

“BECOMING AN AMERICAN PRINCESS?”:  
THE INTERPRETATIONS OF AMERICAN POPULAR CULTURE BY  
YOUNG KOREAN GIRLS LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
Indiana University  
May 2006

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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April 28, 2006

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To My Father,

Jooyong Lee,

Who is *the* Strongest Person in My Life

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Since I started this study, I have continually realized how blessed and lucky I am because of the great people around me. This dissertation is not merely mine but also theirs because I couldn't have done it without them.

First of all, I would like to thank my dissertation director, Dr. Jesse Goodman. Providing constant support and exceptional insight to my academic interest, he has been with me from my first class of the doctoral program to the last moment of my dissertation defense. By allowing me to pursue various kinds of questions and ideas, he encouraged me to freely explore every subject about which I wanted to know and learn. Therefore, he was a powerful force who led me to learn not only how to study and teach, but also how to live.

Next, I would like to recognize my committee chairperson, Dr. Mary McMullen. Her admirable caring has always inspired me to enjoy my studies, have great passion for my career, and feel confident about my ability. It was she who helped me to overcome hardships which I have experienced through the years and finally finish my dissertation. She taught me how to become a strong, respected woman who can be a model for students, teachers, colleagues, and one's own children and family. She is thus a mirror in which I kept reflecting myself and projecting my future.

I also wish to express my appreciation to two members of my committee—Dr. Cary Buzzelli and Dr. William Corsaro. Both of them greatly supported my study by providing valuable comments and pertinent advice. Their assistance helped me get

through the long journey of this dissertation. In addition, I want to thank Dr. Ann Trousdale from Louisiana State University, Dr. Curt Bonk from the Department of Instructional Systems Technology at Indiana University, and Dr. Michelle Scott from Ohio State University. All of them gave me their warm words, sincere friendships, and knowledgeable feedback during the dissertation process even though they were not my committee members. I would also like to acknowledge the Daisy Jones Fellowship, which financially supported my dissertation, and ten Korean girls and their families, who participated in my study.

I thank my family members from the bottom of my heart: my parents, Inja Kim and Jooyong Lee, and three sisters, Kyungah, Eunah, and Jinah Lee, who gave me endless love, sacrifice, and trust which helped me keep going my way; my husband, Chungmoo Lee, who was the only person that has taken care of my pain and tears with continual love for the last 8 years. Thank you, my wonderful family.

Most importantly, I wish to give a very special thank to my son, Christopher Jihoon Lee, who had to understand his mother's situation even before he was born. His shiny smiles and dazzling eyes were the sole inspiration which made me rethink the meaning of education, life, and the world itself more seriously and thoroughly. Love you, Joon.

## PREFACE

There is a poster on the wall of my study room which has six Disney female characters on it. One day, my two and a half-year-old son walked into the room and discovered the poster. Taking a glance at it, he suddenly called out, “That’s mom! That’s mom!” He was pointing at the Princess Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty*. His exclamation made me curious because I couldn’t find anything similar between the Princess and me. As a Korean I’m not blond with blue eyes or bright white skin, and I don’t wear a fancy pink dress, which the Princess Aurora does. A couple of days later, I talked about this story with my husband, who gave me that poster a few years ago. After hearing the story, he laughed and said, “That’s what you want to hear!” He continued, saying, “Many girls like princess things and...want to be a princess. You also like that stuff and...you want to be a princess, too. Don’t you? That was why I gave that poster to you.”

These stories made me wonder about two different but related issues: the first one was what made my son think of me as a sleeping beauty, and the second one was where my husband’s assumptions about the relationship between girls and princesses came from. I tried to find a possible answer to the first question by recalling my childhood memories of my mom. When I was little, I had always thought that my mom was the most beautiful woman in the world. A girl’s mom often represents ideal beauty in the child’s eyes, regardless of what her mother actually looks like. I even saw my mother as having great power over me, which was sometimes like magic because she seemed to do everything

and make everything. Now my son may think as I did; he may see magnificent beauty and power in his mother, in me.

However, even though I assumed that my son's thinking was similar to my own as a child, I still had another question about his reaction. Because I only *supposed and estimated* what my son's thoughts were, without knowing about what he actually meant, I was not sure if my presumption was correct. Was what I supposed really true about his thinking? Based on the arguments of several theorists in cultural studies, the female characters in Disney films are usually good-looking White Americans. I thus asked myself: Has my son been Americanized so much in spite of his young age, or did my son's responses result merely from his level of development? According to developmental psychology, my son wasn't likely to recognize racial differences in popular culture because a child only begins to distinguish differences among races as they are presented in the media at age three. How then can I explain his identification of specific white American characteristics with me, as these are represented by the Princess Aurora of *Sleeping Beauty*, Kim of *Kim Possible*,<sup>i</sup> or Sam, a female character in *Totally Spies*,<sup>ii</sup> rather than any other female characters in American popular culture? Did he perhaps have some unknown way of associating them with me?

As for my husband's implied syllogism, which is "All females want to be a princess. You are a female. Therefore, you want to be a princess," it allowed me to ponder some questions as well. Was his assumption only his own and therefore based on what he might see in me, or was it socio-culturally constructed? No matter what his assumption was based on, how have I been influenced by it? Furthermore, how are many



other young girls or women in society influenced by the assumptions of such “others,” in this case, males? Is it really true that, as Walkerdine (1997) criticizes, these females’ pleasure has often been seen as “involving the fantasizing of another life”(p. 135), one which corresponds with the hegemonic position in that they always desire to be beautiful, white, and royal?

Even though I have wanted to know the answers to these questions, there are not enough answers that have been initiated by children or females themselves. What I have heard is mostly about “others’” gazes and the expectations of children and females, not their stories, which can reveal how much they struggle and how they try to get through these others’ inaccurate assumptions. Where, then, are the voices of children and females now? Why have they been unsung? What do they really want to say about themselves and society? Objectified by and excluded from a group or a whole society, don’t they still live in silence?

Considering the questions that were raised above, this study is an attempt to listen to young Korean girls whose voices are not considered important enough by society to allow them to say what they think about various social values that are embedded in popular culture. I hope, therefore, that this study may help to find a way to create a democratic learning environment in which every child’s voice and experiences can be respected and heard (Freire & Giroux, 1989).

## **Preface**

### **Notes**

<sup>i</sup> *Kim Possible* is a TV cartoon series that has been on the Disney Channel since 2002. In it, a high school teen, Kim, is a white girl who is a cheerleading captain, an honors student, and the savior of the world from villains.

<sup>ii</sup> *Totally Spies* is a fast-paced action cartoon that has been on the Cartoon Network since 2001. It is about three college students in Beverley Hills who unwittingly become international secret agents.

## **ABSTRACT**

R. Lena Lee

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This dissertation was to investigate young Korean girls’ understanding about the American popular culture by using peer group discussions. Assuming that children are active learners in interpreting American popular culture, it focused on how they constructed distinct meanings for the significance that American popular culture holds in their lives. In order to do so, this dissertation looked particularly at young Korean girls who have lived in the United States by examining how these girls interpreted, negotiated with, and reconstructed American socio-moral values and expectations that are presented in American popular culture. In this dissertation, Disney animated films were chosen since they are considered one of the exemplary symbols of American children’s popular culture by American Disney reviewers as well as by Korean audiences.

Before analyzing young Korean girls’ understanding on the Disney films, this dissertation started by illustrating the relationships between popular culture, society, and education, popular culture’s meaning to and influence on children, and the importance of children’s interpretation of popular culture in the field of both cultural studies and education. In addition, it addressed the multicultural contexts of Korean children who live in America and these contextual influences on the Korean children’s understanding

of American popular culture. This dissertation then discussed three major themes, which dealt with young Korean girls' perspectives of the characteristics of attraction of romantic love, their interpretations of sexual messages and constructing sexuality, and their perceptions of being royals in the Disney films. Finally, this dissertation provided some implications and suggestions for young children's parents, early childhood teachers and teacher education programs, and researchers about using popular culture as a way to understand young children and their diverse interpretations which depend on the various contexts of different audiences.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **Introduction**

The interests in and concerns about popular culture have not decreased since the 1950s when television emerged. Various forms of popular culture, including TV, films, video games, ads, and popular music, have had a huge impact on society ever since. Especially during the last decade, mass media has provoked much concern because of the overwhelming amount of information that they dispense and people's constant exposure to them. In particular, the impact of the mass media on children has been great, since children are much more exposed to the many forms of popular culture today than ever before. For instance, according to a medical study (Walsh, Goldman, & Brown, 1996), the average American child aged 2-17 spends as much as 28 hours a week watching television, and gets at least one additional hour a day to play video games or surf the Internet. One study (Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999) also found that children spend an average of 6 hours and 32 minutes per day on various popular media. Thus, the estimates of the combined hours that the average child spends on a variety of forms of popular culture during a school year surely exceed the time that he or she spends in school (Stapleton, 2000).<sup>1</sup>

Most studies of popular culture have merely speculated upon the psychological effects that such culture has on children or have criticized its texts without considering

the perspectives of the viewers—in this case, children—and their socio-cultural situations (Barker, 1997; Buckingham, 1996; Tobin, 2000). Much research has demonstrated the negative effects of the mass media by focusing on either children’s behaviors or responses by means of pre- and post-tests of certain kinds of mass media (e.g., Dill & Dill, 1998; Dubow & Miller, 1996; Robinson, 2003) or through content analysis of popular culture texts (e.g., Berger, 2004; Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 1997; Glaubke, Miller, Parker, & Espejo, 2001). Moreover, many scholars of popular culture have also been skeptical about seeing popular culture as a threat to high culture and as a way of destroying childhood innocence (e.g., Elkind, 1981, 1998; Postman, 1994; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997).

As Huckelba and Corsaro (2003) point out, such studies and responses have overlooked children’s potential to interpret a cultural text. These studies have considered children passive, illuminating what Locke (1989 [1693]) called a “*tabula rasa*,” that is to say, a child is seen as a blank slate to be filled and formed by external stimulations and motivations. Moreover, the relationship between schooling, education, and popular culture has been ignored in such studies as the ones mentioned above because popular culture has not been considered a form of official knowledge that schools have to cover or have to teach students (Cuban, 1986). As several scholars have pointed out (e.g., Cuban, 1986; Dyson, 1997; Giroux, 1995a), this attitude often results from the belief that popular culture is not important enough to learn. Rather, it is mere entertainment, in which people have rarely seen educational value. As Rorty (1989) argues, such a cultural apparatus is not often considered moral or aesthetic, and thus is

put in “a subordinated position within culture” (p. 82). Like many other forms of popular culture, children’s popular culture hasn’t been considered important enough to deal with as an official or legitimate culture, as has “high culture” (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984). As a result, many adults, including both parents and teachers, do not think that they should pay attention to children’s popular culture, in spite of the fact that children are able to learn much about themselves and the world through exposure to it (Corsaro, 1997; Drotner, 2001; Giroux, 1995b; Simpson, 2004).

However, in spite of the need for and importance of understanding children’s own interpretations of popular culture, there are only a few studies that have sought to examine children’s own understanding of American popular culture as it relates to education (e.g., Aidman, 1999; Dyson, 1997, 2003; Tobin, 2000; Trousdale, 1995). Unfortunately, even these studies have not included the voice of Korean children who were U.S.–born or –raised<sup>2</sup> on American popular culture. As a matter of fact, even though many immigrant children learn about American society and its socio-cultural values through popular culture (Olsen, 1997; Pyke, 2000), studies that explore what these children think regarding American popular culture have been neglected.

Korean children and their families, in particular, have had little social attention in spite of their increasing number in the United States (e.g., Lee, 2002a; Lee, 1991; Zhou, 2004).<sup>3</sup> As a “model minority,” Korean children have shown great academic achievement and high educational attainment in the absence of government assistance or intervention in American schools, as well as in society as a whole (Lee, 2002a). Such high academic achievement is associated with Korean migrants’ economic success, but

the problem is that Korean children are often seen as not having difficulties in learning and in adjusting to American culture.

As a matter of fact, Korean children's academic and economic success doesn't necessarily mean that they internally adapt to the American socio-cultural situation (Choe, 1999). In addition, as Lee (1991) astutely notices, Koreans' great educational and economic success does not directly result in Koreans having a high socio-political status in American society mostly because of their language barrier. Therefore, many Koreans have encountered cultural and socio-political obstacles, all of which can cause their isolation and exclusion from American mainstream culture in spite of their high educational levels and economic successes (Lee, 1991).

From this perspective, similar to many other immigrant children, Korean children who live in the United States have been raised in two different cultures, and thus they must negotiate in a dual-value zone that blends Korean cultural beliefs and American social values. However, as traditional Korean cultural assumptions and beliefs as practiced in the home are often disjunctive and incompatible with those of American schools, Korean children's cultural values are not really accepted and represented in American schools, popular culture, and society in general, for all these domains concentrate on dominant American social values and attitudes toward children. Thus, there are many Korean children who not only have to adapt to the American cultural environment, which is very different from that of Korea, but also follow Korean cultural norms, which are necessary to preserve their native cultural heritage. In this sense, it is

important to examine how these children reconstruct Korean and American values as these are represented in American popular culture.

Given the importance of studies on Korean migrant children's interpretations of popular culture, this study will focus on female children. According to several feminists' perspectives (e.g., Bowlby, 1985; Davis, 1997; Faludi, 1991; Kilbourne, 2003), girls and women have been indoctrinated to desire to be and look like Disney princesses, Barbie dolls, or supermodels in popular culture, and this desire forms feminine subjectivity. From this perspective, the female self is not a reality that can be completely determined by a girl's or woman's will. Rather, it is often determined by others'—particularly males'—gazes, perceptions, and attitudes toward females themselves in a particular situation or society. Thus, these “others” become a mirror which reflects female selves in a way that prevents females from knowing their true identities, since they see themselves as others see them. In this manner, the question of what a female should be, act, or look like in a particular society moves from the subjective domain of the “self” to the objective domain of “others,” illuminating what Sartre (1943) has called, “being-for-other,” which refers to an individual's tendency to be dependent on others for one's sense of self.

However, subjectivity is not only based on others' gazes, but is also established by the continual process of struggle between ongoing power and resistance to it (Foucault, 1966). As Foucault points out, the subject is not fixed, but rather unceasingly changes by means of a variety of experiences, intentions, desires, and powers. In other words, subjectivity is constantly in the process of reproduction and transformation. Thus, female

children's identities may not be formed only through their dependence on others' perspectives. Rather, these children can mold and renew their selves through a continual process of struggle, as Foucault suggests.

The point is that the voices of young girls have been often marginalized in popular cultural studies. As Walkerdine (1997) asserts, most studies on girls' narratives about popular culture have been conducted with adolescents, since they have usually assumed that popular culture is a salient feature of youth culture. However, young girls can also establish their own views on popular culture and share these views with peers. As a result, it is important to explore how young girls have negotiated with or overcome social expectations, including gender biased assumptions that are found in popular culture, in order to establish their selves.

In order to take a critical look at young Korean girls' perceptions of American popular culture, Disney animated films have been chosen for this study, as an example of American popular culture aimed at children. As Giroux (e.g., 1995a, 1999, 2000a) has already pointed out in several of his works, American socio-cultural values and assumptions have been consistently represented and reinforced by Disney films, which construct childhood so as to reconcile it to consumerism. Therefore, as an exemplary symbol of American culture, Disney animated films can be used as a tool to examine young Korean girls' perceptions about the United States and its culture in that these films reveal American socio-cultural assumptions to Korean children more clearly than many other kinds of children's popular culture.

It is important to mention, however, that the purpose of this study is not primarily to criticize Disney animated films by verifying that they contain and promote certain stereotypes of or biases against a certain group or culture, as many other scholars have argued (e.g., Bell, Hass, & Sells, 1995; Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002; Giroux, 1995a, 1999, 2000a; Kasturi, 2002; Smoodin, 1994; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997; Trites, 1991; Zipes, 1983). Rather, this study will regard these films as a medium of American values and examine how the American social assumptions and beliefs in these films can be reprocessed and reproduced by Korean children who live in a cross-cultural zone.

Assuming, then, that a child's socio-cultural experiences have an influence on his or her interpretations of popular culture, this study will analyze how young Korean girls interpret American social ideology and values as they are represented in Disney animated films. It will also explore how these girls juxtapose and negotiate with these values by means of Korean social values and beliefs. This study is thus an attempt to examine, as Buckingham (1997) puts it, "the extent to which any of the covert ideological messages allegedly revealed by this kind of analysis [the content analysis of Disney films]—be they 'positive' or 'negative'—actually connect with what might be going on for the children who represent their primary audience" (p. 291).

In addition, this study doesn't aim to generalize about all Korean female children's understandings of American popular culture's messages by seeking a regular pattern or tendency in these children's thoughts and answers. Rather, it attempts to fully disclose the unique and meaningful voice of each child who participated in this study in order to understand what is personally and socially valuable in her situation in light of

those messages. As all of them have a favorite Disney princess for different reasons, their interpretations and understandings may also vary. For example, one girl who participated in the study, Minhee, liked Cinderella because the latter had tremendous patience and generosity, while Belle's self-assertiveness—especially toward men—led another girl, Sunjoo, to choose Belle as her favorite. Another participant, Jisoo, chose Ariel because Ariel and her friends were very funny, but Ahjin picked Snow White because she thought that Snow White's character and physical features looked similar to her. Such perspectives on and narratives of popular culture can reflect these children's own responses to, interactions with, and interpretations of society and its ideologies, exposing their personalities, family values, and socio-cultural background. This study, therefore, proposes to look closely at what each child wants to say and what is important to each child. Like a collage in which each piece is not only alive in its own way, but also a harmonious part of the entire work, each child's special voice contributes to the whole of this study.

Considering everything that has been discussed above, then, this study examines the following questions: 1) Do our children passively receive all of popular culture's messages without reflecting on them? 2) In what ways is criticism of Disney films relevant or irrelevant for these children, who are audiences of those films? 3) How do these Korean girls interpret and modify American cultural messages, given not only their developmental level, but also their personal experiences and the cultural contexts in which they live? 4) What personal concerns and cultural values are expressed in the young Korean girls' interpretations of popular culture? This study looks for possible



answers to the above questions by listening to Korean female children's narratives of the Disney animated films.

The rest of this chapter provides the theoretical and contextual foundations which are related to popular culture and children. First, it discusses popular culture and social ideology. In order to do so, it explores the relationship between popular culture, society, and education in the United States. It also examines global and local—in this case, Korean—aspects of Disney and its films. In addition, various critiques of and arguments about Disney films will be provided in an effort to discuss three major issues: race, gender, and social class. Next, there is a discussion of the absence of children's voices in studies on child education, including popular culture. The remainder of the chapter also illustrates the importance of children's active role in interpreting American popular culture. Finally, since the bicultural context of Korean children who live in the United States has an impact on their internalizations of and perspectives on the messages of American popular culture, this chapter addresses that context, as well as its influence on these children's identity and their socio-cultural values.

## **Context of the Study**

### **Popular Culture and Social Ideology**

In order to examine young Korean female children's interpretations of popular culture in this study, it is useful to discuss, first, the relationships between popular culture

and social ideology, that is to say, the ways in which popular culture represents social values and norms in a given society. In addition, there will be an analysis of how and why knowledge of popular culture is excluded from schools. In this analysis, the concepts of both high culture and low culture will be also discussed. Finally, some explanations of how popular culture functions as a resource for children's knowledge and experiences will be provided.

### **Popular Culture and Society**

Popular culture is a cultural apparatus that can be seen as an important tool in ideological production, and thus it is a place where we can observe the production, reproduction, and transformation of ideologies (Hall, 2003). According to Fiske (1987), social norms and ideologies have developed in the interests of those who have social power, and therefore they function as a means of maintaining the existing social power. Similarly, Kellner (2003) argues that the messages of the media culture reinforce people's recognition of specific norms and values in society so that people can adapt themselves to the existing social order:

Media stories provide the symbols, myths, and resources through which we constitute a common culture and through the appropriation of which we insert ourselves into this culture. Media spectacles demonstrate who has power and who is powerless, who is allowed to exercise force and violence, and who is not. They dramatize and legitimate the power of the forces that be and show the powerless that they must stay in their places or be oppressed. (p. 9)

The point here is that popular culture can be seen as a means of representing socio-cultural values, beliefs, and constraints in a given society by providing the images that

form a common and normal culture in that society (e.g., Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Hall, 1977, 1993; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Moreover, in addition to providing the ideas of “representations of the social world, images, descriptions, explanations, and frames for understanding how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work” (Hall, 2003, p. 90), it also becomes a site where these ideas are “articulated, worked on, transformed, and elaborated” (Hall, 2003, p. 91).

Adorno and Horkheimer (1969) went even further and insisted that popular culture is a site through which both people and their pleasures become commodities, and thus individual difference is produced and determined by society. According to Adorno (1978), examining the process of commodification within popular culture plays a significant role in allowing us to see how the social values of a cultural text are created. Such commodification determines whether a certain cultural text’s aspects are looked upon as important and valuable or not. Based on this perspective, popular culture is merely one form of “the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work and that of the social system” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1969, p. 31), and thus “the culture industry as a whole has molded men as a type unfailingly reproduced in every product” (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1972, p. 127). Therefore, as Naremore and Brantlinger (1991) point out, the final goal of the culture industry is not to create popular culture, but to produce people who are maneuvered into this industry’s commodities.

Adorno and Horkheimer tend to think that the culture industry controls most people by ignoring the complexity of the relationships between a cultural text and its

audience, and commodification can thus regulate an audience's perception of social values and ideologies by reproducing and transforming popular ideologies for audiences (Klinger, 1991). In other words, not only the individual and collective identities of children, men, and women, but also the conceptions of the beautiful, the good, and the true in a given society, are largely shaped, politically and pedagogically, by popular culture. Thus, Giroux (1995a, 1999, 2000b) argues that popular culture should be considered an important place for social knowledge to be discussed, interrogated, and critiqued. As a result, culture can be a useful way to understand a cultural paradigm that shows the relationship between knowledge, values, and power, on which society stands, for popular culture illustrates the dominant social values of society and makes clear the socio-political context within which culture exists (e.g., Giroux, 1995a, 1997, 1999; Hall, 1977, 1993; Kellner, 1995; McLaren, 1995; Scholle & Denski, 1995).

From this point of view, culture can be considered an arena of the production of and struggle over power, in which social ideology and power can be continuously constructed, circulated, and reconstructed (Hall, 1992; Hall, Gay, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997; Giroux & Simon, 1989). Hall explains such a point of view by referring to culture as "the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society" (1986, p. 26). We see, then, that culture is a way to study various cultural practices, and therefore it can always be transformed and negotiated in ways in which political as well as cultural struggle is represented (Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992).

Popular culture therefore represents social values that are circulated in society, and it illuminates what has been called “sociocultural determinant[s],” which establish socially produced knowledge and culture (Apple, 2004). As a result, popular culture should be seen as a pivotal place of “permanent education” (Williams, 1976). To put another way, cultural production is not only a manifestation of socio-cultural hegemony but also a labyrinth of existing oppression and ongoing resistance, since culture is “a contested terrain, rather than a field of one dimensional manipulation and illusion” (Kellner, 1989, p. 141). In Gramsci’s (1971) terms, “popular [culture] can only be conceived in polemical form and in the form of a perpetual struggle” (p. 21). Considering culture a pedagogical arena in life’s daily struggle and conflict, Giroux (1995a), too, articulately states that the study of popular culture focuses on such struggle and conflict by examining how symbolic and semiotic meanings, as well as power, are produced and circulated in a cultural site. From this standpoint, an examination of popular culture can be a means of exposing a pedagogical and political process in culture where the hidden relationship between culture and power exists (Giroux, 1995a; Giroux & Simon, 1989), and thus a means of understanding the dominant as well as the subordinate culture (Fiske, 1992; Kellner, 1994). Hence, to inquire into popular culture is a study of power that is about “the strategies, the networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way it was” (Foucault, 1988, p. 104).

In this way, studying popular culture provides us with a chance to deliberate various social issues that are presented in cultural texts. By doing this, we can look at

those people whose experiences, power, and knowledge are imposed on other people (Freire & Giroux, 1989; Grossberg, Nelson, & Treichler, 1992; McLaren, 1989). More precisely, it allows us to see how knowledge and power come together in various educational places, such as schools and popular culture, in order to silence, marginalize, or dominate certain groups of people because of their ethnicity, social class, or gender (Giroux, 2000a, 2000b).

### **Popular Culture and Education**

As Giroux (1992) points out, popular culture can be a vehicle for teaching particular social roles, values, and ideals to children that is even more influential than traditional learning sites, such as the family, church, and public schools. In spite of this fact, however, popular culture is still not usually considered a part of the official or legitimate culture. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier, many adults have worried about children's exposure to the negative impact of the mass media, which could produce children's alienation from social relationships, violent behaviors, and moral decay. In other words, they believe that the mass media may lead to confusion in the existing social order. The ambiguity about the status of popular culture reflects Bourdieu's (1984) notion of the distinction between high culture and popular culture. According to him, high culture refers to those cultural forms, practices, and objects that are considered legitimate or refined, and are accessible only to members of the dominant classes. In contrast, popular culture involves aspects of culture that are mass-produced and primarily intended for a broader range of the population. Because of its popularity and easy

accessibility, however, popular culture and its practice are often seen as ordinary, trivial, and without real value. In Bourdieu's (1984) terms, it is considered "too closely linked to bodily pleasures and sensual desire," to the pleasure of "animality, corporeality, the belly and sex" (p. 489).

In addition, Bourdieu argues that members of the dominant class and educational institutions exalt and legitimate high culture and its practices. By doing so, they dispense the high values of their culture and its symbols only to others like themselves in order to maintain their cultural ascendancy, which can only be accomplished by employing such a cultural code. Calling such cultural codes "cultural capital," Bourdieu (1984) points out that they contribute to the maintenance of boundaries between the members of different social classes. According to him, high cultural artifacts function as exclusionary mechanisms that are controlled by members of the dominant classes, who use their knowledge and familiarity with high culture to reinforce class boundaries.

In a similar vein, Fiske (1991) argues for differences between high culture and popular culture by introducing audiences' different views of popular culture and high culture. According to him, popular culture is consumed mostly for its relevance, while high culture is generally consumed for its quality and aesthetic standards. An appreciation of popular culture is socially as well as historically constructed by audiences because it can be related to their actual social situations (Cawelti, 1984; Fiske, 1991). In other words, readers find meanings and pleasure in popular culture that are relevant to themselves and their lives. In this manner, the appreciation of popular culture is also practical in that readers can understand and deal with their particular social situations and

relationships by appreciating the concepts of family, friends, school, and work which are portrayed in popular culture (Fiske, 1991).

In addition, as Fiske argues (1991), popular discrimination doesn't have particular criteria by which it judges that one reading is better or more correct than another because a text is "utilizing modes of consumption" which can't be inseparable from "an art of using" (de Certeau, 1984). For this reason, popular artists and work don't have to be seen as "superior" to their readers (Fiske, 1991), and thus each person can be an expert on a popular cultural text (Bordwell, 1989). From this perspective, popular appreciation differs from aestheticism, in which more educated, cultured, and polished sensibilities are considered necessary to appreciate artworks. The activity of popular culture "remains the only possible one for all those who nevertheless buy and pay for the showy products through which a productivist economy articulates itself" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 17).

Relating aestheticism to high cultural sensitivity among the educated bourgeoisie, Fiske (1991) goes on to argue that such aestheticism generalizes refined cultural taste as the best of human nature. Therefore, it plays a crucial role to in separating such taste—for so-called high culture—from the rest of culture by means of its "critical discrimination":

These cultured sensibilities [aestheticism] were found [in the past] almost exclusively among the educated fractions [sic] of the high bourgeoisie and the "culture" they enabled their owners to appreciate was that of their class and gender, particularly the Graeco-Roman and European "great tradition" in literature, music, and the visual arts. What aestheticism did was to universalize these social tastes into ahistorical, asocial values of beauty and harmony, and to construct from them an artificial set of universals that claimed to express the finest, best, and most moral elements of the human condition: the taste of the high



bourgeois white male was universalized into the essence of humanity—a major ideological prize for any class to win! The function of critical discrimination, then, was to mask the social under the aesthetic, so that aesthetic “quality” became a hidden marker of the social quality of those who could appreciate it. (p. 104)

Thus, in contrast to an appreciation of popular culture, which focuses on artworks’ relevance and function in every day life, “aestheticism distances art from necessity in a way that parallels the freedom of the monied classes from economic necessity” (Fiske, 1991, p. 105). In this way, artworks of high culture exist only for the appreciation and cherishing of their perfection and integrality, and thus, as Bourdieu (1984) argues, raising questions about the practical functions of an aesthetic art is seen as ignorant, illiterate, and even immoral.

The arguments of both Bourdieu and Fiske help to explain the alienation of popular culture from official knowledge in schools. According to Bourdieu (1984), cultural legitimacy, which is acquired by cultural capital, can be a pivotal process in socialization, which is one of the major goals of schools. And knowledge, which is dealt with constantly in schools, is considered natural truth, or aesthetic, and functions as a powerful means by which hierarchical relationships in a given society are learned and internalized. In this way, knowledge can be seen merely as power itself (Foucault, 1994), and such power has to do with one’s beliefs and one’s values, as well as one’s relationship to others who do not share them.

As several scholars (e.g., Apple, 2004; Bourdieu, 1984; Bordwell, 1989, Fiske, 1991) insist, in comparison to high culture, popular culture is seen by schools and many scholars as superficial, sensational, and easy, in spite of the fact that the accessibility of

popular culture doesn't necessarily mean that readers who enjoy it lack authenticity or are incapable of interpreting it. Still, schools mostly teach knowledge of high culture to students, rather than that of popular culture, which implies that the former is socially "legitimate" and "official" (Apple, 2002). By excluding popular culture from the official knowledge or discourse in schools and by including only the high and official forms of culture, however, schools are clearly saying that popular culture is inferior, coarse, and illicit. Ultimately, the difficulty and the inaccessibility of a cultural text do not function as a true means of estimating its quality and value. Rather, they become a mechanism to emphasize social class by regulating knowledge in such a way that some groups of people, who don't embrace the values and interests of high culture, are marginalized and dominated in society (Foucault, 1994; Martin, 1992; Schwartz, 2000).

In addition, the exclusion of popular culture and its knowledge from schools has to do with the matter of the "ungovernability of young people" (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 78). As Kenway and Bullen (2001) argue, if children are seen as having more knowledge of popular culture than teachers, then teachers will not be seen as authority figures in the realm of knowledge any more. Moreover, adults in general would be deprived of their "control over the knowledge and experiences that are available children" (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 1995). From this perspective, children are would be regarded as not only being "in danger" from the consumer culture, but also as being "dangerous to the adult order" because of their access to adult knowledge through that culture (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 79).

Popular culture, however, tends to be molded and maintained in a way that often makes it reject educational control (Ross, 1989). Its denial of the intervention by schools can be interpreted as an attempt at “resistance to education,” and thus a refusal to be taught within the boundaries of adult power. “It [such a refusal] has something to do with a resistance to those whose patronizing power and missionary ardor are the privileges bestowed upon and instilled in them by a legitimate education” (Ross, 1989, p. 201). In other words, this refusal can be seen as an attempt to escape from the control of both school and adults—a control effected by means of certain kinds of discipline and power, such as surveillance and normalization. Such control forces children to cultivate dependent and “docile” bodies and minds so as to create effective control over them and thus over the material productivity in a given society (Foucault, 1979).

From this point of view, popular culture, which can be seen as a place in which children have access to information, knowledge, and culture that the schools eschew, may be regarded as more intimately meaningful to them than official school knowledge. This is so because, through popular culture, children learn things that few people teach them in schools. As a result, they not only create a space in which they can express themselves without the intervention of schools or adults, but also experience a transgression of the existing rules and norms. In this manner, popular culture can be subversive of and opposed to the texts used in schools by permitting the kind of fantasy and escapism that enable children to get away from the adult-controlled world (Seiter, 1995).

In short, children’s cultural expression and resistance to school authority are interpreted as a political way to demonstrate the conflicts in their identities, experiences,

and knowledge in relation to the dominant groups in society (Giroux, 1992, 1995a; Grossberg, 1993; hooks, 1992). In this manner, the discourse of popular culture, in which children's cultural knowledge and experience are implied, can constitute a way of seeing what kind of ideological perspectives they struggle with and how they resist the powers that be. In addition, Freire and Giroux (1989) go on to suggest that understanding what is meaningful to children and how they construct themselves through cultural productions results in a more democratic society and in more social equality, both of which empower children. By looking closely at what Korean children's experiences count for and how they are practiced by means of Disney animated films, this study intends to give children an opportunity to negotiate with that power and legitimate knowledge.

### **Disney and American Social Ideologies**

I have already pointed out in the introduction that, as an exemplary symbol of American popular culture for children, Disney animated films have been chosen for this study. Thus, in this section, several critical issues related to Disney will be addressed. First, a brief review of Disney's powerful influence on American children as well as other countries' children will be examined. This review will be followed by a case of Korean society exploring the images of Disney products and Disney itself in a Korean socio-historical context. It will also discuss Disney's strong emphasis on certain American social values in the four films that I chose for this study. Finally, the main

critiques of gender, race, and social class, as these are represented in the four above films, will be addressed.

### **Disney in the World**

American popular culture for children has been criticized by many scholars because it tends to establish American cultural power and hegemony throughout the world by means of its cultural imperialism. (e.g., Cannella & Kincheloe, 2002; Dorfman & Mattleart, 1975; Giroux, 1992, 1995a, 1997, 1999, 2000a; Kasturi, 2002; Koza, 2003; McLaren, 1995; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997). Disney Company especially has a great and sometimes detrimental influence on children around the world. The corporation's tremendous impact on children throughout the world has resulted from its stupendous national and global success since the mid-1930s. For instance, by 1941 it was already reported that one in three people on earth had seen a Disney film (Gomery, 1994), and Disney comic strips had appeared in five thousand newspapers, in one hundred countries, and in more than thirty languages by 1971 (Dorfman & Mattleart, 1975). Moreover, Disney's international revenue has reached 5 billion dollars in 1999 (Wasko, 2001), and therefore, as some scholars (e.g., Herman & McChesney, 1997; Sehlinger, 1993) have pointed out, Disney, one of the American transnational corporations, has become an exemplary model of the global media system.

Disney is seen as a place for safe and wholesome family entertainment by most people because Disney has been closely connected to innocent childhood and fantasy (e.g., Giroux, 1999; Wasko, 2001). For example, according to Wasko (2001), many

Americans think that Disney is incomparable and unique to any other corporations by considering its products pure, innocent, and pleasurable. Thus, as some scholars have already asserted (e.g., Bell, Haas, & Sells, 1995; Giroux, 1995, 1999; Smoodin, 1994; Zukin, 1991), many Americans hardly notice any social ideologies and economic power which have been embedded in Disney. Rather, they often say, “They’re [the Disney company and its leaders] making so many people so happy. And they do it so well—how can one not be awed by their success?” (Wasko, 2001, p. 3)

But Disney’s global phenomenon has been denounced for universalizing a certain form of childhood as natural and ideal in contemporary society through globalization and children’s easy access to the media (e.g., Dorfman & Mattelart, 1975; Giroux, 1995a, 1999; Kasturi, 2002; Murphy, 1995). It has been said that Disney urges homogenous global culture by Americanizing it; if this is true, Disney has had an impact not only on local but also on national cultural identities. This standpoint considers the cultural imperialism of Disney to exercise a great influence on the minds and perceptions of children in other cultures by portraying and celebrating American mainstream social ideology. From this perspective, Disney has disseminated American cultural messages to other countries, thus contributing to the Americanization of children. The ordinary U.S. Citizen, as this occurs, remains relatively unaware of the cultural products of other countries.

Moreover, Disney has been criticized for its “nostalgic” portrayal of the past, in which history and social struggles are embellished and thus perverted (Baudrillard, 1996; Giroux, 1999). Baudrillard (1996) pinpoints this problem:

It [Disney] is not only interested in erasing the real by turning it into a three-dimensional virtual image with no depth, but it also seeks to erase time by synchronizing all the periods, all the culture, in a single traveling, by juxtaposing them in a single scenario. Thus it marks the beginning of real, punctual, and unidimensional time, which is also without depth. No present, no past, no future, but an immediate synchronism of all the places and all the periods in a single atemporal virtuality. Disney realizes de facto such an atemporal utopia by producing all the events, past or future, on simultaneous screens, and by inexorably mixing all the sequences as they would or will appear to a different civilization than ours. (p.7)

According to Baudrillard, a Disneyland amusement park becomes not mere fantasy or imaginary, but real since it is transformed into the actual world of the United States. As a result, it projects the American future based on the illusion of the real, which Baudrillard has called the “hyperreal” or “simulation” (1983, 1996). As a result, Disney suppresses people’s understanding of the real and the historical because what is presented is already “beyond the imaginary” giving supposedly real images of the actual reality of the United States.<sup>4</sup> Giroux (1995b) also reproaches Disney’s concept of innocence by which the history and collective identity of the American past are falsified and misconstrued. For Giroux (1995b, 1999), innocence is a pedagogical means of preserving Disney’s authority and power; for as such authority and power exclude a certain group of people and its values, Disney’s concept of innocence becomes “the discursive face of domination” (1995b, p. 46).

In sum, Disney provides the paradigm for behavior and values not only in the United States but also in foreign countries by implying that “what is good for Disney is good for the world, and what is good in a Disney fairy tale is good in the rest of the world” (Zipes, 1995, p. 40).

### *Disney in Korea*

Disney's reputation in Korea is not an exception to its popularity elsewhere. When Disney's Mickey Mouse was discussed in the daily Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo in the late 1930s, many Koreans were already well-acquainted with Disney and its famous characters (Chosun Ilbo [Chosun Daily Newspaper], 1936; Kim & Lee, 2001). In 1950s, Disney animated films were shown in Korean theaters after the Korean War, starting with *Peter Pan* in 1957 (Huh, 2002; Kim & Lee, 2001).<sup>5</sup> The Walt Disney Korean Company was established in 1992 (Kim & Lee, 2001), and in 1996 the American Disney company received 8.16 million dollars—57.2 percent of the Disney Korean Company's total profits—from Korea (Korean Ministry of Culture, 1997). In addition, the construction of a new Disneyland in Seoul, Korea will be complete around 2011 (Whang & Lee, 2005).

Koreans' perception of Disney is intertwined with the Korean socio-political background in two ways. First, it has to do with a positive image of the United States and its culture, which has been prevalent in Korea since before the 1990s (Kim & Lee, 2001). This positive image is due to American military support for South Korea during the Korean War, as well as the current economic boom in Korea. This positive perception of the United States, once merely an ally, has thus expanded to the recognition of its cultural products. These were seen as good, beneficial, and instructive, when compared to those of Japan, whose cultural products were considered bad and immoral in light of Japanese colonization of Korea. Thus, from the Korean liberation from Japan in 1945 up to the



recent past, the Korean government prohibited Japanese cultural products, while encouraging those of the United States.<sup>6</sup> This Korean policy led the Korean people to ardently welcome American cultural products. American economic power also induced Koreans to value its cultural products. Just as Americans have a positive perception of Disney (Wasko, 2001), Koreans, too, did think of Disney as ingenuous and educational by relating it to American economic status and political power in the world. It is for this reason, Kim and Lee (2001) argue, that Disney films have become a symbol of American economic success and modernization.

Second, this positive image changed to some degree after the 1990s. One reason for this change is derived from the fact that the Korean animation industry didn't fully develop after the establishment of the Walt Disney Korea in 1992 (Kim & Lee, 2001). In fact, this negative aspect to Disney unavoidably resulted from the economic difficulties in Korea at that time because of economic liberalization which had proceeded since the mid-1980s. The catalyst to accelerate the move toward such liberalization had various sources, one of which was the United States' growing economic pressure of free trade in vital areas of the Korean economy, such as the automotive sector (Gills, 1996). In addition, the United States had also demanded that more of Korea's various capital markets open up. Thus, many Korean firms had to survive the severe economic situation in response to the increasing free trade and open markets. As a result, such American economic claims made Koreans feel that Korea had serious economic challenges that were caused by the United States.

