the park. This is important to understand as we continue to interrogate Disney's decisions, both at the park and on the

screen. It is not only possible that Disney is tracking the flow of mobile app users while they are at the park, but they are also tracking users pre and post Disney trips.

The first stage of this study consisted of extensive research of the Disneyland application's representation of possibility for *Elena of Avalor*, where I logged all of the princesses' appearances every morning for a thirty-day period prior to my visit to the park. The first stage is informed by digital ethnography methodological approaches (Hine, 2015). This stage also included my communications with the Disneyland theme park about the possibility of encountering Elena at the park (email communications outlined below). The second stage took place at the park, for twenty-five- and-a-half hours, over the course of two days, July 21st and 22nd, 2018. I planned my trip to Disneyland at this time on purpose, derived from the information I obtained through my correspondence with the theme park. This stage focused on participant observation and photo documentation (Collier, 1967; Suchar, 1997) to develop a thick description (Geertz, 1973), during a process where I engaged as a participant as well. The third, and final, stage took place upon my return from the park and consisted of tracking the Disneyland application's representation of possibility for *Elena of Avalor*, given the knowledge I obtained once at the park. During this time period, I modified my approach due to the information obtained once at the park. The last stage consisted of checking the application multiple times a day: 9 A.M., 12 P.M., and 2:30 P.M., 5:00 P.M. Central Time, for a thirty-day period. A visual representation of the type of approach I followed with my three-stage process is found below:

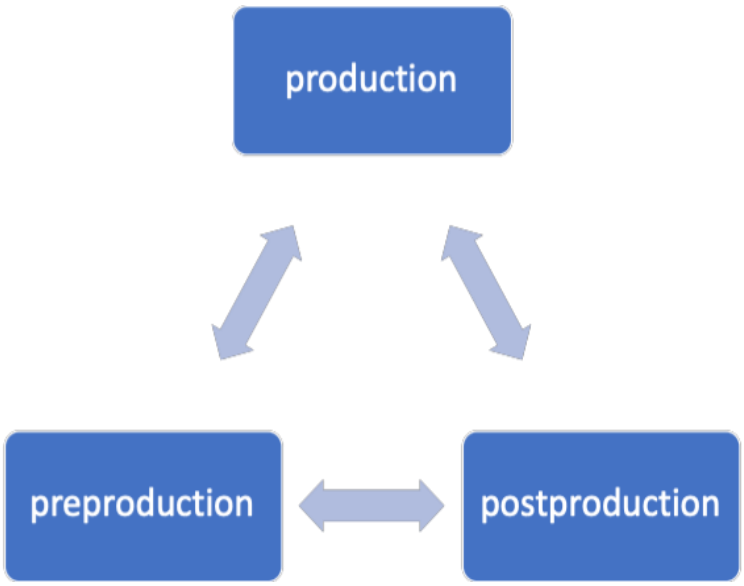

Figure 16: Visual representation of my three stage ethnographic process

Central to my method was remaining unobtrusive in order to protect my access at the theme park. Before delving into my strategies for protecting my access at the park, I must fully acknowledge that I was a guest, an audience member myself. This was evident even prior to my trip to the park. My relationship to the project requires full disclosure of my identity as a Disney fan. Like many media scholars before me, I approach this study as a scholarly critic and a fan. This dual lens allows me to shift between both understandings: the knowledge of theoretical analyses and the knowledge through my membership in consumer and fan communities. Although I am not a member of any formal *Elena of Avalor* fan community, I must acknowledge that I enjoy watching the series. As a research scholar, I remained unobtrusive, outwardly navigating my experience at the park as a fan and guest before all else. I wore Disney clothing (a different Disney t-shirt each day), stood in line with other park guests, and attended the park with my daughter and mother. Further, on the instances when I would write in my ethnographic journal for extended periods of time, I developed a back story for myself in case anyone asked. I would speak about my ethnographic journal as a type of diary, and explain that I was writing in

my diary about my experience at the park. Most of the data obtained for this chapter stemmed from observing interactions and conversations as a park guest myself.

Situated Ethnography

Communication with Disneyland Resort

Disneyland, and the other parks in the Disney family, strategically place their characters in certain locations, for certain periods of time, near specific landmarks, and even during certain seasons (i.e. *Coco* shows, appearances, and/or parades during Día de los Muertos and *Elena of Avalor* during their Navidad parade). In this chapter, I trace the commodity flow (McAllister & Giglio, 2006) of Elena and identify trends that take place at Disneyland over the span of sixty-two days— thirty days before and thirty days after my visit to the park, and over a period of twenty-five and a half hours at the physical park location during July of 2018 (timeline to be explained in-depth later in this section). Prior to my visit to the park, I contacted the Disneyland Resort to inquire about Elena's appearances at the park. I asked the park representatives if they could help me figure out when Elena would be making appearances at the park during the summer of 2018 because I was interested in seeing her during my visit. The park representatives responded with the following communication on January 31, 2018:

> Dear Diana, Thank you for your email regarding the Disneyland Resort. Unfortunately Elena of Avalor is not a set character meet-n-greet. Her meeting schedule changes on a daily basis. She generally makes her appearances in Disney California Adventure in the early afternoon, but this is always subject to change. I hope this information helps and we look forward to your visit!

During a later communication with the Disneyland Resort in March of 2018, I specifically asked when I would have better luck running into Elena at the park, to which a Disney representative replied the following on March 8, 2018:

> Dear Diana, Thank you for your email regarding the Disneyland Resort. Elena does not yet have a set schedule like some of the other princesses, but weekends during peak

> seasons are probably the best option for a better chance to meet all your favorite characters. I hope this information helps and we look forward to your visit!

The emails above contain a combination of personalization and identical opening and closing lines. As previously noted (and confirmed via the first email communication with the park representative), Elena primarily began to appear at California Adventure Park and later migrated to the Magic Kingdom Park. Although the migration to Magic Kingdom is an upgrade for any Disney princess, Elena is still not "a set character meet-n-greet.[23]" Currently, in the Disneyland theme park universe, *Elena of Avalor* as a commodity does not warrant a solidified set of park appearances or as many appearances as other princesses during the summer months. Given the information received from the email communication, I decided to plan my visit on a weekend in the middle of July to maximize my chances of interacting with *Elena of Avalor*.

Disneyland, July, 2018

In what follows I set the stage for my situated ethnography at the physical park setting, before delving into the three themes that emerged during the Disneyland trip on July 21 and 22, 2018. Disneyland opened its doors to park guests on July 17, 1955. Sixty-three years and four days later, my heart raced with excitement at the thought of entering the park with my five-year-old daughter.[24] It was not racing due to the anxiety of the research project that awaited me, but rather at the thought that I was about to cross a threshold into what many people consider to be "the happiest place on earth." At this point, I knew I had to acknowledge my role not only as a scholarly critic, but also as a fan and avid consumer of Disney products. It is nearly impossible

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[23] This has now changed at the Florida location where Elena is a set character inside the Royal Hall.

[24] I must mention that my then five-year-old daughter accompanied me on this research trip. My mother was kind enough to offer assistance for both full days at the park, where she mostly served as her sole caretaker, while I carried out my research. This research trip would not have been possible without my mother's help.

not to be a Disney consumer, regardless of whether or not you have children. Even though I typically roll my eyes when people say Disney is magic, here I was—grinning, giddy, and my heart was racing. I was hopeful that having access to both a critical perspective and a fan's perspective would prove an asset on this trip.

On the first day, I arrived at the park at 7:45 A.M. to find out that "magic hour" was only for Disney resort guests. "Magic hour" grants you early entrance to the theme park. Therefore, I stood in line for over an hour in anticipation of the park gates opening, and while I waited, I observed those around me. I immediately noticed at least eight families around me communicating solely in Spanish. The entrance to the park, in front of the gates, is divided into approximately twelve lines. Some of those Spanish-speaking families were in my line, while others were in nearby lines. A family of six, in the line directly beside mine, was wearing Mexico national team soccer jerseys, with what appeared to be their respective names/nicknames on the backs (i.e. Miguel, Dani, Eddy). I mention this particular family and the amount of Spanish that I heard around me before entering the park because it sets the backdrop for my observations in this chapter, particularly those focusing on Mexico and Elena's use of Spanish.

Immediately after the gates opened, I made my way to the Fantasy Faire. Given my constant use of the Disneyland app, I knew exactly how to get there, without ever having been there. I did not need the paper map offered at the park entrance; I had the image from the virtual map engrained in my memory. Disneyland's Fantasy Faire is nestled in the Fantasyland portion of the park, immediately to the left of Sleeping Beauty's castle (arguably the most iconic Disney landmark). The faire is a picturesque village that looks like it came right out of a story book, though not specific to any one fairy tale. Below is an image of Fantasy Faire from the first day of my research trip:

Figure 17: Disneyland's Fantasy Faire Courtyard on July 21, 2018. Source: my personal photo archive.

In this circular region, you can meet princesses at the Royal Hall, watch a variety of performances at the Royal Theatre, and shop for princess trinkets at the Fairy Tale Treasure Shop. Fantasy Faire is the perfect setting for princess lovers.

The Royal Hall is the most advertised portion of Fantasy Faire and the one with the longest lines. It is a large and dimly lit building, where park guests take turns going inside to meet princesses. At any given point in time, the Royal Hall has three princesses waiting to greet guests (each at a separate sector of the Hall), but the park employees say that they never know what princesses will be in the Hall until that day. Here, each princess devotes about one minute to each guest, where she talks to the individuals about a variety of topics and takes a few pictures with them. As soon as you finish interacting/taking pictures with the princess, you make your

way around the corner to meet the next one.[25] During my time waiting to enter the Royal Hall, I asked one of the "royal attendants" to explain to me, which princesses usually resided inside the Hall. She replied that "princesses come and go as they please." The royal attendants, along with all those working at the Fantasy Faire, and the park at large, go to great lengths to preserve the magic of Disney by reciting scripted responses: they say that Minnie has to head out early in order to help Mickey with some chores, that Cinderella is running late because she had a carriage malfunction, and that later on in the day Snow White will be baking cupcakes with the dwarves. The reiteration of the magic narrative at Disney theme parks allows the space and the characters the ability to serve as representations of reality, while being removed enough from reality to avoid criticisms of their portrayals because, after all, they are portraying fantasy.

This scripted magic narrative is seamlessly transferred to the narrative of Elena at the park, particularly as the "royal attendants" describe her engagements throughout the day. When pressed about why Elena will not be able to make an appearance that day or why she is running late, the "royal attendants" described her engagements in Avalor, the make-believe kingdom where she resides, and carefully took the time to outline her duties. For example, when I asked one of them if she would be showing up to her first appearance of the day, the attendant responded by stating that "I know earlier today she had a few issues come up with some of the Jaquins at the palace. Maybe that's why she is a little late." In the series jaquins are mystical, flying creatures that are tasked with protecting Avalor. They are Elena's primary mode of transportation throughout the kingdom and are central to her defeating the evil forces that she encounters in her kingdom and beyond. Part of the reality/magic hybrid hinges upon the highly

[25] This set up is a bit different in the Florida location, where two princesses inhabit the Hall alongside one another.

scripted Disney cast members, whether they be the actors playing the characters, the "royal attendants," or even the employees selling Dole Whip. If you are employed by a Disney theme park, you are scripted and must follow performance and behavior rules (O'Connell, 2015).