Furthermore, in the late 1980s, the failure of the Korean democratic movement after dictator Jung-Hee Park was attributed to ex-president, Doo-Hwan Chun, but also to the United States. Because in 1980 the United States helped President Chun to put down the movement, then anti-American sentiments have been much stronger since that time. It is not surprising, therefore, that serious concerns about and even condemnations of Disney's industrial influence and its domination of Korean animation and video markets were raised after 1990.

Yet, it is important to note that though anti-Americanism still exists in Korea, Disney is as popular as ever and its animated films are still considered good for children. One reason for this persistently positive view of Disney may be the importance that Koreans place on learning English. As Yang and McMullen (2003) point out, in Korea proficiency in English and experience in United States are of greater value than proficiency in other languages and experiences in other countries for being admitted to good universities and getting good jobs. As a result, most Koreans consider English essential for success in Korea and around the world. In this regard, Korean parents often purchase Disney films to try and make use of them as an opportunity to improve their children's English when their children watch television or video tapes. Furthermore, since Disney video tapes are more available than any other companies' products due to Disney's domination in video markets in Korea, Korean parents do not have a variety of options to choose different kinds of animated films.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, since the 1990s, Disney films have functioned not only as entertainment but also as an educational tool.

Another important reason for Disney's popularity in Korea may be many Korea middle-class parents' positive experiences with Disney films. Disney animated films seemed to play an important role for Korean children as means of entertainment which was rare in Korean society after the Korean War. Thus, Disney films remind many Korean parents of their own childhood memories. As one of my informant's parents said, these Korean parents recall their childhood when they see their children watching a Disney film just as they did as children. From this point of view, Disney films are likely to be a cultural medium by which these Korean parents can connect to their children. Due to their positive experiences with Disney films, therefore, many Korean parents still tend to believe that their children can experience feelings similar to their own to Disney films.

Moreover, Korean parents highly value the fact that many Disney animated films are based on the classics of Western literature that are well-known in Korea. Many of the parents of my informants considered such Disney films as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, Disney's masterpieces, rather than *Jungle Book*, *Bambi*, or *Peter Pan*. In the same vein, many Korean parents are familiar with Disney films based on famous Western folklore, such as *The Little Mermaid* and *Beauty and the Beast*, much more than many other films, such as *Pocahontas* and *Mulan*.<sup>8</sup> The literary quality of these films leads them to trust the quality of Disney films by thinking that children's watching Disney films is just as educational as their reading a work of classic Western literature.

The emphasis on morals in Disney's stories also makes many Korean parents view Disney films as educational for their children. Several informants' parents said that a story's ethics and morals are very important because these parents believe that many young children must learn morality in order for them to be virtuous. Thus, Koreans tend to believe that children can learn from stories such as didactic Korean folklore and Disney animated films, which always promote virtue and punish evil. From this perspective, Disney animated films' moral content meets Korean parents' criteria for the type of story suitable for a child's learning.

After all, the Korean socio-historical context is a pivotal factor in considering whether Disney is good or bad for children in Korea and in allowing Koreans to perceive Disney and its films differently from those of other countries, including the United States. From this point of view, it is possible that the Korean social, cultural, and historical backdrop has also influenced Korean children's unique interpretations of Disney animated films.

### **Social Values in Disney Films**

Disney animated films often contain similar characters, themes, and values that are continually and intentionally presented. The so-called "Classic Disney" stories often sanitize and Americanize classic folk tales through a process that has been often referred as "Disnification" (e.g., Giroux, 1995a, 1995b, 1999; Kasturi, 2002; Rollin, 1987; Wasko, 2001).

One of the American social values that Disney films have emphasized is individualism. According to Taxel (1982), Disney's notion of individualism is "advancement through self-help, strict adherence to the work ethic, and the supreme optimism in the possibility of the ultimate improvement of society through the progressive improvement in humankind" (p. 14). However, such individualism is closely intertwined with and facilitated by the concept of innocence and fantasy, in which the world is always seen as optimistic, easy, and safe (e.g., Giroux, 1999; Hahn, 1996). In addition, according to Giroux, (1999), that world allows an independent individual to escape from a harsh reality by always providing new and enjoyable adventures. Disney is therefore inclined to describe the world as a place in which children themselves can explore whatever they want without fear or worry. Moreover, there is always great romance in Disney films, which often begins with falling in love at first glance and ends with a happy marriage. This kind of romance often leads the protagonists—mostly the heroines—to get married so as to leave home. They are thus seen as symbols of self-reliance, autonomy, and freedom.<sup>9</sup> Morals are also strongly emphasized in Disney films by promoting good and reproofing evil. As several scholars (Artz, 2002; Byrne & McQuillan, 1999; Tobin, 2000; Wasko, 2001) have pointed out, characters in Disney films are explicitly divided between good and evil. In addition, the good always win and their counterparts always lose in the end.

However, Disney films have not only emphasized specific American social values, such as individualism and freedom, but they have also conveyed a certain kind of cultural authority and legitimacy by ingeniously blending with those American values

and ideals (Giroux, 1995b, 1999, 2000a; Jackson, 1996; Smoodin, 1994; Ward, 1996; Watts, 1995; Zipes, 1995). As some of scholars (e.g., Bell, Haas, & Sells, 1995; Giroux, 1995a, 1997, 1999; Kasturi, 2002) have already noted, Disney films represent the American social norms of the white middle class as the American way of life by constructing the United States as “the happiest place on earth” (Giroux, 1995a, p. 45). According to them, Disney films combine an ideology of fantasy and innocence that encourage children to understand who they should be, what societies are about, and what it means to construct a childhood world in an existing social environment—namely, the United States. Put another way, the messages conveyed in Disney’s animated films are important socializing agents as regards the identities of children in that they represent, for the most part, the culture of the dominant American group, mentioned above, the white middle class.

From this point of view, Disney films are defined as a major cultural and ideological apparatus, which holds a socially dominant position in the representation of social relations and political problems (e.g., Adorno & Horkheimer, 1969; Comolli & Narboni, 1982; Frow & Morris, 1996; Hall, 1980). Due to this reason, Disney animated films have been the target of criticism for their pretense as a pure, sacred place for children, in which cultural homogeneity and historical purity are emphasized, while complex socio-global issues, like the cultural differences and struggles of various groups, are ignored (Baudrillard, 1996; Giroux, 1999). Therefore, Disney films are often considered “the ideological vehicle through which history is both rewritten and purged of its seamy side” (Giroux, 1995b, p. 47). According to some scholars (e.g., Fjellman,

1992; Smoodin, 1994; Wilson, 1993), Disney's biased ideologies function effectively by creating story settings that take place in a temporal space that is quite different from the present, and in which Disney's portrayals of undemocratic social structures can be hidden.

As regards Disney's biased social expectations, three major ideological constructions—gender, race, and social class—have been the most controversial and criticized. In order to understand how Disney currently represents its socio-cultural ideologies through its films, four recent Disney films—*The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992), and *The Lion King* (1994)—will be examined. These so-called “classic Disney” films (Byrne & McQuillan, 1999; Wasko, 2001), which are based on fairy tales or folklore, have been more severely criticized than any other films because of their skewed representations of gender, race, and social class. In order to examine Disney's representations of these three issues, an analysis of them based on the four films mentioned above will follow.

### ***Gender***

Gender construction in Disney films has been reproached more than any other issue that comes up when Disney films are being discussed. Since female characters in Disney films are mostly depicted by the white male narratives, their role is determined not through their own will, but by the stereotypes of women in the patriarchal narrative (Gioux, 1995a). Since they are imitations of actual super models or actresses, the heroines of Disney films are innately beautiful, thin, and provocative (Giroux, 1995a;

Stone, 1975; Zipes, 1995). These female protagonists are also, in general, portrayed as weak, passive, and victimized, so they are incapable of independent action or the living of life (Bell, Hass, & Sells, 1995; Giroux, 1995a, 1995b; O'Brien, 1995; Warner, 1992).<sup>10</sup> Some scholars (e.g., Bell, Hass, & Sells, 1995; Lieberman, 1972) insist that a child who wants to be a heroine in a Disney film hopes to be chosen by a prince because they consider themselves helpless without men.

In contrast to these virginal, vulnerable, and innocent heroines who are beautiful and thin, women who have power and fertility are depicted as bad, malicious, and sexual, so they have to be removed from society and the world in the Disney films (Murphy, 1995).<sup>11</sup> These women are always seen as obstacles which the protagonists must overcome because of the former's overt, excessive sexuality and authority (Bell, 1995). The point is that Disney tends to show mostly the negative side of strong femininity, implying that women's power is problematic (Ingwersen & Ingwersen, 1990). According to Trites (1991), in order to represent this negative image of women's power, Disney films also often portray these women as ugly and fat through a "bigoted distortion of human bodies" (p. 150). In addition, there are no mothers who show their great strength and mind in Disney films, and thus the mother seems to be "the faceless figure of figurant, an extra" who "gives rise to all figures by losing herself in the background of the scene like an anonymous persona" (Derrida, 1985, p. 38). As a result, by erasing the existence of mothers and their heritage from the stories, Disney invariably places women under a strong, visible patriarchal order (Haas, 1995).



These biased assumptions about women can be also found in *The Little Mermaid*. Ariel, the heroine in this movie, seems at first to resent her authoritarian father and longs for the human world. This rebellion against her father and her aspirations to live in the different world can be interpreted as the symbol of her desire for autonomy and independence (Giroux, 1995a, 1999; Trites, 1991). As her desire for freedom fades before marriage with a human prince, however, Ariel's desire is defined as the reward of marriage and the abandonment of her past life in this film (Giroux, 1995a, 1999; Lieberman, 1972; Trites, 1991). Giroux (1999) reproaches such a resolution by saying that, "although girls might be delighted by Ariel's teenage rebelliousness, they are strongly positioned to believe, in the end, that desire, choice, and empowerment are closely linked to catching and loving handsome men" (p. 99).

Moreover, Ariel has another problem. In order to get legs and be human, she has to renounce one of her physical attributes—her voice. By losing her voice, Ariel is one of the women who become silent and absent, and who are sacrificed so that they might enter the white male sphere (Kaplan, 1983; Murphy, 1995; Sells, 1995):

Women do not need to speak to men to engage in building human-to-human relationships, but only need to seduce and serenade them into a male-female cultural order. Since her prince is already acculturated and ready for marriage, Ariel does not pose the threat of domestication. Rather, Eric will "treat" her to the joys of colonial assimilation, with her deculturation following necessarily from her loss of power due to denaturalization. (Murphy, 1995, p. 133)

According to Sells (1995), Disney's trade-off here even leads an audience to think that the cost to women of entering the male world is easy and negligible because the pain that results from Ariel's walking is eliminated.<sup>12</sup> In addition, Sells (1995) argues that Ariel

has not only the physical renouncement, but she must also learn how to be a submissive and sexual woman in the male world. Beautiful, sexual, and pliable women are most valued because, as Ursula, the evil sea witch, sings in this film, “the men up there don’t like a lot of blabber” but prefer “ladies not to say a word” or “a lady who holds her tongue.”

Another example of Disney’s male dominate perspective can be seen in *Beauty and the Beast*. By changing the original fairy tale in critical ways,<sup>13</sup> Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* is dominated by the male Beast’s point of view in the narrative of Belle, the heroine (Jeffords, 1995). It is thus the Beast’s will, suffering, and change that become the pivotal focus of the story rather than those of Belle, and, as Jeffords (1995) indicates, Belle becomes a mere “mechanism for solving the Beast’s dilemma” (p. 167) in the Disney version of the story.

As for Jasmine, the heroine as well as the only female character in *Aladdin*, she isn’t able to make any decisions about her life, for she depends on males, such as her father, Aladdin, and Jafar the villain. In addition, Disney’s male dominant point of view depicts her as a woman who tries to solve every problem by using her sexual allure (Kasturi, 2002).<sup>14</sup> Thus, this film produces a negative view of women’s bodies, and the dominant message is a woman’s body can be used as a “tool” or an “object” that will help her to escape from a difficult situation. In the end, like Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, the princess Jasmine also becomes reduced only to the “object of his [a man’s] immediate desire as well as a stepping-stone to social mobility” (Giroux, 1997, p. 59).

Even in *The Lion King*, which is about an animal kingdom in Africa, female lions are described as powerless, incompetent, and ignorant. These lionesses don't do anything without lions and don't even question why only lions are able to rule their land, *Pride Rock* (Giroux, 1999; Wasko, 2001). From this standpoint, all the heroines in these four Disney films are subject to males' power and authority, echoing Giroux's (1999) argument that "independence and leadership are tied to patriarchal entitlement and high social standing" (p. 60).

### ***Race and Social Class***

Race and ethnicity manifest themselves in Disney films by means of several symbolic mechanisms, such as skin color, facial features, racially coded language, and language in general. *Aladdin* has been a particularly frequent target of criticism as it relates to racial matters, because of its characterizations of non-whites as sub-human. For example, as Giroux (1995a) points out, the bad Arabs in this film have heavy foreign accents, beards, swords, and turbans, while Aladdin and Jasmine, who are good persons, do not have these supposed Arab cultural features. The film also depicts Arab culture as violent, brutal, barbaric, and alien. This portrayal confirms Hall's (2003) notion of the "native" in "grammar of race," which refers to the practice of white perspectives describing different ethnic, racial groups as "others" (p. 91):

Another base image is that of the "native." The good side of this figure is portrayed in a certain primitive nobility and simple dignity. The bad side is portrayed in terms of cheating and cunning, and, further out, savagery and barbarism. They [natives] are likely to appear at any moment out of the darkness to decapitate the beautiful heroine, kidnap the children, burn

the encampment or threatening [*sic*] to boil, cook and eat the innocent explorer or colonial administrator and his lady-wife. These “natives” always move as an anonymous collective mass—in tribes or hordes. And against them is always counterposed the isolated white figure, alone “out there,” confronting his Destiny or shouldering his Burden in the “heart of darkness,” displaying coolness under fire and an unshakeable authority—exerting mastery over the rebellious natives or quelling the threatened uprising with a single glance of his steel-blue eyes. (p. 92)

Addison (1993) insists that *Aladdin*, which is “deeply racist” (p. 19), discloses a prejudice towards traditional European aspects of the medieval Persian story, a prejudice that expresses an American cultural assumption which has to do with foreign countries:

Aladdin’s political strategy protracts the complex American metaphor of a “free marketplace, pure of political intent or impact,” where wealth and opportunity are the birthrights of “free” individuals. In that ideological marketplace, Muslim women are prizes to be won. (p. 19)

In this regard, American white romance can be seen as truthful, moral, and just in that it provides freedom to a noble female who is bound by a barbaric, ignorant Arab culture. In other words, it is only American white males who are responsible for the quality and continuity of everyone’s life in the world (Jeffords, 1995; Schaefer, 1981).

Another case of the biased cultural representation is related to the characterization of life under water in *The Little Mermaid*. Characterized by Caribbean-type music, the life and culture under water is depicted as fun but there seems to be no hard work in this world (Murphy, 1995; Sells, 1995). The people there always enjoy their lives without producing anything and spend most of their time singing, dancing, and playing calypso music. Such a perspective has been criticized for its characterization of Caribbean and other equatorial cultures as undeveloped worlds or unknown nature, implying that only civilized society is considered human world (Murphy, 1995; Sells, 1995).

By having Simba and his family speak with British accents and three mean hyenas speak with black and Hispanic accents, Disney's racist point of view is demonstrated in *The Lion King* again (e.g., Gioux, 1995a; Wasko, 2001). According to Byrne and McQuillan (1999), using famous black actors' voices as animal characters in Disney animated films<sup>15</sup> suggests that African-Americans are not people or constitute "representation as simulacrum" in the Disney anthropomorphic world (p. 104). Moreover, the physical appearances of the malicious lion, Scar, and the bad hyenas are presented as being darker than the good lions and lionesses (Giroux, 1999).

The racial representations in *The Lion King* are said to be intimately related to those of social class. For example, Gooding-Williams (1995) asserts that "the elephant graveyard" where the bad hyenas live is a symbol of "the American inner city," not only because of the hyenas' black and Latino accents but also because of their living conditions in "a bleak-looking and overcrowded hi-rise" (p. 376). In addition, like many other heroines and heroes who are—at least, become—princesses or princes in Disney films, Simba is born with privilege and dignity as a future king. Thus, only Simba can succeed to the throne, and this succession is depicted as authorized by all the animals as well as the Creator in a scene in which the animals bow to him and a ray of sun is thrown on him (Artz, 2002; Byrne & McQuillan, 1999). In this way, monarchy is seen not only as legitimate, but also as oracular, so that nobody can change it in this "circle of life." In other words, "no upward mobility" exists in Pride Rock, in which only a select few people can succeed and rule (Kunzle, 1975, p. 16), and thus the white "elite" always seems to accomplish the good and the right and to make their own dreams come true in

the world of Disney. Furthermore, according to Artz (2000), this privileged social class cares only about themselves and their own happiness, not others:

None of the elites question unjust social relations or poor social conditions. The well-read Belle can imagine nothing more than her own romance. Once crowned, Aladdin is unperturbed by poverty and violence. Simba, John Smith, Tarzan, and other heroes seek only self-gratification. The resulting social peace and harmony occur as necessary narrative corollaries to Disney's promotion of elite self-interest. If the Princess is happy, the kingdom rejoices. (p. 26)

As a result, the delineation of social hierarchy as the law of nature in Disney world inclines to justify as unavoidable social inequality (Byrne & McQuillan, 1999; Giroux, 1995a, 1999; Kasturi, 2002). Based on these false representations of race and social class, Giroux (1999) firmly concludes that "there is nothing innocent in what kids learn about race as portrayed in such "magical world" of Disney" (p. 62). For Giroux (e.g., 1995a, 1999, 2000a), Disney is a site in which different ethnic and cultural groups from the white middle class are described as abnormal and inferior, and these groups are presented as posing a threat to society, while white middle class values, social relationships, and language are privileged and universalized.

Analyzing the three issues above as they manifest themselves in certain Disney films is important in that such content analysis helps us understand how American children's popular culture embeds specific social ideologies that support a certain group of people. One of the major foci of this study is therefore to determine how Korean female children perceive the portrayals of race, gender, and social class in four Disney films. By doing this, this study aims not only to make up for the gap between academic theories and our children's views, but emphasize the importance of children's voices in

popular cultural studies. As I mentioned earlier, it has been addressed by numerous scholars that the biased representations of gender in Disney films are formed by male points of view. It should also be noted that there are no Disney films in which Korean heroines appear, so Korean girls are excluded from this wonderful Disney world. Therefore, based on these critiques of the many scholars we have looked at, these Korean girls may yearn to be white American princesses who are always considered perfect from the American point of view. Do they really feel frustrated and want to be white princesses? Do they have the same American perspective on gender, race, and social class? What do they really think about these matters? These questions will get more attention in the rest of the chapters in this study.

### **Children and Society**

Most research in cultural studies has neglected the fact that children can be active agents who interpret popular culture in their own ways by merely emphasizing the analysis on American cultural products themselves. These studies have therefore excluded children's own voices and ignored the reciprocal relationship between children and popular culture. In fact, the absence of children's voices in studies of popular culture is indicative of how children and childhood have been regarded by a given society. Based on child developmental theories that have been significantly influenced by Piaget, children and childhood have been studied only from an adult's perspective in the twentieth century (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 1997).

Thus, it is important to discuss the concept of childhood in current Western societies in order to examine why children's socio-cultural lives and their perspectives have not been received sufficient attention in American research on children. The section, then, focus on how the prevalent conception of childhood has been socially established by means of developmental psychology as well as by notions of childhood innocence and ignorance. Finally, the view of children as active interpreters of popular culture will be addressed by emphasizing the importance of rediscovery of children's voices in cultural studies.

### **Concepts of Childhood in Society**

The study of children and childhood in twentieth century Western societies has been dominated by the idea of child development (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; James & Prout, 1997; Jenks, 1982). This emphasis on development in children and childhood has been influenced by developmental psychology since the late nineteenth century (Jenks, 1982). The developmental psychological perspectives of several well-known theorists—for example, Darwin, Freud, Piaget, and Kohlberg—have considered childhood a universal and natural process in human biological development. According to Jenks (1982), the developmental approach to childhood is based on the notions of rationality, naturalness, and universality. Rationality has been seen as the universal characteristic of adulthood since the Enlightenment, and a common view of childhood has been that it is a period of preparation for rational adulthood. As a child develops into an adult by a natural process, he or she moves from a savage to a civilized state. In relating the



concept of childhood to immaturity as a biological fact, childhood presupposes a lack of completion of adulthood (Burman, 1994). In contrast, an adult is an individual who has already matured and completely achieved through a developmental process, and adulthood is seen as a norm and a desirable state at which childhood aims (Archard, 1993; Christian-Smith & Erdman, 1997). Thus, growing up into adulthood in Western societies is considered a state of both quantitative and qualitative progress, whereas childhood is seen as an inadequate experience or, put in a more positive way, as a period of process and preparation (Archard, 1993; Bouwsma, 1976; Jenks, 1996).

As Jenks (1982) points out, this dominant developmental approach to childhood in Western societies is based on the idea of a natural growth, which is considered an indispensable process of children's maturation. This belief in children's inevitable growth by means of natural law has been influenced by post-Darwinism—which sees development as necessary and essential for the good of children—as well as the confusion between the notion of growth and that of progress that characterized the post-Enlightenment period (Jenks, 1982). The concept of naturally developing childhood has been significantly influenced by Piaget, so much so that Piagetian approaches dominated work on cognition during the second half of the twentieth century. In Piaget's work (e.g., 1953, 1955), child development is seen as having a series of predetermined stages, which apparently lead to the logical competence of adulthood. These stages are ordered temporally and arranged hierarchically along a continuum that begins in infancy, which is a sensorimotor state and has relatively low status, and extends into adulthood, an operative intelligent level that has high status.

Even though a child was looked upon not as a simple subject, but as an agent who could be influenced by and interact with a given social context in Piaget's work (Tesson & Youniss, 1995), Piaget's model has been often seen as an example of how to present a well-established orthodoxy—namely, it says that childhood is a biologically determined stage for rational adulthood in current Western societies. From this perspective, the modern conception of childhood, which suggests that childhood is biologically constructed and that it makes progress by means of the universal law of nature, produced a belief that all children pass through predetermined stages of change in various areas of growth toward competent, autonomous adulthood (Cannella, 1997). In this way, of this conception of childhood, educating children has been mostly based on the needs of children according to children's developmental stages.

Such interpretations of developmental psychology have not only influenced theories and studies of childhood; its influence has also led forms of educational pedagogy to be naturalized and scientific (Walkerdine, 1984). Walkerdine (1984) argues that there is a tendency in developmental psychology to connect biological inheritance to environment. Thus, the naturalization of childhood goes together with that of the family, child rearing, and education, which are ideas or techniques that support scientific views on childhood. The naturalization of childhood, family, and education implies that degeneracy and abnormality, both of which are based on a scientific model of development, should be prevented in order to ensure the achievement of adulthood (Walkerdine, 1984). As James and Prout (1997) write:

They [children and adults] are, in effect, two different instances of the

species. Socialization is the process which turns the asocial child into a social adult. The child's nature is therefore assumed to be different; for the model to work indeed this must be the case. The child is portrayed, like a laboratory rat, as being at the mercy of external stimuli: passive and conforming. Lost in a social maze it is the adult who offers directions. The child, like the rat, responds accordingly and is finally rewarded by becoming 'social,' by becoming adult. (p. 13)

Based on this perspective, child development through natural growth and evolution has been highlighted in child education and its research, including studies of children's popular culture. Thus, childhood as a presocial developmental period has been a major subject of study by stressing its different developmental features, which are based on those of adulthood (James & Prout, 1997). The result has been that the child's socio-cultural life has not received sufficient attention. Even in cultural studies, a child tends to be seen as having an undeveloped learning ability which doesn't allow him or her to analyze or discuss the complicated issues and plots contained in popular culture. This view of childhood accounts for the fact that only a few studies have been carried out which focus on children's own perspective on popular culture (see the following section, "Notions of Childhood and Popular Culture," for another reason for this). By stressing the superiority of the adult world, adults have excluded children's own voices (Jenks, 1996), and thus children's identities have been verified only by adult perspectives in these studies.

### **Notions of Childhood and Popular Culture**

The view of children as dependent on adults is not only a part of developmental theories in which children have been seen as helpless and presocial. Such a perspective is

also contained in the notion of innocence as well as the notions of vulnerability and ignorance, and therefore, it is believed, children's lives should be regulated and protected in order to make childhood "a careful, safe, secure and happy phase of human existence" (James & Prout, 1997, p. 191).<sup>16</sup> Thus, as James and Prout (1997) argue, "most modern strategies of child protection are underpinned by theories of pollution" in which adult society is seen to "undermine childhood innocence," implying that children must be segregated from "the harsh realities of the adult world and protected from social danger" (p. 191). This standpoint of child protection thus implies that children must be controlled and monitored by adults or social organizations such as schools since this world is too decadent, hazardous, and precarious for innocent, vulnerable, and ignorant children.

From around the late 1970s on, however, such a conception of childhood has come to be seen as much more problematic. According to several scholars (e.g, Elkind, 1981, 1998; Kline, 1993; Postman, 1994; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 1997), one of the important reasons for seeing this notion of childhood as problematic has been that children have been exposed to an overwhelming amount of information through the mass media and other technology, which has destroyed childhood innocence by compounding childhood with adulthood. In addition, based on these opinions, children are seen as passive audiences as well as consumers in media culture:

There is a sense in which pictures and other graphic images may be said to be 'cognitively repressive'. Television has the potential to put our minds to sleep. People watch television. They do not read it. Nor do they much listen to it. Television offers a fairly primitive but irresistible alternative to the linear and sequential logic of the printed word and tends to make the rigors of a literate education irrelevant. Watching television not only requires no skills but develops no skills it does not make complex

demands on either mind or behaviour. (Postman, 1983, pp. 78-80)

The adults' concerns about children's exposure to the mass media, which results from "the notion of childhood innocence and ignorance and, by extension, adult wisdom and enlightenment" (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 78), can be also found in the discourse of children's popular culture. Adults tend to accuse the media culture of making children depraved and self-indulgent (Seiter, 1993):

Children's consumer culture is understood to threaten the developmental order of generations: Children are seen to 'learn about life out of sequence.' It also taps into the adult generation's concern that children are defiant and hard to control. Adults are concerned about children's individualistic and maverick styles of behavior. Such matters are of consequence for teachers who are no longer the source of authoritative knowledge and who also have to deal with what they see as children's bad manners, impudence, bravado and egotism. There is a general adult anxiety about the ungovernability of young people. (Kenway & Bullen, 2001, p. 78)

However, as Cunningham (1995) insists, the points of view toward childhood which were mentioned above reflects the expectation of a good childhood, which is "not one in which the essence is freedom and happiness; rather it is good behavior, a deference to adults, and a commitment to learning skills essential for the adult world" (p. 180). In fact, statements about children's needs convey an element of judgment about what is good for them and how this can be achieved (Dearden, 1968; Hood-Williams, 2001; Schaffer, 1990; Stainton-Rogers, 1989; Woodhead, 1997).<sup>17</sup> As Woodhead (1997) notes, the discourse of 'needs' implies "empirical and evaluative claims" (p. 66) which depends on a consensus of knowledge and values in society.

Thus, children's needs are not only part of the description of children's psychological nature; they are also viewed as the basis for specific childhood experiences that are most valued and most frequently adopted in society. As a result, children's needs are a matter of cultural interpretation, which must be context-specific and may well vary in a given context depending on the social values and beliefs (Hood-Williams, 2001; Schaffer, 1990). In other words, as Woodhead (1997) argues, "A statement about children's needs would depend on value, judgments, stated or implied, about which patterns of early relationship are considered desirable, what the child should grow up to become, and indeed what makes for the 'good society'" (p. 73). In this regard, it is not the child himself or herself but adults and society as whole who determine what a child's needs are in education and the future. The concept of children's needs according to developmental theories thus becomes "a powerful rhetorical device" in forming images of childhood and care and the education of children (Woodhead, 1997, p. 77).

The point here is that discussions about what children need from popular culture can also reflect adults' hidden social assumptions, values, and expectations as regards children. They determine what knowledge in popular culture is desirable for or inappropriate to children. These social assumptions about children's needs from popular culture provide another possible reason for the absence of children's voices in cultural studies in that most studies have been carried out without reflecting on children's perspectives.

To summary, like the concept of developmentally oriented childhood, whether a cultural text is suitable for children's needs is also value-embedded and socially

constructed. Like various concepts of childhood that have been socially constructed, what children have to learn from a cultural apparatus such as popular culture is also a matter of socio-cultural values and beliefs by which children's lives are influenced. Different social realities help determine the construction of childhood as well as the reasons why a given society conceives of specific children's needs by means of cultural texts. As I have already shown, the exposure of children to the mass media is seen as the cause of the loss of childhood, as it frustrates a social expectation of childhood in which "the importance of the child *actively* achieving developmental tasks" is emphasized (Seiter, 1993, p. 33; emphasis in original). The perception of the mass media's negative impact on children presupposes that, unlike adults, children are not critical or reflective, a supposition that is "based on the cursory observation that children are not like adults when it comes to television viewing" (Palmer, 1986, p. 136). In addition, such a perception is also likely to determine the nature of an adult-child relationship, which is usually one in which "adults are dominant providers and children are passive consumers" (Woodhead, 1997, p. 78).

However, this notion of children as passive viewers is a value-laden concept, as are developmental childhood and the needs of children. Assuming that children will understand all of popular culture's messages in a way similar to that of adults, this perspective tends to emphasize what children need to learn or not to learn from popular culture according to an adult's point of view (Seiter, 1999; Trousdale, 2004). But children are not only learners caught up in pre-existing knowledge systems. They are also active contributors and participants who form society by interacting with others in

social systems (Corsaro & Miller, 1992; Qvortrup, 2001). As some scholars (e.g., Eisner, 1982; Goodman, 1986) have already insisted, a child is able to make his or her decisions by actively participating in the organization and establishment of his or her own perspective on the world.

From this perspective, this study will seek to reconstruct popular culture by children themselves which can not only allow to us find our children's authentic voices, but also make the meanings of that cultural text more completed and valuable. An attempt to give authorship to children is also closely related to how this study has been conducted as to maximize their empowerment in the study. Thus, the way in which the study tried to perform this task will be addressed in Chapter II, in which children's authorship and their contextual readings will be emphasized.

### **Korean Children in American Society**

Children's thoughts about popular culture are inevitably involved in the specific socio-cultural environment in which they live. This is not an exception for Korean children who live in the United States. As I indicated earlier, since Korean migrant children have been raised in two different cultures, they are in a dual-value zone that blends Korean and American cultural beliefs and social values (see "Introduction" in this chapter, pp. 3-4).

Since many of these children have parents who were born and raised in Korea until they became adults, in particular, they may struggle to reconcile the two different



cultures more than many others whose parents were born and/or raised in the United States. That is to say, their parents may adhere more to traditional Korean cultural values than those who have grown up in the United States.

In this section, then, the culture and family life of these new Korean migrants, both of which influence them to adjust their lives and think of American popular culture in the United States, will be discussed. In order to illustrate the cultural characteristics of these Korean migrants, some observations about their social background and cultural matters will be provided, starting with Asian Americans' cultural habits as they relate to education.

### **Asian Americans and American Education**

Several studies (e.g., Caplan, Choy, & Whitmore, 1991; Mordkowitz & Ginsberg, 1987; Vernon, 1982) have revealed that one of reasons for Asian Americans' success in school is their socio-cultural background, which has traditionally emphasized the importance of education as a result of the influence of Confucianism. This background is reflected in Asian American parents' educational expectations of their children, which at least in part is responsible for Asian children's high academic achievement. The fact is that Asian American parents generally think a child's high educational level or academic achievement is a great honor for the family. Thus, Asian American parents have high expectation of their children's education, and their children tend to respond positively to these expectations (Lee, 1991). In other words, these children's academic success is a sign not only of their strong self-esteem and desire for self-improvement, but also of the

high valuation put on family honor and parents' expectations of children in Asian cultures.

However, there are different ways of explaining Asian Americans' passion for education. For example, according to Suzuki (1980), Asian Americans' great emphasis on education is a reaction to social class in the United States. The exclusion of Asian Americans from participation in American society in the past has forced Asian parents to push for the kind of education that will help their children overcome the social and political obstacles that they once confronted (Sue & Okazaki, 1990). Education is thus an important key for Asian Americans to overcome racial inequality and prejudice. In short, Asian Americans view education as the road to social mobility, so high academic achievement is given great emphasis (Lee, 1996).

Ogbu (1989, 1994) has written in a more detailed way about Asian Americans' attitude toward education. According to him, voluntary immigrants, including Asian Americans, tend to consider socio-political barriers as problems, which can be solved by education and hard work, both of which instill a positive attitude toward the future. Moreover, Asian Americans have a "dual status-mobility frame of reference," which can help maintain their positive views of their future possibilities of living in the United States. In other words, the reason for their optimistic attitude has to do with their double status between their previous situation in their home country and their current situation in the United States. This frame of reference, for many, throws into sharp contrast their current situation with their own past situation or that of their peers in their home countries. This contrast between the hard life of the past and an easier life in the present

encourages them to take advantage of the opportunities in education and occupations in the United States.

Ogbu (1989, 1994) also indicated that voluntary immigrants do not think about the possibility of their exclusion from better opportunities, because they think that such exclusion is the result of their different language or their status as foreigners. In addition, voluntary immigrants have “survival strategies” to overcome their problems. These strategies include returning to their home countries, emigrating to other countries, or seeking some job, all of which mainstream American groups are reluctant to do. As a result, these voluntary immigrants actively accept the dominant culture by learning English, the American cultural heritage, and so forth. They understand that they have to overcome their being difference in order to achieve the goals that made them emigrate in the first place.

These studies’ findings can be applied to the case of new Korean migrants, who are one of Asian voluntary immigrant groups. However, in spite of these studies’ interesting perspectives, some scholars (e.g., Kibria, 2000; Lee, 2002b; Trueba, Cheng, & Ima, 1993) have argued that all of them have assumed that all Asian American immigrants constitute one group, and thus they have failed to clarify and examine intra-group differences within the Asian-American population. The problem is that this assumption of “sameness” among Asian groups (Kibria, 2000) ignores the fact that each nationality within the Asian communities in the United States has a different culture and identity. These studies thus take for granted a prevailing perception about Asians in the

United States—namely, that all Asians and their cultures are very similar, perhaps even indistinguishable from each other.

### **Koreans Migrants and Their Culture**

Korean migrants' original culture is different from many other Asian cultures, and is practiced in a way that reflects their multicultural situations in the United States. They need to adjust to American life, but at the same time, they feel obligated to sustain their Korean cultural values and current social life by being closely attached to Korea. In addition, they desire to maintain their relationships with their families, relatives, friends, schools, and childhood memories in their home country. Many of them have to consider the possibility of going back their home country; thus they feel that they shouldn't neglect to be familiar with current Korean social life. Therefore, they are in the so-called "transnational" status, which refers to multiple social, cultural, economic, and political relations with places both in one's homeland—in this case, Korea—and one's current residence—namely, the United States (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Blanc, 1994). These people occupy no single socio-cultural space but live in a multiple socio-cultural zone which is embedded in two nations. Situated in this dual cultural zone, Koreans determine what they have to do and what is good for their children in the United States by themselves.

Certain Korean values have a great influence on Koreans and allow them to embrace two forms of cultural life. One of these values is the Korean notion of traditional piety in the family, which has been greatly influenced by Confucianism. For

Koreans, the family is the most important thing that each individual has to consider and abide by, and the values of piety are founded on strong support for the family. These values of piety have to do with children's sense of the importance of respect, affection, and duty toward their parents, ancestors, and elders (Kim & Chun, 1994). Both Korean parents and children tend to regard lack of respect for and obedience to elder people, especially parents, as a great transgression against basic Korean ethics. This Confucian-based hierarchical culture is crucial in Koreans' perceptions of relationships between adults and children. That is to say, Koreans think that children should learn from and respect adults without question because it is an obligation to accept the rules of a culture, which take precedence over one's own opinions in Korean society.

However, the Korean parents don't simply have general authority over the children only to control the children. They—particularly the mothers<sup>18</sup>—consider their attention and devotion the key to a child's success, and therefore the responsibility for a child's inadequate achievement attributes to them.<sup>19</sup> This “Korean logic” makes parents whose children have a low academic achievement feel ashamed because they think of themselves as neglected to and irresponsible for their children's future. As a result, they force their children to work harder to get better grades.

From this perspective, many Korean migrant children feel obligated to their parents, who continually devote themselves to their children and their academic achievement (Armbrister, McCallum, & Lee, 2002). Moreover, as such expectations and devotion are very likely a part of Korean children's early life, they often feel stress and guilty when they fail to meet their parents' expectations. In addition, it is obvious that a

conflict between Korean migrant parents and their children may seriously occur because of their multicultural circumstance (Pettengill & Rohner, 1985). Korean children have to deal with American cultural values—self-expression and clear and precise communication of ideas and feelings—outside their homes, but of the same time respect Korean social values, that is to say, endurance, reserve, and consideration for others (Samovar, Port & Stefani, 1998). Thus, these two cultural attitudes, which are often at cross-purposes, can cause difficulties in children’s lives, making them confused about the two cultures with which they have to deal (Kim & Choi, 1994; Lee & Lee, 1990; Rosenthal & Feldman, 1990). Put differently, they are forced to obey their parents’ decisions by giving up their own will and interests, which are greatly emphasized in American society, for the good of their family.

Another important Korean cultural value is the importance of effort, which is considered *the* determinant of success and achievement, rather than innate ability, such as intelligence (Choi, Bempechat, & Ginsburg, 1994; Stevenson & Stigler, 1992). Koreans think anyone who makes a greater effort than others can succeed, so that, if a child gets a low grade in school, Koreans will ascribe his or her lack of success to a lack of effort. This attitude on the part of Korean parents can influence not only an individual child’s academic achievement, but also Korean society at large, for instance, in such matters as success in companies, sports, art competition, and the like. Therefore, the Korean spirit of “We can do it” sees effort as an indispensable factor in success. This strong emphasis on effort affects Korean migrants’ lives in general, for they believe that not only academic success but also social success often depends on their efforts. As a result, they

may attribute their problems or failure not to teachers, schools or society, but to their own faults of insufficient efforts. Hence, even if they have difficulties in adjusting to American life, they may very well ignore them and keep working without blaming American schools and society.

Korean parents' high expectations of their children in education, which are based on a unique way of Korean parenting and Korean social values, are also inevitably entangled with the current social situation in the United States as well as Korea. These parents convince their children that academic success is indispensable for their future occupations and the stability of their lives in both the United States and in Korea. In order to get a job in the United States that will ensure social position and economic success in competing with Americans, Korean migrants think that it is indispensable to at least earn an undergraduate degree.<sup>20</sup> In addition, because it is essential for Korean youths to have at least a bachelor degree or even an advanced degree<sup>21</sup> and good English proficiency in Korea today, Korean migrants know that it is also difficult to get a professional job without a higher education and English skills in Korea as well. From this point of view, Korean migrants consider their children's high academic success imperative, including their level of English proficiency, in both countries.

However, it is important to note that even though Korean migrants tend to be eager to learn American culture and the English language, many of them want to maintain not only traditional Korean cultural values but also their children's fluency in Korean and competence in other academic subjects. The preservation of the Korean culture and language is as important as learning those of the United States, since it can be

a tool not only to connect their children to Korea, but also to survive in Korean society. For instance, as many parents of my informants asserted, in order for their children not to lag behind when they go back to Korea, they feel pressure to prepare their children in certain subject areas, such as Korean and math, which have a huge influence on Korean children's academic achievement in Korea.

I have wondered how Korean children deal with the conflicts and confusion that derive from the social ideological tension and discord between Korean family relationships and American society. That is to say, I have pondered how they reconcile Korean and American cultural values. They are exposed everyday to American cultural beliefs that their American schools and popular culture keep teaching them. Their Korean cultural values and attitudes are not included in these cultural sites. Therefore, as Rosenthal and Feldman (1990) note, these children may struggle with a sense of change in their identity, language, social skills and attitudes, moral values, and behavioral norms in the process of cultural adjustment.