In the previous chapter, I proposed the concept of *fantastical universalism,* which can also apply to the embodied version of Elena (and the references to her kingdom) at the park, wherein park guests may wonder what is the original and what is the simulation, as the lines become blurred. The Project on Disney (1995), outline their experiences with the Disney theme park's construction of reality as they note that "when the original is Disney World, then you might say that the resulting image is not a cousin to reality, but a first cousin once removed" (p.27). If the Elena and the Avalor at the park function as some type of hyperreal cousin, we must interrogate the relationship of this Latina cousin to girlhood Latinidad beyond the park gates because the representations Disney disseminates (both at the park and on the screen) inform people's understandings of reality. In the following section, I outline and analyze the three most prominent themes that emerged during my twenty-five-and-a-half hours at the Disneyland theme park during July of 2018, along with the thirty days before and after the trip: (1) The purification and fixity of Elena and her kingdom as Mexican rather than Latinx; (2) Elena's pedagogical function as a safe Spanish language instructor; and (3) Disneyland's overrepresentation of possibility and underrepresentation of presence of Elena.

La Princesa Mexicana.[26] Over the course of my two-day visit to Disneyland during the summer of 2018, I found that the Disneyland theme park contained the least amount of fabricated ambiguity out of my three case studies. The theme park was the zone with the most prominent positioning of Elena as a specific version of Latinidad as Mexican rather than an all-

[26] The Mexican Princess

encompassing pan-Latinx character. While Disney has a long history of representing Latinidad in ambiguous ways (Valdivia 2008c, 2011), when Latinidad forms a part of the narrative, it is often subtle or not part of the central story. Additionally, Latinidad is often showcased through a sidekick type of character. However, since its inception, *Elena of Avalor*, the television series, has arduously worked to present a different type of narrative. Often referencing their complex "research" practices, the creative team highlights the series' links to Latinidad and Latin America (Whyte, 2018) seemingly shying away from previous ambiguous representations by highlighting Elena's "authenticity." However, as previous chapters have illustrated, through its claims to authenticity, the series contains a wide variety of instances that rely on a representation of ambiguous Latinidad. Earlier I argued that Disney seems to have created a pattern or a rhythm for the animated series, where they roll out two or three episodes relying on specificity, and follow that with three or four ambiguous representations of Latinidad. This strategy allows for a safe consumption of Latinidad that will not alienate the white audience members. My two-day visit to the Disneyland theme park, however, provided a vastly different experience. Rather than notice a rhythm of ambiguity and specificity, I only witnessed specificity. This specificity, however, was not Latina, but rather quite a specific Mexican embodiment of the princess at the park.

Over the course of two days I observed a specific Mexicanidad through the character of Elena, the references to her make-believe kingdom of Avalor, and how audiences reacted to her. As such, the park location as a setting did not provide a back and forth of culture mixing, something which happens throughout the series and the promotion of series. All too often the media implement ambiguous strategies when depicting Latinidad or through their inclusion of Latinx characters. Nonetheless, the number of Mexican identities represented in mediated

fictional settings is more than other Latinx populations and this resonates with the actual demographics in this country. Whereas through its televised and online mediated representation, Elena incorporates other Latinidades, the embodiment of the princess at the park does not allow room for much else other than a Mexicanidad. I witnessed Elena's Mexicanidad both through the audience's interpretations and interactions with her, and through her interactions with them and her script.

Elena showcases her Mexicanidad. During my first day at the park, my daughter and I had a lengthy interaction with Elena during her first appearance of the day. Although she was late, she did not seem to disappoint those of us waiting for her. She took her time with each of the guests in line, hugged children, took pictures, shared stories, and signed autographs. The Disneyland app highlights Elena's appearances by marking the five-minutes when she will be present at Fantasy Faire. I soon learned that those five minutes on the app are used to mark when the line opens and closes. In other words, if the app says Elena will be at the Courtyard from 10:00 A.M.-10:05 A.M., the royal attendants close off her line with a chain so that no one else will get in line after 10:05 A.M. Elena actually spends more than five minutes at the Courtyard, but the end of the five minute intervals are used to mark when the park will no longer allow guests to join the line. Most of Elena's appearances last about fifteen minutes, and they actually do not take place *under* the purple umbrella, as advertised by the royal attendants and the app. The umbrella is only used to mark the beginning of the line. Below is an image of the purple umbrella twenty minutes before Elena's first appearance on my first day at the park:

Figure 18: Disneyland's Fantasy Faire on July 21, 2018. Source: my personal photo archive.

The image below shows the end of the line, where the royal attendants close the chain after the five-minute interval has concluded:

Figure 19: Disneyland's Fantasy Faire Courtyard on July 21, 2018. Source: my personal photo archive.

A sign at the end of the line is supposed to indicate, which princess/princesses will appear in the Courtyard at that time, but they did not include any of the names on either of the days that I was at the park, which often led to confusion among the guests. Typically, the confused guests did not have the mobile app to guide them through their character encounters.

The lengthy conversation on our first day, which I referenced above, concluded with Elena asking my daughter if she liked tamales or enchiladas. This question came immediately after my mother asked her what was her favorite part about being Disney's first Latina princess, to which she responded "estoy muy orgullosa de compartir mi cultura, mi idioma, y mi comida."[27] As soon as she mentioned food, she turned to my daughter and asked her "te gustan

[27] I am very proud to share my culture, my language, and my food.

los tamales o las enchiladas, princesita?"[28] It is not an uncommon practice to use traditional Mexican meals to represent Latinidad in the media. We see this especially with representations of Día de los Muertos and pan de muerto.[29] Although people in other parts of the world are familiar with, and consume, tamales, enchiladas, and even pan de muerto, these foods are considered Mexican staples, and the Elena at the Disneyland theme park articulates her Mexicanidad by referencing these Mexican foods. After my daughter answered her question, Elena explained, "pues a mi me encantan las enchiladas y los tamales. Son mis comidas favoritas."[30] Not only does the Elena at the park reference Mexican foods, but she explains that they are her favorites.

Given that we were the second people in line, when our time with Elena was over, it proved challenging to overhear her conversations with all the other guests in line behind us. I decided to position myself to the side of the Royal Hall, where I was able to sit on a bench and have a direct line of view to the princess and the guests at the meet and greet station. However, from this location hearing full conversations proved challenging. From time to time, I would stand up, approach the station, and pretend to snap a few pictures, while attempting to listen to her conversations with other audience members. I do not believe this stood out, given that so many park guests take pictures of characters interacting with other audience members. Within at least four separate conversations that I was able to hear during her first appearance, Elena mentioned that Avalor was teeming with "culture." She mentioned this to Spanish-speakers and non-Spanish speakers alike. During one of her conversations in English with a young girl and her

[28] Do you like tamales or enchiladas, little princess?
[29] A traditional sweet bread, which is baked and consumed on the days leading up to day of the dead.
[30] Well, I love enchiladas and tamales. They are my favorite foods.

caretaker, both of whom phenotypically appeared to be white, Elena said "I love teaching young girls about where I am from and how beautiful Avalor is. We have so many traditions that a lot of people do not know about." Following this statement, Elena said something to the young girl, which I was not able to hear, but by the intonation, it sounded like a question. I also gathered that it was a question because of the statement the young girl followed up with: "eating tacos and singing with mariachis?" The young girls' reply sounded more like a question, but Elena immediately jumped in and said "Exactamente! Muy bien!"[31] Although in this particular instance, Elena did not mention the Mexican elements or Mexicanidad herself, it led me to wonder if there was something implied in her question that prompted the young girl to answer with a reference to mariachis and tacos, again typical markers of Mexicanidad.

Audiences highlight Elena's Mexicanidad. For Elena's next showing on my first day at the park (11:30 A.M.), I experienced a unique situation. Given some of my cousins live close to Disneyland, my mother asked them to join us at the park. Although they knew that I was on a research trip, they were more than eager to come say hello and venture around the park with my mother and daughter. Having my cousins stand with me in line and visit with Elena, proved an asset because it allowed me to feel more comfortable in terms of protecting my access at the park. In other words, it allowed me to feel more comfortable about showing up in line again to greet Elena. My plan was to tell Elena that my cousin was eager to see her and that we were simply accompanying her. Although this probably would not have stood out, it was constantly on my mind as I was careful not to lose my access at the park. Disney is notorious for kicking people out of their parks who do not act according to park guidelines. Further, they also restrict access to scholars. After my cousins caught up with us, one of them said she was familiar with

[31] Exactly! Very good!

Elena, but she had never seen any of the shows.[32] She said she knew Disney had a new Latina princess that came out "al mismo tiempo que *Coco.*"[33] She then asked "creo que es Mexicana, no?"[34] Given that my cousin had never seen the series, I briefly explained the nature of Avalor and how it is supposed to represent various Latin American regions. She responded by saying that since they came out at the same time, she assumed that *Elena* and *Coco* were both Disney representations of Mexico. I also explained to her that *Elena* actually came out almost a year-and-a-half before *Coco*.

The following day at the park, a different woman was playing Elena. This time, for her first appearance, I waited in line with my daughter, again, but was not the first person in line. Before getting in line (again, I arrived at the park much earlier than her first appearance), my daughter rode rides at Neverland. I did not join her and instead ventured around Fantasy Faire, and later joined the Elena line, about ten minutes before she was supposed to make her first appearance. I was surprised that there were a few people in line ahead of me. This morning, the crowd was much louder, and they even cheered for Elena as she made her way to her final destination. Minutes after Elena made her grand entrance, my daughter joined me in line and we waited for our turn with the princess. The first young girl in line appeared to be a tween. She was wearing an Elena dress, and she had been in line for over twenty-five minutes. When she saw Elena she shouted "I love you Elena" in English. Once she was finally able to meet Elena, their entire encounter seemed very emotional, and to this day I find it difficult to describe. Although I was not able to hear much from where I was standing, I was able to sneak out of line a few times in order to get closer and attempt to hear what they were saying. During one of the instances

[32] She is thirty-two-years-old and does not have children.
[33] At the same time as *Coco*
[34] I think she is Mexican, right?

when I was able to squeeze near the front of the line to hear their interaction, I noticed that Elena and the young girl hugged four times. At one point, the young girl looked like she was on the verge of tears as she explained "los regalos son de Mexico.[35]" The young girl had brought gifts for Elena. From where I was standing, one of the gifts appeared to be a yellow bracelet. Below are pictures from the gift-giving interaction:

Figure 20: Elena of Avalor and audience member interact on July 22, 2018. Source: my personal photo archive.

[35] The presents are from Mexico

Figure 21: Elena of Avalor and audience member interact on July 22, 2018. Source: my personal photo archive.

At first, Elena closed her eyes to heighten the surprise effect. She was overjoyed as soon as she opened one of the boxes and found the yellow bracelet. This instance provides yet another link between Elena and Mexicanidad: the young girl chose to bring her something from Mexico. Whether or not she was bringing Elena a gift from her home, her family's home, or a recent vacation location, she made a strategic choice to gift her something from Mexico. Given that her interaction with the princess was highly emotional, one can assume that this young girl is knowledgeable about the series and Elena at large. Although I tried to move as close as I could to the meet-and-greet location, I was not able to see what her other gifts were.

Shortly following this encounter, and a few others (with younger girls), I started a conversation with the people directly in front of me in line, the group referenced in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. The group consisted of two women and a man. The two women appeared to be in their early mid-twenties. We started a conversation organically because they asked me about the Disneyland app that I was using. They wanted to figure out how to track the different characters and, given that by this point, I had unofficially declared myself an expert, I gave them a brief tutorial as we waited our turn in line. Our conversation was casual, and at one point, I asked them where they were from. One of the women told me that she was from Sonora, Mexico, and I asked if they watched *Elena of Avalor* in Sonora. She immediately responded by saying "Claro que si! La vemos en Netflix Latino America y esta en Español.[36]" She explained that their niece had developed a bit of an obsession with the series and that they were going to try to "video chat" her via FaceTime when it was their turn to take a picture with Elena. The other cousin chimed in and said "A Ximena le encanta porque es la primera princesa Mexicana.[37]" Ximena, I would later find out, is the cousin, whom they tried to facetime. Unfortunately, their facetime efforts were not successful, but the family seemed to have a great time talking to Elena and taking pictures.

Given that we were directly in line behind the Sonoran family, as soon as they left, we said goodbye to them and made our way towards Elena. Thankfully, this was a different actress, and she did not recognize us. After an almost five-minute exchange with the princess[38] (which I explain later), my mother and daughter asked Elena whether she preferred tamales or enchiladas

[36] Of course. We watch it on Nextflix Latin America and it is in Spanish.
[37] Ximena loves her because she is the first Mexican princess.
[38] I recorded this conversation on my phone, as many people do when meeting characters at the park.

(this was based on our previous conversation with the other princess where she asked my daughter which one of the two she preferred). Elena responded by saying that her favorite food "en todo el mundo[39]" were tamales because her grandma had the best recipe in all of Avalor. She further explained that it was a family recipe that had been handed down for many years. This moment highlights how audiences interpret Elena's Mexicanidad, based on previous encounters. Though my mother was aware of my project, she insisted that she solely asked Elena this question because she was convinced that it was the same woman who played her the day before. By finding out her food preference, her goal was to prove or disprove her theory about who the actress was. While attempting to prove her theory, the actress who played Elena at the park that day was confronted with a direct reference to Mexicanidad, and immediately responded with a statement that not only highlighted her Mexicanidad, but also referenced a history of tradition. Further, by explaining that it was her favorite food "in all the world" she positioned herself within the scope of Mexicanidad.

Aside from the frequent references to Mexican cuisine, both of the Elenas that I observed at the park spoke Spanish fluently. Not too long after noticing their use of Spanish, I began to realize that they incorporated Spanish phrases that are typically used in Mexico, phrases that some might even consider Mexican slang. During one interaction on my first day, one of the adults in a group of picture-takers asked her a question that I was unable to hear. Elena looked surprised and responded by saying "a poco?" "Poco" means little, but the phrase is commonly used in Mexico to mean "oh, really?" This is typically said in response to something unexpected or surprising. This was part of a conversation that had taken place solely in Spanish. During another instance, a young girl shared with Elena that she had ridden Space Mountain twice

[39] In all the world

already, to which Elena replied, "Qué padre! Para la proxima me invitas.[40]" The literal translation for "padre" is father, but people use this phrase in Mexico means "how cool!" or "how awesome!" I overheard Elena use "Qué padre!" a few times during my park visit. Not only was Elena communicating (quite prominently) at a Disney park in a language other than English, but she was doing so by often relying on phrases commonly used in Mexico.

Elena as Spanish pedagogy. The Elenas I encountered at the park spoke fluent Spanish and were eager to speak to audiences in Spanish, even when it was clear that the audience members did not understand what they were saying. As such, I find that Elena serves a type of pedagogical function at the Disneyland theme park, which represents the Spanish language in an easily consumable form. Although the women playing Elena are real human beings, the Spanish references they made are contained within the land of Avalor and the Disneyland theme park at large. Disney is cautiously implementing these strategies first and foremost at their park locations, perhaps in order to gauge audience reception of the Spanish language, particularly at a point in our nation's history where Spanish is readily condemned (e.g. Hauser & Santos, 2015; Reuters, 2015). Further, Disneyland conducts ample research to investigate their Mexican audience composition. It is highly probable that Disney conducted focus group analyses before bringing the princess to their park locations, and they more than likely continue to carry out this type of research following her establishment as a character at the park.

Shortly after my visit to California, I stumbled upon a YouTube video by Leo Camacho entitled "Speaking Spanish with Elena of Avalor." Most of the content on Camacho's YouTube channel focuses on Disney (e.g. videos such as Food and Wine Festival at Disney's California Adventure, Weirdest Disney Crush, Disneyland With My Parents, and many more). In his video,

[40] How cool! Next time you should invite me.

Camacho explains that he is at "the Magic Kingdom," though he does not specify at which park. Given that his other videos all take place in California, it is safe to assume that he is at Disneyland. Before he meets Elena, Camacho notes that "we are finally getting some representation on that royal front," (LeoCamacho, 2017), referencing Elena's Latinidad and Disney's much awaited representation of Latinx royalty.

As soon as Camacho meets Elena, she calls him a "prince" and tells him that she is learning how to rule her kingdom. After asking him for tips on how to rule, she gives him her own tips for ruling. Her strategies for being a good ruler involve being "kind and funny" along with "eating tres leches.[41]" She concludes her royal tips by telling him that a final strategy for ruling properly is to "always practice your Spanish, too" (ibid). She looks at Camacho seriously and says "Spanish is very important" and then begins speaking to him in Spanish. Camacho tells Elena that he only speaks a little Spanish, and she responds by telling him that he has to practice. She gives him a basic Spanish lesson of about three phrases, one of them being "Hola. Mi nombre es Leo.[42]" Their interaction concludes with them taking a picture and Camacho leaving the encounter noting that "me enamore con esa princesa.[43]" He follows up this statement by explaining how important it is that she embraces her culture and allows others to embrace it as well. Camacho equates culture to language, and shares that he is determined to continue practicing his Spanish following his encounter with Elena at the park.

Although Camacho's experience with Elena was recorded, uploaded to YouTube, and perhaps even rehearsed, during my two days at Disney, I encountered similar experiences. Prior

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41 A sponge cake made with three types of milks; often claimed by people of Mexico as having originated there.
42 Hi. My name is Leo.
43 I fell in love with that princess.

to my trip, I remember having a few conversations with my mother about whether or not Elena would speak Spanish at the park. I explained to her that I did not think Disney would make that a requirement for hiring, and followed up my explanation by highlighting how uncommon it was for U.S. Disney theme park characters to communicate in languages other than English. I also explained that the series showcases Spanish phrases on and off, but never entire monologues (at least not yet). Ultimately, I was surprised by how often Elena communicated with audiences in Spanish- entire conversations, sentences, questions, even monologues, at the park, regardless of their apparent Spanish knowledge. This could point towards a Disney strategy aiming to highlight and assert her "authenticity" through language.

During our first encounter with Elena, on July 21, 2018,[44] Elena initiated her conversation with us in Spanish. As I explained through the previous theme, this was our first time meeting the princess in the flesh and we were the second group in line. Given that we were speaking quite loudly, it is possible that Elena heard us communicating with one another in Spanish. Instead of saying "hello." Elena looked at my daughter and asked "¿hablas español? ¿Si? ¡Igual que yo! ¿Como te llamas?[45]" Elena's "yes" was in response to my daughter nodding her head following her initial question. We conversed for about one minute fully in Spanish, and then I asked her "¿Cual es tu parte favorite de ser princesa?[46]" She replied: "Compartir my cultura y mi idioma.[47]"The Elena we encountered at the park highlighted her culture and language as central to her princess role. Additionally, she is the first Disney character at a U.S.

[44] This meeting, like all our other meetings with Elena, was recorded on my phone.
[45] Do you speak Spanish? Yes? Just like me! What is your name?
[46] What is your favorite part about being a princess?
[47] Sharing my culture and my language

theme park location to engage in full conversations with park guests in a language other than English.

Through the exploration of my previous theme, her fixed Mexicanidad, I highlight a conversation where my mother asked Elena to explain her favorite part about being a Latina princess. My mother specifically asked the question as it related to her Latinidad, and not princesshood in general, although this question was posed without me knowing she was going to do so. As previously addressed, in answering this question, Elena highlights her joy in sharing her "culture, language, and food." Language forms a central aspect of how Elena not only identifies herself, but how she identifies her importance within the Disney universe. Like Leo Camacho from the YouTube video, Elena also often conflated Spanish with culture, as she explained to other park guests about her pedagogical role within the theme park and Disney at large.

Following the above encounter, I was able to note pieces of a conversation between Elena and a family, that phenotypically appeared to be white. Elena explained to the family the following: "I love teaching young girls about where I am from and how beautiful the land of Avalor is. We have so many traditions and our language is just so beautiful. You know, a lot of people do not know about these things." Although I am not sure what the first part of that conversation entailed (the portion where the family addressed Elena), I was able to hear what appeared to be a response from Elena about what she "loves." Elena's response is layered and touches on the various aspects that allow her to perform a pedagogical function at the Disneyland theme park. She specifically highlights "teaching." She follows up "teaching" by stating that the teaching is directed towards "young girls," as opposed to the Disneyland park guests at large, or Disney viewers at large. When Elena engages the idea of where she is "from," she is positioning

herself as an outsider in comparison to other Disney characters and stories. She references the land of Avalor, which is used to stand in for a mixture of Latin American lands, and explains that it is "beautiful." By engaging in these practices, Elena narrates Avalor as a nonthreatening zone.

Even when the park guests did not address Elena in Spanish, I constantly noticed Elena using Spanish phrases throughout her encounter with various groups. At one point, during a conversation with an older man (who appeared to be White), I heard Elena say "gracias,[48]" "excelente,[49]" and "adios,[50]" at different points throughout their interaction. This happened fairly often throughout both of my days at the park. Most notably, Elena would often say goodbye to non-Spanish speaking girls by saying, "adios princesa.[51]" In this way, Elena solidifies her role as a pedagogical tool for non-Spanish speakers, and at the same time performs authenticity through language. She does not necessarily fulfill that role for those of us who speak Spanish, but rather highlights a connection or a similarity. Even when she is addressing those of us who speak Spanish, in Spanish, Elena showcases not only her ability to communicate with us in our mother tongue, but she also provides a safe display of the language for people who do not understand it.