More important, their difficulties and feelings may be taken for granted at home, in schools, and in American society at a large because of the Korean emphasis on effort as well as their good English proficiency. Such Korean values as effort and endurance can lead them to avoid discussing their difficulties and feelings openly and seriously with their parents and teachers.

In addition, many parents and teachers often think that the younger Korean children, anyway, will overcome their language and cultural barriers quickly and efficiently. This assumption is, in part, supported by the fact that several informants of



this study have great English speaking skills even though they have been in the United States for only two years or so. However, this English proficiency does not prove that they had no conflicts or concerns to live within their multicultural surrounding. From this point of view, it is one of my intentions in this study to disclose more fully these children's thoughts about and experiences of the different cultural perspectives they must negotiate and cope with by discussing the social values represented in American popular culture.

### **Reflections: Overview of the Study**

This chapter addressed the four areas of concerns which will be dealt with in this study; the relationships between popular culture and social ideology, historical and contextual background of Disney animated films, the social concepts of children and children from a sociological perspective, and the socio-cultural characteristics of Korean children living in the United States and their bicultural circumstances.

While looking closely at the issues just mentioned above, I have pondered on how these issues may influence children and their understanding of popular culture. For instance, according to developmental theories that I discussed earlier, a child is considered inadequate in experience and learning in his or her presocial developmental period. Due to this assumption, their perspectives of and experiences of a cultural message may hardly be seen as valid and important.

Moreover, a Korean child's interpretation of popular culture may not be considered important and educational from Korean cultural view of children, which has been significantly influenced by Confucianism. More precisely, his or her perspectives could be ignored within Korean cultural context, since a Korean child's learning is seen as an internalization process that results from listening to others—mostly, adults—and reading a variety of materials. This is so because the acquisition of a pre-existing system of social knowledge and ideologies has a great effect on children in Korea. As a result, children's popular culture often function as a means of teaching specific social rules and cultural modalities to Korean children, not a way in which adults understand what children know, want, and like.

This study's areas of concerns are also related to the value of learning in popular culture: popular culture is not for learning, but for entertainment, an area in which people have rarely seen educational value. Many adults have not found that any "learning" process goes on in a child who is exposed to popular culture. When they find children engaged in a form of popular culture, they often express their sense of the worthlessness of popular culture by saying, "They're doing nothing" or "They are just playing." As a result, many adults, such as both parents and teachers, do not think that they should be actively involved with children's popular culture.

Keeping these possible influences of the areas of concerns in my mind, I thoroughly explore Korean young girls' narratives by means of Disney films, which reveal their various perspectives and ideas about not only themselves but also others and society in general. In order to pursue this, I begin the next chapter, Chapter II by

describing the methodology of this study in detail. This chapter deals with the research procedures and techniques of the study. In addition, it discusses not only the theoretical rationale, but also the problems and difficulties that have arisen through the research process. The chapter will also address an adult researcher's roles in this study, which were dependent on the nature of the relationships among the participants, their families, and the researcher.

Chapter III analyzes my informants' perspectives on romantic love according to three major categories—sincerity, sympathy, and intelligence. In addition, it discusses how these girls considered physical attractiveness by relating it to Korean cultural values of education. I then provide some possible factors that might influence my informants' understanding on the characteristics of attraction in romantic love.

In Chapter IV, I explore Korean girls' understanding sexual messages in Disney films, which have been a target of criticism by several scholars in Chapter IV. In order to this, I first, address how these girls viewed female images of faces and bodies. Their interpretations of sexual messages will be examined by focusing on their different ages. In addition, I discuss my informants' recognition of difference between reality and unreality in light of objectified female body images in Disney films. This chapter will also address the meaning of being sexual in Korean culture.

I also examine the notions of being royals and a princess' marriage in Chapter V. This chapter discerns my informants' understanding of Disney's representations of monarchy by emphasizing the qualification for and the procedure of being a sovereign. I take a serious look at how my informants understood female obstacles and familial love

in their discussions of a princess' marriage in Disney films by comparing it with the male counterpart's. Finally, this chapter presents the children's philosophical narratives of being a princess during their discussions of a Disney's heroine's ethnic and racial descents.

The last chapter of this study, Chapter VI, concludes this study by condensing the major finding of this study. It will also give some of implications and suggestions of the study for parents of young children, early childhood teachers and professionals, and researcher. These implications and suggestions will be an attempt to help them understand young children and their points of view by taking into account of popular culture and paying attention to the diverse messages in popular culture that depend on different audiences.

## Chapter I

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> According to the study of Walsh, Goldman, and Brown (1996), over the course of a year, the time that the average child spends watching television is twice the time they spend in school. Strasburger's study (1993) also reveals that by the time the average person reaches age 70, he or she will have spent the equivalent of 7 to 10 years watching television.

<sup>2</sup> For ease for presentation, I will refer to Koreans who were born and/or raised in the United States as "Korean migrants" throughout this study.

<sup>3</sup> Koreans are one of the fastest growing ethnic groups in the United States, and the 2000 U.S. census estimated that their number is currently over 1,076,000. These are the people who identified themselves as "Korean alone." If those people who reported themselves as "Korean in combination with other Asians or other races" are added, the total number goes to up to 1,228,000. The Korean population in the United States has increased from about 355,000 in 1980, so it has grown by more than 3 times over 20 years. Of these, over 78%, or 845,017 Korean Americans, are foreign-born. In fact, according to the 1996 U.S. Census Bureau's population survey, Korean Americans are ranked ninth amongst communities with the largest foreign-born populations. Moreover, it is reported that about 78% of current Korean Americans immigrated after 1980 (The Korean American Resource and Cultural Center, 2005), so it is evident that Koreans in the United States have close social, cultural, and political ties with Korea.

<sup>4</sup> Baudrillard (1983) suggests that the Houston airport's monorail, which is modeled on that of Disneyland, and the new American housing models, which are based on the Victorian architecture of Disneyland's Main Street, are examples of Disney's "real image" of the United States that are already "beyond the imaginary."

<sup>5</sup> Even though the majority of studies of Korean animated film indicates that the first Disney animated film in Korea, which was *Peter Pan*, was introduced in 1957, some studies (e.g., Hong, 1997; Huh, 2002) suggest that Disney animated films were shown in Korea as early as the 1930s.

<sup>6</sup> Most Japanese cultural products were not imported to Korea before institution of the third open-door policy to Japanese culture in June 2000, after which some forms of Japanese animation were allowed to play in Korean theatres (Noh, 2003). However, the regulations on Japanese animated films will be eliminated by January 2006 when all Japanese animated films will be allowed in Korea (Hankyoraе Chinmoon [Hankyoraе Daily Newspaper], 2003). Therefore, Japanese animated films have been heavily regulated by the Korean government because of Japanese colonization, whereas American animated films experienced no administrative restrictions before the 1990s (Kim & Lee, 2001; Han, 1997). For instance, according to Huh (2002) and Whang (1990), Korean advertisements of some Disney products and Paramount's *Gulliver's Travels* (1961) indicated that Disney films were recommended by the Korean Minister of Education.

<sup>7</sup> Many Korean families have Disney's original English videotapes, rather than those with Korean subtitles or dubbing, because they use these videotapes as educational

tools. In addition, it is very difficult to get the classic Disney films (see “Social Value in Disney Films” in this chapter) with Korean subtitles or dubbing because they are already out of print.

<sup>8</sup>Less than half of my informants’ parents were familiar with *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Mulan* (1998), while most of the children recognized them. In my pilot study, conducted with Korean female children living in Korea, the familiarity with these two films was more limited: only one out of six parents and six children was familiar with *Mulan*, and none of them recognized *Pocahontas*. This tendency, in part, comes from the fact that every Disney film released in the United States is not always shown in Korea, because Koreans have different cultural tastes and sentiments that determine each film’s success in Korea. For example, *Pocahontas* (1995), *Heracles* (1997), and *Tarzan* (1999) weren’t shown at theatres in Korea. Usually only one or two Disney animated films are shown each year, but many of them are released on video in Korea.

<sup>9</sup>As Bellah and his colleagues (1996) have observed, the separation from home and family, including marriage, is closely related to American individualism. As applied to concept of family, marriage is also expected to provide American people with “diffuse, enduring solidarity” and “unconditional acceptance,” even though many people no longer consider marriage, an indispensable condition for one’s life (Bellah et al., 1996, p. 110).

<sup>10</sup>In spite of this unattractive feature of these heroines, some scholars (e.g., Hoerner, 1996; Downey, 1996; Jeffords, 1995) have pointed out that the more recent Disney female protagonists, such as Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* and Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*, become more independent and empowered than those in the past—for example,

Cinderella and Snow White. The degree of Ariel's passivity and her adventurous personality are said to be different from those of traditional Disney heroines (Wasko, 2001). Belle is even called "a Disney Feminist" because of her passion for reading books and her refusal of Gaston's marriage proposal (Jeffords, 1995, p. 170).

<sup>11</sup> According to Murphy (1995), the dichotomy between innocent heroines and powerful but witch-like middle-aged women is one of the important dominant concepts in American culture. Since women and nature are often seen as both identical and oppositional—which is like idea of the "virgin/whore" (p. 126)—in many Western hierarchal societies and civilizations, both of them are objectified for the benefit of the male subject (Diamond & Orenstein, 1990).

In addition, the portrait of middle-aged women is different from that of Disney's older women. Because the latter are post-menopausal, they aren't seen as sexual or prolific, and thus they are regarded as incapable of having any power. Therefore, they are often depicted as godmothers, fairies, and servants who are not threatening or harmful but virtuous and tender-hearted by virtue of their magic, which can heal and comfort others—mostly heroines and heroes (Bell, 1995, p.119).

<sup>12</sup> Unlike the original version of Anderson, the Disney version sanitizes Ariel's pain. Referring it as "women's pain that so often accompanies 'passing' [into the male world]" (Sells, 1995, p. 176), Sell insists that women's scarification and loss for inclusion in the male world is erased and ignored in this Disney version.



<sup>13</sup> For example, the curse of the Beast isn't informed until the end of the story in the original version, while it is explained at the very beginning in the Disney film. The Beast also has to have someone who loves him in order to break the spell in the original version, but in the Disney film he also has to love somebody. These modifications are said to make audiences think of the Beast as miserable and pitiful (Jeffords, 1995).

<sup>14</sup> As Jafar, the villain in *Aladdin*, becomes king and makes both Jasmine and her father slaves, Aladdin tries to regain the magic lamp in order to save them. During this process, Jasmine uses her sexual body to seduce Jafar in order to help Aladdin. She comes to Jafar batting her eyelashes with alluring pose and says seductively, "Jafar, I never realized before how handsome you are." Suddenly, she kisses him to prevent Aladdin from being caught. Kasturi (2002) criticizes this scene, arguing, "the only thing she [Jasmine] can do is to use her physical charms to distract the villain" (p. 49).

<sup>15</sup> We can think about several examples, such as the animal characters with black actors' voices. For instance, Whoopi Goldberg's voice was used for Shenzi, the hyena, in *The Lion King*, and Eddie Murphy's as Sebastian, the crab in *The Little Mermaid*, as well as Mushu, the dragon in *Mulan* (e.g., Artz, 2002; Byrne & McQuillan, 1999; Wasko, 2001).

<sup>16</sup> The notion of innocence is derived in part from both Western Christian images and the Rousseauian idea of childhood by formulating a dichotomy of childhood and adulthood. As Archard stated, "children are seen as nearest to God, whilst adults, correlatively, are furthest from Him" (1993, p.37). In other words, children are seen as having a pure nature, which comes from their recent arrival in the world, but that purity

will be corrupted by society. This image of childhood is opposed to another concept of childhood, one that sees a child as being born in original sin. The doctrine of original sin was a critical belief of the Puritans from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in Western societies, and the Puritans sought to break a child's will, since they believed that children were bad as a result of a lack of both wisdom and knowledge (Cleverly & Phillips, 1986; Greven, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> Statements such as 'X needs Y' generally imply a hypothesis about the goal that results from meeting the need as well as the consequences of failing to do so, since the statement 'X needs Y' is apparently an abbreviation of 'X needs Y, for Z to follow.' According to Woodhead's (1997) argument, Z can be a desirable goal for X, and Y is a way to achieve, or is a precondition for, Z.

<sup>18</sup> In Korean culture, mothers tend to take responsibility for their children's general educational activities and outcome (e.g., taking care of homework and after-school activities, parent-teacher conferences, and volunteering at schools), whereas fathers mostly make crucial decisions on their children's education (e.g., choosing schools and careers).

Regarding Korean fathers' roles, Kim and Choi (1994) assert that fathers have great responsibility for maintaining and improving the status of their families in society. Therefore, they have to "simultaneously consider the implications of a decision on a particular individual (e.g., a child), on the family, on the lineage, and on the community" (p. 245)."

<sup>19</sup> Korean mothers think of their great devotion as important in the playing of their maternal roles (Kim, 1981). According to Kim and Choi (1994), many Korean mothers feel little or no conflict in sacrificing their careers for their children. Even though this tendency is changing in Korean society today, it is still true that many Korean women renounce their careers in order to raise their children. Only 48% of Korean mothers work (Kim, 2003) and only 32.6% of Korean mothers whose children are under age 6 had a job in 2004 (Presidential Committee on Aging and Future Society, 2004). This sense of obligation may derive from the belief that their children are not separate from them. Rather, their children are another self, or what Kim and Choi (1994) have called, “extensions of themselves,” who can give them “vicarious gratification” (p. 242). As a result, their children’s academic achievement and career accomplishments are not only their children’s but also their own.

In this manner, Korean parents exceed many other countries, including Germany, France, Japan, the United States, and any other OECD countries in their economic effort to fund their children’s education (The Korean Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development, 2003). For example, more than 30% of Koreans who live in Seoul spend approximately 15% on their total household income on their children’s education, excluding public educational expenditures (Kim, 2003). For about 10% of Koreans, over 25% of their total income is assigned to their children’s private educational support (Kim, 2003).

<sup>20</sup> In a related context, over 55% of Korean Americans who are 25 years of age and older, earn at least a college degree, while only over 30% of the total American population does (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Even though 25% of the total Korean population (25 years and over) has been reported to have a bachelor degree (Korea National Statistical Office, 2000), over 81% of all Korean high school graduates went on to a university in 2004 (Korea National Statistical Office, 2004).

## **Chapter II**

### **Methodology**

This study was an attempt to understand young Korean girls' interpretations of American popular culture and how these interpretations were influenced by their complicated cultural contexts. In this chapter, I will present the methodology and research design of this study and discuss the difficulties that arose during the data collection phase. This chapter will start with a theoretical rationale for the qualitative methodology that was used. Next, I will discuss my role as a researcher and my relationships with the participants and their parents, upon which my research depends. It will also provide a description of the elements of the research, including the participants, film selection, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, this chapter will present my struggle with several problems that emerged during the research process and the steps I took to solve them.

#### **Theoretical Rationale**

Most studies about children and childhood have been conducted from adults' points of view, altogether ignoring the perspectives of the children themselves. As I noted in the first chapter, this tendency stems from developmental theories which consider childhood a presocial and incompetent stage, relative to adulthood. However, as several scholars (e.g., Connolly, 1998; Corsaro & Miller, 1992; Corsaro & Molinari,

2000; James, Jenks, & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994, 2001; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001) have already pointed out, children actively construct their own meanings in a given society. They are not only influenced by existing social paradigms that will help socialize them, but they are also actively involved in establishing and reconstructing the socio-cultural systems in which they live. From this perspective, as Goodman (1992) perceptively states, as individuals, children continuously “reproduce and transform their social world” (p. 34) by interacting with others and experiencing social reality through their own interpretations of it. Therefore, in this study, I consider children active agents who interpret the messages of popular culture by valuing them not as objects of a study, but as subjective informants and social actors (Alderson, 2000; Christensen & Prout, 2002). Moreover, children’s interpretations of popular culture are inseparable from their social environment. As Corsaro and Miller (1992) explain:

This process [children’s participation in cultural practices] is constructive, and it is necessarily individual and collective. It is individual in that each child’s task is to create personal meanings out of the particular, necessarily limited set of resources to which he or she is exposed. It is collective in that these resources were created by previous generations and are made available to the child by other people. By responding to and negotiating with caregivers and peers in day-by-day encounters with cultural resources, children shape their own developmental experiences while at the same time contributing to the production of social order. (pp. 6-7)

In this sense, this study’s exploration of Korean girls’ understanding of American popular culture is not limited to the unique interpretations of each individual, but includes the complex interrelations between these children and their socio-cultural contexts.

In order to scrutinize how children actively construct the meanings of popular culture and how their socio-cultural contexts influence their interpretations, this study used qualitative methods. As several scholars (e.g., Janesick, 1998, Popkewitz, 1984; Seidman, 1998; Spradley, 1979) have asserted, qualitative methods can convey a detailed account of an informant's experiences and worldview. Therefore, I chose to use qualitative methods as a way to explain Korean girls' feelings, thoughts, and their relation to a complicated social context (Corsaro, 1981, 1997; Corsaro & Miller, 1992; Schwandt, 1998; Mayall, 2000; Trousdale, 2004). In other words, by using qualitative methods, this study strived to "transform the world" of our children (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3).

According to Fiske, (1998), qualitative methods should be central in cultural studies because of the dominant role of texts in this field:

Cultural studies attempts to be multilevel in its methodology and in particular to explore the interface between the structuring conditions that determine our social experience and the ways of living that people devise within them. What has been called "the turn to Gramsci" identifies the crucial difference between cultural studies and the macro-level, determinist, and reductionist tendencies of some other critical theories. (p. 376)

Gillespie (1995) also emphasizes the importance of qualitative research in cultural studies in that it can "deliver empirically grounded knowledge of media audiences in a way that other, less socially encompassing methods [positivistic methods] cannot" (p. 54).

Because the text cannot transmit people's voices (de Certeau, 1988), cultural studies has to pay attention to "how people cope with the system [in society], how they read its texts, [and] how they make popular culture out of its resources" (Fiske, 1992, p.105). Put

differently, by using a qualitative methodology, cultural studies can present readers' voices, and thus "create an aparté [monologue], opening a breach in the text and restoring a contact of body to body" (de Certeau, 1988, p. 235). After all, as Denzin (1992) points out, such approaches demonstrate "how interacting individuals connect their lived experiences to the cultural representations of those experiences" (p. 74). In this regard, qualitative methods can be useful in cultural studies for creating a dialogue between a cultural text and a reader by providing audiences' understanding and thoughts of the mass media more thoroughly (Hobson, 1990; McEachern, 1998).

In short, by using qualitative methods to examine Korean girls' understandings of a cultural text, I attempted to allow each participant of the study to openly express her perspectives and ideas, and give her the maximum possible authorship in constructing meaning.

### **Researcher-Informant Relationships**

As many scholars (e.g., Corsaro, 1981; Mandell, 1991; Mayall, 2000; Robinson & Kellett, 2004) have noted, an adult researcher may inadvertently dominate child-informants, not only because of the researcher's physical size, but also because of his or her socio-cultural authority. Moreover, an adult researcher may intimidate informants due to his or her role as a researcher (Alldred, 1998; Burman, 1992), that is, as a person who interprets and values children's speech, actions, and thoughts—namely, the data. An adult researcher's dominant status can therefore intervene in the behaviors and attitudes



of young participants so as to cause their initial ideas and responses to be hidden or altered.

In a related matter, there are many studies about the different roles that adult researchers have used to study children and childhood (e.g., Coenen, 1986; Fine, 1987; Corsaro, 1985, 2003; Mandell, 1991; Waksler, 1991). Although these roles are unique and variable to some degree, their purpose is the same: to understand a child's social world more precisely and to deliberately suspend adult assumptions about children.

Thorne (1993) thus argues:

To learn from children, adults have to challenge the deep assumption that they already know what children are "like," both because, as former children, adults have been there, and because as adults, they regard children as less complete versions of themselves. (p. 12)

The point here is that my goal with this study was to reveal children's perspectives by freeing myself as researcher "from adult conceptions of children's activities and [allowing him or her to] enter the child's worlds" (Corsaro, 1981, p. 119).

In this study, then, I had to carefully consider how to deal with my status as an adult researcher. This problem was of particular concern in this study because of the nature of Korean culture, in which hierarchical relationships between adults and children are accentuated. In Korean culture, children are required to behave differently to seniors by using a specific behavioral manner and linguistic honorifics in order to show respect for them. For instance, if children try to explain their own thoughts to a senior, a parent, or a teacher by answering an adult's questions or making comments on his or her opinions, they are often considered so rude and impertinent as to be reproachable (Chu,

1993). Thus, a child's reply to a senior can be regarded as a sign of disrespect for him or her in Korean culture. From this perspective, I recognized that this kind of cultural attitude might discourage young participants in this study from expressing their personal feelings and thoughts to me, as an adult researcher. And, as suggested earlier, they might feel uncomfortable not only as a result of my status as an adult, but also as a result of my profession of a teacher, who seems to be endowed with greater authority and power than many other adults in Korean culture. Stated differently, if they see me as a researcher as well as an authority figure, my informants could be "double-trapped" into feeling obliged to answer correctly and civilly so as to avoid seeming impertinent. As a result, as Alldred (1998) notes, such a situation might lead this study to be adult-centered, rather than informant-centered:

It can be argued that children are having to render themselves meaningful in adult-centered terms, and explain themselves convincingly to those in power over them. Seen in this light, children's interviews, because they entail the requirement to make sense for adults, might not necessarily be empowering occasions for children. The idea that any ethnographic subjects are free to present their own meanings in any radical sense neglects the ways in which the dominant culture provides hegemonic meanings. (p. 154)

Nevertheless, while I wanted to pay careful attention to minimize the traditional Korean adult-child relationship so as to allow the informants to speak without reserve, I did not want to completely ignore their Korean culture and values for certain reasons. First, this study would hinge on how I, as the researcher, managed not only relationships with my informants, but also the intricate interactions between these informants, their parents, and me. It was crucial for me to make my young informants see me as something more than

an authoritarian adult. At the same time, I felt that I had to give my informants' parents reassurance and trust, both of which would allow them to think of me as a responsible, mature, and professional person who was capable of taking care of their children and their children's learning.

This dilemma stemmed, in part, from this study's particular research setting. Unlike many other studies conducted in schools, in which the researchers didn't necessarily have frequent and close interactions with the children's parents, this study couldn't be carried out without maintaining a fairly close relationship with the parents. I had to meet and talk with my informants' parents in front of my informants at least once with each interview as I took the children to and from their homes. In addition, since many of my informants' families invited me and my family to special occasions (see "Reflections" in this chapter), I had a sense of conflict and contradiction in my various roles. At the time, I had to be a friendly, not-quite-adult interviewer, a responsible and mature researcher, a knowledgeable primary education professional, and a good mother. Therefore, choosing the researcher's role, which would appeal to only my informants, would be neither effective nor desirable in this study. Rather, maintaining constant and sincere attitudes with both my informants and their parents was necessary to avoid making them feel deceived and insecure.

Moreover, as my relationships with my informants developed, these children sought to verify and reaffirm my roles, identity, and status as a Korean woman based on their cultural knowledge and sense. They posed culturally value-laden questions before and after interviews, such as "Are you a teacher?" "How old are you?" "Are you

married?” “Do you have a baby?” and “Where is your family?” I understood that answering these questions could potentially influence their behaviors and attitudes, since I was revealing my dominant status over them, but I also knew that I had to reply sincerely to their questions. In Korean culture asking and answering such questions is an essential step in getting to know someone, regardless of the person’s age and sex. As a result, it was unavoidable that I would answer them in order to have—or, at least, attempt to initiate—a human relationship with my Korean informants.

Given my two-fold and often contradictory role, I could not become a “least-adult,” which could allow me to be a “completely involved participant” (Mandell, 1991, p. 40) in children’s world by trying to become one of children, nor could I adopt a “reactive” role as one who “not act[s] like other adults” and waits for children to initiate action toward the researcher (Corsaro, 1981, p. 130). Nonetheless, the fact that I did not—more precisely, could not—adopt certain kinds of researchers’ roles, which have proven effective and useful in other research situations, did not necessarily imply that there was no possibility of establishing close relationships with my informants in the study. Rather, I believe that all researchers’ relationships with informants and their roles must vary according to specific research situations and cultural contexts (Thorne, 1993).

Faced with this unique research situation, therefore, I searched for a different way to make my “entry, acceptance and participation” into my informants’ groups possible, because it is indispensable in ethnographic studies of children (Eder & Corsaro, 1999). In finding the pertinent way, I didn’t endeavor to eliminate *all* of my associations with power and authority. Rather, I proceeded by introducing myself to my informants within

the boundaries of their culture, because I understood that it would not be easy to get into their lives without letting them know me first. As Graue and Walsh (1998) articulately put it:

It is very difficult to relate to another person unless that person can be positioned within one's larger "kinship" system. For me to know who you are, I have to have an analog for you within my experience. All interactions are mediated. People do not interact directly, but through cultural definitions, expectation, roles, and so on. (p. 101)

Put another way, I wanted to be an honest and sincere adult-researcher who asked for great help from young informants who were specialists in their own knowledge and culture which I was keen to learn and understand. I settled on a suitable role for myself, which allowed me to retain my identity, but also allowed me to become as close to my informants as possible. From this point of view, I adopted the role of a "go-between," whose socio-cultural position was often located between that of an adult and a child in Korean culture, such as an aunt who is a mother's younger sister in a family.<sup>1</sup> Despite her physical size, age, and social status, the younger aunt is not fully considered an authoritarian adult, like a parent or a teacher in Korean culture. Instead, she acts as a mediator or facilitator who can bridge the cultural and generational gap between children and parents. Particularly among Korean girls, the younger aunt is often seen as a helper, companion, or collaborator who can *release* these girls from their parents'—especially their mother's—authority and supervision by advocating and supporting children's points of view. Thus, in this role, a researcher doesn't necessarily have to be seen as an ordinary Korean adult who has significant power and authority over them.

This role of the go-between, younger aunt was effective in this study for another reason. When I started this research, I typically got to know my informants' mothers first; then their mothers introduced me to their children. In Korean culture, when a child is introduced to a woman by his or her mother, the child is usually encouraged to call this woman "aunt," based on the relationship between the woman and the children's mother. It was this cultural identification that might allow me to create effective three-cornered relationships comprised of my informants, their parents, and me in this study.

By assuming the role of the aunt, I maintained a friendly, open-hearted, and straightforward attitude toward my informants.<sup>2</sup> I repeatedly and consciously conveyed that I was not an expert, an authority, or an authoritarian in their culture and world,<sup>3</sup> since, as Robinson and Kellett (2004) point out, "a factor that sustains unequal adult-child power relations is a belief that adults have superior knowledge" (p. 84) in studies with children. After all, I did not deny being an adult or pretend to be a child. Instead, as a go-between, I attempted to make my informants feel intimate and secure, and thus explore their thoughts freely with me during the research. As Bishop (1998) remarks:

Researchers (...) are repositioned in such a way as to no longer need to seek to *give voice to others*, to *empower* others, to *emancipate* others, to refer to others as *subjugated voices*, but rather to listen and participate with those traditionally "othered" as constructors of meanings of their own experiences and agents of knowledge. (...) In such ways, the researchers participate in a process that facilitates the development in people of a sense of themselves as agentic [*sic*] and of having an authoritative voice. It is the function of the cultural context within which the research context positions the participants by constructing the story-lines, and with them the cultural metaphors and images, as well as the "thinking as usual," the talk/language through which research participants are constituted and researcher/researched relationships are organized. Thus, the joint development of new story-line is a

collaborative effort. The researcher and the researched together rewrite the constitutive metaphors of the relationship. (pp. 207-208)

In brief, being an adult researcher, I could not simply “put aside all markers of difference” (Graue and Walsh, 1998, p. 79) in this study. Rather, by acknowledging the unique cultural context of my informants and their families, I remained aware of the importance of managing culturally flexible and appropriate roles for myself as a researcher. Thus, as Mayall (1994) has argued, this study was based on the idea that:

The critical and distinctive characteristics of the subgroup children’s interactions with both other people and with daily settings depend not so much on their absolute powerlessness vis-à-vis adults, but on the precise nature of the power relationship between the children and the adults in any given settings. Thus I want to suggest that the level of their powerlessness varies according to how the adults in the specific social settings conceptualize children and childhood. Childhood, it is argued here, is not experienced as one set of relationships; rather its character in time and place is modified by adult understandings in those times and places of what children are, and what adult relationships with children are proper. (p. 116)

My point is that, having respect for my informants, their families, and their culture, I have sought a way to establish trusting relationships with them, thereby, giving my informants the opportunity to express their own ideas as experts on their own knowledge and culture.

## **Research Design**

### **Participants**

Ten Korean female children who lived in the United States at the time of this study participated in this study. They were children from kindergarten to third grade who

lived in Midwestern areas of the United States. They were either Korean Americans (2 girls) or native Koreans (8 girls) but their parents were all Koreans who were born and raised in Korea before they came to the United States. Their families had lived in the United States at least 1 year and a maximum of 15 years, but six of them had lived here for 2 years or so. Five of the participants' families considered going back to Korea within 3 to 4 years of having come to the United States.

These families were mostly from Seoul, the capital of Korea, and were all middle class families. The parents had earned at least an undergraduate degree, and eight of the fathers had more than a Master's Degree and two of the mothers had Master's degree. Only one of these mothers worked, and she was a part-time master's student taking on-line classes. In addition, seven of them lived with their mothers and siblings, even though none of their parents were divorced. This was the case because most of their fathers came to the United States for one or two years to study and then went to back to Korea to work. These fathers were either graduate students in short-term college programs or visiting scholars at a university. Even though most of the participants in this study had not lived in the United States for a long time, their English was good.

Table 1, which follows this chapter, describes each of the participants in the study. I will describe in detail how I located these informants later in the section of "Research Process."



### **Film Selection**

As I noted earlier, in Chapter I, four Disney animated films have been chosen for this study: *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and The Beast*, *Aladdin*, and *The Lion King*.<sup>4</sup> The films were chosen based on a careful analysis of the films' relevance to the issues with which the study deals, such as gender, race, social hierarchy, family, love, and good and evil, all of which were discussed in the previous chapter. They were also selected as a result of taking account of their differences and similarities in relation to each other. For example, female gender roles are represented differently in *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*, even though there are important women characters that live in similar situations in terms of their parents, their love lives, and their physical appearance in these films. The degree of familiarity with these films on the part of both the children and the parents was also considered. By selecting popular Disney films for Korean children as well as their parents, the study attempted to connect the parents' perceptions and expectations of the films with the children's responses to the films more closely.

### **Data Collection**

This study was carried out mostly by interviews with informants. As Kvale (1996) notes, "An interview is literally an inter view, an inter change of views between two persons conversing about a common theme" (p. 44). Such interrelational discourse is crucial in understanding that knowledge is constructed by the relationship between a person and his or her world (e.g., Carspecken, 1996; Derrida, 1973; Lyotard, 1991;

Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In other words, knowledge isn't fixed, neutral, or certain, but is always entangled with social values and beliefs that are circulated in people's relationships (e.g., Apple, 2004; Carspecken, 1996; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Thus, as Carspecken (1996) quite rightly points out:

At no moment can we be both simply aware of an object and aware that we are aware so that perception becomes a certain ground for knowing. At the moment of "knowledge," of being aware that we are aware, we at best have an image or trace of the object given to us presumably just before during a moment of simple awareness. Presence cannot give us certain knowledge. Theories of truth have believed in presence, but presence is nothing other than a belief, not a certainty. (p. 13)

From this standpoint, knowledge is not an "attempt to mirror nature," but a "matter of conversation and social practice" (p. 171), and thus conversation with others is the "ultimate context within which knowledge is understood" (Rorty, 1979, p. 389).

The interview as communication allows a researcher to know "what is in and on someone else's mind" (Merriam, 1988, p. 72), which can't be understood from direct observations and tests. Thus, as Gubrium and Holstein (1998) note, interviews have become, for a long time now, a means to disclose one's authentic inner discourse in responding to certain questions. As a result, in order to reveal Korean girls' innate thoughts in this study, interviews with children were thought to be a good tool to expose their unconscious responses and attitudes.

In this study, I organized interviews into mixed age pair groups,<sup>5</sup> which depended on the informants' intimacy with each other. As several researchers (e.g., Baturka & Walsh, 1991; Graue & Walsh, 1998; Hill, Laybourn & Borland, 1996; Mauthner, 1997) have noted, pair or small group interviews are one of most effective methods to conduct a

study with primary grade children. In addition, according to the researchers just mentioned above, these kinds of interviews can be useful because children tend to feel more comfortable talking about a subject with their peers than with just an unfamiliar adult. During the interviews, the participants supported, corrected, and added to each other's opinions, and thus encouraged one another to find the appropriate questions and answers by themselves.<sup>6</sup>

In each interview, a group watched one film in my presence and then took part in a semi-structured interview with me. Over a period of 6 months, each group had 4-5 interviews, which were held for 90 minutes most of the time. Each of the interviews was audio-taped and transcribed. In order to make sure that my questions and responses to the informants were appropriate, the first two interviews were closely reviewed by my dissertation director, Dr. Jesse Goodman. The group interviews were held in public but comfortable places,<sup>7</sup> in which the children and the researcher could stay quietly separated from other people without being disturbed, for instance, in a small classroom or a lounge in a university building. These semi-public places worked quite well throughout the study. In addition to the interviews, I sought out other ways to obtain descriptions of the children's interpretations of the films more clearly (Denzin, 1978). Thus, I collected relevant information and documents from personal gatherings and talks with children, informal discussions with parents, and children's research notes (see "Research Process" in this chapter) and drawing.

I started each interview by asking introductory questions about each film, such as "How was this film?" and "Was it much more fun than the previous film(s)?" Once I

began the interviews with these questions, they were led by my participants for the most part. Talking about their general impressions of each film, my informants mostly initiated to discuss their opinions about several critical issues, such as the concepts of beauty, gender roles, and poverty. However, when some particular issues didn't clearly come out of our interviews, I guided them by asking questions which were made based on the content of each film. These questions included: 1) What do you think about the female protagonist (the male protagonist/ the female protagonist's family)? 2) What does she (he) look like? 3) Have you ever wanted to look like her (to be like her/him/them)? When? 4) Did you know which person was good or bad (the protagonist's nationality/ethnicity)? How? 5) Why could only this protagonist become king? Why do you think that character wanted to be king? 6) If you were that protagonist in that situation, what would you do? and 7) Do you like the ending of this film? If you could change it, how would you want it to be changed? Moreover, in order to help my informants recollect their memories of the films, I sometimes used the picture book of each film made by Disney Enterprise cooperation. This worked effectively in reminding them of a certain scene or characters by providing a concrete "prop" for them (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

My informants' use of language was quite dynamic. Some of them—mostly the older children—spoke in Korean when an interview began but their language often shifted to English in the middle of the interview. Sometimes, they discussed their ideas with each other in English, and then told me about their synthesis of opinions which were the results of discussions in Korean. In contrast to these children, the younger children in

kindergarten tended to speak mostly in English throughout the interviews. I thus used either Korean or English depending on the informants' choice for each interview.

However, whenever I noticed that a child felt uncomfortable speaking only in English during the interviews, I tried spontaneously but carefully to lead her to speak in Korean.<sup>8</sup>

### **Data Analysis**

Analyzing data depends on how a researcher refines various and complex perspectives on information which he or she has from his or her informants. Thus, as Denzin (1998) puts it, analysis of data is “the art of interpretation” and the delicate “task of making sense of what has been learned” (p. 313). In addition, Denzin (1994) goes on to argue that:

This [analysis of data] may also be described as moving from the field to the text to the reader. The practice of this art allows the field worker-as-bricoleur<sup>9</sup> (Levi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17) to translate what has been learned into a body of textual work that communicates these understandings [*sic*] to the reader. (p. 500)

This translation of matter from the actual research field to a different reader is particularly crucial for this study since it is considering children's—in this case Korean children's—powerless public voices. As already mentioned in the introduction, as a minority, Korean children are far too often silenced in American society and their perspectives and lives have received less attention. The exclusion of their voices from American society prevents them from having a real influence on social and cultural matters (e.g. Corsaro, 1997; O'Kane, 2000; Qvortrup, 2001). Therefore, by bringing

young Korean informants' voices into a text that can reach adult audiences, this study attempts to take them into society and its decisions about them.

In this sense, my analysis of Korean children's understanding of popular culture was more than merely discovering new knowledge about an unknown issue (Christians, 2002; Denzin, 2005). It was an attempt to be "pedagogical, political, moral, and ethical, involving the enhancement of moral agency, the production of moral discernment, a commitment to praxis, justice, an ethic of resistance, and a performative pedagogy that resists oppression" (Denzin, 2005, p. 951). In this manner, this study emphasized my informants' culture by analyzing their points of view, because "what is acceptable and what is not acceptable research, text, and/or process is determined and defined in reference to the cultural context within which it operates" (Bishop, 1998, p. 211).

Given the importance of my informants' social and cultural contexts, I first transcribed all of their words and expressions, including their laughs, poses, tones of voice, and use of language. As Corsaro (1981) observes, "the identification of contextualization cues is seen as a methodological strategy for determining how children link linguistic information with prepositional content on the one hand and extralinguistic cues and background expectations on the other" (pp. 139-140). Moreover, each interview was transcribed immediately after it was finished. These strategies helped me to verify my understanding, correct my misperceptions, double check missing points in a discussion, and create meaningful follow-up questions for future interviews.

I read all the transcriptions several times in order to look not only for the children's shared perceptions, concerns, and interests, but also each child's unique and

different points. In doing this, I examined what verbal and nonverbal expressions they repeated, and constructed several possible themes of meanings, which is what Carspecken (1996) calls the “meaning field” (p. 96). As I constructed and reconstructed the meaning field, I continually revised and modified the tentative themes that were initially chosen. These themes were based on group interviews and my field notes of interviews as well as on the relevant information which was mentioned before (see “Data Collection” in this chapter, p. 86). After settling on certain themes, I used a “negative case analysis” method (Carspecken, 1996; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), checking which did not fit into a specific theme for minimizing the possibility of having an invalid construction of meaning. By means of such strategies, therefore, the interview data were reviewed and newly categorized in succession in order to classify them according to more appropriate and accurate themes, and make my interpretations more truthful (Glaser & Strauss, 1975; Goodman, 1986; Strauss, 1987).

Moreover, in order to reduce the possible misinterpretations of the children’s responses, my perceptions were checked by triangulation (Carspecken, 1996; Corsaro, 1981; Denzin, 1978; Geertz, 1973; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stake, 1995). As the sole researcher of this study, I tried to view the children’s perspectives from as various ways as possible in order to estimate their understanding in a more appropriate, cogent way. In addition, my interpretations were clarified by my informants and their parents as well. The so-called “member checks” were conducted during interviews with the children and through informal discussions with their parents (see “Getting Connected” in this chapter). In this way, my interpretations of the data were often reconstructed and modified based

on the reflections and comments of both my informants and their parents. Thus, the analysis process of this study was recurrent, holistic, and entangled by having the opportunity to “change focus, modify questions, find new ways of interpreting data, identifying issues that are unaddressed within current data sources, and shaping writing through local ideas” (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 159).

As a result of the procedures mentioned above, this study had several categories of major themes, so the themes were concepts that described various categories (Merriam, 1998). These categories were further divided into two parts. The first part of the categories had to do with such themes as gender, race, and social class and hierarchy, which were, as I discussed in the previous chapter, responses to analytical studies of Disney animated films. The second part dealt with the themes of family, education, and other matters that often arose, but are unrelated to the three above themes. The name of each category was chosen from the informants’ words and linguistic expressions during the interviews (Corsaro, Personal communication, February 5, 2005).

### **Research Process**

Research with young Korean children was a challenge for me, because I had to embrace various kinds of situations, problems, and dilemmas throughout the research process. As some researchers (e.g., Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Goodman, 1998; Irwin & Johnson, 2005) have rightly observed, even though difficulties and challenges in the field of research—particularly studies with children—have been known for some time now, these practical hardships of the research process have not been fully discussed or at least



have often been excluded in completed or published research. Therefore, the following section will address what I experienced and suffered through the research process. By relating this experience, I hope to help other researchers who will face similar concerns in their future (Corsaro, Personal communication, March 22, 2005).