My analysis of Elena's use of Spanish is informed by Urciuoli's (1996) investigation of how and when Spanish is used to achieve different purposes. Although they have officially included Spanish at the park, Disney is still able to minimize, or altogether take it away, at any given moment. Consistent with Urciuoli's findings of Spanish use in inner spheres and outer spheres, Elena's safe and consumable Spanish becomes a commodity at the Disneyland theme park location. She notes that "Languages other than English become ethnically safe when used in

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48 thank you
49 excellent
50 goodbye
51 goodbye princess

carefully scripted contexts: print and electronic media, emblematic language in festivals and parades, waiters with accents at ethnic restaurants" (ibid., p.55). Urciuoli further explains that in the inner sphere, language (specifically Spanish) is messy and accepted, mostly among members of the in-group. Language in the outer sphere, however, is highly policed and structured. As part of the outer sphere, the Disneyland theme park showcases Spanish through its only Spanish-speaking princess character.

The fact that the Spanish-speaking Elena is contained at the park, where Disney can mold her in real-time, not only makes risk averse sense, but also positions a character who communicates in Spanish within the outer sphere of language policing. Taking a leap of this kind via an animated television representation, however, would involve the permanent existence of a character speaking in full sentences and carrying on full conversations in Spanish (something which has yet to happen in the Disney universe). Elena not only provides a character who can communicate with Spanish-speaking park guests in Spanish, but she also serves a pedagogical role for the non-Spanish speaking guests. As she translates sentences and says small phrases to people in Spanish, she is serving as a teacher. This type of language acquisition pedagogy is reminiscent of Nickelodeon's *Dora the Explorer* (Harewood & Valdivia, 2005). Similar to Dora, through the embodiment of an animated character at their theme park (a character that takes on flesh form), Disney is able to showcase the Spanish language in a way that does not present too much of a threat to the nation.

Further, like Leo Camacho from the YouTube videos, Elena often conflates language and culture. When Elena mentions "sharing her culture and her language," as her favorite part of being a princess, she is not referring to sharing these with the people of Avalor, as they all speak the same language and form part of the same cultural mythical universe. Rather, Elena is relating

her role of princess to her actual function at the park, beyond the role assigned to her on the screen. Therefore, Elena is explaining her role as a pedagogical tool employed by Disney to educate audiences (in this case the audiences at the park), about a specific culture and language. This appears to be an extension of the assertion of her authenticity through difference. This is unique to Elena, and Disney's first engagement with Latinidad in princess form, because she is one of a few (if not the only) princess to position her culture as her "favorite" aspect of being a princess, something which she repeatedly states at the park.

Finally, as Elena references Avalor, which is supposed to represent a mix of Latin American countries, she allows Avalor to appear as a non-threatening, magical zone. If we are to think of Avalor as a representation of some magical Latina American region, this is significant. Elena incorporates language and traditions into her answer and thus further drives the narrative of herself as an outsider (Ramirez-Berg, 2002). She also relies on media tropes used to represent Latinidad, such as representations of Latinxs as traditional people, who are often closer to nature.

Domesticity for a safe consumption of Spanish. During the visit with Elena when my cousins joined us, Elena recognized us from the first visit and welcomed us back. We were the first people in line this time and Elena immediately started talking to us in Spanish, even though we came to visit her with additional people (my cousins). Perhaps she assumed that because we were together, we all spoke Spanish. Regardless, she was quick to ask my daughter "y a quien me trajiste esta vez?[52]" in reference to my cousin. She did not address my cousin as much as she did my daughter and ultimately just took a picture with her and said that it was nice to meet her. Of particular importance when it comes to the picture with my cousin is her conversation surrounding how to pose for the picture. She suggested my cousin pose with one hand on her hip

[52] and who did you bring me this time?

and slightly bend her leg in front of her. She modeled the pose for my cousin and said “Asi. Bien linda.[53]” The picture they took is below:

Figure 22: Elena of Avalor and audience member interact on July 21, 2018. Source: my personal photo archive.

Immediately after this interaction, the conversation Elena had with my daughter consisted of complementing her on her attire and asking her if she owned any of her clothing. Elena asked “tienes ropa mia?[54]” My daughter interpreted that to mean clothing from the series or clothing featuring Elena on it, so she immediately responded by telling her that she had an Elena dress, Elena shoes, a scepter (the magic wand-like device, which Elena uses to cast spells and perform magic), and a set of flannel pajama pants. The rest of their conversation focused on my

53 Like this. Very cute.
54 Do you have my clothing?

daughter's dress, her accessories, and other articles of clothing that she owns, Elena and non-Elena specific. Elena concluded the conversation by asking my daughter if she owned a lot of shoes.

These types of interactions were not just present when she instructed my cousin on how to pose or when she asked my daughter about her attire/accessories. They were also present through her conversations with other park guests, particularly through her focus on young girls' clothing. On our second day at the park, Elena, once again (though this was a different woman playing Elena) asked my daughter about her clothing. Following a short exchange about my daughter's dress collection, Elena asked her what her plans were for the rest of the day. Elena suggested that the next time my daughter come to the park, they could meet with her sister, Isabel, and go to the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique. Although Elena did not specify what they would do at the boutique, this is the location where young children (typically girls) undergo princess makeovers. According to the Disneyland Resort Website "with the wave of a wand, Bibbidi Bobbidi Botique offers head-to-toe pampering for budding bluebloods suitable for even the most castle-worthy occasion" (Disneyland Resort, 2018). Packages range from $64.99- $450.00 (plus tax), with two "knight" packages advertised for "young heroes." I argue that Elena's strong emphasis on femininity at the park falls in line with the theme of her pedagogical function because it places her within a realm of safe consumption. Disney strategically introduces Elena as their first Latina princess *and* as their first character at a U.S. theme park location to fully command (and communicate in) a language other than English. In order to provide a counterbalance for what could be interpreted as two radical moves on behalf of Disney, they safely and carefully place her at the California park location as an authentic Spanish-speaking representation of Latinidad.

Elena often lightly placed her hands on her chest as showcased in the picture below:

Figure 23: Elena of Avalor on July 21, 2018. Source: my personal photo archive

She engaged this rehearsed and staged position when showcasing emotions of love or admiration for something or someone. This body language was identical through both of the women playing Elena, a rehearsed gesture. In addition to the delicate positioning of her hands on her chest (as shown above) she also engaged in a similar gesture where she placed her hands under her face (as shown in the picture below). These gestures allowed her to appear much more delicate than the version of princesshood we see on the series.

Figure 24: Elena of Avalor and audience members interact on July 22, 2018. Source: my personal photo archive.

Through an analysis of Elena's body language and posture at the park, it is important to make a distinction between the princess at the park and the princess on the screen. The television Elena appears to be much more in charge and ready to fight. She often engages in daring physical feats and literally fights and casts spells on villains. Although she mostly wears her trademark red dress, there are a few episodes where she wears jeans. At the theme park, however, Elena does not reference these moments or engage in such physical challenges (the

latter would probably prove difficult in a meet-and-greet setting). Much like the other Disney princesses at the park, Elena uses a sweet, high-pitched voice that also seems rather rehearsed and well-planned. Her voice on the series is much stronger and less shaky.

I find that Disney adds another layer to the safe consumption of Elena's Spanish, and her overall Latinidad, by distancing her from the "girl power" qualities she embodies on the screen. I did not notice the Elena at the park talk about her bravery, courage, or leadership, all of which are qualities that the promotion of the series strives to highlight. Rather, the Elena at the park talks about cooking and taking care of her sister. She also constantly asks the young girls who greet her about the clothing and accessories they are wearing. In this way, Disney positions Elena's prominent use of Spanish alongside an easily digestible and less threatening version of femininity, one that is much less aligned with the postfeminist girl power that the series strives to highlight and is rather an example of "domesticity" (Haralovich, 2017). In order to achieve a safe representation of Latina girlhood at the theme park, Elena has to let go of some of the qualities that mark her as strong and fearless animated subject through the series, proving that she is not a consistent figure of girl power once she becomes a live experience for guests to interact with. Further, her body language (as briefly explained through the interaction with my cousin before taking a picture), highlights traditional markers of femininity (McGladrey, 2013).

To build upon this notion of the traditional markers of femininity, I must note that the positions Elena engages as she takes pictures and interacts with guests are almost identical to those described by Goffman (1976), particularly "the feminine touch" and "self-touching." When describing "the feminine touch" Goffman notes that in advertisements it is more often women who are showcased delicately using their fingers to provide a "just barely touching" (p.29) effect. This effect was evident when witnessing Elena barely placing her fingers under her face. Further,

the “self-touching” that Goffman describes is supposed to convey “a sense of one’s body being a delicate and precious thing” (p.31) a delicacy, which seemed obvious when witnessing Elena lightly placing her hands on her chest. By analyzing the Elena at Disneyland, one can see that one of Disney’s most prominent strategies for achieving safety is through Elena’s connection to traditional feminine markers.

Overrepresentation of Possibility and Underrepresentation of Presence. Traditional feminine markers may not be enough for Disney to feel economic risk averse safety in presenting their newest princess at the California park location. During my time at the theme park, I noticed that Disney limits and suppresses Elena’s appearances, but the only way to fully understand how this works is through a digital immersion in the Disneyland app. I call Disney’s strategy of featuring Elena at the park “the overrepresentation of possibility and the underrepresentation of presence” because through a perusal of the Disneyland app at the beginning of the day, Elena’s presence is overrepresented, but after tracking the app historically, a significant amount of her appearances are removed throughout the day. As previously noted, prior to my trip to Disneyland, I logged Elena’s appearances at the park every day for thirty consecutive days. At this point, I only logged onto the app in the morning (9 A.M. CT) and obtained my information once a day. Given my experiences at the park, after my return I modified my approach to gathering data and logged on multiple times a day. This modified strategy allowed for an empirical demonstration of Disney’s positioning of Elena at the park during the summer of 2018.

Working in tandem with the suppression of Elena’s times at the park, and also forming a part of the underrepresentation of her presence, is her actual location at the park when she does make an appearance. Although prior to arriving at Disneyland I knew Elena’s appearances would take place at the Fantasy Faire Courtyard, it was not clear from the description on the app what

section of the courtyard she would inhabit. As I previously explained, The Fantasy Faire consists of the Royal Hall and the Royal Theatre. It is next to Cinderella's Castle and you can enter through Fronteirland (this is more of a side entrance), Main Street, or the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique (a lesser known entrance). The most popular princesses are the ones typically allowed to inhabit the Royal Hall. During my time at the park, Ariel, Snow White, and Cinderella were the ones selected to greet audiences inside the Hall, and when I asked the royal attendants if/when Elena is regularly inside the Hall, one of them said that she makes appearances inside the hall "on rare occasions." Otherwise, that day and most days, Elena resides beside the purple umbrella outside of the Royal Hall.[55] I would later find out that when the app indicates a "Fantasy Faire Courtyard" appearance, they are referring to the small section beside the entrance to the Royal Hall, marked by a large purple umbrella. Elena's existence under the purple umbrella speaks to her underrepresentation at the park. Rather than living inside the Royal Hall all day with the most popular princesses, Elena is not only eliminated from the princess rotation on multiple occasions, but she is also relegated to the princess periphery (literally) by existing outside of the Royal Hall.