### **Getting Started**

When I began to seek participants for this study, I already encountered the first difficulty. I contacted nine Koreans who either had children whose grades were between kindergarten and third or knew some families who had children in those grades. But only one of these families wanted to participate. One of reasons for this rejection was that many of these Korean children didn't have enough time to participate in the study because of their extracurricular learning activities, such as English tutoring, music lessons, swimming, and reading classes. Thus, for their parents, the participation of their children in this study took time away from learning these academic subjects.

This tendency reflected not only the Korean parents' passion for their children's education, as I pointed out before (see "Korean Migrants and Their Cultures" in Chapter I, pp. 52-57), but also their perceptions of learning. In Korean culture, which has been significantly influenced by Confucianism, a child's learning is an internalization process that results from listening to others—mostly, adults—and reading a variety of materials, rather than by asking children questions or asking them to express their own thoughts. The acquisition of a pre-existing system of social knowledge and ideologies has a great effect on Korean children. In this way, the Korean parents could possibly see my study,

which focused on their children's own verbal expressions of their personal thoughts and interpretations, as unnecessary and valueless for their children's learning.

Related to this perception, this study's area, popular culture, also made some parents refuse to participate as well. Several parents were worried about their children's exposure to animated films. They tended to think that there was nothing to learn from popular culture and expressed their sense of the worthlessness of popular culture by saying, "Watching TV at home is enough for them. We don't want to waste our children's time by letting them see such cartoons." Some of them also asked: "Are you going to teach English or something else by using those videos at any point?" or "If you choose instructional videos, we'll then think about it [participating in the study]."

These responses prove an assumption that many people make about popular culture which several scholars have pointed out (e.g., Cuban, 1986; Dyson, 1997; Giroux, 1995); that is, popular culture itself is not for learning, but for entertainment, which people often see as having little educational value. As mentioned earlier in this study, children's popular culture hasn't been considered important enough to deal with as official or legitimate culture—namely "high culture"—in many Western societies (see "Popular Culture and Education" in Chapter I, pp. 14-20). Korean adults, too, often don't find that any "learning" process goes on in a child who is exposed to popular culture.

One parent in particular asked why I chose these "useless and evil" Disney animated films, which were full of harmful messages, for my study. During the conversation, she kept saying that we adults had to shield our children from violence and sex in society as much as we could, because children are so ignorant and naïve that they

absorb everything. For this reason, she didn't allow her children to watch TV or to go Disneyland. Once children were exposed to such "temptations," she said, it was impossible for them to overcome them. She closed her speech by insisting that I stop conducting this futile project, which could only have detrimental effects on children.

This parent's perspective reminded me of one of the well-known social conceptions of the child or childhood that we have already seen before in the Chapter I (see "Notion of Childhood and Popular Culture" in Chapter I, pp. 43-48). Like many Western societies including the United States, Korean society tends to think that a child is considered inadequate and innocent.<sup>10</sup> In addition, based on the arguments of the woman I just quoted, I understood another assumption about children—namely, that they are passive learners. Thus, this parent had to control her children by trying to get rid of *all* resources from which they might get access to impure, hedonist messages and information. This assumption exactly corresponds to what James and Prout (1997) argue, which is that the only way to prevent the corruption of children's innocence is to separate them from the adult world in which various social ills exist.

Face with this problem of finding informants, I had to rethink the way that I would have to approach my informants and their families. In doing this, I started to reflect on how I could convince my informants and their families to participate in my pilot study in Korea. As a matter of fact, the pilot study's informants drew from my existing long-term relationships, such as my family. Although none of the six informants' parents knew me, they gladly participated in the pilot study because they were well acquainted with my sister and her family. They trusted my sister, and the

feeling of trust was spontaneously connected to me, her younger sister. When I sought my informants here in the United States, the Korean parents didn't know me well. To them, I was just one of many other doctoral students who sought to use their children as participants. This lack of an intimate relationship between them and me might lead them to hesitate to participate in the study. As a result, having a young Korean informant was unavoidably related to how much that informant's family—particularly the parents—knew about me and how much they would trust me as a person, not merely as a researcher.

Based on this idea, I again began to seek my informants by focusing merely on people who had close relationships with me. I tried to determine whether my family members or my friends had any candidates for my study or, at least, knew some eligible families for my research. Fortunately, one of my sisters, who was temporarily staying in my town, had close relationships with three families who had young girls. My sister told me with confidence that these families “should” be able to do it because she had “helped them a lot” before. Even though it took quite long time to get the permission of these families, because of their children's busy schedules mentioned earlier, they finally allowed their children to be my informants.

In addition, I sought to help from an old friend in a different state, whose daughter was 6 years old. Although we couldn't see each other for a long time and I met her daughter only once, when I called her and talked about my difficult situation, she immediately accepted my request without any further questions and even introduced me to another family.

One of my informants was a former student of mine at a preschool where I worked. When I asked her mother if her daughter could participate in this study, she consented readily, mentioning how I had helped her daughter in preschool.<sup>11</sup> One month later, I started interviews with her daughter and niece, whose family moved to stay at her house for a while. Furthermore, she voluntarily introduced me to other families as well when my interviews with her daughter and niece ended. They were the families of her daughter's classmates, and the parents allowed their children to be my participants.

In sum, most of the informants' parents allowed me to have their children as participants, because of their own close relationships with me, or because they felt grateful to me or one of my family members. Like many other Korean parents, several of these parents thought this study might affect their children's academic learning adversely (see the section, "Getting Connected"). In addition, they told me that they didn't want their children to be exposed too much to the mass media. However, for these Koreans, a human relationship with someone was the first consideration in the matter of participation in a study, rather than other values, because life is a sequence of interdependent relationships with others in Korean culture.

It is also important to note here that my informants' parents—in this case the mothers<sup>12</sup>—had a positive image of Disney animated films, as mentioned above (see "Disney in Korea" in Chapter I, pp. 24-28). Such an image helped me avoid confronting one more difficulty in getting children to participate in the study. Since these parents considered Disney films good for their children in general, they didn't have any serious reservations about this study because of its use of Disney films.

## **Getting In**

While seeking my informants, I also thought of how I could give them more “authorship” in this study. I wanted them to consider this research not merely mine, but ours. I didn’t think that I could get these young children—who were used to adult directions and control—engaged actively in the study merely by asking questions and listening to their answers. As having several discussions with my dissertation chairperson, Dr. Mary McMullen, I gained an insightful idea about how to make the study more collaborative with my young informants. Based on her suggestion, I decided to use visible and tangible tools, such as a research uniform and nametags, which could symbolically show them their status as co-researchers in this study. Thus, I designed T-shirts for the children with lettering which read: “I’m a Junior Researcher.” I also had a notebook and a paper file holder for each of my informants, on which I put a short line, “Junior Research Team: Researcher \_\_\_\_\_ (each child’s name).” In addition, I had the same kind of shirt, notebook, and holder as their own.

Before starting actual interviews with the children, I met each pair of children or each child ahead of time with her mother. This meeting was to let these children know not only about the study, but also about me. As I noted earlier in this chapter (see “Researcher-Informant Relationships” in this chapter, pp. 72-79), I wanted to give them first a chance to *search* for who I was and what we were going to do by “embedding” myself in their culture and lives instead of “distancing” myself from it (Collins, 1990, p. 202). When I had this meeting with them, I gave them the materials, and briefly

explained what they were. During interviews, I also consciously adopted certain verbal confirmations which indicated them that this study was one of teamwork and that they were also experts. For example, I continually used such expressions as “We, all of us researchers,” “Today’s research topic is...,” “Our next research meeting will be...,” and so on.

Many of them liked these ideas and actively used the materials I provided them. When they found me without the T-shirt, many of them asked me, “Why don’t you wear this shirt? You are on our research team!” If they did not wear it, they often told me and their peer why not. Moreover, 7 out of the 10 children always had their notebooks and file holders. When these children had some ideas, which came up at home or at school but wanted to discuss them with their “research team,” many of them wrote or drew their ideas in their notebooks and showed both her peer and me at the next interview.<sup>13</sup> During the interviews, they used their notebooks in order to explain clearly and visually what they thought and wanted to say. Of course, this strategy didn’t work for all the children—for instance, the group in the different state didn’t wear their T-shirts or use the notebooks very much. However, I reflected that these symbolic representations of co-authorship in this study could be a way to convey to the children my eager intention to work with them as a team and to bond with them more closely.

### **Getting Connected**

After finally getting my informants, there were still problems in conducting this study. First, as I have already discussed, several participants were very busy so it was

difficult to set up a date for an interview. They were involved in certain learning activities even during the weekend, for instance, practicing their music lessons or preparing for quizzes at school.

Second, even though the parents of these children allowed me to have their children as my informants, some of them still expressed their anxiety about their children's participations at the beginning of the study. In contrast to the children's reactions to this study, which they found fun and interesting,<sup>14</sup> their parents expressed their concerns about their children's participation in the study by pointing out that it wasn't directly connected to their children's academic performance in school.<sup>15</sup> In addition, because I couldn't help doing most of the interviews after school hours, my participants had to stay quite late with me. As a result, some of the parents felt more nervous, which led them to regard these interviews as too long.

I thus had to consider how I could assure these parents not only that their children were safe with me, but also that these activities were a learning opportunity and an educational experience for their children. Therefore, first, I decided to call a parent of each informant during and/or after interviews in order to let him or her know what we did or were doing. Like an aunt who can be a child's intimate guardian (see "Researcher-Informant Relationships" in this chapter, pp. 72-79), I tried to talk sincerely and friendly about what the children were saying, doing, and even eating. In addition to calling, I also provided major points of their children's perspectives to their parents—mostly mothers. After our all interviews were completed, I typed each child's unique and interesting points of view during the interviews and gave them to her mother.



At first, the calls were often my one-sided reports about interviews. But as time went by, surprisingly, many of the parents—mostly the mothers—tended to wait for my calls. When I described our interviews, many of them spontaneously responded to me by talking about their children, their own opinions about Disney films and popular culture, and their concerns and problems related to their children’s education and living in the United States. Furthermore, several mothers wanted to discuss their children’s points of view, which I typed up and gave to them. After all, by allowing these mothers to monitor the research process, I not only made them feel comfortable with this study, but also got them involved in the study, and thus I could make sure of my understanding of the informants’ thoughts with their parents.

### **Reflections**

In this chapter, I discussed the methodology of the study in which qualitative research methods, all of which were an attempt to closely reveal children’s—particularly, Korean girls’—thoughts and ideas, were emphasized. I also presented my role of a “go-between” in the research in order to fit into not only children’s world but also their Korean culture. In addition, I described my difficulties which came from various Korean socio-cultural perspectives, such as those of human relationships, popular culture, and education and learning, and how I dealt with these difficulties.

Before I started the interviews, I assumed that the children might be bored talking about the films or be reluctant to be with me, an unfamiliar adult. These preconceptions led me to estimate that most of the interviews were going to be less than 1 hour.

However, it did not take long for me to realize that I was wrong. The first interview with my first group lasted over two hours; they did not stop talking. Most informants were eager to express what they thought and understood, not only by talking but also by acting, showing, and role-playing. Looking at me, who kept asking if they wanted to go rest room or to have a break during their discussions, they said, “Don’t worry. I am fine now. If I need it, I’ll tell you, okay?” In spite of Spradley’s (1979) wise advice, which is that an ethnographer should intentionally have “complete ignorance” (p. 4) of participants’ lives, I did not completely eliminate my unconscious assumptions that I had made about this study.

As all of our relationships developed, many mothers recognized me more and more as a familiar person who was interested in and who actively interacted with their children, rather than as an immature, careless researcher whose behaviors and attitudes were childish. As a result, they sometimes asked for my help with their families’ events, sought my advice or invited me to their special occasions. For example, I was called on to help move to a new house, give a ride, give advice for approaching to their children’s school teachers, and choose a day care center, and I also attended picnics, lunches, dinners, and children’s music recitals. By helping them and just being there with them as an “aunt,” I could get connected with my informants’ everyday lives, and thus gain a better understanding of them.

This study can’t capture the rich group dynamics that occur in larger groups of children and in groups of children with diverse levels of socio-economic status. Nevertheless, it helped me understand why we adults should listen to children proving

my informants' admirable critical thinking and deliberate attitude in interacting with others throughout the research. In the next chapter, I will discuss how these Korean girls talked about romantic love which was presented in Disney films. This discussion will touch on the notions of good and bad people, the important characteristics of attraction in romantic love, and possible factors which might influence my informants' understanding such characteristics.

## Chapter II

### Appendix

Table 1

Individual Information of the Participants in the Study

Name <sup>a</sup> (Pair Group)	Grade(age) & Years <sup>b</sup>	Nationality	Purpose to stay in the U. S.	Family members (living with one's father /Father's occupation <sup>c</sup> )
Ahjin (A)	1 (7) - 1	Korean	Educating children	Parents & 10-year-old brother (no/owner of a computer shop)
Jisoo (A)	K (6) - 2.5	Korean	Earning father's degree	Parents & 3-year-old sister (yes/doctoral student)
Minhee (B)	3 (9) - 3	Korean	Earning father's degree	Parents & 4-year-old sister (no/master student-banker)
Sunjoo (B)	2 (8) - 3	Korean	Earning father's degree	Parents & 4-year-old sister (yes/master student-banker)
Joona (C)	K (6) - 9	Korean- American	Earning father's degree & Working	Parents (yes/computer technician) * Mother had a MA degree.
Youri (C)	K (6) - 15	Korean- American	Working	Parents, 17-year-old sister and 15-year-old brother (yes/businessman)
Narim (D)	K (6) - 2.5	Korean	Earning father's degree & Educating children	Parents & 1-year-old sister (no/master student-office worker) * Mother was a student in the master's course.
Haana (D)	2 (8) - 3	Korean	Earning father's degree & Educating children	Parents & 4-year-old sister (no/visiting scholar-research director)
Kaain (E)	3 (9) - 1.5	Korean	Father's study & Educating children	Parents & 6-year-old sister (no/visiting scholar-professor)
Heesun (E)	K (6) - 1.5	Korean	Father's study & Educating children	Parents & 9-year-old sister (no/visiting scholar- professor)

<sup>a</sup> Each participant's name is a pseudonym.

<sup>b</sup> The years indicate how many years the families have lived in the United States.

<sup>c</sup> In the case of two occupations for a father, the first occupation is that of the father in the United States and the second occupation is that in Korea.

## Chapter II

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The “younger aunt” refers to a maternal one, “I-Mo” in Korean, throughout this study.

<sup>2</sup> I referred to myself as “aunt” throughout the study but I didn’t force the children to call me that. For example, when I called their homes in order to set up an interview date, I said to them, “This is Aunt Lena. How are you?” In addition, like many other aunts, I sincerely listened to and responded to their stories, even when they were not exactly related to the study. They told their stories in my car, in a hallway, on the phone, in a restaurant, on their beds, and in a rest room. As I listened to their stories, our intimacy greatly increased. When they eagerly talked to me about their schools, friends, families, and various other experiences, they told me sometimes, “Aunt Lena, don’t tell this to my mom” or “I can talk to you because you are on my team.”

I also tried to find our common interests and things that they liked to do—for example, dancing, drawing, playing card games, collecting stickers and book markers, and talking about “boys.” Sharing experiences with them connect me to them very much. Many of them thus wanted me to come by—and even sleep over at—their houses, go to a movie and hang out shopping because, as they said, “We [they and I] can have a greater time together” to think, talk, and laugh.

<sup>3</sup> During the interviews, I said to them “I don’t understand what you are saying. Can you help me understand?” “Nobody told me about it before. Thanks!” “Wait! Can you say it again? I didn’t know that,” “How can you do that? Let me know,” and so on.

<sup>4</sup> These films were transcribed into English and had Korean subtitles.

<sup>5</sup> First, I tried to have at least groups of three for the interviews according to the advice of one of my committee members, Dr. William Corsaro. He suggested that I could have more effective interviews by seizing children’s culture and interactions in larger groups. In addition, according to Dr. Corsaro, the children could help prevent the domination of one child’s voice over the rest of the children. However, to seek three children who knew one another *and* set up a date on which all three children were available were extremely difficult in this case. Thus, I had to decide to have pair groups in this study.

<sup>6</sup> For example, when one of my informants had a difficult time remembering a certain event or said something that was related to an interview question, another informant facilitated her memory or verified her statements by saying, “When you visited my house the other day, you said your mom was mad because you didn’t clean up. Didn’t you?” “You said before you had a boyfriend in Korea before you came here! Are you lying to our team?” and so on. Moreover, each girl in the pairs often supported or disagreed with the other’s opinion by expressing her own thoughts, like “She is right,” “That is really true,” “Uh-oh, I don’t think so...,” or “Not all people like that.”

<sup>7</sup> In the pilot study, the group discussions, which took place in participants’ homes, proceeded less effectively than those in public places because the children’s attention was

absorbed by other things, such as a telephone ringing, toys, siblings, and parents. This was why this study was conducted in the semi-public places.

<sup>8</sup> Sometimes, the children seemed not to broach their points merely by repeating “I think...I think...,” or saying to themselves, ‘How can I say it [in Korean]?’ Or when I felt that they kept giving very short positive answers only after another peer spoke, like “Me, too,” “That’s right,” and “I think like that, too,” I assumed that there was a possibility that they might be uncomfortable speaking in English. In these situations, I initiated the use of Korean by saying, “To speak in Korean is easy and fun for me. I like it. If you also like it, let’s speak in Korean whenever you want” or by starting to speak Korean of my own initiative.

<sup>9</sup> As for Levi-Strauss’ term, “bricoleur,” Derrida (1992) explains that that person is who “uses “the means at hand” which are already there, which had not been especially conceived with an eye to the operation for which they are to be used and to which one tries by trial and error to adapt them, not hesitating to change them whenever it appears necessary, or to try several of them at once, even if their form and their origin are heterogeneous” (p. 157).

<sup>10</sup> However, unlike Western societies, in which such a concept of childhood is often seen as something negative and incompetent compared with adulthood, Korean culture sees childhood in more positive ways. It emerges from Korean cultural images of childhood, rather than through the influence of Western developmental theories. In fact, Korean culture is in favor of child-like qualities such as innocence, cheerfulness, energy, and brightness (Peak, 1991). Since the child-like is seen as one of the unique, important,

and necessary characteristics of childhood, Korean people think that it should be persistent and encouraged during childhood. Thus, a child's early maturity or a lack of child-like features is considered very wrong, queer, and miserable in Korean culture. As a result, such an image of childhood has led many Korean parents whom I contacted to assume that I might deprive their children of those child-like characters by making them start to ponder certain issues.

<sup>11</sup> When I saw her for the first time there, she was a new student and used to cry every late afternoon waiting for her mother. As I found her crying every day, I talked about her situation a main teacher but she confessed that she had tried to sooth her since she came there but it didn't work well. She didn't speak or understand English very well at that time. I, too, wanted to comfort her but the only thing I could do was hug her, sweep aside her tears with my hands and talk with her in Korean. Her mother also sought to have my advice and opinions about her daughter's situation. As time went by, her crying gradually decreased, and finally she didn't cry any more by the last month I worked there. In spite of the fact that I couldn't conclude that it resulted only from my help, her mother thanked me because she thought that my being a Korean teacher was great help in making her get used to that circumstance.

<sup>12</sup> I mostly met and talked about this study with my informants' mothers because, as I pointed out in the previous chapter, Korean mothers usually take charge of their children's activities or their participation in a certain project or program (see "Korean Migrants and Their Culture" in Chapter I, pp. 52-57).



<sup>13</sup> In addition, in order to inform me of their thoughts and ideas more precisely—or to have just fun sometimes—many of them actively prepared each interview by bringing several things from their homes and shared them and often gave one of them to me. This kind of attitude was also extended to my interviews. For instance, my informants started to respond to me as an expert or a researcher. They talked to each other to provide their ideas more clearly to me, repeated their important points with specific examples, and kept checking my understanding by saying, “Do you understand what I mean?” “Is it hard to follow?” or “I think we have to think about it more and talk again when we get together next time.” Moreover, several of them asked me what our next film would be and then they were prepared to discuss the film with their teams by having a preview at home.

<sup>14</sup> Most of my informants showed their interest in the study by saying, “It is so fun!” “Can we stay here more? I have many things to tell you!” “When do we meet again? Every Friday? Or how about every day?” and “Do you know my telephone number? Are you sure if you have it? If you don’t know it, we can’t meet again.”

<sup>15</sup> Several mothers said to me, “The interview time is too long. Could you reduce it a little bit? Then my child could study other things more.” “Can you meet her just twice? Two meetings seem to be enough to watch films and talk about them. There are a lot of things she has to do,” or “Can you contact us next month? My daughter has to work hard this month because we have an important test at school.”

## **Chapter III**

### **“Boys Like Smart Girls More Than Pretty Girls”:**

#### **The Characteristics of Attraction in Romantic Love**

When my informants discussed their ideas about the four films chosen for this study, romantic love was one of their most prevalent themes. As scholars (e.g., Giroux, 1999; Wasko, 2001) have pointed out, most of the four Disney films discussed earlier have heroines who fall in love with male protagonists, and my informants often discussed love in the films.<sup>1</sup> Although my young female informants were aware that these heroines were much older than themselves, they offered interesting opinions about the heroines' lives and situations by using certain strategies, such as imagination, inference, personal stories, and vicarious experience, which they had obtained from various resources—for example, families, relatives, teachers, friends, books, and popular culture. During discussions about the hero or heroine who was falling in love, the girls in this study eagerly talked about the features of these characters that made it possible for them to love or to be loved. Therefore, in this chapter, I explore these girls' ideas about the essential aspects of love.

In a related matter, the issues of their discussions inevitably extended beyond romantic love, to include the meanings of “good” and “bad,” since my informants' feelings of love could be directed only towards good people. As a result, they talked

about why a person loves another by speculating about their definitions of “good” and “bad.” They also described the different kinds of beauty which they had to consider: important and substantial on the one hand, and secondary and unconvincing on the other. As a result, in this chapter, I also investigate what good and bad meant to the informants of this study.

In order to examine my informants’ perspectives on love, three major themes which came up often in their discussions will be addressed—namely, sincerity, sympathy, and intelligence. In analyzing their understanding of these themes, I will also scrutinize their perspectives on physical attractiveness, which did not get as much emphasis as the three themes just mentioned. Moreover, my investigation of these Korean children’s understanding of Disney’s movies takes into account the possible factors which might have influenced the children such as Korean socio-cultural values and their language acquisition. Finally, I will examine the meaning of being “nice” by relating it to the Korean paradigm of gender.

### **Good People: Those Who Can Be Loved**

In talking about a film and comparing it to another film, my informants usually pointed out that one protagonist fell in love with another because of certain good features. Of these features, these girls gave precedence to personality as the most lovable feature in the characters. These girls’ ardent preference for good personalities was intensified when they discussed bad people’s characteristics in the movies. When describing bad characters’ appearances and traits, they first acknowledged certain external features

which the bad people in the movies had in common, such as facial features, facial expressions, clothing, and the tone of the laughter. At the beginning of a discussion with Sunjoo and Minhee, they first talked about bad people's shared characteristics in the movies.

Sunjoo said, "The bad guys have eyes like this [pulling up both eyelids with her hands]. And they look like witches...and mean. And they frown a lot and trick other people and when they do...they see what trouble the other people get into and laugh at them. The bad guys also don't have any families. And no one helps them. They just do only by themselves." Minhee then said, "Yeah. They are alone or usually with animals. And when the bad guys laugh, they laugh really loud, high, and ...like 'Heeee! Heeee!' But when the good guys laugh, [in a light tone], 'Ha! Ha! Ha!' like that. And they usually hold a stick, I mean a club or... a cane...something like that in their hands." Sunjoo, again, commented, "And the bad guys wear dark colored clothes a lot. Not the people in the *Aladdin* movie. Those people were born there so they've always been like that. I mean the other people. If you look at their skin color, it's a little dark. Like...Ursula! Her skin is purple." (Interview summary)<sup>2</sup>

As I mentioned earlier in Chapter I, there are some symbolic mechanisms, such as skin color and facial features, by which race and ethnicity are represented in Disney films.

These two girls seemed to notice such semiotics that was embedded in the films. As was the case with an Asian-American girl in Tobin's (2000) study of children's reactions to a film, Sunjoo also first described the bad people's eyes. Such single eyelids in Disney films, the so-called "Asian eyes" (Wasko, 2000), have been criticized as one of the Disney films' biased racial representations or ethnic stereotypical manifestations. In addition, Asian eyes are often described as plain and ugly from the American perspective of beauty, in which big eyes with double eyelids are considered beautiful (Tobin, 2000). However, even though they are Asians, my informants did not identify their own

appearance—in this case, their eyes—with that of bad people or with bad people’s raised eyes.<sup>3</sup> Like Sunjoo, they merely pointed out that slant eyes signify bad people’s, “like witches,” meanness, rather than disparaging the actual shape of the eyes.

Furthermore, when Sunjoo and Minhee talked about bad people in the discussion above, they mentioned not only their physical features but also their behaviors, attitudes, and even personal backgrounds—for example, the families and sidekicks—as common characteristics. In order to clarify her interpretations of bad people’s shared characteristics, Sunjoo made a point about ordinary people in *Aladdin* and their skin color—which is an example of one of the racially biased codes in Disney films according to some scholars (see “Race and Social Class” in Chapter I, pp. 35-39)—by saying, “Not the people in the *Aladdin* movie. Those people were born there so they’ve always been like that. I mean the other people.” In this way, Sunjoo tried to emphasize her belief that bad people were determined not merely by similar physical features, but also by similar personalities, behaviors, and origins.

One of my informants, Minhee, strongly protested when I asked if her ideas about bad people’s shared physical features in movies was related to her real life. For example, she used the example of her friend to make a strong objection when I asked if she thought someone whose skin color was a bit tanned, or whose accent was little strange, and whose face was mean-looking, was bad and wicked in reality. She then raised her voice and said:

You shouldn’t think like that! Then what about my friend? And everyone from the market [in *Aladdin*] isn’t all bad! They look like they’re from India. We studied culture at school, and we saw a video about India and

when they speak English, they talk like those people from the market. They can speak English but they don't sound like the people here. That's because they haven't lived here. And a friend of mine, who was born in the South [of America] and grew up there, that person talks differently, too. And anyway, just because you don't speak English like the people here doesn't make it wrong. It's not their fault. They were just born and raised there.

Because she thought that my question was too generalized or simplistic, Minhee proposed the example of her friend, who did not speak Standard English in the discussion above. In addition, her learning experience was one of the persuasive ways in which ensured her understanding of different cultures and their people. Put another way, learning about another culture—in this case, that of India—allowed her to appreciate that living in a different place could influence people's ways of living and talking. From this point of view, the skin color or accent of the people in the market place in *Aladdin* did not lead Minhee to think of them as bad people.<sup>4</sup> It was unreasonable and unconvincing to her, therefore, that the bad people's sharing of certain physical features would determine who was bad in reality.

The other girls also insisted that a person's character was more important than his or her physical features, and introduced their own personal experiences. Narim and Haana were eager to convince me that a person's physical traits should not be the sole factor in making a judgment about him or her. Narim strongly argued:

I have a friend named Daniel and he's black. But I don't think Daniel's bad because his skin is dark. He's a really good kid. Skin color doesn't matter. In the movies, I think they color the bad kids dark because...the color black or dark colors don't make you feel good...and they're scary colors.

Following Narim's statement, Haana agreed with Narim's point of view and presented a

unique point of view about the representation of color in the movies:

That's right. And the Little Mermaid's dad has white hair not because he is good, but to show that he is old. When people get old, their hair turns white. That's an age problem, and does not mean a person is good or bad. When I was in Chicago, there was a Latino with tan skin in my class. She was a little dark, [looking at Narim] like Narim [both laughing], but she was not a bad kid at all!

Like Minhee and Sunjoo, Narim and Haana strongly disagreed that there is a definite correlation between a person's appearance and his or her personality. These girls' positive friendships with children of different ethnicities allowed them to remain firm in their belief that, when judging an individual, "Skin color doesn't matter." Moreover, both Narim and Haana had interesting ways of interpreting the symbolization of color in people's physical appearance, such symbolization being a manifestation of the biased racial representation which Giroux (1995a, 1999), Sells (1995), and others have reproached.

According to several girls, dark-colored and light-colored skin simply had to do with being different. When I asked why bad people were often drawn with dark skin in movies, many girls said that dark colors "don't make you feel good and they're scary colors," and thus, as Minhee said:

We can tell right away who is the bad guy and who is good guy in the movies. If we make the good guys and bad guys look the same, we can't know who is who and...[we are] very confused. You know, movies end quickly and...if the good people look like the bad people, then...we can't know who is who exactly, even when we watch the whole thing.

Often noticing that bad people were dark, they still did not always indicate that good people were light. Therefore, although my informants believed that one could not

determine whether a person was good based on skin color, they still perceived dark colors as bad, unpleasant, fearful, and crude, because dark colors—in particular black—have similar connotations in Korean culture.

Furthermore, Sunjoo and Minhee discussed certain points of view which are related to current racial issues when they talked about who was good and bad.

Sunju said, “If you lie, or pretend to be kind on the outside when you’re not inside, then you’re not a good person. And even when you actually see a person, and that person’s skin color is dark or [he or she] wears dark-colored clothes, you can’t know everything about that person. Black people are black people because they were born like that, not because they’re bad. And...black people can be scared of white people, too, because they’re different from them. We often think people that are different from us are mean or scary.” Agreeing with Sunjoo, Minhee commented, “A long time ago in America, black people didn’t have freedom. Then Martin Luther King Jr., and people like him, stood up and then...now they have freedom. But a black kid in my class thinks that white people might attack his family because something bad [slavery] happened before. So he’s afraid of white people. I think...so I think what happened to you...or what happened in the past, I mean...like history, things like that, those things are very important for us.” (Interview summary)

In this discussion, Sunjoo spoke of biological differences between white people and black people, which are innately determined regardless of his or her intentions. Due to this reason, to Sunjoo, it seemed unfair when a person was judged by his or her physical traits. In addition, giving her knowledge of American history, Minhee sharply pointed out that the fact of slavery still influences Americans—for example, one African-American boy in her class. Minhee thus considered history or one’s experiences consequential for people, as well as their relationships with others. Another girl, Haana, expanded upon the idea of American slavery, intertwining it with her historical knowledge articulately:



I know why they [bad people] have dark skin [in the movies]. And I've thought about why the bad guys have dark skin. A long time ago, Americans brought people over from Africa to make them slaves. People living in Africa usually have dark skin. So slaves have dark skin. And...so Americans thought that anyone with dark skin was a slave. I think that's why they [filmmakers] used dark skin. They wanted to make them [the bad people in the movies] seem bad like slaves. But that was a long time ago and it isn't like that now. People don't think like that any more after the Civil War and they freed them [the slaves] from slavery. And blacks are not slaves any more. I have black kids in my class, too. I like them as long as they're nice to me, [laugh]. But I think Americans still think like that...about slaves...even though it [Civil War] is completely over. Maybe that's why they draw bad guys like that [in the movies].

Haana understood a hidden assumption in American society, which is related to racial prejudice. According to her, the American belief that dark skin implies “bad like slaves” still lives in some Americans' mind.

However, none of these girls mentioned Koreans or Asians in discussing the relationships between color and race. They pointed out the tension among Whites, Blacks, and Latinos, but excluded Asians. During their discussions about this issue, several girls called the first three ethnic groups just mentioned “they” or “Americans,” and did not include themselves or Koreans-Americans. In Haana's comments mentioned above, her perspective as an outsider was revealed, for she believed that problems between racial groups were not related to her (“I like *them* [blacks] as long as they're nice to me”), but only to Americans (“But I think *Americans* still have those thoughts about slaves”).

Thus, as some scholars have previously noted (see “Race and Social Class” in the Chapter I, pp. 35-39), my informants pointed out such differences more clearly when they

compared good people to bad people in the movies. However, they did not apply the rules of the films to their real life. Instead, as they reflected on their knowledge and experiences, and shared their ideas with the other girls, they tended to ponder why such racial rules had been used in the films. Thus, even though most of them did not comprehend the complex nexus between racial codes, social injustice, and racism in American society, which have been discussed in other scholars' research on Disney films, as I noted earlier in this chapter (see "Race and Social Class" in Chapter I, pp. 35-39), they were prudent enough to simplify these codes in applying them to real relationships with others.

In this regard, according to most of my informants, different physical traits such as skin color, appearance, and ways of speaking hold no more significance than the difference and uniqueness of each individual, in spite of the fact that these physical traits sometimes led them to "think people that are different from us are mean or scary." In other words, as Jisoo asserted, "No matter how pretty or kind they look, they can be bad"; as a result, most of my informants echoed Sunjoo, who said, "Even if you actually see a person, [and] that person's skin color is dark or...[the person] wears dark colored clothes, like black or...something, you can't know everything about that person. You have to look at what he or she does."

### **Sincerity**

The sincerity of some of the good characters in my informants' discussions was given remarkable emphasis by my informants. These girls proposed the importance of

sincerity by using Ursula, the villain octopus of *The Little Mermaid*, as an example of that virtue. Although Ursula turned into a pretty woman, none of my informants considered her truly beautiful. Some said that she could not be seen as beautiful as long as they knew she was “bad,” to use Haana’s word. Haana spoke articulately on this point:

Even when she [Ursula] wears pretty earrings or puts on make-up like red lipstick, Ursula is so ugly! Because...even when she turns pretty and turns into a princess, she still lies! Ursula is Ursula, even when she changes. She does bad things. That’s why she’s not pretty.

In spite of a fact that my informants found Ursula’s changed appearance fairly pretty, they did not want to concede her beauty completely because she was evil. As they saw the matter, Ursula’s dishonesty and evil was persistent and unrelenting, whereas her appearance was easily changeable, and, therefore, discredited. Jisoo nicely summed up Ursula’s absence of the characteristic virtues in a single sentence: “Ursula is pretty...but still ugly.”

Similarly, a person’s physical appearance was often considered very vulnerable and ephemeral because it could change depending on how well the person behaved and treated others. Ahjin and Jisoo talked about the fleeting nature of physical traits while discussing why Belle did not find Gaston attractive in *Beauty and the Beast*. Ahjin told me:

When he came to her [Belle’s] house, then...he came in and put his feet up on her books that she really liked, but his shoes were still on! So yuck! And he treated her dad badly, so she doesn’t like him after that. I think that’s why a person should act better than look good. No matter how much Gaston loved Belle, he shouldn’t have acted like that. I think...he thought that Belle really liked him because he was good-looking...

because...do you remember the three girls in the village? Those girls really liked him. They said, "Oooh! Oooh!" whenever they saw him. So he thought Belle would be like those girls. But he was wrong.

Jisoo also agreed with Ahjin's idea, saying that "Nobody likes people if they should put their feet up just anywhere like that. Gaston seemed like...too tough and a real showoff."

In this discussion, according to Ahjin, Gaston prided himself on his good looks because many other girls in his village liked his appearance. Therefore, Gaston's self-conceit caused him to assume that Belle would also like him because of his good looks.

However, Ahjin and Jisoo pointed out that even though Gaston was handsome, Belle did not like him because he had bad manners and an unpleasant personality. As a result, according to my informants, the most important component in love was how appropriately a person expressed his or her feelings and affection for another person, since the first impression that a person was physically attractive often changed depending on a person's attitudes.

The other girls agreed with Ahjin and Jisoo in giving more importance to good character than physical traits. Haana, for example, insisted that Jasmine liked Aladdin not because he had good looks, but because he was nice and saved her life. To Haana, therefore, "being honest, truthful, and nice" was seen as more important in love than physical attractiveness. In short, many of my informants gave priority to a sincere heart as opposed to good looks; like Narim, they concluded that "A man who is really nice and helps a lot, like the Beast or Aladdin...that man is better than a good-looking man like Gaston."

## Sympathy

My informants' emphasis on the feeling of empathy was another substantial part of love in their discussions of good character. Many girls often compared Gaston to the Beast in emphasizing the importance of sympathy. As a matter of fact, the appearances and personalities of Gaston and the Beast were clearly in opposition in the movie *Beauty and the Beast*. Thus, for my informants, this film seemed to be a more definite and pertinent example than any of the other films in discussions of the problem of characteristic beauty versus external attractiveness.

First, in discussing the two male characters in *Beauty and the Beast*, these girls severely criticized Gaston, saying that they didn't like Gaston because he was "very rude and mean" to Belle, her father, and even the Beast. "Gaston is good outside and bad inside, and he is just like that foolish Octopus in *The Little Mermaid*!" Narim said decisively. Because of his meanness, my informants did not feel any pity for Gaston even when he fell over a precipice and died in the movie; to many of them, his dying was seen as a natural result of his bad behavior as well as character. In contrast, my participants appreciated the Beast's sense of understanding as an essential element of beautiful character. Contrasting Gaston to the Beast, Ahjin clearly described the importance of this virtue:

If you like and love somebody so much, then you should think about what that person really wants to do and do that for him. But Gaston just did things that he wanted. So Belle doesn't like him. But when he [the Beast] saw how sad Belle was when she found her dad got sick...even though he liked her and...and...wanted to stay with her, he told her to go! I think the Beast is different from Gaston.

Like Ahjin, most of the girls appreciated the Beast's consideration for Belle. They tended to be impressed by his great understanding, which was associated with his sacrifice, by recalling that "He brought her to the big library to please her 'cause he knew she loved books," "He asked Belle what she wanted," and "When she said she wanted to go and see her father, he let her go back to him [her father]." Therefore, the Beast's tenderness and self-sacrifice for Belle reminded my informants that understanding someone's suffering was indispensable in love because, as Minhee asserted:

If you love him [someone], you have to understand him and do something that he wants to do. Even, you know, even when he isn't very nice to you, you have to be nice and understand him...and still think of him first. That is love.

As a result, many of these girls regarded a person's understanding and consideration to be a consequence part of his or her beauty, which could in turn lead to him or her being loved.

Narim and Haana also related the Beast's sense of understanding to the feeling of sympathy about another's situations or problems in *Aladdin*. When I asked what kind of man Jasmine seemed to like, Narim and Haana suggested that Jasmine liked a man who understood her distress. Narim insisted:

She [Jasmine] liked a boy that knows her heart. Remember that part when he [Aladdin] shows her where he sleeps in the market? They were in totally different situations. But both of them thought like they were trapped...I think Jasmine started to like him then. And Aladdin, too. Aladdin can feel what Jasmine feels!

Haana agreed with Narim and added, "Yeah. Their situations were exactly opposite.

Like...Aladdin wants to live in the palace but he is poor, whereas Jasmine is rich but lives

outside of the palace like poor people. But their feeling is the same.” According to Narim and Haana, sympathizing with Jasmine allowed Aladdin to bond with her and win her love. Jisoo agreed with these girls’ ideas, mentioning the same scene in *Aladdin*: “Do you remember when Jasmine tells Aladdin at that market place that...her dad is forcing her to marry? Then, Aladdin says, ‘That’s not right!’...because Aladdin knows Jasmine’s heart.” These girls regarded sympathy as a precious human feeling which could produce an emotional connection even between the princess Jasmine and the “street rat” Aladdin, despite their very different social status. As a result, according to these girls, sympathy helped two individuals—in this case Aladdin and Jasmine—overcome their different social backgrounds and enabled them to fall in love.

Another informant, Heesun, also spoke about the great value of consideration and sympathy, describing the lack of any deep emotion in Prince Eric in *The Little Mermaid*. Even though Heesun acknowledged that Ariel liked Prince Eric in this movie, she herself didn’t like him because:

He didn’t impress me. That prince did not make me cry, not once. And in the movie, he hardly does anything. He didn’t do anything special for Ariel! He didn’t treat her well, either. He just played a flute...and walked along with a dog and...that is it.