The princesses who typically reside under/beside the purple umbrella are Rapunzel, Jasmine, and Elena, though schedules typically change during holiday seasons, like Christmas and Halloween. During my visit to the Disneyland theme park, there was no way of knowing the princess lineup for those princesses appearing under the purple umbrella, unless you had access to the Disneyland app or unless you asked the royal attendants (though they often are not all that knowledgeable about schedules). There is a chained off entrance leading to the purple umbrella, with a sign at the end of the entrance, which theoretically indicates which princess/princesses

[55] I was later informed that when it rains, they cancel the appearances under the umbrella.

will appear in the Courtyard (under the umbrella) at that time. While I was there the sign read "Fantasy Faire Welcomes" and contained a blank space below to allow for the name of a princess/character. An image of the sign and entrance to the line is included below:

Figure 25: Disneyland's Fantasy Faire Courtyard on July 21, 2018. Source: my personal photo archive

As previously stated, without access to, or an understanding of how to work the Disneyland app, audiences were left wondering who was scheduled to make the following appearance under the purple umbrella. I stress this because it informs my use of the Disneyland mobile application as a site of analysis.

Moving beyond her actual location at the park, Elena's appearances are virtually overrepresented, but physically underrepresented at the park. I noticed this during my first day at the park, prior to her first scheduled showing. According to the Disneyland app, Elena was supposed to make her first appearance that day (July 21, 2018) at 10 A.M. Figure 14 previously indicated this trend. However, by 10:10 A.M., most of us who were waiting in line began to

wonder where she was or if she would appear. At 10:15 A.M. I stepped out of line and asked one of the royal attendants if he knew when Elena would be joining us. He replied by saying that Elena must have had issues with her Jaquins. Again, the attendants adhere to Disney scripts in order to preserve the magic narrative of the park. I then asked if she would be coming out at all, to which he replied that he was not sure how long it would take to resolve the issues with the Jaquins. Finally, at 10:18 A.M. (her appearance time was supposed to be from 10:00 A.M.-10:05 A.M.), Elena came out to greet her fans under the purple umbrella. Given that Elena's appearance was a bit delayed, a few fans who were waiting for Rapunzel were a bit perplexed by the situation (and most of these fans did not seem to know who Elena was). Rapunzel was set to make her appearance following Elena that day (which was the usual order any time I check their appearances that month), but given that Elena came out a bit later than she was supposed to, the crowd who was waiting for Rapunzel began to ask questions. This seemed to encourage the royal attendants to try to speed up Elena's interactions in order to make way for Rapunzel and Flynn Rider, Rapunzel's love interest in both the film and the television series.

For the remainder of that day, however, her appearance times remained intact. It was not until the following day that Elena's underrepresentation of physical presence was solidified as more than a coincidence. I arrived at the park an hour before it opened on On July 22, 2018. While I waited for the gates to open, I made sure that I knew all of Elena's appearance times. At 8 A.M. that morning, the app indicated the same times as the day before. After making my way inside the park, and shortly after purchasing an over-priced coffee at Main Street U.S.A.'s Starbucks's location, I noticed the bench at the Fantasy Faire Courtyard was empty. Although there was still over an hour left before Elena was supposed to make her appearance, I sat on the bench and observed as the Fantasy Faire began to welcome its morning guests. Fantasy Faire is

one of the quietest and most relaxed areas at the park (in terms of crowds and noise level), and at this time in the morning, the crowds were slow. This allowed me ample time to review my notes from the previous day and take in the conversations and situations around me. At around 9:30 A.M. (thirty minutes prior to her first appearance), I checked my Disneyland app once again, and I noticed that Elena's appearances had changed. All but her 10:00 A.M. appearance were deleted from the app. Thinking this must be a technological glitch, I immediately asked one of the royal attendants. The attendant advised me to keep checking the app because "sometimes they move their schedules around and the app is the best place to check in on that." I asked him if this was something that happened often, to which he replied that "it does happen from time to time." Explaining my disappointment to him, I also asked if there was a possibility that Disney would add more times later in the day and he informed me that something like that "rarely ocurrs." He concluded our conversation by saying that "Elena is probably busy taking care of other things around the park, so she will not be able to make it back here at her usual times." This concluding remark seemed to be much more definitive than the first remark, and only came up after I continued to inquire about her appearances.

After Elena's first appearance, I returned to the bench and looked through the Disneyland app to see if, perhaps, the park had made drastic schedule changes throughout. Although I was not familiar with all the characters' appearances for that day, it did not look like any of the other times had been altered. Most notably, Rapunzel's schedule had not changed. Throughout my time at the park, I noticed that Rapunzel and Elena shared a similar schedule and they both occupied the space under the purple umbrella. Although Rapunzel usually had one or two more appearances than Elena, their schedules were somewhat similar and I often noted her appearances as a point of reference. On that day, Rapunzel's schedule remained intact, while

almost all of Elena's times were virtually removed from the app, which led to a physical underrepresentation of the character at the park. For the remainder of my second day at the park, I stayed on that bench most of the day. Around 3 P.M., I noticed one of the attendants constantly looking over at me. At one point he even came to greet me and asked if I needed anything. Given that central to my methods was a desire to protect my access at the park, I decided to leave the area shortly after explaining to him that everything was well and that I enjoyed writing in my diary at the Fantasy Faire.

Although I left the Fantasy Faire around 3 P.M., I continued to make my way back to the area at least once an hour until 9 P.M. (when I left the park). Prior to my departure, I returned once more and observed for another twenty minutes, somewhat hopeful that perhaps Elena would emerge. I left the park that day with a better understanding of Elena's underrepresentation, and decided that it was necessary to modify my data gathering process upon my return in order to better understand Disney's practices surrounding Elena's appearances at the park. Immediately following my departure, my plan was to continue logging the list of Elena's appearances as marked on the Disneyland app. As mentioned through my methodological description, this is a practice I implemented prior to my arrival at the park. Before heading to Disneyland, I logged Elena's advertised appearances on the Disneyland app every day for a period of thirty days. I logged on to the app every day at 9 A.M. An example of my data is listed below:

June 20, 2018

10:00 A.M.- 10:05 A.M.

11:30 A.M.- 11:35 A.M.

2:00 P.M.- 2:05 P.M.

4:00 P.M.-4:05 P.M.

June 21, 2018

10:00 A.M.- 10:05 A.M.

11:30 A.M.-11:35 A.M.

2:00-P.M.- 2:05 P.M.

4:00 P.M.- 4:05 P.M.

June 22, 2018

10:00 A.M.- 10:05 A.M.

11:30 A.M.- 11:35 A.M.

2:00 P.M.- 2:05 P.M.

4:00 P.M.-4:05 P.M.

Figure 26: screenshot of my personal log of Elena'a appearances.

The image above is a mirror of the rest of my log for the thirty days prior to my departure- Elena was advertised as appearing those same four times, every day. For the third step of my data gathering process, a modification was necessary based on my observations at the park.

During the thirty-day period following my last day at Disneyland, I logged Elena's advertised appearances multiple times a day. I searched for her appearances at 9 A.M., 12 P.M., 2:30 P.M., and 5 P.M., rather than just 9 A.M. Every morning, during that thirty-day period, her schedule looked like the one above: 10:00 A.M.- 10:05 A.M., 11:30 A.M.-11:35 A.M., 2:00 P.M.- 2:05 P.M., and 4:00 P.M.- 4:05 P.M. However, after checking the app multiple times a day, a different trend emerged. During ten of the thirty days, all but Elena's 10 A.M. appearances

were removed. During five of the thirty days, her appearances were removed following her 11:30 A.M. appearance. Finally, during three of the thirty days, her 4:00 P.M. appearance was removed. Out of a total of thirty days following my Disneyland visit, the Disneyland app consistently featured Elena as a meet-and-greet character for twelve days, without altering or removing her times. This means that Elena made her scheduled appearances less than half of the times throughout the end of July and most of August. This trend seems to further solidify my observations at the park concerning her underrepresentation in the flesh. On any given day, Elena may be advertised as a set meet-and-greet character (appearing four times a day), but she is overrepresented virtually and underrepresented in the lived space at the park. Through my third stage of data collection, I was able to empirically demonstrate that Disney removes over half of Elena's virtually advertised park appearances throughout the day. I argue that this is a strategy that Disney implements as they try to figure out how/if to permanently add Elena, and all that she represents, to the Disney park universe.

Conclusion

The Disney theme parks allow their guests the opportunity to encounter embodied representations of animated characters in live form. In the summer of 2016, the Walt Disney Company placed *Elena of Avalor* in person to debut at Disneyworld in Orlando, Florida. Disney situates the princess and her story in the zone where there is live interaction with audiences. Some might consider this a risky move, especially considering that Disney welcomed the princess to their U.S. park locations not long after the television debut of the series. However, as a top transnational media conglomerate, Disney is strategic along every step of the way. When *Elena of Avalor* occupies a live setting, audiences are able to interact with this character and vice versa, so how can Disney preserve control? Part of their strategy, with all characters and

elements of the theme parks, resides in the highly scripted and rehearsed nature of the setting. This chapter provided an analysis of Disney's control of the identity and lived transactional space of the production of the princess in the zone where the company allows real time audience interaction.

I found that audiences read and interpret Elena in a way that highlights her Mexicanness, rather than the pan-Latinidad, which the series promotes. In turn, the actresses playing Elena at the park highlight Elena's Mexicanness through their food, culture, and language references, all of which refer to Mexicanness/Mexicanidad. In addition to the foregrounding of the princesses' Mexicanidad, the Elena at Disneyland provides a pedagogical function at the park through a sanitized representation of Spanish language instruction, which also proves to be a Disney strategy for showcasing her authenticity. Further, in line with Disney's attempts to control their theme park setting, Disney limits Elena's appearances at Disneyland in a variety of ways. The following contains a more detailed explanation of the three themes.

First, the Elena at Disneyland is produced and read via a predominantly fixed Mexicanidad: she is read by audiences as a specific Mexican representation and is also produced as such via the actress playing the part. This is primarily done through food references and Spanish phrases. This differs drastically from the ways in which Elena is advertised virtually and on television, as a representation of Latinidad at large. This Mexicanidad presents a type of fixity, where Disney can specifically reach out to the largest Latinx group in the nation, and particularly in their Anaheim location. The observations of this project, whether virtually or in the lived setting, are specific to Disney's Anaheim location, which is situated in close proximity to the U.S./Mexico border. It could very well be the case that the Elena at Disneyland provides an example of Disney adapting to a specific context (in close proximity to the Mexico border).

When the princess is anchored at the park, we see a strategy, which could very well be location-specific.