The absence of any real emotion in Prince Eric, then, made him unattractive to Heesun. She could not find any special inner beauty in this prince who merely “played a flute and walked along with a dog.” To her, he did not play a significant role in the movie or make any great effort to gain Ariel’s love.<sup>5</sup> Like Heesun, many of the other girls also had little regard for him and criticized his personality, appearance, and outfits: “He was not

handsome at all or brave, either,” “He had weird, ugly clothes,” “I think he was silly,” and “He acts like a hotshot. Always acting like [putting her hands on her waist] he’s so sure of himself!” As a result, even though Prince Eric was like most of the handsome men who often appear in Disney films (e.g, Giroux, 1999; Kasturi, 2002), he failed to make a favorable impression on most of my informants. To put it differently, due to his lack of effort to understand, care for, or sacrifice for Ariel, the girls did not tend to see Prince Eric as worthy of being loved.

### **Intelligence**

Another salient factor which my informants saw as essential to gain love was intelligence. When they talked about intelligence, the focus of these girls was mostly on a single heroine, Belle of *Beauty and the Beast*. Acknowledging Belle’s passion for reading in the movie, many of them thought that she was smart “because she read a lot of books.” One girl, Haana, described Belle’s intelligence by relating it to her reading habits during a conversation with Narim.

Haana said, “She [Belle] is very confident about what she does. No matter what bad things the other people say about her dad, she doesn’t lose her love for him and keeps taking care of her dad. That is maybe...because she is smart. She likes to read books. But other people...especially Gaston, he tells her she doesn’t have to [read]. But she continues to read. The librarian said that Belle has read some books twice already but she still likes to read them. Belle and I are similar because she and I like to read books! [laugh]. If you read books, you get to know a lot of things. Maybe Belle, I think, wants to be smart. If you’re smart, you can do anything! That’s why I like Belle. Maybe the Beast [likes her because of her intelligence], too. She is nice and smart!” However, Narim cried, “But I think being smart isn’t good. Abraham Lincoln was really smart, right? And someone tried to kill him. He died in the end. So...I don’t



think it's good. I don't wanna die." Haana replied with a smile, "Narim! Even so, if you're smart, you can get A+ on all subjects! How great is that?" Narim, answered, laughing, "That is so true!" (Interview summary)

Haana articulated Belle's intelligence from evidence in the movie. She described particular scenes, such as that of the librarian and that of Gaston's visit to Belle's house, as examples of Belle's enthusiasm for reading books. In other words, Haana saw Belle's love of reading as a symbol for her knowledge. Like Haana, most of my informants agreed that Belle's erudition led not only to confidence in herself, but also to her being so lovable. But, interestingly, Narim had a different opinion about being smart in this discussion. To her, being smart was not considered good because of the assassination of President Lincoln. That is to say, she thought that intelligence could lead people's being killed. In spite of her disagreement, however, Narim finally approved of Haana's notion that great intelligence was one of the crucial means to have successful academic performance.

Haana's enthusiastic assessment of Belle also stemmed from her identification with Belle, for she said, "Belle and I are similar" as a result of their passion for reading. By identifying with Belle, Haana went on to presume that Belle's intelligence might be one of the reasons why the Beast loved her. In this regard, counter to some scholars' arguments (see "Gender" in Chapter I, pp. 31-35), Haana's identification with Belle was not based merely on Belle's appearance; rather, Belle's intellectual ability allowed Haana to project herself onto Belle. Thus, Haana chose Belle as her favorite heroine in Disney films because the latter was intelligent, a trait which Haana considered vital.

My informants' emphasis on intelligence was also manifested in a discussion between Minhee and Sunjoo, a discussion in which they explicitly expressed their ideas about intellectual ability by sharing personal stories. Minhee and Sunjoo, whose parents were exceedingly passionate about their children's academic performance and education, argued that "Boys actually like smart girls more than pretty girls." Thus, discussing Belle's qualities of inner beauty, such as being nice and kind, Minhee started to talk about the connection between intelligence and inner beauty.

Mine said, "Some boys in my class...they like girls who are not smart. Those boys don't exactly know if they [the girls] are smart or not. They just like those girls because they look pretty at first. One boy thinks that I'm really smart, so that's why he likes me, and the reason he likes me is because they do just regular math but I do the advanced [kind] and they do just regular language. There are two kinds of the advanced one. I do both. [Raising her voice] And kids [some girls in her class] that act pretty brag too much! They say they're the most popular. But boys like smart girls more than pretty girls. I've never seen any girl that acts all pretty who's better in math and English than me. I do well at school and playing the piano, too. I have a lot of talent. Boys like girls like that. Girls who are smart and talented...like me. So boys say that I'm more popular than those kids, but they don't accept that. And one of those girls thinks that boys like me because I am good looking. The way I talk and my clothes and hair barrettes...something like that. So that girl copies these things! Whew! Boys like that even less. They say, 'Why do you copy Minhee?' But she keeps doing it. And she brings things like bracelets to school every day and talks about which one is prettier." Sunjoo agreed with her and said, "[clapping] Yeah! Yeah! They [some girls] do exactly like that! Those girls go to the washroom and just look in the mirror *all* the time! They look at their faces this way and that way, and...tie and untie their hair...and say 'I'm the best!' That's all they think about. So they don't study too much. And they don't listen to the teacher when she says something in class. So when I was finishing fourth grade math, they didn't even know second grade math!" (Interview summary)

The point here is that, like Haana in the previous discussion, these two girls' definitions of being smart were also intimately related to levels of academic performance. Their

advanced academic performance made them confident. They asserted that sometimes boys like “girls who are not smart” because they have not yet evaluated these girls’ intelligence. To Minhee and Sunjoo, therefore, it was obvious that boys liked girls who were “smart and talented like me [Minhee]” as long as they recognized the girls’ intelligence. Minhee was particularly convinced that her smartness was indispensable to her popularity in school. Even though the boys did not explicitly say why they liked her, she had no doubt about the reason, since:

They [boys] know my work. I can tell how they see me. Whenever they see my work, they whisper [to] each other, like “Look at that,” “Wow, she is so great!,” something like that. That’s why they like me. I am kind of smart.

This discussion also showed that both girls criticized the girls who acted “pretty” and who placed undue value on appearance, rather than on intellectual ability, as measured by taking advanced classes and playing a musical instrument. They blamed such girls for spending too much time adorning themselves, which prevented them from attaining academic excellence. Minhee even went further, indicating later in this discussion that a smart girl’s pretending to be an “idiot” was a strategy for avoiding boys’ attention and affection:

One of boys [in Minhee’s class] thinks that a girl is smart because she is good at games. That girl wants him not to like her. So she pretends that she is [an] idiot and not really good at games. But finally, today, he broke up with her! But that girl was not that smart, though. Really. She got 5 or 6 wrong answers on our math test! So she has bad grades sometimes. I’ve never have a bad grade.

In this way, by comparing their own intellectual ability to that of other people in their classes whom they did not consider popular, Minhee and Sunjoo were asserting that their academic achievement made them worthy of love.

The point is that, as I mentioned in Chapter I, these Korean girls' high level of academic performance was very likely a sign of their strong self-esteem. In this sense, these informants believed that being smart was more important than physical appearance in obtaining love, as well as in judging people in general. Thus, even though my informants could not find many intelligent protagonists in Disney films, they did not ignore intelligence or treat it as insignificant. Instead, they unwaveringly considered it important and even necessary in love, as well as in life.

### **Physical Attractiveness: A Complex Matter in Romantic Love**

In analyzing my informants' argument that being nice is generally more important in love than physical appearances, I found that they did not completely ignore the latter during their discussions of the films. According to my informants, physical attractiveness was valued under certain conditions. First, the girls considered physical appearances important for people's first impressions. Ahjin talked about such impressions as determining Belle's initial sense of who Gaston was. She argued that Belle had good impression of Gaston because of his physical attractiveness. Ahjin remarked:

Belle liked him. [But going on saying very fast], I mean...she didn't like him because he was so rude and dirty. But...but...Belle first liked Gaston a little, and then she liked the Beast. It didn't seem like she didn't really like Gaston at first because he was handsome and also strong...so he could fight off the bad guys.

Ahjin gave an example of Belle's positive feelings towards Gaston in a confident manner, recalling the scene in which Gaston visits Belle's house: "She opened the door for him and even let him into [her house] when he came to her house!" Based on Ahjin's interpretation, Belle's allowing Gaston to come into her house was a sign that Belle found him attractive. To Ahjin, there was no reason for allowing him to enter other than Belle's good impression of Gaston because "Only people I [Ahjin] like can come into my house."

Like Ahjin, my other informants thought that a person's appearance or physical traits might be influential only when people met him or her for the first time because, as Jisoo and Minhee commented, "We don't know if that person is good or bad and we can only see that person's appearance at that time." They also noted that boys liked pretty girls "because they don't exactly know if they [girls] are smart. Like...when we don't know if boys are smart or not." Haana also said that even if the Beast might find Belle attractive because of her beautiful appearance at first, "he could really love her only after he knew that she was so nice and kind...and cared for the birds." Therefore, to these girls, a person's appearance can be a secondary component, not sufficient or indispensable for true love.

However, physical appearance can have an impact on a person's attention and win that person's favor in another way. As Minhee said, this is when people "treat us very badly their looking is very important, because their looking is only a good thing for them." That is to say, a person's physical beauty can be his or her strength when that

person's inner characteristics may not be good. Hence, his or her physical appearance can supplement his or her internal features. Minhee's recognition of the influence of physical beauty was much clearer when she discussed males' views on females' looks. She revealed her ideas on this subject when talking about what Ursula did to win Prince Eric's love in *The Little Mermaid*.

She [Ursula] is very bad and too fancy there. I know why she turned into [a woman] really pretty. Because she wanted the prince to break up with Ariel. When she turns really pretty...I mean, prettier than Ariel, then the prince will like her more than Ariel.

According to Minhee's argument, a woman—in this case, Ursula—used her physical beauty in order to win a man's—that is, the Prince Eric's—love because he was going to choose the better looking woman of two. From this point of view, even Minhee, who strongly insisted on the importance of intellectual beauty for love throughout this study, perceived that a woman can compete with another woman so as to obtain love by using her physical appearance. Although Minhee insisted that men like women who are beautiful when they do not know who is smart or not, as mentioned above, it is true that she unconsciously presupposed that a man “*will* like her [a woman]” instead of another woman “when she [the former] turns prettier than” the other.<sup>6</sup>

Like Minhee, some of my other informants were likely to point out that male characters liked heroines because of their good looks whereas they rarely discussed heroines' affection for heroes' physical attractiveness.<sup>7</sup> For example, Haana talked to Narim about why Gaston wanted to marry Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*. Narim started

to say, “I think he [Gaston] likes Belle because she’s good-looking, the way she wears and the way she is.” But Haana disagreed with Narim and said:

I don’t think Gaston likes the way she is. Belle’s not rude but nice, but Gaston likes Belle because she’s pretty. In the movie, they [the characters in the movies] say Belle is the prettiest girl in the village. So he only likes Belle’s looks, not how nice and smart she is.

Put another way, even though Haana appreciated Belle’s good personality, she did not completely align herself with Haana’s points of view. She clarified the reason for Gaston’s wanting to marry Belle, which was not because of Belle’s virtues, but because she was good-looking. To Joon and Yuri, too, it was evident that Gaston wanted to marry Belle because she was pretty. They said, “As soon as Gaston saw her, he said, ‘That’s the girl I wanna marry!’” They also said that “Gaston tells Belle he doesn’t like to read books, [which Belle likes to do]. What she really liked to do didn’t matter to him.” Heesun directly brought this view into her discussion when speaking of Ariel and Prince Eric in *The Little Mermaid*.

Kaain said, “I think Ariel is brave because she saves the prince from drowning.” However, Heesun disagreed with her by saying, “No, the Little Mermaid isn’t brave. She’s just ...pretty! Boys... like pretty girls. That’s why the prince likes the Little Mermaid. Like Aladdin. He just loved Jasmine when he saw her for the first time ‘cause she is pretty!” (Interview summary)

In this discussion, Heesun expressed an idea about Ariel that was quite different from what Kaain thought. To Heesun, the most salient feature of Ariel is not characteristic virtue, but physical beauty. This girl, Heesun, who was one of only two girls who often said she wanted to be a princess because of a princess’s gorgeous attire and adornment,

valued females' physical attractiveness more than good personality in obtaining males' love.

My informants also made this point about males' love and females' physical attractiveness when talking about Aladdin's love. When I asked why Aladdin liked Jasmine in *Aladdin*, all the girls answered that he fell in love with her at first sight at the market. Narim told me that "Aladdin likes her because she is pretty good-looking. Do you remember what Aladdin said when he saw her the first time? He just said, 'Wow!' [laughing]." As a result, as is the case in *Beauty and the Beast*, the movie, *Aladdin* also has an explicit scene in which why a male character—namely, Aladdin—falls in love with a heroine—Jasmine in this case—so all of my informants seemed to think that his love started with Jasmine's physical beauty. Therefore, the relevant movie scenes in which particular lines or facial or body expressions were portrayed provided my informants with a way in which my informants determined the moment that a male character's love was budded.

As for female protagonists, only Ariel showed a female's attraction to a male's physical beauty, since such a scene appears in *The Little Mermaid*.<sup>8</sup> But even in the case of Ariel, the girls pointed out that such beauty of the male was not the sole reason for Ariel's love; there was another reason for it—eagerness of exploring a new world—which intrinsically encouraged Ariel to love him. Therefore, Prince Eric's physical attraction was not initial motive of Ariel's love; rather, like her song, Ariel's desire to "be part of the world" led her to fall in love with a human—namely Prince Eric—and



consider him handsome. From this perspective, one of the girls in this study, Jisoo, noted:

When the Little Mermaid came up to the top of the ocean and saw outside, she didn't find any other men she really liked besides that prince. If she saw another man and met him for a while, she might think he [Prince Eric] was not that handsome and love another man. Then she might not have married that prince.

The point is that most of my informants tended not to seriously consider male characters' physical attractiveness crucial for the female characters' love. Rather, as I noted in the previous section, they thought that heroines' love generally depended on the heroes' good behavior and treatment of the heroines. More precisely, these girls tended to regard good personalities as important for everyone in love, whereas they thought of physical attractiveness as essential only for males' love in the movies. As a result, in trying to understand romantic love in Disney films, on one hand, they were likely to interpret the reasons for the heroines' love by identifying the heroines with themselves. On the other hand, these girls attempted to define the reasons for male characters' love by basing them on each film's plot, scene, and dialogue, in which they perceived how long characters had known each other or why they liked each other.

From this standpoint, their points of view did not, however, simply lead me to conclude that their yearning for physical beauty was merely concealed or that their innocence and naiveté kept them from perceiving a different way to look at an issue—love, in this case. Rather, the girls attempted to understand love not only by means of their own views but also those of others'—namely, males'—perspectives; whenever they were asked if they wanted to be physically attractive, like Ariel or Jasmine, most of them

firmly answered that they did not want to, since “no one can be the same as me,” as Sunjoo put it (this matter will be discussed in detail in Chapter V as connecting it to my informants’ notions of ethnicity of the royals in Disney films.) Put differently, my informants acknowledged the fact that these were different perspectives to see the world. At the same time, they were faithful to their own values, which were closely related to their own culture, families, and lives without giving them up.

### **Possible Factors Influencing Children’s Perspectives on Romantic Love**

This chapter has shown that virtues such as sincerity, empathy, and intelligence were regarded as important by most of my informants in gaining love. To these girls, characteristic beauty was the first component that they considered in love, rather than physical beauty. Considering, then, my emphasis on my informants’ different perspectives on romantic love, one might posit that there are certain factors which influenced their belief that characteristic beauty was of great importance in achieving love. With this possibility in mind, I will discuss three of these factors in this section: Korean cultural values in education, the age of my informants, and the nature of language acquisition.

### **Korean Cultural Values in Education**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, intelligence was one of my informants’ emphases in the matter of winning love. In order to explain the significance of intelligence, they used themselves as examples because they were quite confident and

proud of their intellectual ability. The point to be considered here is that their own perspectives on intelligence reflected their families' and their culture's views on intellectual ability. That is to say, the children's points of view were the products of the influence of Korean culture, in which academic success is remarkably important. As I mentioned in Chapter I, most Korean parents' high expectations as regards their children's education are derived from the Korean social context (see "Korean Migrants and Their Culture," pp. 52-57). The value of education and intelligence was likewise highlighted in the childrearing of my informants' families. In their discussions, several girls mentioned their parents' views on education and academic achievement. Put another way, my informants recognized that the pursuit of a good education was a top priority, since they were taught that academic success or lack of it will decide their future. In talking about the importance of intellectual ability in matters of romantic love, Ahjin confessed:

I don't really know why I have to study...But they [her adult family members] say I'll be smarter when I'm grown up if I study hard now. When you become a grown-up, you have to be good in math and English, too. If somebody asks you something when you are a grown-up and you don't know [the answer to the question], it is awful...I think. So if you'll be a grown-up, you have to know a lot. Children like me...know a little bit but grown-ups know many, many things. Aunt Lena, you know a lot, too. Right? And my mom said she did not know many things when she was little. So she studied hard and hard...then she knows everything now! If I am smart when I grow up, I can become an artist or...anybody I wanna be...like famous person like my uncle. He had to study very hard when he was little like me, I think. But...if I really want to be an artist, I think I can do only artwork. But...why...why do I have to study hard? [Long pause.] Ah...I know. If there's a problem in the workbook that tells me to color the answer to...like, 'What is two and five?'...something like that, I can't solve it and can't color either when I don't know about math. So I think I have to study.

Obviously, at first, Ahjin could not understand the reason for studying hard. Eventually, however, she recognized the difference between her opinion and those of “grown-ups,” as she explained why she had to study hard in order to become an artist. Originally, she believed that a person could become an artist when he or she was good at artwork, without being good at other academic subjects. In spite of her confusion about why she should study, however, she did not strongly disagree with her family’s giving such a high value to education. To resolve this conflict, she tried to determine why adults wanted her to study and related academic performance to artwork by noting that she must color in her math workbook. She thus attempted to understand Korean adults’ reasons for studying hard rather than challenging them. Like Ahjin and many other Korean children (Rohner & Pettengill, 1985), many of my informants did not respond negatively to their parents’ high expectations as regards their education.

Furthermore, when discussing the consequences of being smart, my informants touched on the fact that it was an important quality for adults. Like Ahjin, many girls accepted their parents’ expectations of a successful education for them, because they often found their parents knowledgeable about everyday life. They often mentioned how their parents always helped them in their studies. Thus, some of their remarks were; “When I ask her [her mother] a lot, she knows everything,” “My mother...or sometimes my father works with me at home,” and “When I came here [the United States]...and I didn’t speak English very well, my father was the only person who helped me out. He talked with me, taught me English, and...did everything for me.”

In this regard, their conceptions of intelligence were inevitably related to their conceptions of adulthood. These girls viewed being smart as important for becoming a complete adult who should be both erudite and responsible for his or her children's learning in the context of Korean culture. From this point of view, children must cultivate their intellectual ability so as to be competent adults. This perspective reminds us of a point made by certain other scholars (e.g. Archard, 1993; Bouwsma, 1976; Jenks, 1996) as I noted in Chapter I (see "Concepts of Children in Society," pp. 40-43). As in Western societies, childhood in Korean culture tends to be considered a period of preparation for adequate adulthood, even though such preparation in Korean culture seems to be focused more on education and academic success than it is in Western culture.<sup>9</sup>

Given the importance of great intellectual ability in adulthood in Korea, these girls went on, in a concrete way, to associate the concept of intelligence with an indispensable quality in being a good mother. For example, Ahjin said, "If your kid asks you something that you don't know, you can't teach your kid. I didn't know words like a chipmunk or a raccoon, but Mom knew them all."

Similar to Ahjin's opinion, both Heesun and Kaain talked about their opinions in this matter.

Heesun said, "When you are an adult and a mother, you have to teach your kids. If you don't know much, you can't teach them. So you have to learn a lot before becoming [an] adult." Kaain agreed: "Right. If you're smart, you can be anything, so you have to be smart. And if you're smart, your children will be smart, too. If your children don't know something and ask you, you can teach them. If the mom doesn't know it, then the children won't either." Kaain added, [raising her voice] "And, and, if the

girl is smart, she'll meet a smart boy. That is because smart people like other smart people. That's why my mom says I have to be smart, to meet a smart boy." (Interview summary)

As I noted before (see "Korean Migrants and Their Culture" in Chapter I, pp. 52-57), in Korean culture mothers are often responsible for their children's education and academic performance. In this regard, my informants pointed out that mothers must be intelligent and knowledgeable about academic subjects. To these girls, therefore, being a mother is not easy, because she must be thoroughly competent in many subject areas, including math, Korean, and English, as well as piano, violin, swimming, and the like. Moreover, as Kaain said above, the purpose of being a smart girl was "meet [ing] a smart boy." Of course, several girls also considered that being smart was related to one's future profession, since, like Ahjin said in the previous chapter, successful academic performance is seen as a pivotal basis of any occupations in Korean society (see "Korean Migrants and Their Cultures" in Chapter I, pp. 52-59). However, being smart was looked upon as indispensable for their marriages in that "smart people like smart people," as Kaain put it.

In considering their future roles as mothers and wives, therefore, my informants recognized that cultivating their intellectual ability was requisite for both themselves and their future children. From this standpoint, being "a wise mother and a good wife," which is traditionally one of the pivotal Korean virtues in a woman, was clearly emphasized by the girls in this study. In other words, my informants' perspectives on intelligence revealed that their families regarded education and academic achievement as

necessary for not only socio-economic success, but also for love, marriage, and parenting in their future.

As a result, it is important to note here that the Korean emphasis on intellectual ability implies that these girls' lives would be unfulfilled without family and social interdependence, which are of great important in Korean culture. The point here is that marriage and children are still indispensable in Korean culture, and are seen as inevitable parts of these girls' futures, rather than independence and freedom, both of which are often seen as exemplary social values in the United States (I will discuss the issue of family in more detail later in Chapter V.)<sup>10</sup> In sum, being smart is meaningful and necessary for these girls if they are to play an important role in Korean life.

### **Language Acquisition**

My informants' acquisition of English might also have had an impact on their recognition of certain racial codes in the Disney films. As I mentioned earlier, when they talked about the good people and the bad people during their discussions of love in the films, these girls knew that there were different groups of people who were described by means of certain symbolic codes in the films. However, most of the girls in this study did not hear the films' different linguistic accents, for instance, the difference between those of Aladdin and Jasmine, and those of the merchants and soldiers in *Aladdin*. Certain physical features, such as skin color and facial characteristics, seemed obvious to the girls, but the different linguistic accents were hardly noticed.

When the girls pointed out the differences among the film characters' use of English, their focus was the differences in tone of voice, not the accents. A conversation between Jisoo and Ahjin revealed such a tendency. In the discussion of Jisoo and Ahjin, I asked if they thought that the English spoken by the market people or the soldiers was the same or a little different from that of Aladdin. Jisoo said:

I think they were a little different. The market people have to raise their voices a little to sell things. And the soldiers have to talk a little scary to catch Aladdin and stuff. But Aladdin and Jasmine don't have to, so they don't have to talk in a loud voice. And Sebastian talks a little different from Ariel, too, because Sebastian worries a lot about everything. And nags a lot [laughs]. So he talks low a lot but then yells at Ariel when scolding her...Ariel sings good and likes to sing and likes to have fun, so her voice is a little high. In *The Lion King*, the hyenas have high voices and laugh like this, 'H-e-e-e Hee Hee.' Simba is very quiet and tends to talk a little low and soft. Because he is a cute little boy, his voice isn't that loud or high.

I asked them again, in light of their own experiences, whether they had ever seen or heard people around them who talked like the film characters. Jisoo answered:

I've never seen anyone that talks like the market people in Aladdin or like the hyenas, but there's a lot of people that talk like Simba. In my class, [for example], Michael, Jason, Anthony...There's lots of kids like that. Their voices are very cute and soft...like Simba.

Meanwhile, Ahjin confessed that she did not understand the differences, unlike Jisoo: "I don't think I've seen any [differences]. Uh-um...I really don't know. If you meet a person from India, wouldn't he talk like Aladdin? [laughs]."

In this conversation, Jisoo thought that different accents were a matter of one's occupation, duty, or personality, rather than one's nationality or ethnicity. Like Jisoo, several girls said that the merchants and the soldiers had very loud voices because the



former had to sell their products in the noisy market and the latter had to catch thieves. Based on my informants' interpretations, therefore, the merchants and soldiers, without their loud voices—which were different from those of Aladdin or Jasmine, whose occupations did not require loud voices—might not be able to work effectively. In addition, as Jisoo mentioned above, some of my informants answered that many of the boys in their classrooms talked like Simba. This opinion can be accounted for, in part, because these girls thought that Simba had the voice of “a cute little boy,” a voice that was like that of some of the boys in their classrooms. On the other hand, Ahjin did not even acknowledge differences among the voices of the characters in the films. And assuming that the movie *Aladdin* was set in India, she supposed that Aladdin's way of speaking English, which is perhaps that which most people would associate with Standard English, to be that of natives of India. A couple of girls responded in a way similar to Ahjin's, saying, “I don't know.”

Although it is not certain why most of my informants did not notice the different accents of the characters in the movies, one possible reason might have been their inability to distinguish different English dialects or foreign accents from Standard English. In fact, most of my informants were non-native English speakers who have not studied English for a long time. Therefore, it might have been difficult for them to recognize the differences between the various English accents that were present in the films, for instance, Ebonics, Hispanic, Arabic, British, and the like. Moreover, most of them had not lived an environment in which they might have been exposed to a variety of English accents. Because of this, the racially coded languages might be hardly

mentioned as explicit differences among the film characters in my informants' discussions.<sup>11</sup>

### **Reflections: Being Nice and the Gender Paradigm**

When my informants thought of good personalities as crucial for romantic love, they did not talk about the characters of female characters in the films as much as they did those of the male characters. This tendency was quite different from the observations of some Western feminist scholars (e.g., Butler, 1990; Davies, 1987; Gilligan, 1982; Walkerdine, 1990), in whose work the general statement that “girls are nice and boys are tough” has been often applied to children’s lives (Thorne, 1993). Rather, my informants’ emphasis on a good personality in love applied mostly to the male characters, such as Gaston, the Beast, Aladdin, and Prince Eric. Therefore, it might be assumed that, although the girls were confident about the importance of a beautiful character in both male and female characters, they seemed not to be able—or willing—to find appropriate examples of heroines in the movies to whom it would be appropriate to address this point, with the exception of Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*. Such heroines as Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*, Jasmine in *Aladdin*, and Nala and Salabi in *The Lion King* did not clearly embody the elements of a beautiful character that achieves love which my informants had discussed, elements such as sincerity, a sense of understanding others, and sympathy. As a result, my informants apparently had trouble finding examples of good personalities in the female protagonists in the four Disney movies that are considered here.

Nevertheless, even though I assumed that the lack of adequate examples of heroines who merited consideration by reason of their characters might impede my informants in regarding beauty of character as important for female characters, I still wondered if there was perhaps another reason for my informants' responses. For when I compared their reactions to Ursula with those to Gaston, I found different responses to each of these evil characters. While my informants insisted that Gaston's bad manners and behavior were certainly the reason for Belle's losing interest in Gaston, they did not interpret Ursula's evil character in the same way. That is to say, even though they condemned Ursula's vindictive personality, as was mentioned earlier in this section, none of my informants supposed that her bad character might lead her to lose a male's—in this case Prince Eric's—love.

Considering my informants' different reactions to Gaston and Ursula, I speculated that they might have had different interpretations depending on who wanted love from whom. Love, for Gaston and Ursula, were different in light of the gender of both subjects and the objects of their love. As for Gaston, he was a strong male, who tried to obtain the love of a nice female, Belle. In order to win her love, Gaston approached Belle aggressively.<sup>12</sup> If we interpret his aggressive approach as an extreme form of activeness, then we can say that most male characters in the Disney movies have this quality in their pursuit of love. More precisely, even though the ways in which they approached heroines varied to some degree, these heroes were described as actively attempting and challenging to win love. They clearly displayed their good manners, special abilities and talents, and strong intentions in their desire for love, all of which my informants referred

to as “being nice,” “understanding,” or “sacrificing.” If one of them did not show such desperate effort to win love—for instance, Prince Eric, as was mentioned earlier—my informants characterized him as a person who did not deserve love. Therefore, the appropriateness of the male characters’ behavior and attitudes seemed to be based on their own intentions and on their desire to win love—like Aladdin—or their dramatic self-transformation due to the power of love, for example, the Beast. From this point of view, males’ good manners and personalities were transformed into a masculinity which often implies being active, progressive, and even aggressive in one degree or another. Such aggressiveness thus tended to be used positively as a masculine mechanism to obtain love in the films.

However, Ursula, a strong woman, had a different story. Like Gaston, she was eager to get the attention of someone who was a gentle man, in this case, Prince Eric.<sup>13</sup> But her method of trying to win love was different from that of Gaston, for, unlike him, she did not approach love aggressively, but tried to win it by alluring him with magic instead. After turning into a pretty woman with a sweet voice, Ursula merely appeared before Prince Eric and waited for his reaction. In spite of the fact that Ursula is considered one of the most powerful female characters in Disney films (Murphy, 1995), what she did for love was no more than to transform herself into a beautiful but vulnerable female. From this perspective, as the Ingwersens (1990) state, strong femininity is depicted as negative, weak, and passive.

Moreover, most heroines in these Disney films, such as Belle and Jasmine, are not described as actively pursuing love. They are simply “there,” ready and waiting for a

man's love. Even Ariel, the only female character in the films who is eager to win love, does not take any action to obtain it; she merely sits on a boat waiting for Prince Eric's kiss, which will allow her to remain human. In other words, unlike their male counterparts, these heroines are not portrayed as active and strong-willed, but as passive and naïve in seeking love.

Furthermore, as some of my informants suggested, the niceness of these female protagonists is often defined as an inherited quality in the films. When they discussed Belle's being nice, for instance, the girls tended to describe her as innately good natured, saying "She is so nice to take good care of her father," "She takes good care of birds!" and "She talks very nicely with the baby pot, the candles, and...the clock, something like that, in the Beast's castle." From this perspective, many of my informants implied that Belle's good personality was based on her natural disposition, rather than qualities which could be attained and nurtured by her effort and will by reminding me of Goffman's (1977) argument, in which the natures between women and men are fundamentally different. For this reason, many of my informants might not have perceived the good personalities of the females as being important, whereas they believed that such goodness in males was of real consequence in the quest for love.

As a matter of fact, several of my informants who argued for the importance of characteristic virtue in love, seemed to realize, again, that a woman's appearance was important for a man's love in the Disney films. Their perception of the importance of such female physical beauty for romantic love was intensified when several girls did not find a concrete verbal or visible clue for why a prince should love a female character in a

movie. For example, many girls did not clearly understand that why Prince Eric wanted to marry Ariel because it was not explicitly explained in the movie. Moreover, unlike *Beauty and the Beast*, this movie did not have scenes in which Ariel's good personality was emphasized in her relationship with the prince. Thus, many girls assumed that Ariel's good looks might be the sole reason for the prince's love. The point is here that the movie's emphasis on the female characters' physical appearance and its lack of clear mention of Ariel's good personality, my informants paid primary attention to Ariel and Ursula's physical appearance more frequently than to any other female character in the other movies, including *Belle* and even *Jasmine*.<sup>14</sup>

From this standpoint, the inclusion of active and strong female characters in the movies may have been important for the girls in the study who can have obtained their beliefs and values from Disney film heroines. Perhaps the absence of the appropriate females who can be good role models who can be good role models in the movies covered in this study did not allow my informants to fully appreciate the significance of the willingness and activeness in the women's personalities. Although my informants were confident of and ceaselessly insisted on the importance of females' good characters in love, they did not give actual assent to this idea by completely embracing the female protagonists in the films.

This fact supports the arguments of those scholars who have denounced Disney films for their emphasis on women as sexual beings rather than beings that are independent and strong. Such scholars are concerned that these films lead children to internalize such images (see "Disney in the World" in Chapter I, pp. 21-23), and the

consequence of this internalization is that children may consider women only dependent, weak, and sexual beings. The point is that my informants might have recognized females' strong and positive qualities more clearly if the films had contained true heroines and emphasized their good internal features, which were clearly revealed through the appropriate dialogue and scenes.

To summarize, given my informants' perceptions of what it means to be nice, the dichotomy in gender characteristics in American society—the “nice and gentle girl” versus the “strong and tough boys”—was decoded differently in my informants' discussions. As a matter of fact, my informants' cultural background did not thoroughly erase their own “dualistic assumptions” about females and males (Throne, 1993, p. 107), assumptions in which girls' culture is clearly divided from that of boys. In addition, my informants' cultural background forced these girls to make different assumptions as regards gender characteristics from those in American culture. Hence, Korean cultural values and beliefs provided them with another cultural framework of patriarchy, in which gender characteristics were divergently interpreted, that is to say, “nice males and intelligent females” in this study. As a result, the notions of gender roles were diverse and complex (e.g., Boldt, 1997; Shapiro, 1988) based on these Korean girls' responses and interpretations, which were influenced by Korean culture.

As they thought about romantic love in the Disney films, these girls kept reflecting on the notions of physical beauty and the meaning of sexuality in that they were exposed to them by means of the cultural messages which the films continually conveyed. When they talked about such issues, their understanding of the various kinds

of sexual messages in the Disney films was also revealed. In the following chapter, therefore, I will examine how these girls interpreted physical beauty and sexual messages, which are explicitly and implicitly embedded in the Disney films. In order to examine these interpretations, I will relate my informants' thoughts about them to their conceptions of the images of the human body—particularly, those of female bodies, images which were clearly affected by Korean culture. In order to do this, I will look closely at the problems these girls struggled with and how they attempted to cope with them.



## Chapter III

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note here that my informants did not use the term “love” explicitly. This reluctance was more evident when they spoke in Korean than when they spoke in English. Even though I was not sure of the reason for not using the word, I assumed that it might come from Korean culture and language. Many Koreans do not often use the word “love” to mean romantic love, because they think of it as unbecoming or shameful to verbalize such love. They tend to use it when its meaning expresses sublimity and absoluteness, such as parents’ love or people’s love in situations in which they sacrifice their lives. They also value the emotional or spiritual sense in people rather than the verbal self-expression of each individual. Thus, Koreans often blame someone who does not understand others’ feelings well by saying, “Why do you know everything only when it has to be said?” Like most Koreans, my informants did not use the Korean word for love to describe romantic love. When several informants talked about their affection toward their families, however, they chose the Korean and English word for “love” rather than the word for “like.” They often described romantic love with the word “like” in Korean. Thus, I had to consider my informants’ definitions about the romantic relationships between opposite sexes, that is to say, romantic love, regardless of their choice of the terms and languages.

<sup>2</sup> As I already discussed in Chapter II, during the discussions in this study, my informants spoke in Korean as well as in English; the younger they were, the more they

used English in the conversations (see “Data Collection” in Chapter II, pp. 81-85).

Therefore, I have transcribed Korean into English when they talked about an issue in Korean. Moreover, I have corrected their English grammar so as to make their remarks easier to read, according to the suggestion of my dissertation director, Dr. Jesse Goodman.

<sup>3</sup> Although many of the girls in this study listed “Asian eyes” as a physical feature of bad people in Disney films, none of them used the term “Asian eyes” in Korean or English, or pointed to their own eyes in order to describe them. This was probably because my informants did not find any similarity between “Asian eyes” and their own, or those of the Koreans around them. When we discussed what kind of eyes they considered pretty, several girls mentioned eyes “like Korean women’s.” In order to clarify their remarks, I asked again if they wanted to describe “raised” eyes as Korean women’s eyes; but these girls laughed and said, “No! No! Not like that. [They are] Just round and... a little big... but not too big... those kinds of eyes. Those are Korean women’s eyes. You know that!”

<sup>4</sup> When Minhee talked about the merchants’ different accents in *Aladdin* in order to argue that it was unreasonable to assume a link between physical features and personality, I also asked why Aladdin or Jasmine did not have such different accents. Minhee answered, “They must have learned English properly [laugh]. I mean... like my tutor, their English tutor must have been an American or they learned English right here in the United States. But not in California or the Southern area of America [laugh].” She perceived their English as being correct and appropriate, and as an example of so-called Standard English. But she did not seem to consider it a problem, because, for her, each

individual learns in a different way. From this perspective, she tried to explain the reason for this, based on her own learning experience. For instance, she mentioned the tutoring by means of which she learned English.

<sup>5</sup> Even though my informants understood that Prince Eric played a significant role to kill Ursula in the film, many of them did not appreciate his role much, by saying, “He tried to kill Ursula, though. And finally she died,” “He just did something at the end of the movie. He stabbed her body,” and “He forked her just once. Just once! How could she [Ursula] die with just one stab? I can’t understand. It’s so weird.”

<sup>6</sup> Minhee’s point exactly reflected what Baudrillard (1998) has called, women’s “derived” or “vicarious” value, which implies women’s self-satisfaction by being objectified:

Women are only called on to gratify themselves in order the better to be able to enter as objects into the masculine competition [enjoying themselves in order to be the more enjoyable]. If a woman is beautiful—that is to say, if the woman is a woman—she will be chosen. Under cover of self-gratification, woman [the feminine model] is consigned to the performance of proxy ‘services.’ She is not autonomously determined. (p. 97)

Since the self of a woman is subjective only by being objectified, it is unavoidable for women to deal with adorning themselves which can allow them to be satisfied. In this way, the women are defined not by themselves but by men.

<sup>7</sup> This perspective might stem from the movie plot, in which romantic love is quickly developed. Several girls made the point that Prince Eric did not know much about Ariel or Ursula in *The Little Mermaid*. As Haana pointed out, “He [Prince Eric] has known Ariel only for three days,” and “Ursula showed up to the prince on the third

day after they [the Prince Eric and Ariel] met.” Therefore, the girls considered physical attractiveness essential in this case. Because these film characters did not know much about each other, my informants were not likely to wonder about the fact that Prince Eric’s first impression depended on female characters’ beauty.

Falling in love quickly in the Disney films was often criticized for their emphasis on females’ external features and sexual appearance in romantic love (e.g., Giroux, 1999; Kasturi, 2002; Sell, 1995). Thus, when Jisoo discussed *Aladdin*, she pointed this fact out more precisely:

At that age, teenagers [like Jasmine] are so picky. I think she [Jasmine] was like that. She was pickier than Ariel or Snow White. They found persons they liked really fast but Jasmine wasn’t like that. She was just alone in the palace...with only Raja [the name of her pet tiger in the film] and...she didn’t find the right boy for quite little long time. I think... Aladdin, too...he didn’t find the right girl for a while. Then they all meet someone similar and...begin to like each other.

First, by comparing Jasmine to the adolescents of today, who are “so picky,” Jisoo thought of her difficult personality as one reason why Jasmine did not quickly meet her “right boy.” In addition, when talking about Jasmine’s long wait for her love, Jisoo contrasted Jasmine to the other Disney princesses as well. Jisoo said that the other princesses in Disney films were not like Jasmine or today’s adolescents; these princesses easily fall in love with men by finding their lovers “really fast.” From this perspective, Jisoo recognized that the protagonists’ falling in love at first sight was almost always present in the Disney films (Giroux, 1995a), in which strong physical attractiveness plays a significant role.

<sup>8</sup> When Ariel sees the Prince Eric in the movie, she says to a seagull, a friend of hers that “He is so handsome!” Several girls remembered this line exactly and talked about it.

<sup>9</sup> Even though these informants’ families came from the middle class, about which the parents were knowledgeable, in part, because of their attainments in higher education, the emphasis on children’s education is still one of salient Korean social values and tendencies.

<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, my informants’ views on intelligence—which they related to marriage, spouses, and children, and were emphasized in their conversations about the Disney films—could be interpreted as the Korean girls’ reliance on men. Therefore, the tendency of these girls’ dependence on men could illuminate some scholars’ (e.g., Bell, Haas, & Sells, 1995; O’Brien, 1995) argument that Disney films have too often highlighted traditional women’s roles as a negative way in order to control women (see “Gender” in Chapter I, pp. 31-34). From this point of view, these girls might be unduly influenced by the image of dependent women in the Disney movies, in which most of the heroines are often rewarded by a happy marriage to a handsome, noble man. Even though these girls’ perceptions of intelligence—rather than physical appearance—were characterized as important in winning love, it apparently disclosed another kind of androcentrism, which has been influenced by Korean culture.