Second, the Elena at Disneyland provides a pedagogical function at the park through a sanitized representation of Spanish language-learning, that also serves to highlight her authenticity. Elena is the first Disney character at a U.S. theme park location to communicate in a language other than English for extended periods of time. She communicates at length with Spanish-speaking guests (entire four-five minute conversations), and incorporates short Spanish phrases in her conversations with non-Spanish-speaking guests. The latter phrases almost always seem to form part of a type of language education strategy. At a time when the use of Spanish is so often chastised in this country, Disney strategically incorporates this Spanish speaking princess into their theme park lineup by highlighting Elena's femininity in order to provide a less threatening version of Latinidad. The femininity that the theme park highlights is not reflective of the "girl power" representation available through the series. As is the case with the fixity of her Mexicanidad, her highly feminized representation stands in contrast to the representation and advertising of her character, where her postfeminist qualities come to the forefront to forgo traditional femininity.

Lastly, and as an overarching theme related to Disney's attempts to implement control at their theme park setting, Disney limits and suppresses Elena's appearances at Disneyland, "the overrepresentation of possibility and the underrepresentation of presence," because Disneyland appears to provide many possibilities for interaction with the live Elena (possibilities highlighted virtually through the mobile app), but as these interactions are removed from the lineup (in real time and through the app), Elena's actual presence is highly scarce in relation to other princesses

at the Fantasy Faire, and even to Rapunzel. This pattern could be a Disney strategy to test out how park guests react to the newest Disney princess at the park.

Disneyland, with its sanitized version of America, incorporates Mexicanidad and Latinidad at large. Through Elena of Avalor, Disney continues to remain in control by deploying time tested strategies. Aware of the risks of placing a dark-skinned, Spanish-speaking character at the park, Disney implements different techniques for economic risk aversion purposes. Through *Elena of Avalor,* Disney has found a way to engage both Pan-Latinidad and Mexicanidad simultaneously, particularly through their inclusion of the princess at the park. Disney's inclusion of Elena at the park, however, positions her within Mexicanidad. Unprompted, the actresses playing Elena often make references to Mexican markers, most notably food. The presence of Mexicanidad, which is never directly called out through the series, commercials, or infographic, is called out, named, and fixed at the theme park. Elena's pan-Latinidad proves easier to sustain through the animated series, but it would be more challenging to sustain that in the flesh.[56]Further, in the flesh, Elena's leadership aspects are abandoned in favor of a safe femininity, thus proving that the theme park setting provides an experience for park guests that is different from the one they receive through the other synergized iterations of Elena.

[56] For example, it would be difficult to hire an actress that could reference cuisine from Peru, Argentina, Mexico, and Chile, while incorporating Spanish phrases used in all of those locations, depending on the park guests.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Disney's Flexible Latina Princess is a "Princesa Mexicana"

On October of 2018, the official Disneyland Resort website announced that they would bring back their "¡Viva Navidad! Street Party." Although the Disney parks are well-known for their holiday season festivities (i.e. "Mickey's Not So Scary Halloween party" throughout the entire month of October), this one relates to this dissertation because of its links to Latinidad. The street party takes place at Disneyland's California Adventure Park and is inspired by *Los Tres Caballeros* (1944). This street party, which of course is another Disney parade, highlights Donald Duck leading a celebration through the park's Paradise Bay location. In *Los Tres Caballeros*, a Disney film commissioned by the U.S. government to help ease tensions during the Good Neighbor Policy, Donald Duck visits Latin America and meets Jose and Panchito. More than seventy years later, Donald Duck brings Jose and Panchito to Anaheim to join his "fiesta." The "¡Viva Navidad! Street Party" took place this past holiday season from November 9, 2018- January 8, 2019 and dates back to 2013.[57] The Disneyland website explains that the celebration is the ultimate "family fiesta," and the Disneyland mobile application features a picture of mariachis at the forefront of the parade. The majority of the parade consists of ballet folklorico[58] dances and mariachi music, with a few minutes of samba[59] near the end.[60] In an interview a few days after the opening of the parade, Carlos Martinez, a Disneyland employee, explains that the Latinx celebration consists of much more than the street parade. Martinez highlights all the food options they have as part of their homage to Latinx culture. He notes that,

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[57] It is not clear whether this parade has been featured every year since then.
[58] a traditional ballet style Mexican dance
[59] a traditional Brazilian dance
[60] Information retrieved from the Disneyland website, along with multiple viewings of the parade on YouTube.

for a limited time, the park will sell “tamales, champurrado, atole, sopes, tacos, the list goes on and on. Not to mention the desserts like buñuelos and empanadas” (Condes, 2013). According to Martinez, this parade is rich in cultural significance. Below is a screenshot of the Disneyland mobile application’s page featuring the showtimes for the parade:

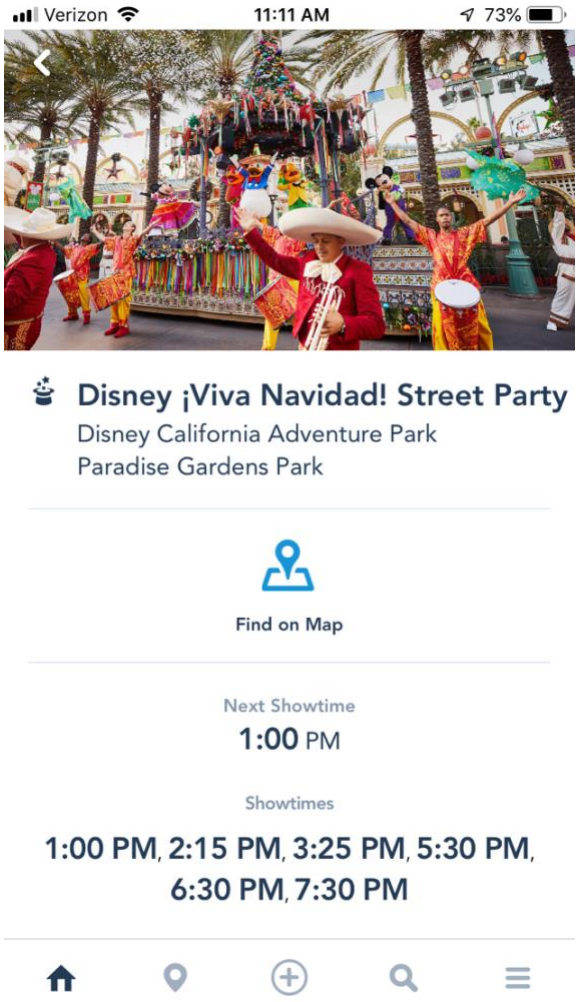

Figure 27: Disney Viva Navidad Street Party Showtimes. Source: my person Disneyland mobile application.

In addition to their cuisine (which like most things related to Elena, is mostly Mexican), their use of the Spanish language inverted exclamation point, and their inclusion of the characters from *Los Tres Caballeros*, Disney California Adventure concludes its “¡Viva

Navidad! Street Party" with an appearance by Elena. During her "Musical Grand Arrival,"[61] Elena sings and greets Disney audiences on a float surrounded by flowers and one of her Jaquins. Her musical number is about thirteen minutes in length and according to the Disneyland website, "Elena will greet well-wishers with stories and songs from her native land" (Disneyland Resort, 2018). With the inclusion of the *Navidad* Street Party and Elena's Grand Arrival comes an overrepresentation of possibility bestowed upon Elena during the *Navidad* season. During Disney's winter holiday season (2018-2019), the Disneyland app shows Elena consistently appearing at California Adventure Park. Her appearances are displayed on the app as follows: 10 A.M.-12:30 P.M., 12:50-1:45 P.M., 2:05-3:20 P.M., 3:40 P.M.-4:45 P.M. Although she was moved to the other California Disney park, she made many more appearances during the 2018-2019 *Navidad* season than during my visit over the summer of 2018. Since all the data collected about the *Navidad* festivities has been virtual, I cannot attest for what took place at the live Disney California Adventure park setting during the holiday season. Below is a screenshot of the Disneyland mobile application's character page for Elena. This image was captured on December 28, 2018, but is consistent with every time I checked Elena's character page on the Disneyland app during the holiday season.

[61] This is the name of her performance at the park.

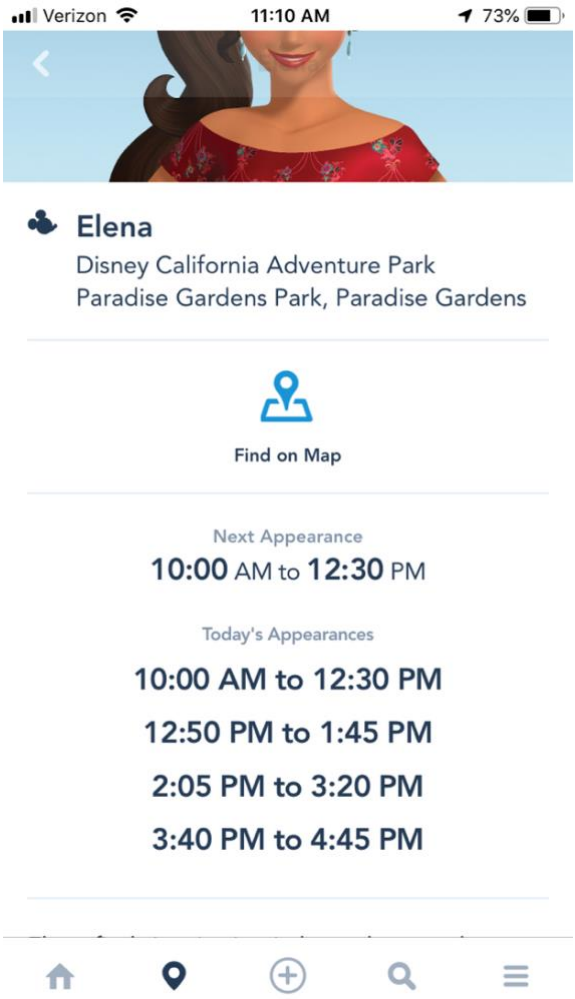

Figure 28: Elena of Avalor's appearances at California Adventure on December 28, 2018. Source: my personal Disneyland mobile application

Whether or not these appearances actually take place, a question that comes up after noting Elena's overrepresentation of possibility and underrepresentation of presence at the park during the summer of 2018, a larger theme emerges within her *Navidad* appearance. At the Disney California theme park, where Elena becomes a live experience, Disney allows for an expanded prominence during *Navidad*, albeit at Disney's California Adventure park and not the more visited Magic Kingdom. As part of this finding, and as a conclusion to this project, I extend Urciuoli's (1996) observation about the Spanish language (referenced in Chapter five) and apply it to Disney's inclusion of Latinidad. For Disney, when Latinidad and Spanish exist in an *outer*

sphere (Urciuoli, 1996), it makes the most economic risk averse sense to position that Latinidad within the three holidays/Latinx traditions identified in chapter four: Día de los Muertos, Navidad, and Quinceañeras. As such, Elena can make many more appearances at the park during the *Navidad* season, not just through her Musical Grand Arrival, but also through her multiple appearances at Paradise Gardens. Below is a screenshot of the Disneyland mobile application's page featuring the showtimes for "Princess Elena's Musical Grand Arrival":