<sup>11</sup> While the areas in which most of these girls lived, and the schools to which they went, had many Asian families, they did not have many children who came from different ethnic groups. According to my informants, even though there were African-

American children and Hispanic children in their classrooms, their numbers were not significant. In addition, as their parents told me, they did not have much interaction with other children's families, who had different cultural backgrounds, outside their schools; rather, they usually socialized with Korean families mostly by going to Korean churches in their areas or meeting Koreans whose children were in same schools or after-school programs.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Gaston visited Belle's house, talked with people about how to win her love, and made plans to woo her.

<sup>13</sup> Even though, unlike Gaston, Ursula did not love Prince Eric, her ultimate goal of winning love was the same as Gaston's.

<sup>14</sup> Even though Jasmine's good looks in *Aladdin* were also discussed in several informants' discussions, Aladdin's attraction to her involved other considerations as well, such as her high social status and her great ability to learn, which was implied in a scene in the movie when Jasmine jumped from one building to another with a long stick as Aladdin did, saying "I am a fast learner."

## **Chapter IV**

### **“Body Language Is Something Like Sign Language”:**

#### **Understanding Sexual Messages and Constructing Sexuality**

As I noted earlier in this study, females' sexuality and bodies are often depicted not according to female perspectives but to those of males (see “Introduction” in Chapter I, pp. 1-9). As a result, they have been objectified in various kinds of mass media, including Disney animated films (e.g., Giroux, 1995a; Kasturi, 2002). However, while such negative representations of female sexuality and the female body in cultural apparatus have been seen as a harmful influence on our children in several cultural critiques, young girls' actual understanding of these representations is still missing in the field of education as well as in cultural studies.

Considering this absence of young girls' own views, this chapter will closely explore how my informants conceive female sexuality by examining their interpretations of sexual messages in the Disney films. Even though my informants were mostly eager to share their ideas in the study, some issues of female sexuality seemed to complicate our talks because of their developmental stages and their cultural backdrop. Therefore, discussing sexual messages and sexuality in the Disney films revealed various responses depending on their age and family background. In thinking about sexual messages and sexuality, these girls reflected on body images based on personal experiences as well.

This chapter therefore looks at these girls' points of view toward human faces and bodies in the Disney films—particularly, the faces and bodies of four Disney films' heroines. In addition, it will deal with their interpretations of certain sexual messages of the films, which are conveyed by means of sexual gestures and innuendos. In analyzing the girls' interpretations of Disney's representations of female sexuality, the different ages of the participants will be emphasized as an important factor in influencing their understanding. I also examine their responses to such messages by reckoning with some critical issues—children's recognition of reality and unreality and their perception of objectified female bodies, which were disclosed in the girls' discussions. In this chapter, then, the meaning of being sexual in Korean culture through these girls' perspectives is investigated.

### **Children's Perceptions of Body Image**

Most of my informants often told me that human heroines in the Disney films that we watched together were pretty. Even though they described not only their physical appearances but also other features, such as their personalities, outfits, and families, the girls' impressions of the film heroines' physical beauty were salient in their discussion. In this section, I take a look at these girls' perceptions of the female characters' body images. In addition, I deliberate on how two different types of women—sexual women and feminist women—have been presented in the Disney films based on my informants' ideas.



### **Pretty Face and Weird Body**

My informants' perspectives on what is physically beautiful were clear when they spoke of the film heroines' faces and bodies, and their emphasis on the female characters' faces, rather than their body shapes, was quite remarkable. When I asked what kinds of physical features made these heroines pretty, Narim and Haana explained the following point of view.

Narim said, "Everything about the Little Mermaid is pretty. Especially her long hair and her face are pretty." Haana added, "Her long eyelashes are really pretty. I think people with long eyelashes are pretty. I want later to make my eyelashes long."

Of Ariel's features, her hair and face, including eyelashes, were chosen as the most attractive to Narim and Haana. Like these girls and children in some studies (e.g., Intons-Peterson, 1988; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Wehren & De Lisi, 1983), many other informants argued that the heroines' typical feminine traits, such as long hair, big eyes, and long eyelashes, were important components in making them look pretty; "She [Ariel] is pretty. Her hair is very long and her eyes are big, too," and "Her [Jasmine's] face is so pretty," Joon and Youri said.

In a related matter, talking about Ariel's face of *The Little Mermaid*, Jisoo expressed her idea about the face and the body shape. She pointed to Ariel's face in *The Little Mermaid* in the picture book and said:

Around this area [is pretty]. Because the art teacher said...[making her tone higher] even if we draw the body weird but we draw the face pretty, then she [the person whom we draw] looks pretty. Yeah, she [her art teacher] said that. So the Little Mermaid is like that. I mean...she [Ariel] looks too skinny. Uh-um...her waist is like this much [drawing a deep curve with her hand around her waist], like that. Remember her very

skinny belly? It was so weird. Like...[picking up the picture book again and turning the pages to find one that shows the shows the Little Mermaid's whole body, then pointing to her waist area] look at this! Here [her waist and belly area], it's very...thin and...so, a little weird. Her body is too skinny but like...that art teacher said, because her face is pretty, so she looks pretty.

In insisting that a person's face was more important than his or her body, Jisoo introduced her art teacher's idea. According to her art teacher, one's face was an indicator of estimating a person's physical beauty. As a result, although Ariel's body was not pretty, she looked fine because of her beautiful face. Along with this, Jisoo revealed another interesting point of view in this conversation. To Jisoo, Ariel was too thin to be pretty. Particularly, she pointed out Ariel's thin abdomen and waist, which she considered "weird." Ariel's abdomen was also strange and abnormal to Narim and Haana. In a discussion with these two girls, such a point of view about the female characters' thin bodies was revealed.

Haana first talked about Ariel's pretty face and her eyelashes. She then said, "But Ariel is so skinny. I don't think that's very pretty." I asked, "Does either of you [Haana or Narim] want to be thin like Ariel?" Haana laughed loudly and answered, "No! No! Not me. I don't wanna be that skinny. [I want to be] Just normal. It's weird to be skinny like Ariel [laughs]. Do you, Aunt Lena? Do you wanna to be thin like Ariel?" Without specifically saying "Yes" or "No" I answered that "I think I also like being normal, as you [Haana] said." Laughing, Narim then commented, "She [Haana] is already thin and if she is gonna be thinner like Ariel, it'll look so bad! [Laughing again, she looked at Haana and said to her] Sorry! [Both laughing] But [it is true that she is] not pretty at all." (Interview summary)

As we see, according to Haana and Narim, Ariel's body was not considered pretty at all. Rather, it seemed abnormal. Considering Haana's strong objection to being thin, like Ariel, the level of Ariel's thinness tended to be seen as far too "skinny" to Haana, who

wanted to be “just normal.” By laughing at Haana, who was thin, Narim also expressed her objection to being “thinner like Ariel.” To Narim, Ariel was not attractive, but “bad” because of her exceeding slimness. Like Haana and Narim, many other informants perceived Ariel’s body as unattractive, while commending her beautiful face; they often talked about Ariel’s thinness, saying, “[She was] Pretty but thin,” and “She was too skinny!”

Such a negative point of view a film heroine’s thin body also arose during my informants’ discussions about Jasmine in *Aladdin*. In one conversation, Minhee talked about Jasmine and said, “Her [Jasmine’s] face is fine but she’s very thin!” Similarly, Sunjoo said, “She looks good to me, too. She is skinny though. Yes...I think she is very skinny.” The other two girls, Jisoo and Ahjin, did not consider Jasmine’s thinness attractive or desirable, either: they said that “Jasmine’s pretty but a little skinny,” and “Her arms and legs are okay but her waist area seems like...too thin.”<sup>1</sup>

In sum, my informants did not interpret Disney’s presentations of thin, sexy female bodies as attractive. However, in spite of such views of female bodies, those of female faces seemed to be quite different: that is to say, they were more westernized. From this point of view, one might say that my informants’ perspectives of Disney heroines’ pretty faces proved the modified concepts of Korean beauty after modernization in which the western features of female faces, such as double eyelids and high ridge of the nose, are considered beautiful. Reflecting on these girls’ different perceptions between faces and bodies, however, I have wondered if there might be another factor to consider in interpreting their perceptions. More concretely, even though

my informants' westernized views were convincing, their insufficient recognition of particular Western features in film heroines' faces might more strongly urge them to consider film heroines' face pretty. Their perceptions of a Disney heroine's ethnicity will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

### **Being Sexual or Being Feminist?: Female Dilemma**

Considering that most of the girls in my study emphasized the two heroines'—Ariel's and Jasmine's—thinness, I assumed that this emphasis might, in part, result from how much these female characters' bodies were exposed in the films. Ariel and Jasmine, who were regarded as thin by my informants, appeared in the films with their shoulders, waists, abdomens, and arms exposed. Interestingly, Ariel's body shape was also criticized by some scholars (Giroux, 1999; Trites, 1991; Wasko, 2001) because Disney put too much emphasis on the glamorous, flawless, and sexy female body. They therefore compared Ariel to a Barbie Doll and “the silhouette of a woman sometimes seen on the mud flaps of semi-trucks in the USA” (Wasko, 2001, p. 135). Because of the nudity of heroines' torsos, my informants seemed to be able to see these film characters' bodies clearly and thus conclude that these heroines were very thin. Hence, most informants tended to perceive this emphasis on the heroines' perfect bodies, in spite of the fact that they interpreted those bodies differently—that is to say, these girls regarded them as too thin, and thus abnormal, instead of sensual or beautiful.

In contrast to my informants' perspectives on Ariel and Jasmine as mentioned above, however, Belle in *Beauty and the Beast* was described differently by these girls.

When they talked about Belle, my informants did not say much about her physical features. Rather, they mostly pointed out Belle's matters concerning her personality, such as her niceness and intelligence, both of which I discussed in Chapter III (see "Reflection: Being Nice and the Gender Paradigm" in Chapter III, pp. 138-144). Such a good personality rarely appeared in the other films which they watched in this study. Moreover, even when some of them described Belle's physical appearance, they mentioned her pretty face, and none of them indicated that her body was too thin. There was the only one girl, Haana, who discussed Belle's body and described it simply as normal: "She [Belle] is medium size. Not too fat, not too thin, [laughs]," Haana said.

In addition, Belle has been called a "Disney feminist" (Jeffords, 1995, p. 170) by some Disney critics because of her rejection of Gaston, who was merely macho (see "Gender" in Chapter I, pp. 31-35). According to these critics, Belle's virtues, such as being intelligent, strong, and nice seemed, seemed to imply feminist characteristics. Such a Disney feminist, Belle, unlike Ariel and Jasmine, tended to refrain from wearing provocative clothes in the film. She almost always entered in the entire film without disclosing any part of her body.<sup>2</sup> She hardly thought of or expressed her sexual curiosity or desire in the film, either; she mostly concentrated on reading adventure books, taking care of her father, or teaching manners to the Beast.

In this regard, the Disney films seemed to signify that a woman—namely, Belle—could be defined as feminist merely by being cultivated and being modestly dressed, whereas the other women—such as Ariel or Jasmine—were portrayed as merely sexual beings through the representations of their sexy, exposed bodies.<sup>3</sup> By dichotomizing the

types of film heroines as being sexual or feminist, therefore, Disney makes it clear that females' feminist qualities cannot be reconciled with their sexuality. Put differently, a woman was viewed as inevitably choosing to be either sexual or feminist; she never has both qualities at the same time. In discussing Belle, such a view of women in the Disney films might have led my informants to emphasize Belle's inner characteristics and avoid thinking about her body and sexuality in this study.

### **Children's Age and Interpreting Sexual Messages**

According to certain studies on children's sexual development (e.g., Bourne, 1995; De Jong, 1989; Langfeldt, 1981; Measor, Tiffin, & Miller, 2000), children's interest in sexual relationships generally increases when they reach adolescence. These studies have shown that children in their early childhood, like my informants, have a curiosity about sexuality and want to talk about, see, and know it. According to these researchers, children's sexual curiosity tends to be gratified by having conversations with their parents and playing with peers, not by having actual sex relationships. In addition, the above researchers have found that children aged 5 to 7 are likely to be less aware to the concept of sex itself than 8- to 10-year-olds, who tend to understand sex matters more than younger children and show their uncomfortable feelings about sex by discussing such matters.

As these studies suggest, my informants' age levels have influenced their understanding of and response to sexual messages in the films in this study, even though there were often different interpretations of these messages depending on each child's

personal experience and knowledge. Thus, in this section, I will examine their understanding of sexuality and related topics by emphasizing their age difference. In discussing their ideas, this section will analyze two scenes from *The Little Mermaid* and *Aladdin*, both of which have often been denounced for their distorted views of the sexuality of women (see “Gender” in Chapter I, pp. 31-35).

### **Younger Children**

My younger informants, whose age was 6 to 7, did not try to conceal their thoughts about the films’ sexual messages to me. For when such a topic came up, most of them tended to express their ideas by providing straightforward answers to questions and sharing their opinions with their peers in their discussions. By listening to their ideas, I found that the films’ sexual messages were conveyed differently to these younger girls. For example, 6-year-old Jisoo’s unique views were revealed when she spoke of Ariel’s facial expressions which implied sexual looks.

Jisoo said, “She [Ariel] is pretty, yeah, but...when the Little Mermaid was a person, she did something weird with her eyes. That, [makes a face] a little bad.” I asked, “Eyes? When did she do something weird with her eyes?” Jisoo replied, “Like this [slightly tilting her head like Ariel did and rolling her eyes up and blinking widely], when she did it like this, her eyes were dark...something like that. And when she did like this [rolling Jisoo’s eyes up again] and made a mean face...she got them [such eyes] on the boat...in the canoe. Like the witch’s eyes. Right then...the prince was holding his hands like this [crossing her arms across her chest] and when the prince [laughs] looked at the Little Mermaid, [rolling her eyes up again and blinking them widely], ‘Heeee!’ [laughs].” I asked again, “Do you think she wasn’t so pretty when she did that?” she then answered, “[laughs] No! Not at all! [laughs].” (Interview summary)

In this discussion, Jisoo described Ariel's facial expression when Ariel nearly got kissed by Prince Eric on a boat. In this scene, Ariel tried to get a kiss from Prince Eric by giving him a sexual look, such as blinking and slowly closing her eyes, or pushing her lips out. When Jisoo saw such looks on Ariel's face, she supposed that Ariel had only "something weird and bad" in her face. Apparently, Jisoo did not seem to understand what Ariel's sexual facial expressions meant. According to Jisoo, such sexual gestures made Ariel's eyes "dark," and thus "mean like the witch." As a result, Jisoo could not understand why Ariel made such bad, evil eyes in front of the Prince.

Like Jisoo, who was not aware of Ariel's sexual gestures, all of younger girls, whose age was 6 to 7, did not seem to completely recognize another sexual message in *The Little Mermaid*. That scene contained one of Ursula's lines including a song, which suggested to the voiceless Ariel that she use her body—the so-called "body language" in the song—to get Prince Eric's love.<sup>4</sup> This is known as one of the notorious scenes in Disney films, for it seems to objectify women's bodies (see "Gender" in Chapter I, pp. 31-35). For instance, Joona and Youri, who were the youngest girls in my informant group, did not catch this sexual message in Ursula's lines. When these girls talked about Ursula, I asked them if they understood what Ursula had said about body language.

Joona simply answered, "No. I don't know. And...I don't remember [Ursula's saying]. She was just singing at that time, wearing a black dress, wasn't she?" Youri then said, "Un-um...when she [Ursula] said Ariel can use body language...doesn't that mean to use sign language? You know, people who can't talk, they use sign language."

In this discussion, Joona did not ponder the meaning of Ursula's body language in order to answer my question because she could not even recall Ursula's song. She barely



recognized that there was a song sung by Ursula in a “black dress” in the film. From this point of view, Joona seemed to fail to seize the sexual meaning of Ursula’s lines about “body language.”

In contrast to Joona, Youri seemed to reflect more on my question by remembering that scene better than Joona. Even though Youri did not completely understand the hidden meaning of Ursula’s lines, she interpreted it in her own way, that is to say, body language was treated as a kind of sign language. Her association of body language with sign language, derived from the fact that Ariel could not talk. Ariel’s inability to speak led Youri to think about who “could not talk” in reality, like Ariel in the movie. Considering real mute people, then, Youri extended her idea of how these people communicate with others. From this process, she inferred that sign language is an alternative for those who cannot use their voices.

Such an association of body language with sign language was not only Youri’s idea. Another girl, Jisoo, had the exactly same idea:

When she [Ursula] sang, she was climbing up the wall, and [singing by making up her own tune] ‘Men don’t like chatty women!’ like this. But I don’t know why they [men] don’t like it [chatting] but I know what body language is. That’s something like sign language.

Like the other younger girls, Jisoo did not completely perceive the sexual meaning of body language by concentrating on her idea of sign language. She even went further to point out a different perspective on “body language” by explaining how Ariel used such body language in the film:

When the Prince tried to guess her [Ariel’s] name on a boat...she went... [putting her head forward while blowing air out of the side of her mouth

to blow up her side hair] like this [in order to express her frustration at seeing the Prince, who did not guess her right name].

In other words, Jisoo understood the meaning of body language based on Ariel's nonverbal gestures. Ariel's body gestures and motions were presented as her means of communication after her losing voice in the film, and therefore body language was seen by Jisoo as a language that used a person's body instead of his or her voice. From this standpoint, body language was literally interpreted as language with body motions. Jisoo thus identified body language with sign language in that both body language and sign language had a common feature in using a person's motions and gestures.

Moreover, in thinking of body language as sign language, the word "language" in Ursula's "body language" seemed to make Jisoo sure of her idea even more.

When Ursula took her [Ariel] voice...in that part, she [Ursula] said to her [Ariel] that body language was important because people like it. But you know...most people don't use that [body] language. So, when we talk in that language, we don't really know what it is.

When I listened to Jisoo, I could see that she was likely to understand body language as a kind of orthodox "language" in this discussion by saying that "most people don't use *that language* [emphasis mine]," and "when we talk in *that language* [emphasis mine]."

According to Jisoo, body language was looked upon as a language which was not used very often among people, but certainly it was a *sort* of language. Therefore, body "language" was an actual language just as Korean "language," American "language," and sign "language." In other words, the word, "body" in body language seemed to be interpreted literally by Jisoo, and thus body language was determined as a language by means of a person's body.

## Older Children

As for the older children in this study, they seemed to understand sexual messages more than the younger girls. As developmental theory suggested earlier in this section, the idea of having actual sexual relationships, including kissing, petting, and hugging, tended to make the older children, whose age was around 8 to 10, uncomfortable when talking about such matters. This discomfort with sexual messages was found in a discussion with 8-year-old Sunjoo when talking about the scene in which Ariel and the Prince Eric almost kissed. Sunjoo, who cried, “Gross! So gross!” when watching Ariel and the Prince almost kiss, expressed her feelings more clearly during the discussion. She raised her voice and said, “[Frowning] Love is gross! Because...we have to kiss! Hew! It is too gross! Even when I like him [someone]...I don’t like to kiss and stuff like that!” After listening to her opinions, I asked her how she knew that was not good but gross. She then replied with a wry face, “People’s lips put together for that.” When I asked again, “Did you see your parents kiss?” Sunjoo replied, “No! I just know it. I know.” Minhee then added to Sunjoo’s answer, saying:

You know the movie, *The Princess Diaries*? We watched it together. It [kissing] looked very gross when those characters kissed each other. At the end [of the movie], they go like...kiss together. And the princess, just like this [lifting one foot behind her] and [both girls are laughing]... It [her shoe] was just a flip-flop! Can we watch *The Princess Diaries 2* and talk about it next time? I haven’t seen that yet.

The remarks of these two girls showed their reluctance to watch or discuss a sexual scene. To these girls, simply the putting of lips together was enough to make them think of

kissing as “gross.” Moreover, I understood how these girls acquired such knowledge of sex matters by means of this discussion; they have learned it not from parents or schools, but from popular culture. As several scholars (e.g., Corsaro, 2003; Kenway & Bullen, 2001; Seiter, 1995) have articulately pointed out, these girls learned about sexual relationships indirectly from popular culture—in this case, a Disney movie, “The Princess Diaries,” and talked about them with each other (see “Popular Culture and Society” in Chapter I, pp. 10-14).

As for the sexual message in Ursula’s body language, these older girls certainly had different responses from those of the younger girls. Several of the older girls not only focused on the sexual message itself, but also analyzed the reasons for Ursula’s intentions and Ariel’s responses to them. It is, however, important to note that the older girls’ discussion showed that their perspectives on sexual matters were closely entangled with their age as well as their culture. For example, 8-year-old Haana shared her ideas of Ursula’s body language with 6-year-old Narim.

Narim said, “[Raising her voice] It’s a lie that boys like girls who use body language more than girls who talk a lot! It is *a lie!*” Agreeing with Narim, Haana replied, “That’s right. [That is] A complete lie. If a girl is pretty or...something like that...it is not that important. Boys like nice and smart girls.” Narim commented with smile, “Yeah, it is so true!”

In this discussion, Narim firmly denied Ursula’s argument of females’ body language by saying it was “a lie.” However, it is uncertain here that how exactly Narim understood the arguments’ hidden meaning based on her statements because she did not provide specific reasons for her opinion as to why this was not true for her. In spite of this fact, Narim’s disagreement might be understood better by paying due regard to the following

narrative of Haana, which Narim strongly consented to at the end of this discussion. First, Haana explicitly supported Narim's idea that Ursula's argument was "a complete lie." Thus, Haana's awareness of the sexual message was revealed more even clearly than Narim's in that Hanna presented her idea by relating it to the concept of a female sexual body as "pretty or something like that."<sup>5</sup> In addition, Haana provided a reason why Ursula's saying was not true to her: "boys like nice and smart girls." From this point of view, these girls' dissent from Ursula's remark about body language stemmed from their strong cultural belief in the superiority of inherently nice and truly smart girls, which was discussed in the previous chapter.

As Haana did, other girls disagreed somewhat with the concept of using body language by emphasizing inner characteristics. When I asked the same question about Ursula's remark on body language, for example, 9-year-old Kaain first smiled at me and said:

I think the most important thing is being smart. Then we can solve anything. It would be great if we study well and know lots of things. Then we can do everything well in school...I think Ursula said those things like that...to make Ariel think that it would be okay to be without a voice. If not, Ariel would not have agreed to give up her voice and Ursula couldn't have her voice. But you know...Ariel doesn't think very much...uh-um...She is like...a kind of person who makes decisions really fast, isn't she? So she can't be patient and...when Ursula said that, she didn't think about it very long and...just did it [decided to give her voice to Ursula]. If she was a little smarter, she might not do it like that.

It is remarkable that Kaain did not ask about or mention what was meant by Ursula's body language in this discussion. She did not even use a single word which was related to body language or using the body. Rather, Kaain merely discussed her thoughts of "the

most important thing” to “solve anything”—which is “being smart.” To Kaain, body language did not seem to be a pivotal key to settling Ariel’s problem because Ursula talked about the importance of body language so as to deceive Ariel. By explaining why Ursula said to Ariel that using body language was important, Kaain’s point tended to become clearer. Kaain regarded that Ariel’s impatient personality led her to believe what Ursula told her without thinking carefully before making a decision. As a result, according to Kaain, Ariel’s imprudent decision was caused by her lack of intelligence—or, at least, her insufficient smartness.

Like Kaain, another girl, Minhee saw Ariel’s decision to give up her voice as unwise:

I don’t understand why Ariel did it [tried to use body language]. If we lose our voices, we could write on paper. Ursula said that boys don’t like chatty girls and she just believed her [Ursula’s] word for word and did just what Ursula said. Ursula was just trying to trick Ariel. But Ariel was fooled! She was...kind of...not smart.

Like Kaain, Minhee did not discuss Ursula’s body language itself in this discussion. Instead, she mostly expressed her negative reactions to Ariel’s decision. Minhee was skeptical of Ariel’s behavior because it was not judicious, but thoughtless, thus suggesting an alternative—namely, “writing on paper”—for Ariel in order to talk with Prince Eric without her voice. Minhee criticized Ariel for her unawareness of Ursula’s bad intentions. Thus, Ariel, who did not have enough insight to pass careful judgment, was not considered smart by Minhee.

The other girls did not consider Ariel’s use body language appropriate or prudent, either. As Kaain and Sunjoo said, “I think Ariel is like...a little stupid,” and “She [Ariel]

shouldn't have followed what Ursula said! She [Ursula] is evil!" Like Minhee, they reproached Ariel for her silliness of using body language by suggesting different ways to communicate with other, such as writing a letter, writing on sand, and on drawing.<sup>6</sup> To summarize, the importance of intelligence in Korean culture was a major indicator for my older informants in deciding what was true or false in internalizing a cultural message. As a result, for these girls, who interpreted and understood what a sexual message implied quite accurately, the sexual message of Ursula's "body language" was not looked upon as entirely credible.

### **Critical Issues Considering Children's Perspectives on the Body and Sexuality**

This chapter showed that my informants focused on female characters' faces rather than their body shapes in talking about physical beauty, and that their interpretations of sexual messages in the Disney films could be different depending on their ages. However, there were some critical issues to consider in analyzing the ways in which these girls' understood body images and sexuality. First, even though the girls did not perceive heroines' bodies as important in determining physical attractiveness, they poignantly noticed the differences between and the similarities of body images in Disney films as opposed to their own sense of reality. Second, most of my informants had similar opinions on certain sexual messages and how to interpret them regardless of their age. Therefore, I will discuss these two major issues more closely in the following section.

## **Female Body between Unreality and Reality**

When discussing the fact that the female protagonists' bodies in Disney films were very thin and unattractive, several informants insisted another point of view; that is, those movie heroines' bodies were unusual, and thus unrealistic. Sunjoo and Minhee made just this point.

When I asked about Ariel's looks, Sunjoo said, "She is pretty...and thin. But [even though she is very thin]...she looks like one of the princesses [in the Disney films]. I think she might look weird if she was a real person, but as a princess in the movie, she's okay." Minhee agreed, saying, "I think most of the princesses in the [film] stories are the same. They're not really fat and they are all pretty. We [her family members and she] saw all the princesses at Disney World but they were not skinny [laughs], because they were just normal people." Sunjoo said, "Yeah, that's right. And...and...they [the princesses in Disney movies] are different when we actually see them [the princesses at Disney World]. Those [the Disney films] are stories...I mean...they were made up...like a fake thing. But the princesses [at Disney World] are real people." (Interview summary)

Sunjoo perceptively pointed out the typical pattern of Disney princesses' physical appearances—namely, being pretty and thin. However, my informants insisted that such a pattern is "okay" in movies, because they were a "fake thing." Moreover, as Narim and Haana had, these two girls also thought that being thin like Ariel or many other Disney princesses was not good and positive in reality. In order to support their perspectives, Sunjoo and Minhee gave an example of the princesses at Disney World, which they visited. Observing that the princesses at Disney World were not as thin as the movie princesses, the girls rightly perceived the differences between fiction and reality. Thus, the Disney film heroines could not be seen in real world. Therefore, Heesun firmly concluded, "How can a real person be like that? That is a cartoon."



The recognition of the difference between Disney films and reality was explained more precisely in the girls' finding a physical discrepancy between American women and Disney princesses. Narim thus noted:

I've never seen like...a person like that. Like Ariel. Americans are a little fat. [Raising her voice] Oh, but I have seen someone who looks like the Little Mermaid! There was a girl, her name is Ashley, she was in my class before. She wore earrings and had long hair like Ariel. She was very pretty.

The point is that Narim compared people's bodies in reality with Ariel's body by discussing Americans' body shapes. To her, many Americans whom she saw around her seemed to be fat, so it was difficult for her to find analogy between American women and Disney princesses in the light of body shapes. Even when she spoke of her classmate who looked like Ariel, the similarity between that girl and Ariel came not from the girl's thinness but such features as personal ornaments and hair style. Sunjoo and Minhee, too, noted a difference between Disney heroines and American women, telling me "They [Disney princesses] are not like Americans...I mean...their bodies...because American people are really fat."

In light of such discordance between female bodies in Disney films and the bodies of real American women, however, these girls had different perspectives when comparing Disney princesses with Korean women.

When I asked if they had ever seen women who were as pretty and slim as Ariel, Minhee firmly answered, "In Korea." I asked again, "In Korea? You mean...on Korean TV?" Minhee replied, "No! We can see a lot of them [the pretty, thin women] just on the street. Korean girls are really pretty and they are not fat at all. They are much prettier than Ariel. American people eat a lot of junk food and so get really fat." Sunjoo agreed with Minhee by saying, "Right! They [Korean women] eat a lot of

rice, Kimchi [a Korean traditional side dish] and vegetables. That's why they're slim." (Interview summary)

Minhee's positive view of Korean women's external beauty was very firm. According to her, ordinary Korean women were pretty and thin. In order to explain the reason for Korean women's supreme beauty, Minhee and Sunjoo proposed better eating habits in this discussion, for they regarded the reason for people's thinness and fatness as what they eat. To Minhee and Sunjoo, whose mothers did not allow their children to eat American fast food due to its malnutrition and sanitization, it is natural that eating "rice, Kimchi, and vegetables" was a crucial factor in making Korean women slender, whereas eating "a lot of junk food" caused Americans to be fleshy.<sup>7</sup> Based on this logic, American women could not look like Disney princesses whereas Koreans were "much prettier than Ariel." As a result, it was unconvincing for the two girls that the heroines of Disney films portrayed real American women, who were seen as fatter than those heroines.

Considering my informants' responses to female bodies of both real and unreal, I have pondered the relationships between an image of popular culture and that of reality. As my informants pointed out, an image of popular culture does not represent American reality any more. Instead, these girls found that there is certain discordance between American reality and American popular culture as regards female bodies (Breazeale, 1994; Fraad, 1990; Kilbourne, 2003; Pipher, 1994; Wykes & Gunter, 2005).<sup>8</sup> The image of popular culture was thus seen to distort reality and substitute fallacy. This point of

view illuminates Baudrillard's (1998) view of the mass media, in which he insists that they transcend what is truth or falsehood.

The truth is that advertising (like the other mass media) does not deceive us: it is beyond the true and the false, just as fashion is beyond ugliness and beauty, and the modern object, in its sign function, is beyond usefulness and uselessness. Advertising is prophetic language, in so far as it promotes not learning or understanding, but hope. What it says presupposes no anterior truth (that of the object's use-value), but an ulterior confirmation by the reality of the prophetic sign it sends out. It turns the object into a pseudo-event, which will become the real event of daily life through the consumer's endorsing its discourse. (p. 127)

In other words, an image of popular culture has value not by modeling actual life but by "promoting hope," which does not exist in reality. Media images of women's bodies, therefore, attempt to make people believe that there is an unconscious consensus in society about physical beauty by constantly conveying a certain message—in this case, women's thin bodies. As some of my informants criticized above, females' thin bodies in the unreal Disney films might be seen as true and real whereas those of American women in reality seemed to be false and unreal.

Of course, the emphasis on women's thin bodies in the mass media is not merely an American phenomenon; thin bodies are the prevailing images of women in Korean popular culture as well. It is also true that many young women and girls want to be slim in Korea (Cho, 2002; Lee, 2002a). However, American popular culture, such as the Disney films, can be differently presented in a given society—for example, Korea. The point is that although Korean women can find women with thin bodies in American popular culture, they may notice the discrepancy between the media images in Disney films and themselves much less than American women do, because of Korean women's

relatively slender body shapes. Put differently, as some of my informants argued, an image in American popular culture is likely to be projected in a different way, depending on whether or not a society's reality is notably similar to or different from that of Americans.

### **Female Body as an Object**

In interpreting sexual messages in the Disney films, I discussed earlier that my informants' responses tended to be different depending on their age. That is to say, the younger they were, the less awareness of sexual gestures and innuendoes they had. Nevertheless, I found an issue to which my informants had similar responses regardless of their age. The issue had to do with Jasmine's kissing Jafar in *Aladdin*. This scene is when Jafar rules the city and Jasmine and Jasmine's father become Jafar's slaves. When Aladdin comes back to the palace in order to get the lamp back, Jasmine finds that Aladdin was there. For helping Aladdin, Jasmine pretends to allure Jafar and kisses him.

In discussing this scene, nine of the ten girls knew precisely that Jasmine kissed him so as to deceive Jafar into concentrating his attention only on her, not on Aladdin. For example, Youri and Heesun told me, "[She did it] Because she wanted to keep Jafar from seeing Aladdin, from turning around. She wanted Aladdin to take the lamp," or "Because Jasmine was trying to keep Jafar from finding Aladdin."

However, none of these girls recognized that it might be problematic for Jasmine to use her body to help Aladdin. Enticing Jafar by means of Jasmine's body seemed to be necessary and even reasonable, because Jasmine was in difficult situation. The girls did

not wonder why Jasmine had to use her body until I brought this issue up by asking what they would do if they were Jasmine in this situation.<sup>9</sup> My informants' doubtless thought about Jasmine's reaction derived, in part, from the fact that they could find specific clues in that scene. For example, Minhee and Narim said that Jasmine had very limited capacity to do something for Aladdin due to her handcuff. "I think she [Jasmine] had to do like that...because Jasmine's hands were all tied up, I mean...in cuffs or something," as Minhee put it. As a result, Jasmine's being handcuffed in the scene made these girls consider that Jasmine used her body in the only way possible to solve her problem.

It is important to note here that even though their observations of a particular scene were plausible in explaining Jasmine's action, my informants tended to only take into account Jasmine's body, rather than her intelligence in discussing her way of solving a problem. Moreover, they did not perceive that Jasmine's hands were only bound at the beginning of the scene and that she could move freely by using her two hands when Jasmine actually kissed Jafar in the movie. As a result, these two girls could not think of a different way to help Aladdin, mostly because of Jasmine's physical limitation. Therefore, many of my informants, who valued female intelligence highly throughout this study, seemed to neglect the fact that Jasmine's cognitive ability was not restricted at any moment in this scene.

Haana also provided her perspective on using the female body in the above situation. According to her, Jasmine's reaction resulted from her elaborate intention of deception:

Jasmine kissed Jafar because she knew what he liked. She knew Jafar

liked her so if she kissed him, he wouldn't think about other things like... he didn't know where Aladdin was [laughs]. That's why she did it like that [she kissed him].

In other words, Jasmine's kissing Jafar was not a reckless action that did not take into account cause and effect. Rather, her action was based on her careful consideration of how to help Aladdin effectively. From Haana's perspective, in which Jasmine's kissing Jafar was a result of her intellectual engagement, a woman's using her body is appropriate and even reasonable if it is necessary to solve a problem.

My informants' similar responses to Jasmine's kissing made me think about what male protagonists do when they encounter an obstacle in Disney films. First, in the movie *Aladdin* the hero, Aladdin, solved a problem differently than Jasmine. Instead of using his body, Aladdin cleverly played a trick on Jafar to escape from a difficult situation. Of course, it might be obvious that Aladdin would not try to seduce Jafar by kissing him, because Jafar and Aladdin were depicted as heterosexual males in the movie. However, even when I thought about how male protagonists overcame his difficult situation in Disney films, they often adopted a method which is quite different from using his body sexually. For example, Prince Eric in *The Little Mermaid* did not allure Ursula in order to escape his dangerous moment. Instead, he bravely fought against Ursula and finally killed her by himself. In the case of Prince Phillip in *Sleeping Beauty*, the male protagonist's solution to his problem was similar: he fought and killed the evil witch, Maleficent.<sup>10</sup> My point is here that Disney films tend to present a man, who solves a difficult problem by using either his courage or his intelligence unlike a woman—namely, Jasmine—who tempts an unpleasant man—Jafar, in this case—by using her sexy body.

When my informants discussed Jasmine's use of her body to help Aladdin, Narim disclosed another interesting perspective which was related to women's sexuality.

Talking about why Jasmine had to kiss to Jafar in *Aladdin*, she introduced an idea based on her personal experience into the discussion:

If we like somebody, we wanna give something to them. So Jasmine acted like that. Jafar...he liked Jasmine, so she knew he wanted Jasmine's kiss. So she pretended she liked him and kissed him! And...my second boyfriend [she had two boyfriends] said if I am gonna kiss him, he would give me 20 bucks! [laughs].

After listening to Narim, I asked her what she said to her boyfriend. However, Haana, who already seemed to know about this story from Narim, interrupted. She smiled and said to me, "She said, 'Yes!' Right, Narim?" Narim then nodded her head and laughed.

Again, I asked Narim why her boyfriend said that he would give her money. Narim replied:

Because...I don't know exactly...but maybe he wanted to be romantic. Because, you know...if boys like girls, they give girls presents, flowers, rings...many things like that. So I think he wanted to give me something.

In an earlier conversation, Narim thought that it was necessary for Jasmine to kiss Jafar in order to make Jafar believe that she liked him. According to Narim, since liking somebody means to "give something" to that person, Jasmine had to pretend to like Jafar by giving something—in this case, a kiss—to him. Narim's idea of giving in love was more clearly explained in the discussion just mentioned above. That is to say, Narim associated giving with the concept of "being romantic" in love. To Narim, being romantic was closely related to the give and take between two lovers. As an example of such a romantic exchange, Narim talked about her boyfriend, who wanted her kiss in

return for his twenty dollars. She perceived her boyfriend's idea as being no more than a simple way of expressing his romantic feeling. As Narim's kiss stood for her love, her boyfriend's money showed his affection. Therefore, in thinking about her relationship with her boyfriend, only the fact that he was eager to give her something seemed to be of great value to Narim, because his act of giving itself implied that he liked her. From this perspective, what kinds of objects her boyfriend wanted to give her did not matter to Narim. Put another way, to Narim, money was not different from many other types of presents, such as "flowers [and] rings," all of which can symbolize her boyfriend's love for her. In this manner, Narim might consider that Jasmine's kiss was also a form of expressing love, which was necessary for her to pretend to like Jafar in the scene.

Reflecting Narim's ideas of a woman's use of her body, however, I have had some questions: Why did her boyfriend demand merely her sexual act for their give and take in love? Why would he reward her kiss by giving his money, rather than by giving a kiss back? In other words, why were females' sexual acts—in this case, kisses of both Narim and Jasmine—more often seen as an object than those of their male counterparts—for instance, kisses of Narim's boyfriend and Jafar—in romantic exchange?

As a matter of fact, in this exchange, a female's kiss was considered an object which could be exchanged for other objects by a male, such as money, presents, and power. The point is that a female was seen to lose or impair her female value or even her self because of her sexual act unless material compensation by a male accompanied it and she thus "recovered her expenses" (Cixous, 1986, p. 88).<sup>11</sup> In this regard, even if Narim did not think that she had lost something in her self and by establishing her own sexuality,



she could be seen as someone who needs to “recover” from others’—namely, her boyfriend’s—views. By romanticizing a woman’s sexual act, Narim failed to recognize others’ perspectives on her kiss as well as on Jasmine’s sexual allure. As a result, Jasmine’s kissing Jafar was interpreted differently by her. To Narim, such a gender biased representation of a Disney film was not seen as female’s objectified sexuality, but as a symbol of a person’s romantic feeling.

### **Reflections: Being Sexual in Korean Culture**

This chapter has shown that my informants did not emphasize female bodies as important in determining physical attractiveness. Such interpretations of body images in the Disney films were somewhat different from some scholars’ apprehensions of them mentioned in the Chapter I (see “Introduction” in Chapter I, pp. 1-9). That is to say, these girls considered the film heroines’ bodies very thin, and thus unattractive, whereas such sensual body images were severely criticized by certain scholars for Disney films’ undue emphasis on slim and glamorous female bodies as a standard of beauty. In addition, these girls’ responses to sexual gestures and innuendoes were influenced by their age. In contrast to the younger girls in this study, who were unaware of hidden sexual messages in the films, the older girls tended to be more knowledgeable about those messages and interpreted them with reference to Korean culture. As a result, none of my informants completely understood or entirely received the sexual messages which were presented in the Disney films.

Considering the older children's critical responses to the films' body images and sexual messages, however, I have wondered if these responses could be analyzed in a different way by taking a careful look at the meaning of being sexual in Korean culture. This possibility occurred when I observed that some of the older girls seemed to express great abhorrence for the film protagonists' sexual gestures. Such a hostile response clearly turned up in a discussion in which Sunjoo expressed her dislike of Ursula's sexual looks.

This girl [Ursula] pretends to be pretty. [Frowning her face and raising her voice] But she opens her eyes like this [half opening her eyes] and she seemed like...she thought of herself as so, so pretty. But she looks like... someone who really likes boys. And with her weird eyes she got all pretty and went to the prince!

Even though she considered Ursula a beautiful woman, Sunjoo thought that the way in which Ursula opened her eyes was "weird." In the previous section, "Age and Interpreting Sexual Messages," Jisoo found Ariel's facial expression strange, but Sunjoo's attitude toward Ursula's unusual eyes was not identified with Jisoo's. Jisoo implied that the word "weird" here was superficial—for example, strange, bad, or ugly—whereas Sunjoo seemed to suggest that Ursula's way of opening her eyes was a sign of her inordinate sexuality, so she described Ursula as "someone who really likes boys."<sup>12</sup> During this discussion, Sunjoo even condemned Ariel for her caring too much for a man—namely, Prince Eric—by saying, "She [Ariel] liked him [Prince Eric] first and she seemed to like him too much!" For this reason, Ariel could not be her favorite female character in the Disney films; instead, Sunjoo chose Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*,

because “She didn’t do anything first to the Beast and she didn’t like him that much...I mean...[Belle was] not like Ariel [in liking a man]!”

Sunjoo’s antagonistic view to be sexual brought me back to a Korean perspective, in which exposing a person’s sexual desire has been considered unworthy, shallow, and immoral (Cheng, 2005; Park, 2000).<sup>13</sup> In any case, a negative view of female sexuality can be still found in Korean society today, in spite of widespread social change (Lee, 2002a). That is to say, Korean female sexuality is often supposed to be veiled because it has for long been seen as a female vice in Korean patriarchal society.<sup>14</sup> Such female sexuality in Korean culture was illuminated in a discussion in which Narim and Haana talked about Ariel’s sexual gesture in *The Little Mermaid*. After strongly disagreeing with Ursula’s argument that boys liked women who used body language, these two girls continued:

Haana said, “And [boys like] girls who like to wash socks! [both Haana and Narim laughing]. Girls had better like it instead of body language [Laughing again].” I asked, “Do boys like girls who like to wash socks? Why?” Looking at me with a smile, Haana explained, “Because boys sometimes don’t like to do laundry. My dad doesn’t like it at all. And if boys don’t do it, then we have to. It can’t be that nobody does it.” “[Standing up and pointing at Haana with her finger] Yeah! Yeah! That’s right! My dad, either! He never does laundry! Never! [laughs.]” Narim added. (Interview summary)

In analyzing these girls’ perspectives, I have found that these girls tended to map out being female not by thinking of women as lovers, but by considering them good wives in families. As I noted earlier (see “Korean Cultural Values in Education” in Chapter III, pp. 130-135), the Korean traditional conception of a female, which is that she should be “a wise mother and a good wife,” was likely to be strongly influencing these two girls’

minds. Female sexual desire has been excluded from the Korean concept of “a wise mother and a good wife”; rather, their responsibilities to accept sexual needs of a male and to lead a chaste life have been emphasized. Therefore, the sexual subjectivity of Korean women has been overwhelmed by their responsibilities for their husbands and children, and thus female sexuality has been marginalized in Korean society. That is why this Korean cultural view of hiding female sexuality remains influential for many Korean women in today’s society (Lee, 2002a; Lee & Kim, 1995; Park, 1996; Moon, 2002).

Based on this Korean view, Haana and Narim might not consider being sexual or sexy important in order to be a wise mother or a good wife. Rather, they thought that, doing domestic chores was important for females to win males’—namely, their husbands’—favor. By observing their fathers, who hardly did such chores, Narim and Haana assumed that girls should like to do laundry in order to make boys like them.

Moreover, according to the two girls, domestic work seemed to be assigned mostly as one of females’ duties because “if boys don’t do it, then we [females] have to do it.” In other words, a woman’s role in a Korean family is to serve a man and comply with his requests. These girls’ points of view reminded me of the Korean family system, in which domestic chores are still considered Korean women’s work, and thus many Korean men are rarely involved in them. As Lee (2002a) states, Korean patriarchal society has, in part, maintained and reinforced male authority by disengaging men from daily housework expecting instead that they are supposed to work outside the home to provide the appropriate socio-economic resources for their families. As a result, the social justification of men’s separate activities has determined that women should do the

domestic duties, which are seen as necessary to live, but effeminate and worthless in Korea. Such a social aspect was presented in the discussion of Haana and Narim. From this Korean perspective, these girls might devalue women's being sexual and place women's "doing laundry" right after being smart or nice. In this way, Haana concluded, "Girls had better like it [washing socks] instead of body language."

In addition, Korean culture has looked upon that children's sexuality should be concealed as well by restricting the expression of sexuality the adult domain. Such a perspective was revealed when Sunjoo discussed her ideas more explicitly with Minhee.

Sunjoo said, "So we can do pretty things and...and...be pretty when we grow up. Yeah...only when we're growing up, we can do it [pretty things and actually be pretty]." But after Sunjoo's saying, Minhee disagreed, saying "Not always. Not always. And also you have to study after you grow up, too." "[Raising her voice] Yes, we do. I know! But if we're as big as my mom...we *don't* have to," Sunjoo answered. Then, looking at me, Minhee clarified their opinions to me, "Aunt Lena, so, we study a lot more when we're little and study a little less and sometimes...we don't have to when we're bigger. Right, Sunjoo?" Sunjoo nodded her head with a smile. (Interview summary)

According to Sunjoo, having interests in one's physical appearance was allowed only to "grown-ups." Furthermore, even though Minhee noticed that there were always exceptions to being pretty and studying hard, she did not seem to completely deny Sunjoo's point of view. Both Sunjoo and Minhee thus concluded that when they grew up, they would not have to study as much as they did at present.

In order to clarify their conception of being grown-up more clearly, I asked them again, "When don't we have to study? As Sunjoo said, do we have to be a mom like Sunjoo's?"

Minhee answered me, “Uh...um ...college, college students...If we study hard and go to college, we become pretty and do all pretty things ...like...put nail polish on and...make-up, too. And we can wear pretty clothes and stuff.” Sunjoo then added, “I just want to do it [think about being pretty] when I’m a grown-up, a grown-up...I don’t know exactly when...but like...when I go to university.” (Interview summary)

Minhee and Sunjoo basically defined adulthood as being college students in this discussion. For these two girls, “going to college” was considered a barrier through which they will have to get in order to “become pretty.” Put another way, being a college student seemed to be the transition from being a hard-working student to being a sexual woman in this case. Such a perspective, which sees college students as adults, can be examined by understanding the exceeding competition for attending universities in today’s Korea. As I noted earlier (see “Korean Children, Korean Culture, and American Society” in Chapter I, pp. 48-56), the great value of and passion for higher education has been located for a long time in Korea. In addition, it is very difficult for Koreans to find a fine job without a college degree. Therefore, a child’s entering a Korean “ivory tower” often symbolizes to Koreans a great endeavor for a child, as well as a validation of his or her ability, which has been formed through his or her childhood. Many Korean adults—particularly, parents—tend to strongly encourage their children to concentrate only on academic achievement during their childhood by promising the children tremendous freedom and autonomy right after their children become university students. By doing this, Koreans would be appreciating and rewarding their children’s hard work, prominent accomplishment, and great endurance in their lives.

From this Korean cultural perspective, certain matters, such as relationships with the opposite sex and paying attention to his or her physical appearance are often seen as a hindrance which can have a harmful influence the child's pursuit of academic success. Many Korean parents and teachers thus warn children not to get too close to the opposite sex and not to concern themselves with physical beauty by saying, "You can pretty yourself up later after going to college," "There is a time for studying [going to college]. If you blow it, it will be hard to have another chance," or "Even if you spend your time only in study, it may not be good enough to go to a good college, so how could you possibly think of other things?"<sup>15</sup> Even though some of Korean adults have liberal attitudes toward their children's attention to physical appearance or their relationships with friends of the opposite sex, the emphasis on academic success is still great in Korean society.

From this perspective, Minhee and Sunjoo's discussion above clearly reflected Korean beliefs about being sexual; being a "grown-up" was seen as appropriate only to adulthood, at which time one could deserve "pretty things" and become sexual beings. Put differently, for these two girls, adulthood is characterized as a period in which children can be free from study, and focus on their physical appearances. Studying hard is not adult responsibility any more; rather, it should turn into a choice which depends on a person's decision at that point. As a result, a child as a sexual being was not right or desirable, but bad, whereas an adult's interests in being sexual are not bad or forbidden, but normal and reasonable. Another of Sunjoo's narratives confirmed this issue. When I asked her about being pretty or liking boys, she firmly answered:

That [being pretty or liking boys] is so bad! If someone acts pretty and likes boys, she's not smart. Because if...a girl always thinks about how to be pretty every day, she can't study. Because she has to study every day, but she only thinks about tying her hair and wearing skirts...you don't have time to study! If we don't study hard, we can't have good grades. Then we could have no money and...sometimes...when we'll grow up, uh-um...we could become a beggar, too.

According to Sunjoo, a person's paying attention to either his or her physical appearance or the opposite sex—that is, being sexual—will lead him or her only to lose time meant for study. But there was also another possible result when a person does not study hard; that person may have “no money,” and such lack of economic stability could even make that person “become a beggar,” which is one kind of a miserable adulthood for Koreans.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, Sunjoo told me without hesitation that to be pretty or like men was “very bad” because then one could not be “smart.”

From this point of view, Sunjoo's ideas in this discussion revealed that an interest in being sexual would be treated negatively by the fact that it interfered with hard work in Korean culture. In other words, a Korean child's excessive fondness for her physical appearance was seen as unadvisable and wrong, since the absence of hard work could lead that child to have a tragic future. As a result, like Sunjoo's, a girl's paying attention to her looks or her seeming to like boys inevitably involves a question of morality that is linked to be intelligent, which is a girl's obligation as a child in Korean culture (see “Korean Cultural Values in Education” in Chapter III, pp. 130-135). In this sense, a young Korean girl's moral perspectives and beliefs of smartness had to do not only with “the private, individual sphere,” in which her own judgments and evaluations are



involved, but also with “social, cultural realm” that determines which values are morally appropriate to an individual (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002, p. 3).

Considering these girls’ thoughts about female sexuality, in which Korean cultural perspectives were revealed, then, even more fundamental questions have occurred to me: Based on their cultural lens, might my informants attempt to intentionally ignore the films heroines’ sexual body images? Another question has to do with the work of certain scholars (Foucault, 1979; Irigaray, 1985); did these children perhaps start to struggle with their sexuality, which is often objectified and controlled by their male-dominant cultural paradigm? In other words, like Tobin’s (1997) argument, might culturally restrained female sexuality prevent the girls in this study from thinking of their bodies as a place for pleasure and desire?

In sharing their opinions on female sexuality, most of my informants did not disagree with their cultural values and assumptions—for instance, being sexual was adult behavior and women necessarily did domestic chores. Rather, like Ahjin, who asked herself about the importance of academic performance (see “Korean Cultural Values in Education” in Chapter III, pp. 130-135), these girls have attempted to readily adopt—or sometimes unconsciously internalize—such ideas, and have consistently waited for their promising adulthood, in which they can be “pretty” as well as “smart” mothers and wives. Even though their interpretations of the Disney films’ sexual messages disclosed their perspectives in understanding being female, these girls’ sexuality still seemed to remain hidden by Korean culture.

In sharing their ideas on the sexual messages and body images in the Disney films, my informants discussed other important issues, such as marriage, family, and social class. In the next chapter, therefore, I will examine their understanding of the Disney films by focusing on these three issues just mentioned above. The results of the film protagonists' love in the four Disney movies in this study were often concluded by marriage. Thus, I will look at these girls' conversations about what factors made a hero or a heroine decide to get married. Moreover, their discussions of marriage will be inevitably related to families in the next chapter, since marriage implies women's leaving their own families or territories in the Disney films. In discussing these issues, I will also deal with my informant's ideas on different social statuses and hierarchy, which have often been looked at in the Disney films.

## Chapter IV

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As I listened to these girls talk about what external features made the heroines beautiful, I found that they hardly spoke of those of the male characters. This lack of discussion about the males' physical beauty might be related to the fact that, as I noted in the previous chapter, my informants' strong emphasis as regards the male characters was on their good personalities.

Moreover, none of my informants talked about the Beast's physical appearance in *Beauty and the Beast*, even though, like Prince Eric of *The Little Mermaid*, he also turned into an attractive, noble man at the end of the story (Giroux 1999; Sells, 1995). Instead, a couple of my informants expressed their thoughts about the Beast's looking fearful and repulsive, and they saw him merely as an animal. Narim said, "He is very scary...[raising her voice] especially at the beginning! Remember when Belle goes into that castle? The Beast roars at her! How could she [Belle] marry him? He is a beast!" Ahjin also told me that "He looks very wild and fierce." To them, as Haana pointed out, "He is just...a beast [laughs]. Like...the other wild animals." This view might be because he has mostly appeared as a beast throughout the film. As a result, rather than his being seen as human being, the Beast's animal characteristics seemed to dominate my informants' perceptions.

<sup>2</sup> By wearing her yellow evening dress, Belle exposed her shoulders only in the last scene of the film.

<sup>3</sup> This tendency can also be seen in another Disney film, *Pocahontas* (1995). Even though Pocahontas, who is based on a historical Native American figure, is described as somewhat brave and smart, it is obvious that her trim and slender body is emphasized in the film: her body was quite exposed in her short outfits. Thus, her story in the film tended to convert from that of a brave woman's struggling to save her tribe to that of a woman's romantic love of a handsome British man. Concerning this issue of Pocahontas, Giroux (1999) argued:

Bright, courageous, literate, and politically progressive, she [Pocahontas] is a far very from the traditional negative stereotypes of Native Americans portrayed in Hollywood films. But Pocahontas's character, like that of many of Disney's female protagonists, is drawn primarily in relation to the men who surround her. Initially, her identity is defined in resistance to her father's attempts to marry her off to one of the bravest warriors in the tribe. But her coming-of-age identity crisis is largely defined by her love affair with John Smith, a blond colonist who looks like he belongs in a Southern California pinup magazine of male surfers. (Giroux, 1999, p. 101)

From this perspective, Pocahontas's inner strength—her intelligence and courage—which was disguised, as well as her being sexy and romantic, was evolved. Such a process is what Giroux has called, the “politics of innocence,” in which Disney “reinvents it [history] as a pedagogical and political tool to secure its own interests, authority, and power” (Giroux, 1995b, p. 46).

<sup>4</sup> This scene was when Ursula took Ariel's voice. In order to deprive Ariel of her voice, Ursula said to her, “You'll have your looks! Your pretty face! Don't underestimate the importance of body language!”

<sup>5</sup> Haana's expression, "being pretty," is relevant to describe female sexuality in Korean culture. In fact, all of my informants never used such terms as "sexy," "sexual," and "gorgeous," in this study, like many other Korean adults and children who are reluctant to use such terms. This tendency will be more discussed later in "Reflections" in this chapter.

<sup>6</sup> In contrast to the younger girls, the older girls did not suggest sign language as a possible way for Ariel to communicate. This is so, in part, because the older girls tended to understand that "body language" was related particularly to the female body and sexual relationships. In addition, Kaain, told me that sign language could be another method but it might not be good for Ariel because learning sign language would "take a long time."

<sup>7</sup> I knew this fact when I met them for the first time because I brought McDonald's hamburgers for their dinner that day. As they saw them, they told me that their mothers did not allow them to eat American fast food, such as McDonald's and Burger King hamburgers, except when they were traveling in another state or country, in which "there was nothing to eat except McDonald's," as Minhee said.

<sup>8</sup> Such a discrepancy in what the American mass media show and reality has often been reproached, especially for its strong recommendation of thinness to young American women. According to Kilbourne (2003), such an "obsession with thinness is most deeply about cutting girls and women down to size" (p. 262), which is related to a "tremendous fear of female power," (p. 262) particularly since the modernization of society:

Powerful women are seen by many people (women as well as men)

as inherently destructive and dangerous. Some argue that it is men's awareness of just how powerful women can be that has created the attempts to keep women small. Indeed, thinness as an ideal has always accompanied periods of greater freedom for women—as soon as we got the vote, boyish clapper bodies came into vogue. No wonder there is such pressure on young women today to be thin, to shrink, to be like little girls, not to take up too much space, literally or figuratively. (pp. 262-263)

Similarly, Piper (1994) criticizes American culture for its excessive emphasis on women's appearance—which she has called, the “national cult of thinness.” She argues that such an American preoccupation with being thin has been caused by female representations in the mass media: “Even as real women grow heavier, models and beautiful women are portrayed as thinner. In the last two decades we have developed a national cult of thinness. What is considered beautiful has become slimmer and slimmer” (1994, p. 184).

<sup>9</sup> When I asked them such a question, they seemed to feel too embarrassed to answer. Many of them hesitated, saying, “I've never thought of it before,” and “Well...I don't know. I might do like that [kiss Jafar]...but I don't know.”

<sup>10</sup> Neither Ursula in *The Little Mermaid* nor Maleficent in *Sleeping Beauty* expressed their sexual interest in a hero in the films, even though some scholars pointed out that the two women have been implicitly portrayed as having females' excessive sexuality (see “Gender” in Chapter I, pp. 31-35 and the note, p. 64). In fact, I barely recalled only one Disney film in which a female character explicitly expresses her sexual interest in a male—Bo Peep, who was a sheep-raising lady in *Toy Story* (1995). In spite of the fact that this film's overall gender representations would be problematic, she may

be considered sexual because she expresses her sexual desire for Woody, a male protagonist. She says, “Wanna say I get someone else to watch the sheep tonight? Remember, I’m just a couple of blocks away.” Reflecting such an absence of female sexuality, a woman who *dares* to express her sexual desire tends to be still undesirable or, at least, invisible in most Disney films. That might be the case because women’s sexual desires are often symbolized as dangerous or filthy, and thus an obstacle to be eliminated from the Disney patriarchal world (see “Gender” in Chapter I, pp. 31-35 and the note, p. 63).

<sup>11</sup> A male body or sexual act was not completely involved in this exchange process. Instead, what was involved in it was considered a material object—for instance, Narim’s boyfriend’s money. A male’s self seemed to avoid being damaged in this exchange, and therefore, he returned to his unchangeable self (Cixous, 1986). As Cixous (1986) insists, a male is preoccupied with any kind of return because he is “more directly threatened in his being by the non-selfsame [the altered self]” (p. 87). The basic reason for male preoccupation with the unchangeable self has also been explained by a masculine sexuality which focuses only on the penis. Cixous (1986) says that “masculine sexuality gravitate[s] around the penis, engendering this centralized body (political anatomy) under the party dictatorship” (p. 87). As a result, according to Cixous, men try to keep making themselves return to “this regionalization [penis]” (p. 88). Therefore, in order to always preserve their selves without altering themselves in the process of exchange, men think that:

The gift brings in a return. Loss, at the end of a curved line, is turned into

its opposite and comes back to him as profit. At first what *he* wants, whether on the level of cultural or of personal exchanges, whether it is a question of capital or of affectivity (or of love, of jouissance)—is that he gain more masculinity: plus-value of virility, authority, power, money, or pleasure, all of which reinforce his phallogentric narcissism at the same time. A man is always proving something; he has to “show off,” show up the others. Masculine profit is almost always mixed up with a success that is socially defined. (p. 87)

In addition, Cixous insists that unlike men, she does not consider what she gets back when a woman gives something. It is so because it is not necessary for her to always return to her unchangeable self. This perspective can be explained through an argument of de Beauvoir (1976): Due to her absence of a penis, a woman does not have to return a certain point of her—namely, her penis, and even she *can not* return to it. Her self is unseizable, and Cixous has called this self “cosmic” and “worldwide.” Thus, a woman’s sexuality is different from that of man, which is regional, that is to say, phallogentric.

<sup>12</sup> This expression, “someone who really likes boys,” comes from Korean traditional culture. When Koreans see a woman whose clothes, make-up, or behavior is gaudy, they often negatively blame her by using Korean cultural idioms, such as “someone who is fond of men,” and even “someone who is going to kill men [because of her strong sexual desire].” This kind of malicious description of a woman who is likely to have strong sexual desire has played a role in suppressing female sexuality in Korean patriarchal society for a long time.

<sup>13</sup> Another possible reason for such an antagonistic perspective of being pretty can be also related to traditional Korean culture, in which people’s appearances have been



devalued. This tendency might be an outgrowth of Korea's strong emphasis on naturalism. Korean naturalism, which can be defined as harmony with nature, was greatly influenced by Shamanism and Buddhism. In Korean culture, nature is considered the sole source of everything, and thus its unsophisticated beauty has been highly valued (Kim, 1996). Even though Korean naturalism originally came from Shamanism and Buddhism, and was then changed somewhat under the influence of Confucianism, the importance of naturalism in Korean beauty is still placed today. In other words, by aiming at such naturalism and having its influences, Koreans tend to minimize any artificial traits in human beings so incorporate natural elements into Korean culture as much as they can (Kim, 1996).

Such naturalism is closely attached to the concept of beauty in Korea, so that beauty should be natural, simple, and unsophisticated, since absolute beauty is always nature itself to Koreans. For example, one study (Mun, 2004) examined certain images that Koreans like by choosing some adjectives which contain favorable images. According to this study, Koreans from age ten to fifty-nine picked "simple," "elegant," and "unvarnished," as their first words, while the word "[physically] beautiful" was chosen by only people in 40s as their top three words—that is to say, this word was not considered favorable and it did not even appear in the list of the rest of age groups. Therefore, Koreans' tendency to prefer naturalistic features seemed to be evident in this study.

In a related matter, Korean beauty can be extended to the ideas of being natural, truthful, and "as-it-is," which imply being natural. From this perspective, the judgments

and estimations of a person or even of an object based on his, her, or its external features, have long been considered imprudent and even wrong in Korea. For external features can be changeable, artificial, deceiving, and momentary, all of which are considered the opposite of eternal nature. Thus, only focusing on a person's physical appearance has been questionable at best. This warning can be found in such Korean proverbs as "He or she makes you pay for her beauty [She is full of her own beauty]," "It is only a colorful wild apricot [It is not as good as it looks]," "An empty cart should be noisier [A person's external features can be the opposite of his or her internal virtues]," and "We can know ten ways to submerge water but we cannot know only a way in a person's mind [We cannot be sure of a person's mind]."

From this perspective, by deemphasizing variable and transient external features, Korean culture has stressed immanent factors of great value instead. As a result, Koreans generally believe that a person's mind is more important than anything else, such as physical appearances, property, and social status, in determining who he or she is. Therefore, having insight into see a person's invisible mind and appreciating his or her true heart has been encouraged. This insightful ability has often been defined as wise and moral because things truthful and eternal are often visible to people who embrace this Korean tradition.

<sup>14</sup>This social tendency has been influenced by Confucianism. Korean society, influenced by Confucianism, has attempted to put female sexuality down by closely connecting it with ethics. For example, female sexuality was considered evil in a law in the Cho-Sun Dynasty (1392-1910), "The Seven Valid Causes for Male Divorce," in

which one of components was that when a man had a wife who had strong sexual desire, a husband could legally expel his wife from his family.

<sup>15</sup> I certainly remember that my parents and teachers have often said those things until I went to university. By saying them, they kept trying to remind me of how important having successful academic performance was for my future. In addition, I still hear such comments when I visit my sisters' houses; they keep saying them to their children. I also found that many of my informants have been raised in the same way. Like many other Koreans, these parents worry about their children when they find their children's increasingly "look into mirrors" to see themselves, which is seen as a clear indicator of sexual awakening in Korean culture.

<sup>16</sup> Many Korean parents have explained poor people's economic hardships on their lack of education. These parents have often told their children that the latter will not have a good future without a great education. Such a tendency comes mostly from Korean Confucianism, in which education is emphasized as one of the important foundations for living including a person's occupation.

## **Chapter V**

### **“It Doesn’t Matter If a Princess Is From Europe or China”:**

#### **Hooking Up in the Royal Context of Disney**

As several scholars have already pointed out, the appearance of royal families and the clear representation of the differences between social classes are salient themes in many Disney films (see “Race and Social Class” in Chapter I, pp. 35-39). The idea of royalty, for example, was discussed by my informants in this study, and most of the time they related such an idea to a life that is easy and comfortable, responsible, but sometimes restricted.

However, questions about who could be a king or a queen confused these girls to some extent because, as they confessed, they had not thought about them much. Therefore, they saw the process of becoming royalty as one of the most complicated issues in this study. For this reason, the issue of becoming a king or a queen encouraged them not only to deliberate on social ideologies relating to social classes and social hierarchical power, but also to seriously inquire about the existing social inequality relating to issues of gender as well. As a result, these girls kept wrestling with such questions, that is, with what they had never experienced or considered before, by agreeing, debating, and challenging each other in their discussions.

This chapter thus discloses my informants' various doubts, concerns, beliefs, and assumptions in dealing with notions of being a royal. In order to do this, it starts with these girls' general perspectives on monarchy, including the qualifications of a king or a queen, the process of selecting him or her, and the nationalities of princesses. In this chapter, the marriage of a royal person—particularly, a princess—is also discussed. In doing this, I examine how my informants understood a princess's obstacles to getting married in Disney films. Moreover, I look closely at an important factor—namely, the family—which was thoroughly considered and continually manifested itself during these girls' conversations about a princess's marriage. Finally, in my reflections on this chapter, the children's philosophical narratives about being a princess will be presented. I discuss them by illuminating the children's truthful, meditative considerations of each individual's unique self, these considerations being expressed when they thought of Disney's heroines' different ethnic and racial descent.

### **Disney's System of the Monarchy**

Some of my informants said that they wanted to be a queen or a princess for several reasons. In particular, young girls often said that they wanted to be a member of royalty because of their eagerness to do everything they wanted to do without working, to be rich, to wear pretty dresses, and to see the world under the sea—for instance, as Ariel does in *The Little Mermaid*. From this perspective, these girls' eagerness to be a queen or a princess was the result of the royals' easygoing life. However, when they thought of how to be a king or a queen, their responses were different. Therefore, in this section, I

discuss these girls' views on the sovereign—mostly, a king or a princess—by scrutinizing three major matters: the process of becoming a king, the qualifications of being a king, and the nationality of a princess.<sup>1</sup>

### **Who Becomes a King and Who Chooses Him? : The Process of Becoming a King**

It is remarkable that when my informants thought of becoming a king, all of them had trouble finding relevant answers to the questions of how a person becomes a king. Even though they easily explained why Scar, the bad lion in *The Lion King*, wanted to be a ruler, by saying, “Because he could get everything!,” “Because he wanted to boss around all people,” or “Because he could do whatever he wanted!,” these girls had to take time to account for how Mofasa, a good lion in the same movie, could be a king and how Scar, at least at the beginning, could not.

Thus, reflecting on and rethinking the matter of who became a king for a while, some of my informants finally started to introduce their ideas on how a sovereign is designated. One girl, Minhee, said:

If someone becomes a king or a queen, either his mom or his dad has to be the queen or the king. So that person is a prince or a princess. Only princes or princesses can become the kings or the queens. [Raising her voice] But now if a prince from a country likes you and chooses you [as his wife], Aunt Lena, you can also become a princess and later the queen. And if a princess decides to marry an ordinary man, he can be a prince, too. It [becoming a princess or a prince as an ordinary person] was hard in the past, but now it is possible.

Minhee articulately pointed out that royal descent or cross-class marriage was a possible way to be a ruler. For example, she recognized that succession to the throne is

transmitted from generation to generation. Moreover, such marriage with a royal family member as that of the English Princess Diana to Prince Charles—which was an example of another girl whose name was Haana—was seen as an exceptional way of being royalty by some of my informants.

Based on this idea of bonding by kinship in the royal family, some critical questions could be simplified for these girls. For example, in *The Lion King*, Simba's becoming a king was considered adequate and right by these girls since the succession of the throne has handed down from a father to a son, not to a younger brother—for example, in the case of Scar. This was so because, as Minhee said above, in order to be a king or a queen, “either his [a person's] mom or dad has to be the queen or the king.” In addition, for these girls, such a perspective of kinship seemed to be a possible answer for a question, that has been proposed by Disney scholars (e.g., Ingwersen & Ingwersen, 1990; Murphy, 1995; O'Brien, 1995; Wasko, 2001) who criticized Disney's failure to present powerful and positive female authorities: Why did neither Sarabi or Nala, who were lionesses in the movie, rule her country, Pride Rock? To my informants, the fact that no queen ruled the animal kingdom was not unfair but persuasive, because the queen did not have any kinship with the king. Thus, Haana commented on this standpoint more accurately:

Sarabi isn't Mufasa's sister. And Nala isn't Simba's sister, either. But Scar *is* Mufasa's brother. Scar is older than Sarabi so Scar became the king first. Mufasa is the oldest, then Scar, then Sarabi. So when Mufasa died, Scar became the king next because it was his [Scar's] turn [to be a king]. If there wasn't Scar, then Sarabi would have ruled the country even if she wasn't a sister of his [Mufasa's].

According to Haana, first, patriarchic consanguinity is a priority in light of the succession to the throne; next, age can determine who is going to be a king; and last, hereditary is influenced by marriage. Like Haana, several girls mentioned that these three means to in succeeding to the throne. In this way, it was convincing not only that Scar had to become a king prior to Sarabi or Nala, but also that the other animals could not be king.

However, one of my respondents, Ahjin, had a different point of view concerning who could be a king. She insisted that a person could be a king by means of effort:

Servants and people like us can become a King, too. If you're good to the King and do your job very well...then the King raises you to the next higher place. And you become higher and higher and...some day, the King is gonna tell you, "You are the next king." Then you can be the King! So the servants should be good to the king and help him out a lot. Then later, they [the servants] can be served well like that [as the king is served]. So even if it may be hard to serve him [the king] and do their [the servants'] jobs well, they should stand and be nice to the king. [Raising her voice] When one of my Korean kindergarten teachers told me to put kids' shoes in order, I didn't want to do. But I thought...if I did a good jobs with it [putting the shoes in order], I would remember it [how to do] better later on. So when I become a teacher, I can tell the kids how they have to do because I remember exactly and know about it. And I try to be good when my mom sends me on errands, too, because...I can do [send her children on errands] the same later on only when I know what to do. But...becoming a king could be much harder [than becoming a teacher or a mother]. I mean...if people don't have many chances to see the king, it would be hard to work for him. No matter how well they do their job, that King can't see them so he doesn't know that [how well they do their job]. It's like...it could be hard to be a king to the other animals, you know...the elephants, the giraffes, the hippos... 'cause they [the other animals] rarely got to see Mufasa.

In Ahjin's narrative, becoming a king was seen to be the result of a person's great effort.

If a person tried to do his or her best in serving a king and accomplishing his or her tasks and responsibilities, that person could be a king. However, in this process of a person's



becoming a king in the future, it was indispensable that the present king should know and appreciate the potential king's effort and sacrifice. Therefore, a person could not be a king if he or she had little opportunity to meet and see the king, who exercised his influence in light of choosing the next king. From this perspective, Ahjin considered why other animals could hardly become a king because they had few chances to meet and show their effort to the king.

Ahjin also argued that obeying a king's orders should be necessary for a person because the person learned what to do as a king by following that king's orders. Thus, being a servant seemed to be seen by my informants as a period of apprenticeship, by which a person could "exactly remember and know about" the role of a king, and thus "tell what they [the servants] have to do." In order to explain this concept of apprenticeship, Ahjin clarified her opinions by giving two examples based on her experience in our discussions: being a teacher and a mother. In spite of the fact that Ahjin did not want to obey her teacher's and mother's orders, she did not reject them because following their directions was a learning experience for her in becoming a teacher and a mother in the future. In this way, to Ahjin, becoming a king was understood as a process that was similar to becoming a teacher or a mother.

My informants' discussions of who could be a king sometimes led them to wonder how a king was selected and who chose the king. For instance, two girls, Narim and Haana, spoke of such issues when discussing the royal descent of a family as an important factor in being king. However, when these girls tried to justify royal descent,

they encountered another dilemma in generalizing the rule. Haana began the discussion about this plight:

A king's father was a king and that king's father was a king, too. I could understand that kind of stuff [the royal descent of a family]. But now I have one thing I don't know. I don't really know who chose the king [in *The Lion King*]. Wasn't it that monkey [Rafiki, who was the wise old baboon in the movie]? [Laughs] You know he [Rafiki] knew Simba [the male protagonist of the movie] was going to be a future king...but I don't know [how] exactly. I only thought like...at the very beginning [in a given society], there was a king and if that king had a son, then that son became the next king. And if the king had a daughter, then she became the queen ...something like that.

Thinking about who could be a king, Haana realized that there existed a question whose answer she was not sure of: Who chose the king? Even if Haana admitted the royal family's succession to the throne by means of kinship and applied such a rule to Mufasa's succession in *The Lion King*, she could not find reasonable answers for her question of who had selected the king, Mufasa. Although she assumed that Rafiki the baboon might have chosen the king because of his wisdom in foreseeing Simba's future as a king, it was not certain for Haana that such evidence supported her hypothesis.

When Haana finished, Narim raised her voice and told her, "I don't really get it. Then who chose the very first king? If a person wanted to be a king, then did he say to the other people that he gonna be a king?" Narim seemed confused by Haana's idea, which was that "there was a king at the very beginning." Smiling, Haana answered Narim, "Like I said, I don't know, Narim. I really don't know. But I just imagined there was something or someone...who decided who was gonna a king or...[there was] someone [who] was a king himself or whatever." Thinking of who could be a ruler

tended to be complicated for these girls, so led them to reflect on such questions. As Narim concluded, “This is a *hard* question! I’ve never thought about it before.”

Like Narim and Haana in the discussion above, several of my informants were not sure how a king was selected. Even though a couple of girls suggested that “the government or something first decided who was gonna become a king and servants,” or “they [people] voted... like we vote today,” they explicitly exposed their uncertainty because they often said, “I don’t know but,” “Maybe,” or “It seemed like” in the discussions.

### **Who Should be a King?: The Qualifications for Becoming a King**

While struggling to find clear answers in the process in selecting a king, my informants then reconsidered the question of who could be a ruler by emphasizing why a particular person—or animal—should be selected. Rethinking such a question, several girls pointed out a person’s disqualifications in becoming a king. For example, Narim and Haana, who were uncertain in the discussion above about who determined the first king, talked about the qualifications of being a king.

Narim said, “I don’t really know about it [how a king could be selected in *The Lion King*]. But Scar wanted to boss around everybody. I think that’s why he wanted to be the king. I mean, because bad Scar shouldn’t be the king, Mufasa became the king.” Haana added, “That Scar couldn’t become a king...uh-um...I know that is unfair. But Scar was *really* bad. He did many bad things to his brother. But Mufasa was nice. So he [Mufasa] was chosen to become the king. Everyone [in the movie] thought that Scar was so bad and it would be good to have Mufasa as the king. (Interview summary)

In this discussion, showing her uncertainty about the selection of a king, Narim started to speak of the qualities a king-to-be should have. According to Narim, Scar could not be a king because of his “bossing around everybody.” In other words, Scar’s eagerness of reigning over others was considered his only reason for being a king. As a result, since it was necessary not to allow the “bad scar” to be a king, there could be only one lion, Mufasa, who could be the king. Another girl, Haana, agreed with Narim. Even though Haana clearly recognized that Scar’s ineligibility to be king was “unfair,” Scar’s evil personality made Haana avoid considering him qualified to be a king. Haana emphasized the disqualifications of Scar to be a king by pointing out that “everyone” in the movie was dissatisfied with him.

The other girls also emphasized Scar’s bad personality when talking about who could be a king in *The Lion King*. As Kaain explicitly noted:

Scar shouldn’t be a king because his friends were the [bad] hyenas. He [Scar] hung around bad animals so he wasn’t qualified to be the king. The king has to be good and think a lot about his people. But Scar didn’t do that from the beginning [of the movie]. I think that’s why he wasn’t qualified to become a king.

These girls, then, concluded that Scar’s evil personality was a pivotal factor in preventing him from becoming a king because “if so [that is, if bad Scar became a king], every servant and all the other people would have suffered,” as Sunjoo put it.

From this point of view, someone’s disadvantage in attempting to become a sovereign tended to be rationalized or justified based on his or her disqualifications—for example, a bad personality. In other words, a flaw in someone’s personality was intimately seen as a major cause of his or her lower social standing. As a result, these

girls' association of Scar's "bad" personality with his "unfair" position in his society confirms Sleeter's (1993) argument about analyzing unequal social structure: these girls conceptualized that lower social status was the result of an individual's inadequacy. In other words, there was no need to take into account any other social factors such as "the distribution of resources" among people or "the ideology of equal opportunity" (Sleeter, 1993, p. 158).

However, in spite of the fact that a good king could rule well, one of these girls was not still sure of who could become a king, confessing her uncertain knowledge about such a question. A discussion with Jisoo revealed her hard time in finding appropriate answers for that question.

When I asked about Scar in the movie, Jisoo said, "He was a little mean. And he wanted to become a king because his brother was already a king." I asked her again, "Why do you think Scar couldn't become a King? Can only a special lion or a special person become a King or can anyone become a King?" Jisoo answered, "[Laughs] No! Not anyone. But...I don't know exactly who can be one [a king]. He [Scar] was a little bad and wants to kill people [animals] in the movie...and he got jealous and tried to become a King. That's why [Scar could not be a king]. I think a king is a good person." When I said, "Oh, then a good person has to become a King?" Jisoo replied, "Not really. [Long pause] I don't know. Because...[kings are] sometimes good persons but sometimes not. I really...don't know [smiles]." (Interview summary)

Jisoo's confusion about who could be a king was clear in this conversation. Even though she certainly knew why not all people could be a king, she was not able to explain why a particular being—in this case, a lion, Mufasa—could be a king but not another one—namely, Scar. She attempted to figure out the answer by pointing out Scar's bad, unattractive personality, but she finally failed to produce a logical explanation of why

there were some kings who were bad like Scar. Like Jisoo, several girls in this study could not completely figure out the mechanism of social hierarchy and power by means of the explanation of a bad personality.

Some of the girls did have another reason why only Mufasa could be a king in the movie: Mufasa had strong physical power. Their responses appeared when Joona revealed her opinions in a discussion:

The other animals [those other than lions] couldn't become the king, because they couldn't fight the lion and win. And Scar couldn't either because Mufasa was *much* stronger than him. If an animal could bit the lion, then he could be the king. To become the king, that animal has to be very strong because he should protect the other people and...the country, too. That's what a king does.

The fact that a strong lion, Mufasa, was a king seemed to be convicting to Joona because no other animals were able to win a fight with the lion in reality. In a similar vein, Joona did not regard Scar as a great king since his weak physical strength could not accomplish the king's responsibility to "protect the other people and the country." Jisoo also had a similar thought. She pointed out such a perspective more distinctly in our dialogue:

The other animals aren't naturally supposed to be a king and the lion is the king in the animal world. I've heard...seen somewhere, like *The World of Animals* or something like that on [Korean] TV, that the lion is the king of all animals...because it's the strongest. So both in the story I've heard and in the movie *The Lion King*, lions are kings. Then... 'cause this [*The Lion King*] is an animal story, I just thought that only lions became a king and the other animals couldn't do that [become a king].

It was obvious, for Jisoo, that only lions could be kings because they are apparently "the king in the animal world." Her idea stemmed not from her imagination but from her learning from a TV documentary. As a matter of fact, there is a TV documentary

program, called, “*The World of Animals*” in Korea, and Jisoo seemed to recall such a program that she had watched before. Thus, her knowledge of the law of the jungle, in which the weak are the prey of the strong, tended to allow Jisoo to conclude that a lion’s becoming king in *The Lion King* was reasonable and “natural.” As a result, she did not really wonder why some other animal could not be king.

### **What Does a Princess Look Like?: The Nationality of a Princess**

Some of the young participants indicated that they had not seriously thought of the question of what ethnicity or nationality the princesses in the films should have. They said that they did not exactly know the princesses’ nationalities or ethnicities. For example, Joon and Yuri, who were the youngest of my informants, disclosed their uncertainty by saying, “I don’t really know, but ... lots of Koreans are pretty [as Disney female characters are pretty]. My mom is pretty. And I’m pretty. And my acting class teacher is pretty and she is American,” and “I don’t really know. Isn’t she [Ariel] an ocean person? She looks Korean, too...I don’t know.”