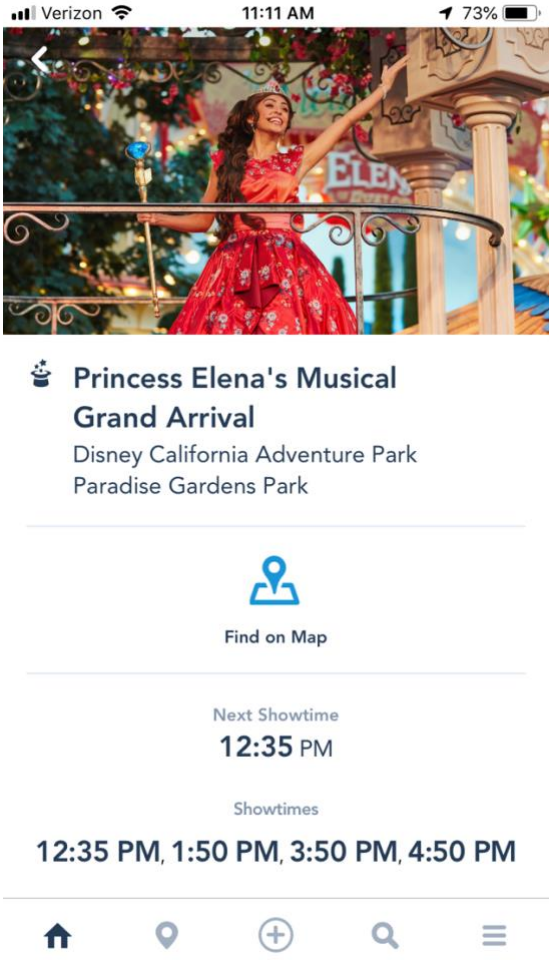

Figure 29: Princess Elena's Musical Grand Arrival Showtimes on December 28, 2081. Source: my personal Disneyland mobile application

Elena makes many more appearances at the park during the *Navidad* season, just like Miguel from *Coco* during the Halloween season, where the film becomes a stand-in for Día de los

Muertos. Below is a set of images featuring Elena at Disney's California Adventure Park on January 2, 2019.[62]

Figure 30: Elena of Avalor's Musical Grand Arrival on January 2, 2019. Source: Brock family personal photo archive

[62] The pictures were taken by a friend of mine who was at the park at this time.

Figure 31: Elena of Avalor at Disney's California Adventure Park on January 2, 2019. Source: Brock family personal photo archive

Although Elena's presence at Disney's California Adventure is not permanent, she was established, for well over a month, as a core character with meet-and-greet interactions as well as her own parade, thus contributing towards a sense of overrepresentation at the park. However, immediately following Disney's 2018-2019 *Navidad* season, Elena returned to the Magic Kingdom, returning to her previously established appearance times (about five per day). When cultural producers map out fantastical territories, particularly in a Disney space, the process is strategically managed, meticulously created, and painstakingly scripted. Given that understanding, what is the significance of Elena's prominent appearances at the California

Adventure park over the Magic Kingdom park, particularly during the holiday season? This project indicates that *Elena of Avalor*, in its multiple synergized iterations, serves as a testing space for Disney as they continue to further their inclusivity attempts to reach out to more audiences worldwide, while simultaneously attempting to target a growing market of Latinx audiences domestically.

When examining the production of *Elena of Avalor* (chapter three), I found that Disney uses/used three prominent production practices. First, it produces a flexible Latinidad through the series and Disney social media platforms, a Latinidad that jumps back and forth from specific to vague (though refusing to name Mexicanidad) and appeals to both Latinx and non-Latinx viewers. The Disney infographic referenced in chapter three is a perfect example of this. Through this visual advertisement, Disney promotes Elena as a representation of various Latin American regions, but upon a closer look, this flexible Latin American (not Latinx) representation is mostly Mexican. This specificity, however, is masked through names of locations that many people may not recognize as Mexico-specific. To others, however, these might be so obviously Mexican that they need no further calling out. This back and forth process continues to form part of that flexibility. Second, Disney produces a specific kind of Latinx talent and utilizes the labor of the Latinx actors to promote the series' Latinidad through managed prosumerism. Finally, Disney produces Elena as a way to showcase Disney's corporate social responsibility through Elena's partnership with Girl Scouts U.S.A. and through the new cultural/ethnic element in their yearly Corporate Social Responsibility Reports, which positions Elena as a representation of girl power. These production practices are encapsulated through the fantastical realism that constructs Elena and her kingdom as a product of thirty-countries, thus providing a perfect example of popular culture's taming of complex hybridity, flattening of

difference, and the eternal foreigner trope. Elena is far more continuous than her marketing materials lead us to believe.

In the textual analysis of three purposefully selected *Elena of Avalor* holiday episodes (chapter four), I found that through the representation of Elena (and her "culture"), a Disney strategy emerges. Disney employs diverse representational tactics to attract viewers of color (in this case Latinxs), but does so through common themes and tropes, so as to not alienate their non-Latinx audiences. A close examination of the first season of this series reveals that Disney mimics familiar tropes previously identified in Latina/o media studies scholarship about representation, which locate Elena and her kingdom within the realm of the eternal foreigners (e.g. Aparaicio, 2003; Flores-González, 2017; Jiménez, 2004; Valdivia, 2010). However, Disney strategically releases these elements. During the *Elena* series when the tropes are becoming more and more specific, Disney begins to shy away from these and provides an easily digestible (non-specific) representation for non-Latinx audiences. This rhythm, or strategy, that I have located within the *Elena* series rolls out specificity followed by ambiguity. Disney is strategic in how it employs these markers of difference, and part of the strategy, within the storyline of the series, seems to involve balancing the overt Latinidad so that it remains consumable for non-Latinx audiences, a finding that overlaps with that of the flexible Latinidad. While balancing the specific with the ambiguous Latinidad in the television series, Disney consistently represents Elena as a can-do girl, allowing her to remain a constant girl power figure.

Through my production and textual analysis, I found that while Disney showcases Elena as a figure of girl power, they refuse to name Mexicanidad in both the promotion of the princess/series and the actual series itself. Although Disney relies on Mexican locations, cuisine, and traditions, they do not directly mention Mexico, but instead promote the storyline as a tale of

hybrid Latinidad. However, at the embodied location at the park (chapter five), I found that Disney actually highlights Elena's Mexicanidad through highly scripted performances, nonetheless never identifying Elena as Mexican. Moreover, Disney replaces Elena's girl power with more traditional feminine characteristics. The park analysis provides a breakthrough not only for Disney scholarship, but girlhood studies, Latinx studies, and media studies at large, revealing that Latin American hybridity, through character performance, is difficult to achieve and maintain beyond the television screen. Moreover, it makes more economic risk averse sense to anchor the Elena at the theme park in specific Latinidad, one that aligns with the location-specific demographic data Disney has collected. Overall, my analysis virtually (through the Disney mobile app), and at the park, yielded three themes. First, as mentioned above, the Elena at Disneyland is read and produced via a predominantly fixed Mexicanidad. Second, the Elena at Disneyland provides a pedagogical function at the park through her constant use of Spanish, which further serves to reinforce the character's "authenticity." Lastly, and as an overarching theme related to Disney's attempts to implement control at their theme park setting, Disney limits and suppresses Elena's appearances at Disneyland. I call this last finding "the overrepresentation of possibility and the underrepresentation of presence." Embedded within these findings is the role that Elena serves as a safe version of femininity.

Together, the findings from these three case studies allow me to formulate a broad set of analyses in relation to race, popular culture, age, and gender. Disney attempts to appeal to a Latinx market through this animated series/character. Disney's strategies are similar to those of mainstream media—as mainstream media construct Latinidad, it is a type of hybrid Latin American representation that emerges. Therefore, *Elena of Avalor* is not a rupture, but rather a continuity. Although *Elena* is a fictional animated series, the experiences and settings the series

draws on are rooted in actual cultures and locations, so names and situations are plausible. For example, a kingdom by the name of Avalor, which simply puts an "a" in front of the Spanish word "valor," which means courage or bravery, is not an unrealistic name. It creates the illusion that this location is real, that the lived experiences taking place within the borders of Avalor might somehow be part of a reality somewhere. Avalor's existence is further strengthened by the fact that the creators of the series explicitly highlight their reliance on Latin American traditions, tales, and experiences, yet implicitly foreground Mexican and Spanish elements.

As such, Elena (the princess) and the series itself are actually Latin American rather than Latinx. The fantastical narratives in the text, the promotional materials (particularly the infographic), and the theme park experiences highlight and draw on inspirations from Latin America, specifically Mexico, rather than U.S. Latinidad. This is significant considering that *Elena of Avalor* was pitched and first introduced as Disney's first Latina princess. My dissertation shows that through all of its iterations, the *Elena of Avalor* text engages both Pan-Latinidad and Mexicanidad simultaneously, but relies much more prominently on Latin American narratives, specifically those of Mexico. Now that mainstream culture acknowledges the Latinx population, Disney claims they created their first Latina princess, but my findings suggest that at all three points of analysis, the Latinidad is only at the rhetorical level and is used strategically to create an illusion of "authenticity," which Disney hopes will generate greater profits through articulating the U.S. Latinx audience. This illusion of "authenticity" not only flattens differences, but continues to position Latinx characters and storylines as eternally foreign. This finding partly echoes Helaine Silverman's (2002) research on *The Emperor's New Groove,* where she notes Disney's reticence to mention Peru throughout the entire film. The reticence to mention or reference Mexico within the *Elena of Avalor* texts analyzed herein points

to an unnamed specificity, which very much accords with Disney risk averse strategies. At this political moment, creating a Mexican character might prove too daring, not for Latinx audiences but for the implicitly white mainstream audiences steeped in anti-immigration discourses. Additionally, the ambiguity of origin allows Disney to play with history and signifiers with minimal backlash.

It seemed almost serendipitous that just two weeks after wrapping up my first girls' media studies project, Disney announced the soon-to-be-debut of their first Latina princess. As a Latinx media studies scholar, who had recently started focusing on girlhood studies, the coincidence seemed almost unreal. The literature I examined that summer continuously pointed towards the lack of Latina girl representations, particularly in animated form. The literature also lacked in its attention to Latina girls. Two-and-a-half years later, Disney is riding high on their laurels of Latinx representation, especially after the back-to-back releases of *Elena of Avalor* and *Coco*, both animated representations of Latinidad. Through a process of analysis inspired by the circuit of culture approach (Du Gay et al., 1997) and what media studies scholar Douglas Kellner refers to as the tripartite approach to media/cultural studies (Kellner, 1995), I interrogated the construction of *Elena of Avalor* in three different zones: production, text, and audience. This triply layered approach is one seldom undertaken in girls' media studies. Through an investigation of different layers within one text, my dissertation highlights how Disney, as a transnational media conglomerate always seeking profit maximization, moves in and out of ethnic/racial ambiguity through one character/series. Moreover, they follow the same in and out strategy through their "girl power" discourse as they strip Elena of most of her girl power at the theme park setting, but consistently highlight it through the other synergized iterations, such as the series and company reports.

Contributions to the Field(s)

In order to productively engage with the varying nodes prevalent in this dissertation, I combined methodologies to engage in a tripartite approach to media/cultural studies. When analyzing media texts, you cannot gain full insight without studying production, text, and audiences simultaneously. These are equally significant processes that influence each other and are sometimes in contention with one another. My case studies have provided a way to engage major cultural processes for understanding how Disney represents Latina girlhood. I also bring different disciplines into conversation with one another to unearth the complexities of *Elena of Avalor* as an animated cultural product aimed mostly at a pre-tween audience.

This research foregrounds texts and identities understudied in media scholarship, particularly about age, gender, and race. My findings suggest that media scholars need to continue to explore the contested terrain of popular culture, especially in animated content purporting to provide progressive representations of various identities. Children's television, specifically within feminist media studies, is under-researched. Qualitative analyses of animated content's relationship to gender and race are practically nonexistent, yet "progressive" animated representations continue to be hailed and promoted by media giants, like Disney. My case studies intersectionalize girls' media studies by extending feminist media scholarship to examine the mutually informing categories of age, gender, and race in relation to the study of girls and the media. Although referring to live-action performative girlhood on the Disney Channel, Blue (2017) finds that "…Disney Channel's girl- focused series deploy racial and ethnic differences in efforts to authenticate their characters, their narratives, and their environs" (p. 376). My three case studies demonstrate that Disney continues to implement these strategies through the "authentication" of their first Latina princess, through all of its synergized iterations.

This dissertation also makes a significant contribution to childhood studies, particularly within television research. Children's television research understudies issues of race (e.g. Aubrey & Harrison, 2004; Baker & Raney, 2007; Keys, 2016), and my dissertation contributes to this gap in the literature, with a focus on girlhood. Within Latina/o media studies, this dissertation also helps expand the field by bringing mediated (animated) representations of Latina *pre-tween* girls to the scholarly table, a task which has currently only been undertaken by few scholars (e.g. Banet-Weiser, 2004; Keys, 2016), and only one working within the Disney canon (Valdivia, forthcoming). Although there is a vast amount of research regarding the Walt Disney company, this is the first study that combines production analysis with text and audience research at the level of animated programming. Methodologically, the audience studies node contributes an innovative three-stage method for virtual and live theme park research.

Elena of Avalor, in all of its synergized iterations, is produced and controlled by Disney. Especially in the theme park setting, where audiences interact with the character in real time, Disney controls and manipulates Elena and her kingdom, whether it be by restricting her appearances, highlighting them during the holiday season, or fixing the princess within Mexican and traditionally feminine narratives. Possibly the most important intervention this research makes is in regard to the embodied location of the princess at the theme park. This is where we are able to see how a major media conglomerate commodifies and tames complex hybridity in real time, and in accordance with the *Elena* paratexts. We see here how Disney selects, positions, backtracks, but nonetheless unambiguously commodifies ethnicity through different tropes of "authenticity" invoked at different times. This nimble and flexible approach is a classic foot loose and fancy free strategy of neoliberal transnational corporations wherein the terrain of Latinidad [and any other ethnicity for that matter] is treated as a malleable and disposable profit

factor. This dissertation broadly explores how marginalized people are represented in the media by providing a focus on the representation of Latina girls in animated form. The project herein explored how a transnational media giant reinforces a flexible and ambiguous Latinidad to their economic advantage. In order to advance their economic goals, the Latinidad they produce and disseminate is actually not Latinidad, but rather Latin-Americanness, and even more specifically Mexicanidad.

With the new addition of the supposed first Latina princess, Disney appears to be testing out their engagements with the Latinx market, particularly at a time when Latinx discourses are politically turbulent. Although it seems to be that Disney is rolling out specific Latinx representations (in animated form) we have to question whether or not these representations are Latinx. This dissertation has provided an example of the Walt Disney Company's profit-driven interests in producing an easily consumable Latina girlhood in animated form, through different platforms, as a way to contribute to their success in an ever-growing web of synergized media operations. The end product is not a Latina princess, but rather a princess anchored in Latin America, most notably Mexico, which is nonetheless never named. In many ways, *Elena of Avalor* illustrates how Latinxs remain marginalized from the U.S. mainstream. As mainstream media continue to produce Latinx representations, they are mostly in relation to the Iberian peninsula. As they place Elena and her kingdom in conjunction with Latin American narratives, Disney continues to invoke the eternal foreigner trope. In order for *Elena of Avalor* to be accepted and recognized by non-Latinx, mainstream audiences, Disney created her as a familiar and stereotypical representation of Latinidad, which is tied to Latin America more broadly, rather than U.S. Latinidad. Although we see Elena on merchandise, television, and around the

Disney theme parks, the three nodes explored in this dissertation demonstrate that she holds a position as a permanent outsider within the U.S. national imaginary.

Limitations and Future Research

Rumors have started to emerge through various online platforms that Lin-Manuel Miranda has plans to roll out Disney's first Latina princess on the big screen (Bui, 2018; El-Mahmoud, 2018; Scott, 2018). Following some backlash related to the frustration of creating *Elena* as a series rather than a feature film (e.g. Castillo, 2016; Friedman, 2016; Velez, 2016), Disney may be ready to take that leap. Selecting Miranda to lead the operation would prove a sound economic decision for Disney. Miranda is incredibly popular at the moment and is considered by many to be a Latinx activist when it comes to issues of representation. Most prominently known for his Broadway hit *Hamilton*, Miranda recently joined the Disney universe, providing the musical score for *Moana* (2016), and starring in a lead role in *Mary Poppins Returns* (2018). Further strengthening his partnership with Disney, Miranda's future projects include co-producing the live-action *Little Mermaid,* which has already generated its fair share of controversy over the casting of Halle Bailey as Ariel (e.g. Falcon, 2019; Harmata, 2019; Harriot, 2019; Mears, 2019), along with the *Ducktales* reboot. Additionally, after *Coco*'s worldwide success in 2017, Disney may feel as though it is time to bring forth a Latina girl through the full-length animated feature film that many hope for. For the time being, though, these are solely rumors. The rumors, however, point to a larger trend. Audiences, fans, and critics are highlighting and noticing Latina girlhood, specifically via animated form.

As Latinx purchasing power continues to grow, so does the commodification of Latinidad. As part of the growing visibility of spectacular Latinas in mainstream media, Disney stepped into the playing field with the introduction of their first Latina princess on the small

screen. Disney is at the forefront of providing animated representations, and as such their most recent efforts to tap into the Latinx market via Latina girlhood bring attention to a population of girls seldom highlighted through popular culture, particularly at the pre-tween age. Celebrity interviews with Jenna Ortega, Gina Rodriguez, and Amy Carrero illuminate Disney's investments in promoting *Elena of Avalor*'s significance as a Latina. As the "first," in the realm of Latinx animated royalty, the princess wears a heavy crown on her head. She wears this same crown as she moves beyond the screen into the territory of the virtual and even in the flesh at the Disney theme parks. The series and the princesses' existence at the intersection of Disney, girlhood, childhood, media, and Latinidad pave the way for future projects that can be undertaken in various fields. The existence of the princess and the series itself also provides a provocative starting point for explorations of other issues relating to theme parks, cultural citizenship, transnationalism, audience studies, and more. Throughout the remainder of this section, I will highlight a few instances worth exploring as extensions of this work.

As numerous Latina/o media studies scholars have highlighted, Latina audiences continue to be understudied and Latina girls as audience members are practically a nonexistent entity, but Latina girls *are* audiences. As members of the largest racial minority group of children in the nation, Latina girls' numbers in the audience continue to grow. According to the *Child Trends* 2014 report "America's Hispanic Children: Gaining Ground, Looking Forward," 20.9% of Hispanic children spend "more than two hours in front of the television on an average weekday," (Guzman, Murphy, & Torres, 2014, p. 29) in comparison to 13.6% by "non-Hispanic white" children. Given these numbers, more research focusing on Latinx children as audiences should be on the horizon. For this project, I was not able to talk to girls themselves, and the data collected in the form of quotes or conversations was gathered through my participant observation

as part of an ethnographic approach I tailored for my theme park experience. My findings based on the conversations that took place at the park raise useful questions about girl audiences that demand further investigation. What could follow as an extension of this work is a focus group and interview study with Latina girls. A well-rounded study would fuse the elements present in this dissertation with further explorations about how Latina girls make sense of and negotiate the *Elena* series, the Elena at the park, and Elena toys/merchandise, all forming part of a circuit of culture approach that interrogates the series along with its paratexts, with a deep focus on the ways in which girls are understanding these.

Part of this circuit of culture approach would require a stronger focus on the Elena at both Disney theme parks nationally and those abroad. Given the recent inclusions of Elena at the park and the overall presence of Latinidad therein, it is worth asking what is the logic behind where and when Disney places its assets at the theme parks. Further, what is the relationship between the U.S. parks and the many parks around the world in terms of how and where they position their characters and their make believe worlds? Although the assets that Disney deals with are purely fantastical, there is a logic behind their arrangements at the parks, a logic driven by the desire to secure vast profits, and this is an area that demands further exploration. I have already conducted preliminary analysis at the Disney World theme park, and one of my future projects includes the integration of this data into my already existing modified situated ethnography at the California theme park. By positioning these two alongside one another, I will be able to provide an in-depth ethnographic look at the Disney theme parks' inclusion of Elena and Latinidad comparatively at a national level. Hopefully, the research will not stop at the national level. Exploring the inclusion and reception of Elena outside of the U.S., would also prove fruitful, especially considering Disney's global reach. Research about the international and transnational

flows of Elena would allow this research to move beyond the scope of U.S. culture and industry approaches.

While my study highlights many of Elena's synergized iterations, one possible study could focus on Elena toys or merchandise. Elena is not only consumed via television and at the theme park, her toys, gadgets, and accessories are sold prominently at Disney stores, Target, and many other physical and virtual locations that sell toys, such Disney online and ShopDisney. A future study could explore if and how Disney differentially markets *Elena of Avalor* in relation to "white" princesses both through the Elena toys and her accessories. Research in relation to the American Girl collection, for example, notices that the accessories that come with the Latinx girl dolls differ from those associated with the "white" dolls (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002; Zaslow, 2017). Further research about the Elena toys and merchandise would prove a welcome addition for both girlhood studies and childhood studies.

Ultimately, I hope this research carves out a space for studies focusing on Latina girls and their relationship to the media. This dissertation has helped fill many gaps within the interdisciplinary scholarship focusing on girlhood, media, Latinidad, children, and Disney. However, the work herein also highlighted a significant amount of research that must still be conducted. It is my intention to continue emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary research within media studies, research that not only explores the relationship between popular culture and Latina girlhood, but research that also addresses the many ways in which popular culture tames complex hybridity at large, often in animated form. As transnational media giants, including Disney, continue to provide narratives and storylines featuring more and more characters of color, media scholars must continue to interrogate the many ways in which these corporate behemoths represent these various identities to their economic advantage. What Disney

claims it is doing must always be weighed against a boots on the ground engagement with products, audiences, and production practices.

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