In spite of these younger girls’ insufficient understanding of a Disney princess’ ethnicity or nationality, such a question seemed not to make my informants as confused the questions about the process of becoming a king. This was so, in part, because they had already formulated certain criteria by means of which a princess’s nationality was estimated. First of all, several girls assumed that a princess’s ethnicity was based on certain physical racial features, such as the eyes, hair, and skin color. For instance, Haana denied that Ariel could be an Asian because of her “red hair color,” which is not a

physical trait of Asians; according to her, “Most Asians have black or brown hair.” Jisoo and Ahjin had a similar perspective in a discussion of *The Little Mermaid*.

Jisoo started to say that “They don’t look Korean...But I haven’t thought about it because...The Little Mermaid and Ursula weren’t people. But if we were to think them as people, the Little Mermaid looks like white. Ursula’s a little dark, so I don’t think she would be white.” Ahjin added, “I don’t really know about it. They look Korean, or maybe they’re Americans. But I think Snow White really looked Korean. Her eyes were black and so is her hair.” Jisoo commented, “Most Koreans have dark eyes but the Little Mermaid didn’t, so her eyes didn’t make her look like a Korean. But she looked Korean a lot of the time, too, when she was doing something or just...when I saw her in the movie. But I think Belle looked Korean. Her eyes are dark and so was the color of her hair.” (Interview summary)

For Jisoo, thinking about the ethnicity of Ariel or Ursula was not easy because they were not “people.” Therefore, the species of both tended to lead her to avoid deliberating on the question of their nationalities. But even when she assumed both Ariel and Ursula were human, their ethnicities were still confusing to Jisoo. The point is that, in spite of the fact that Jisoo often considered Ariel a Korean “when she was doing something or just when I [Jisoo] saw her in the movie,” Ariel’s nationality was not completely supported by her physical traits—for example, her skin color and that of her eyes were not typical Koreans’ physical attributions. Therefore, a princess’ ethnicity became more complicated when some of her behaviors and her general figure did not completely correspond to her physical features. From this standpoint, Snow White and Belle were seen to look like Koreans by these two girls in that they had brown or black hair and eyes, which are typical Korean features.



Another factor that helped my informants understand the princesses' ethnicities was the particulars of each film, for instance, the origins of the stories (*Beauty and the Beast* is a French folktale and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is a Western folktale), styles of architectures (there is a Western castle in *Beauty and The Beast* and an Islamic palace in *Aladdin*), major spaces of the film scenes (the sea in *The Little Mermaid* and the desert in *Aladdin*), use of language (English in *The Little Mermaid* and French in *Beauty and The Beast*), and types of clothing (Korean traditional clothes, Han-Bok, in Korean folktales and Western evening dresses in Disney films). Minhee, for example, clearly discussed some of these factors:

Cinderella looked like she's from Europe and Snow White was from Europe, too, because they were wearing European dresses. And Belle looked French...the Little Mermaid looked like...she came from the Pacific Ocean! [Laughs] But these Disney stories are not Korean made-up stories. They are all foreign stories. So the people or princesses can't be Koreans. (Interview summary)

At first, Minhee talked about the possible nationality of each Disney heroine based on several factors mentioned above. But later, she revealed another perspective in which all the Disney heroines could not be Koreans. That is to say, the clothing, language, and background of a movie did not convince Minhee in determining a Disney heroine's nationality, since she was sure that "These Disney stories are not Korean made-up stories."

It is important to note here that during their discussions of a princess's nationality in a Disney film, my informants did not point out or complain about the fact that there was not a Korean princess in any of the Disney films. Their different perspectives were

disclosed when I asked if they liked another Disney animated film, *Mulan*, because of its Chinese heroine, or if they wanted to have some Korean princesses in Disney films, which did not include any Korean protagonists. Sunjoo calmly said, “Mulan was from China, not Korea. So she wasn’t a Korean. I don’t have any reason why I have to like it [the movie, *Mulan*] more than any others [other movies] because of it [Mulan’s ethnicity]. And even if she [Mulan] were a Korean, she couldn’t be me.” Minhee agreed, saying, “We [Minhee and Sunjoo] are not Chinese. Koreans and Chinese are very different. We [Koreans and Chinese] are not the same.” Put differently, these two girls did not highly value Mulan’s Asian racial background, which was similar to their own. Rather, they did not find any similarity between the Chinese girl, Mulan, and Korean girls, themselves. Since it was clear to them that “Koreans and Chinese are very different,” there was no particular reason why they should like *Mulan* more than many other films “because of it [Mulan’s ethnicity].”

In fact, the movie *Mulan* is often seen as Disney’s attempt to portray a different race—in this case, Asians—than that of whites in order to provide another positive racial model for audiences—mostly, children. Such portrayals may also be Disney’s response to severe critiques, in which Disney’s cultural bias toward certain ethnic representations has been blamed for its tendency to make children keep on learning and internalizing its inappropriate characterization of different ethnicities (see “Race and Social Class” in the Chapter I, pp. 35-39). However, for my informants, Mulan’s Asian racial makeup was not significant, in allowing them to identify or bond with Mulan. Put more concretely, if Disney anticipated representing all Asians—and thus, seeing all Asian markets as

“lucrative” (Entertainment weekly, 1998)—by means of a Chinese girl, *Mulan*, it could be interpreted as another socio-cultural paradigm of American society in which ignorance of diverse Asian ethnicities was manifested. This is so because, in the film, Asian ethnicities and their different cultural features were mashed into one category, “Asians,” and were thus generalized as the same, which was what Kibria (2000) has called “the racialization of ethnicity” (p. 81). My point is that my informants’ unique Korean nationality, ethnicity, or culture disappeared in *Mulan*, in which Disney’s possible assumption was revealed: all Asians are similar. However, the film, *Mulan*, seemed to fail to arouse my informants’ sympathy; instead, their responses to a Disney heroine were likely to be more complicated and philosophical than Disney might expect, because the responses were inevitably entangled with their views of each person’s different self, which will be more addressed later in this chapter.

Furthermore, two girls, Minhee and Sunjoo, emphasized Korean women’s beauty when talking about the absence of a Korean princess in Disney films:

Minhee said, “I think the mermaid is pretty but she looks...like...different from Koreans’. The mermaid princess doesn’t really look like a Korean. She is like a European. You know it is like...they [Korean women] are Koreans, not Japanese, Americans or Europeans. I mean...Koreans are better. They are smart and pretty.” I asked Minhee again why she thought of Ariel as a European. Then she answered, “Because...all fancy over there! The place [in the film] is...the room, the table, and the princes’ and princesses’ clothes...those are all fancy. All fancy things are European things, not Korean things. Koreans...can be really fancy only with like...special clothes.” Sunjoo added, “Yes, they [Koreans] are not that fancy but royal!” “That’s right. Being royal is much, much better [than being fancy]. The most I like is just normal,” Minhee said. Sunjoo commented, “But fancy clothes look good on the Little Mermaid. But royal clothes, like Han-Bok [Korean traditional clothes], don’t look very good on her.”

“That [Han-Bok] is traditional...very traditional. Being traditional is very important, because not every country has a long tradition like us...I mean. ..Korea, it is a very special thing. Even America doesn’t have it,” Minhee said. (Interview summary)

Minhee noticed that Ariel looks like a Caucasian even though she could not precisely explain how Ariel looks different from other ethnic people, such as Asians. In spite of her vague perception, one reason why Minhee thought of Korean women as “better” than any other ethnic women is obvious: they are “smart and pretty.” This positive response to Korean women was closely related to her nationalism. A strong belief in Korea as a royal country with a long tradition, which “even American doesn’t have,” allowed these two girls not only to have ardent pride in her country, Korea and its people. As a matter of fact, her evaluation of Korea is one of emphases in educational and political discourse in Korea, for it gives Koreans a sense of patriotism and preserves Korean culture and ethnicity. In particular, Korea’s long, glorious tradition has always been mentioned in important texts in elementary education, such as “Educational Constitution for Koreans,” and textbooks of history and social studies.

Moreover, whenever Korea has a national difficulty, the idea of Korean people’s strong will to survive throughout its long history is politically embossed in order to encourage Koreans to get through the hardship. For example, Koreans have often been reminded of one of their examples, Korean economic growth in the 1960s to 1970s—the so-called, “Miracle of Han River.” And when they had an economic crisis in 1997, an emphasis on their past survival appeared again in Korean society so as to reinforce Koreans’ strong sense of community, which has been handed down from generation to

generation for a long time as a great national quality (Hankyora Shinmoon [Hankyora Daily Newspaper], January 1998, August 1998; Kong, 1998). As a result, such an emphasis on Korea's long, glorious tradition has already begun to develop in Minhee, who is a former first grader in a Korean elementary school. Such an emphasis might lead her to adopt an ethnocentric perspective.

As a result of such patriotic attitudes, Minhee and Sunjoo's ethnocentric point of view was revealed. Even though they thought that being "royal" was better than being "fancy," these two girls could not completely explain why. To them, Korean women's superiority and Koreans' excellence were just there as truths. Therefore, instead of enumerating particular reasons to support her ideas of Koreans' superiority, Minhee only emphasized the great ethnic traits of Koreans by simply describing them as "Koreans, not Japanese, Americans or Europeans."

### **A Princess' Marriage Barriers**

A Disney princess' romantic love often ended in marriage. Such marriage was intertwined not only with social classes, but also with gender in various ways. This question of why a princess wanted to get married allowed my informants to reflect two aspects of marriage: the princess' views on her love and those of others on her marriage. In this section, therefore, I examine my informants' perspectives on marriage by looking closely at their thoughts about the external factors that influenced a princess' marriage in Disney films. Since my informants mostly discussed two films, *The Little Mermaid* and *Aladdin* in which two heroines were eager to marry, this section focuses on my

participants' points of view of the two films just mentioned. In addition, I discuss how a princess' marriage is presented as compared to that of a prince's marriage in Disney films.

### **Different Body and Different Place: Princess Ariel's Problems**

In discussing the serious impediments to Ariel's marriage, my informants first pointed out her different physical or ecological status from that of human beings. According to them, Ariel's marriage to a human, who is a different species, was considered very dangerous because humans were "fish eaters."<sup>6</sup> As a result, Sunjoo told me that "I...know why the Little Mermaid's dad told the Little Mermaid not to marry a human. Because the Little Mermaid is a fish and a human is a *fish eater*! That's why her dad did it [said] like that." The opposition of Ariel's father to her marriage was understandable to Sunjoo in that humans often eat fishes, including Ariel, half of whose body was fishlike. This perspective was more clearly revealed by Youri:

When people [humans] saw her [Ariel], what if they killed her? They could eat her because she was a fish...I mean...the lower part of her body ...like this area [indicating her waist line to her feet], that was a fish! She has a fish tail. (Interview summary)

The concept of humans as "fish eaters" in the film seemed to be very convincing to these girls in thinking about the possible prohibition of Ariel's marriage to a human. Like these two girls, most girls in this study also supposed that it would be difficult for Ariel to marry a human being because of his characteristics as a fish eater.

Moreover, some girls argued that Ariel's different body structure would be a tremendous problem for Ariel in trying to live "on land." Joona, for instance, told me such a point of view in a discussion:

I think...her [Ariel's] dad didn't want her to meet a human on land because mermaids can't breathe if they go on land. They're half fish! But Ariel didn't know that [that she couldn't breathe on land] and...kept trying to go.

In this narrative, Joona was concerned about whether Ariel could live on land or not because Ariel "couldn't breathe" out of the water. Like Joona, several girls said that it would be impossible for Ariel to live on land because of such a breathing problem and also because she had no legs. As a result, for my informants, the prohibition of Ariel's marriage with a man was not simply related to her romantic love; rather, it was a serious matter, which had to do with Ariel's life and death. As matter of fact, according to some scholars (Kaplan, 1983; Murphy, 1995; Sells, 1995), Ariel's becoming human was not only painless, but also without apparent cost in the Disney film, because Ariel apparently regained her voice at the end of the film. However, my informants did not consider Ariel's becoming human easy (see "Gender" in Chapter I, pp. 31-35 and also the note, pp. 62-63). Instead, the difference in her physical body was a more complicated matter which was difficult to resolve.

In a related matter, having such a different physical body from humans' created another obstacle for Ariel—living in a different place. The different living environment must be considered in Ariel's marriage with a human, because a different way of living can be traumatic in adjusting a person's new life. Heesun expressed her opinions:

The Little Mermaid didn't know much about the human world. Remember how she combed her hair with a fork [in a scene when she met Prince Eric and had dinner with him in his palace in the movie]? This kind of thing [behavior] would look very strange to humans. She would be teased and have no friends...and the prince [Eric] might not like her, either. You know...[a frown on her face] she could be so weird to him. It would be very hard for her to fit in [the human way of living] because the sea and the human world were so, so different. I think that's why her dad told her not to meet humans." (Interview summary)

Therefore, drawing on a particular movie scene, Heesun pointed out Ariel's ignorance and naïveté in living in the human world in this discussion. Based on such a scene, Heesun insisted that Ariel's unfamiliarity with human life probably caused such problems as "being teased and having no friends." Heesun also expressed her apprehension about Prince Eric's attitude toward Ariel. Heesun's concern had to do with the fact that Ariel's love might be influenced by her lack of acquaintance with the way in which humans lived. Put differently, according to Heesun, since Ariel had not been assimilated into the human world, she would possibly be seen as "so weird" to Prince Eric, who was obviously accustomed to that world. Therefore, unlike Murphy's (1995) argument, in which Prince Eric was expected to "treat Ariel to the joys of colonial assimilation" without "any possibility of a problem arising" (p. 133), Heesun believed that living under the sea or on land was not the only problem confronting the lovers. Rather, it was the fact that people were often emotionally or mentally different from each other.

Heesun's interpretations of Ariel's hard life were quite different from those of Sells (1995). Sells asserts that, as a symbol for Ariel's lack of independence and autonomy in the male social system, such a different physical body can only be considered a hardship for Ariel. Therefore, only Ariel should change her physical



attributes in the film—in this case, change her fins in order to get legs, which would allow her to have the “mobility” to enter male society. However, my informants’ perspectives on the difference in the physical nature of mermaids and humans did not have to do only with Ariel’s problem, but also with that of the Prince Eric: that is to say, these girls’ idea was also related to one of reasons why Prince Eric could not live in Ariel’s sea world. Another girl, Narim, also argued that “it would be okay to bring him [Prince Eric] into the ocean. [Raising her voice] But the prince couldn’t breathe if he was under the water! He couldn’t swim and there would be sharks, too!” Since it was not possible for humans to breathe in water, many girls of my study considered that Prince Eric, who was a human being, would not be able to live under water. As a result, as my informants saw the matter, Prince Eric would have the same kind of problem that Ariel had: he would be expected to have fins and gills instead of legs and lungs in order to be “mobile” and live under the sea. These girls’ various thoughts about Prince Eric’s living under the sea will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

My informants’ considerations seemed to be even more clearly revealed when they focused on Ariel’s fishlike features than her human ones. This emphasis on Ariel’s fishlike features may derived from the fact that, as some girls put it, “Ariel is more like a fish, because she lived under water.” As a matter of fact, in understanding the idea of a concept of mermaid, my informants seemed to interpret a mermaid as an organism which could talk and think, as humans do. But the difference between mermaids and humans was that the former lived in the sea. Jisoo precisely disclosed such a point of view by saying, “They [mermaids] and people are the same. Even if they are [fishlike] mermaids,

they talk. They talk and people talk, too. But they [mermaids] just live in a different place [from humans’].”

Ariel’s difficult situation also included her powerlessness in the human world as well. According to Jisoo, Ariel could suffer from her lack of access to the economic and political resources which she was used to as a princess in sea world. As she put it, “But here [in human world], she wasn’t a princess any more, her dad wasn’t with her any more, and, and...there is no witch and no magic stuff. She had to live as just a normal people did.” In other words, there was nothing on land that Ariel could rely on, such as her father or even the “witch.” As a result, Ariel was not seen by Jisoo as a person who could depend on either her father or her lover. Rather, for Jisoo, Ariel should stand alone as “a normal people” because she was excluded from the kingdoms of both her father and Prince Eric. Even though it would be doubtful to conclude that by such exclusion Ariel had spontaneously gained “independence,” Ariel was not portrayed by Jisoo in the exactly same way in which some scholars (e.g., Giroux, 1995a, 1999; Kaplan, 1983; Trute, 1991) have depicted—namely, by denouncing her continual dependence on a male. Put another way, Jisoo did not consider Ariel primarily a royal female, who was handed down from a male—her father, Triton—to another male—Prince Eric, and thus, always being under “male protection” (Trites, 1991, p. 146). Instead, Ariel was expected to encounter and endure any hardship without any others’ help or shelter in order to make a life for herself in a different world.

Like Heesun, one of the other girls, Kaain, deliberated on the possibility that Ariel would have a hard life in the human world by calling on a personal experience as an example of how difficult living in an unfamiliar place was. She said to me:

Think about this. Even within the human world, there are many different countries and...people live very differently in those countries. So it's not easy at all to go to another country and live there. Then...imagine how different the sea world and the human world would be...and how difficult Ariel's life would be. When I first came here [the United States], it was a little hard, because I couldn't speak [English] very well like I do Korean. And...I didn't have any friends here. But my case was a little different from Ariel's because my mom and dad had already told me that it would be very hard [to live in the United States]. So I started learning English before I left Korea. I think that made it less difficult. I studied English really hard after I came here. But nobody told her [Ariel] how tough her life would be and Ariel didn't prepare anything to live there [in the human world], either. And, and...my parents also had some friends here and there were some Korean kids at school, so I wasn't totally out of place from the beginning. But Ariel didn't have any mermaid friends on land so she could be [totally out of place from the beginning when she was going to live on land]. It would be very difficult at the beginning [to live in the human world] even though it could be better after that. I had, too [that is, Kaain also had a difficult time at the beginning when living in the United States]. But now it is okay. (Interview summary)

Kaain supported Heesun's analogy of the differences between "the sea world and human world" by speaking of the problem at living in "many different countries." The point is that an individual should not have an "easy" life when a person leaves his or her homeland and moves to another, even in this "human world." From this perspective, Kaain understood that Ariel's life would be more difficult than that of many others who had merely moved to different places on land. When imagining Ariel's life in the human world, Kaain reflected on her past when she came to the United States. She confessed to having some problems adjusting to American life, and in speaking English and having

friends. As we understood earlier, Kaain considered such problems probable ones for Ariel. According to Kaain, however, Ariel's life might turn out much worse than Kaain saw it turning out because Ariel "didn't prepare anything" to live in human world and did not know "how tough her life would be." Moreover, Ariel could be completely isolated from her former life and people in that there would not be any mermaids on land. From this standpoint, Kaain supposed that Ariel, who seemed to be "totally out of place" and have no connections with her previous life, might have a laborious time in adapting herself to her new circumstances particularly at the beginning. Similarly, recalling their past experiences in the United States, a couple of girls in this study also supposed that Ariel's life in the human world would be difficult, just as theirs had been. In this way, by comparing their experiences with those of Ariel, my informants attempted to infer Ariel's difficult situation in the human world.

### **Social Expectations and the Family Situation: Princess Jasmine's Obstacles**

During discussions of Princess Jasmine's marriage, most girls, first, pointed out the unique legal system of "Agraba," which was the name of country where Princess Jasmine lived. These girls explained such a law based on a scene from the movie that they precisely recalled. For instance, when I asked why the Sultan, Jasmine's father, wanted Jasmine to get married, Narim firmly answered, "Because there was a law in that country, and the law said that she had to get married by the time she's sixteen years old." Haana added to Narim's explanation by saying, "And that law also said that she had to marry only a prince. But she had only three days left before her [sixteenth] birthday."

Such a discussion of this law was extended to my informants' historical perspectives on women's marriage, because *Aladdin* is a story from in the past. Since Jasmine's love was not linked to her marriage just like that of ancient princesses who lived "long time ago," these girls assumed that the story of *Aladdin* should not be present. In this way, Minhee attributed the discordance of Jasmine's love in marriage to the general tendency of past marital tradition to be marriages of convenience. Due to the main current of marriage at that time, as Minhee argued, Princess Jasmine was expected to marry a prince regardless of how "fat or ugly" he was. From this point of view, such a traditional law in society was considered a huge obstruction by my informants. This was the case, in part, because they understood that it was not easy to amend social laws even when they were "unfair," as Haana argued.

In addition, my informants often mentioned Jasmine's family situation as another impediment: she did not have mother or siblings. They pointed out that such an absence was an important reason why her father would want her to get married soon. Sunjoo articulately commented on this:

He [the Sultan] tried to get Jasmine married because she was gonna be lonely. Jasmine's dad loved her and so wanted her to get married and live happily with a family. Jasmine didn't have any sisters. Her mom's gone, too. And after her dad dies, she will be left all alone to live by herself but that would be too hard for her.

As Sunjoo argued, living alone in this world without any family would be "lonely" and "hard" for Jasmine. Like Sunjoo, several other girls assumed that Jasmine would have to live alone without any family because she had no mother or siblings in the film. From this perspective, they considered marriage a positive mechanism with which the princess

could have a new family member. As a result, they thought that the Sultan wanted her to marry because of his apprehension about her future. The importance of a family was applicable not only to ordinary people's lives but also to members of royalty because everyone would "feel lonely" without a family. Ahjin integrated such a point of view:

If you live only by yourself...it's scary. You don't have to get married, but it's nice to live with someone you love...because, later, after your mom and dad die...So when you have to live all alone, it will get really sad and lonely. So I think it would be really good to have someone I like when there's no family around me.

According to my informants, then, if Jasmine already had other family members, her father would not be trying to force her to marry. In sum, it is true that her father's attempting to force her into marriage was seen by my participants as an obstacle of Jasmine's own ideal of marriage, but it was still considered a reasonable way of having her own family for her future life.

### **Self-sacrificing Princess and Self-interested Prince: Gender in Marriage**

While my informants made a point about some of the obstacles to a princess' marriage in Disney movies, I found that they had quite different interpretations of a prince's marriage. When talking about Prince Eric's marriage in *The Little Mermaid*, for example, these girls thought that Prince Eric wanted to marry a person who saved him from drowning. Sunjoo told me: "The prince wanted to marry the woman that saved him. He wanted to marry her because...he thought it [saving him] was a really great thing and he wanted to show how much he appreciated her." Put another way, Prince Eric's marriage stemmed from his eagerness to express his appreciation to the person who saved

him. In addition, some girls understood the reason for his marriage as being certain physical traits of female characters, such as a pretty face and beautiful voice, as I discussed in Chapter IV (see “Pretty Face and Weird Body,” pp. 150-155). Prince Eric’s sole problem tended to result from himself, not other factors, in that he did not recall who actually had the voice that he had heard. Unlike in their discussion of princesses’ marriages, therefore, external factors were not mentioned by informants as regards Prince Eric’s marriage: he did not have to neither marry a princess nor get married because of unfair law. He could marry merely according to his will.

From this perspective, as Murphy (1995) articulately points out, the reason for Ursula’s taking Ariel’s voice away from her was very obvious for Sunjoo: Ursula did not want Prince Eric to recognize Ariel’s voice, because Prince Eric’s love attributed to “a single attribute” (p. 132). Therefore, such a perspective of Ariel’s losing voice was understood mostly from Ursula’s point of view for ultimately having power. In this way, for some of the other girls in this study, Ariel’s loss of her voice is different from some scholars’ insistence in which the deprivation of Ariel’s voice was merely interpreted as a female sacrifice that would allow entrance into the male-dominated world (see “Gender” in Chapter II, pp. 31-35). Put differently, the girls in my study regarded that it was not closely related to the relationships between Ariel and Prince Eric, but intended by Ursula who wanted rule the sea world instead of Triton by means of Ariel.

The lack of external obstacles to a prince’s getting married was more clearly shown during these girls’ conversations about *Aladdin*. In particular, many girls understood that there were two major reasons for Aladdin’s marriage: Jasmine’s physical

attractiveness and Aladdin's desire to be a king. One girl, Joona, precisely disclosed these points of view by saying that:

Aladdin thought Jasmine is so pretty so he liked her. That's why he wanted to marry her. And if he married her, he became a king and that's so good! [Raising her voice] And Jafar wanted to become the king so he wanted to marry Jasmine, too. And even before Aladdin met Jasmine, he saw the palace and said he wanted to live there and...he could [live in the palace] if he married Jasmine!

Like some girls' perspectives on Prince Eric's marriage—I examined them in the previous chapter—Joona thought that Aladdin's marriage was the result of Jasmine's good looks. However, Aladdin had another reason for his marriage with Jasmine: “becoming a king.” Remembering one of Aladdin's scripts, Joona exactly pointed out Aladdin's initial desire to be rich, to live “in the palace,” which was the case “even before Aladdin met Jasmine.” Kaain had the same opinion as Joona: “Maybe Aladdin wanted to marry Jasmine more because she was a princess and rich. Because if he married a rich princess, he wouldn't be a ‘street rat’ any more and he had no problem at all to live.”

From this perspective, like Prince Eric, Aladdin was not seen as having any serious social impediments in the area of marriage in my informants' discussions. Even though he was a “street rat” who would not be allowed to marry a princess, such a socio-economic plight tended to be solved by my informants because Aladdin had the Genie, who made him a prince with his magical power in the film. His marriage was motivated mostly by his own intention to “be rich.” As a result, a male's marriage in Disney films seemed to be pursued based on his own decision and desire, regardless of his social class whereas marriage for a female often required the compromise and the sacrifice of her



needs. Hence, a man was not interrupted by external obstacles such as his living place, his family situation, or even his socio-economic status, all of which were considered tremendous hardships for royal female characters in the Disney movies. In this way, as some scholars, such as Jeffords (1995) and Giroux (1997) have already made a point (see “Gender” in Chapter I, pp. 31-35), my informants viewed that a man in Disney films was seen to use marriage as stepping-stone to improve his social environment.

Such an outlook on a man’s marriage can be also found in the Beast in *Beauty and the Beast*. As Narim noted, “The real answer [of the question of why the Beast wanted to marry Belle] is that the Beast wanted to break the spell [which made him turn into a hideous beast] and become human again.” Haana and Narim admitted that “the Beast kind of used Belle” hoping that “the spell can be broken” by her. Even though the two girls argued that using Belle for breaking the spell was “not necessarily bad” because, “It [staying with and loving the Beast] was her own choice,” the Beast’s initial intention of using Belle for his survival was too obvious for them to ignore.

As a result, it is remarkable that Disney heroines were understood by the girls in my study to have social or physical obstacles in getting married regardless of the extent to which they were royal or rich. Moreover, they were seen to be easily turned into tools for males’ needs for and interests in improvement of their lives. In this regard, a female’s socio-economic status in Disney films was not significantly influential either in their getting married by their own free will or in preventing themselves from being degraded as a simple means in a man’s life. Rather, for the Disney heroines, the matter of gender

was prior to that of social class, and thus they were born merely to be used by their male counterparts.

### **From Marriage in Disney Films to Gender Inequality in Reality**

My informants' discussion of Disney's different portrayals of marriage led some of them to reflect on certain real social phenomena. One of discussions of *Aladdin*, by Narim and Haana, clearly made their points of view about women's limited abilities and situations. Speaking of Jasmine's marriage, these two girls found that Pocahontas, in the Disney animated film *Pocahontas*, was in a situation similar to Jasmine's: both of them were forced to marry someone they did not love by their fathers. Thus, Narim asked: "Why can't every princess have her own way in marriage?" Smiling, Haana quickly answered, "They [princesses] can marry men they love and do everything if a rule can be changed. There is a rule, Narim. Only a man can be or do something [according to the rule]!" Making a face, Narim cried, "Haana! That wouldn't be fair!" Haana confirmed both princesses' unfair situations in marriage in detail and but went even further to argue that "there is a rule" which says "only men can do":

I know [their situations are not fair]. But that's the rule. Have you ever seen a president that's a woman? There's a chart of all of the previous American presidents in my class, but I see only men, men, men. It is very hard even to be a woman vice-president. So a woman can't become the president.

In order to support her idea of the "rule" in this conversation, Haana had given an example of "a chart of all of the previous American presidents in my [her] class," which did not include any women, but "only men, men, men." According to Haana, women

could not “do everything” because of the “rule” that definitely determined women’s paths and destinations, which were different from those of men in society. In this regard, for Haana, society itself was seen as an obstacle not only to females’ getting married but also their pursuing different kinds of goals. Jasmine’s marriage in *Aladdin* was therefore looked upon simply as one instance of various social impediments which women would have to face throughout their lives.

After Haana made her point, the two girls started to reflect on why such an unfair rule existed. Then, Narim expressed her idea:

I know why a woman can’t become the president now. If a woman was the president...uh-um, [opening her eyes big and raising her voice] they [would] have to do too much! They [would] have to have babies and raise them and...have to cook, too. It is just too much for them!

Like some of the girls in discussion of *The Lion King*, Narim presumed that women’s domestic duties were a critical reason for women’s being unable to be presidents. To Narim, who had a new baby sister at that time, “to have babies, raise them, and cook” were considered the first priorities for women. Thus, serving in another role, such as being president, was “too much” for a woman, like her mother, because she already had a lot of work to do at home.

Haana, who listened to Narim’s opinions, commented: “Or maybe...[the reason why women can’t be president is] like in *The Lion King*, [in which] males are older than females. So...they [the males] are going to be a president.” This narrative perhaps reveals one of Haana’s assumptions: “males are older than females,” at least in marriage. In effect, what she is saying is that age is crucial in Korean culture in determining a

person's authority or people's subordinate relationships. Therefore, both girls' fathers were older than their mothers, so it was not odd for Haana that an older father should be considered the head of a family. It is true that *The Lion King* did not give any clear indication of the ages of the lions and lionesses, but Haana just assumed that, as her father was older than her mother, lions like Mufasa and Scar were seen to be older than the lioness Sarabi. For Haana, as for many girls, age seemed to explain why Sarabi did not rule her country in the film (see "Who Becomes a King and Who Chooses Him?" in this chapter, pp. 198-203). The fact that the rulers at home, in society and in the world were the males, not females, was understood as natural and convincing to the informants.

Moreover, Haana provided another possible reason why there were only male presidents, saying that "Even though she [a female] could [be a president], I think it would be very hard after becoming [a president], too. Because girls don't know army stuff! If there will be a war, it can't be that the president doesn't know things about the military." Listening to Haana's logic throughout this discussion, I could not help but interject at this point by asking, "Can't women learn those military things?" Then, looking at me and laughing, Haana said:

Then I guess it'll be okay, Aunt Lena. But it [army stuff] is hard and boring [to learn] to us [women]. [Pause] I don't know...then maybe...we can do it. But I am still not sure if we can because, you know, we have a rule [which says that there is something that only men can do]. I don't know...I don't know if I can still become the president. I just want to be an actress. It [becoming an actress] would be much better. (Interview summary)

Talking about female awareness of "army stuff," Haana's argument, at first, seemed to be moving from social prejudice toward women to the insufficient ability of women

themselves. Their lack of military knowledge, for example, was seen as proving women's disqualification for being a president in that, according to Haana, full capacity to deal with "a war" was very important for the president and women did not have that capacity. When I interrupted her with the question about the possibility of women's learning, however, she returned to the issue of the social inequality of women in the narrative above by saying "I am still not sure if we can because, you know, we have a rule."

Considering Haana's responses, it was certain that she was aware of the gender inequality that has been embedded in society. By attributing women's lack of equality to social hegemony—which Haana has described as "a rule," she did not deny what women's reality looked like. In spite of her awareness of social unfairness, however, Haana could not completely cope with that reality by actively attempting to change it. Instead, she might try to avoid the reality by having available, possible aspiration, which was "becoming an actress." Even to Haana, who was one of the most knowledgeable, intelligent, and assertive girls in this study, women's competent abilities and their qualifications for solving problems were still uncertain. Reflecting on her and her ideas, I still doubt that she lived with the so-called "mauvaise foi [bad faith]," trying to hide "a displeasing truth" or present truth as "a pleasing untruth" (Sartre, 1943, p. 89). Still did she try to force herself to justify or minimize her "displeasing" reality—her uncertainty about a possibility to be a president, in this case—as an individual choice or preference, namely, her view that being of an actress was "better" than being concerned with "military stuff"? Put a different way, isn't it possible that Haana saw her desire as a sole

impetus to “change everything” (Sartre, 1943, p. 89) in her life by concealing the actual truth? At any rate, Haana might confirm what the “right” and “true” reality (Yolen, 1983, p. 299) for young girls was once again by means of a Disney princess’s—namely, Princess Jasmine’s—marriage and her obstacles.

### **Familial Matters Relating a Princess’ Marriage from Children’s Perspectives**

One of important foci of my informants’ discussion of a princess’ marriage was families. For these girls, a person’s marriage could not be separately considered from his or her parents and siblings because their families and their families’ perspectives were highly valued in a person’s decision to get married. In addition, the idea of marriage led my informants to consider another issue—separation from their families—because they understood that marriage in Disney films was described as a life which was accomplished by living apart from one’s family—particularly, one’s parents. Here, then, I discuss these girls’ perspectives on family by focusing on parental love, which was represented in marriage. Moreover, I examine their concerns about separation from families that was caused by marriage.

### **Familial Love in a Princess’s Marriage**

In discussing princesses’ marriages, my informants pointed out some familial factors which were inevitably involved in these marriages in several different ways. Of such factors, parental love was frequently discussed by my informants. Such love was discussed in the girls’ conversations about Ariel’s marriage in *The Little Mermaid*. Their

understanding of this marriage was presented in a conversation between Youri and Joona about a film scene in which Triton was angry at Ariel and destroyed Ariel's entire collection of human artifacts because of her repeated contact with human world.

Youri said "He [Triton] broke Ariel's things because she kept trying to go up on land and meet humans even though it's very, very dangerous. So he got angry. And...it [that scene] was like...much scarier because of his trident [rather than himself]. He used it [his trident] to break everything. The trident was so powerful, so...it just broke everything." Joona also said, "Yeah, that's right. Ariel didn't know that and...kept trying to go. [Raising her voice] Her dad tried hard to tell her many, many times but she wouldn't listen, so he got mad and broke her things! My dad gets really mad and scary, too, if I keep not listening to him. When I just look at my dad at that time [wearing a tearful face and raising her voice], it is so scary and I'm just all tears. I once cried for 3 hours! And I should really listen to my dad, or he gets mad and it is really, really scary. But he's my dad so he can do that. It [his doing this] is for me! Ariel's dad did the same thing, like my dad [he, too, did it for Ariel]." (Interview summary)

When Youri thought of Triton's treatment of Ariel, she did not simply blame him for his severe, violent scolding of Ariel, which was strongly presented in the scene. Rather, Youri inferred the cause and effect relationship of Triton's reaction by thinking of why he would become so angry as to have taken such an action against Ariel. In other words, she analyzed Triton's response by integrating a certain source for his anger, namely, Ariel's careless behavior. Moreover, Youri attempted to attribute Triton's "scarier" action to his "trident," not to Triton himself. Therefore, the troubling violence of Triton's action derived merely from his using too strong a tool for rebuking Ariel. In this regard, the responsibility for his seemingly tyrannous reaction was transferred from Triton's original intention to do or his fastidious personality to his mistake of choosing "so powerful" a tool, which "broke everything."

Similarly, Joona admitted that Triton's action was very scary, she was not antagonistic to him; instead, she tried to understand him by comparing him to her father, who is "my [Joona's] dad so he can do that [get mad and scary]. It [his madness and scariness] is for me [Joona]." From Joona's standpoint, the punishment handed out by both her father and Ariel's father was interpreted as an expression of their love to their daughters. Moreover, like Joona, many of the other girls insisted that, since Triton loved his daughter Ariel, it was natural and indispensable for him to force Ariel to realize what was good for her and what was not.

From this perspective, Triton's harsh treatment of Ariel was not merely interpreted as his fault or his "abuse" (Trites, 1991, p. 150) of adult power. Instead, in order to fully understand Triton's action, one girl, Minhee, argued that Ariel "should have considered what was in his heart [why he had to do such an action]" since his doing initially stemmed from a concern for her safety, not his own. Minhee even caught a facial expression of Triton's sadness in the movie, so she criticized Ariel for her insufficient understanding of her father and his true intention. Triton's apparently tyrannical reaction toward his daughter Ariel, then, was understood as another form of parental love by these girls. The point is that these young Korean girls understood that parental interference and even reprimand were different ways of expressing parents' love and caring by having desire for their children to become good people. In short, since these girls understood their parents' intentions and expectations, which were sometimes conveyed by severe rebukes, they attempted to respect them.



These girls' thoughts about families and marriage reminded me of Ballenger's (1999) observations on Haitian culture. According to her study, severe scolding and punishment in Haiti, as in Korean culture, was a mechanism that affirmed parental affection, and thus enhanced the relationship between parents and children. From this standpoint, my informants thought that Ariel's father's "more stringent, controlling, and therefore, a more loving approach" could give a child "reason for doing something" (Gonzalez-Mena, 2001, p. 121). Unlike American children who perceived such controlling mostly as parental hostility and refusal, these Korean girls tended to understand the parent's rigid control as an indication of great parental caring with low neglect and as powerful impetus for shaping a child's good behavior (Kim & Choi, 1994; Rohner & Pettengill, 1985).<sup>3</sup> In other words, like many other Korean children, my informants saw a strict parental approach not simply as distrustful, excessive control, but as an indispensable factor for a child's successful future (Rohner & Pettengill, 1985).

Such a perspective was also found in discussions of Jasmine and her marriage in *Aladdin*. Haana spoke of parental love by concluding, "Later [at the end of the movie], Jasmine's dad [the Sultan] even changed the law so his daughter could marry the person that she really loved. He loved her that much." According to Haana, the Sultan's concerns about Jasmine's life were associated with his thoughtful effort to make her life better. From this standpoint, the Sultan's changing the marriage law, which will be discussed more later in this section, was seen as an attempt to allow Princess Jasmine to pursue her true love. Haana thus appreciated the Sultan's revision of the law by saying that "He loved her that much." Like Haana, some other informants pointed out his love

for Jasmine when they talked about her marriage. As Ahjin put it, “Her father [the Sultan] was really worried about her because...she would live without a family even after she is gonna get old.”

In this manner, for my informants, a princess’ individual needs, love, and freedom were not considered simply an individual’s matter. These values were extended to be shared that person’s family—Jasmine’s parent, in this case. From this perspective, these girls tended to understand a father’s objection to or disagreement with a princess’ love and her desire to marry in a Disney film not as an obstacle, which deprived her of her freedom or love. Instead, it was seen as an important way to protect her from possible danger or suffering.

Most of my informants did not completely accept or highly value Disney protagonists’ marriages by means of which Disney films have explicitly portrayed an American social value that individual choices and independent lives are always prior to many other values such as familial love. In other words, their different understanding of marriages in Disney films disclosed that Korean cultural influences, which have emphasized a person’s community life, seemed to impose on them more than those of American culture in which individualism has been strongly encouraged. In a related matter, these girls’ responses to marriages may imply that they would understand and accept parental involvement in their marriages. Considering current Korean society in which arrangement marriages are not unusual, this implication can be more plausible. Therefore, since they positively thought of their parents’ way of love and they considered

a person's marriage a familial matter not that of an individual, my informants may respect their parents' opinions and expectations in their marriages.

### **Marriage and Separation Anxiety from Family**

It is remarkable that many girls in this study emphasized the importance of family in talking about princesses' marriages. In a related matter, these girls explicitly stated their apprehensions about marriage life separate from their parents by placing themselves in the Disney princesses' situations. In particular, my informants' anxiety about separation from their families was intensified when they discussed the ending of *The Little Mermaid*. First of all, all of my informants described Ariel's leaving to get married as "sad" because it would be "separating [her] from her family." Even when these girls completely understood that Ariel's marriage was initiated by Ariel herself in the movie, her marriage was still seen as "sad" to them. Thus, Minhee insisted that "If I were Ariel, I would not marry that Prince. I'd rather...stay home because I don't wanna miss my family! My family is more important than that prince [laughs]." Heesun expressed the same kind of feeling:

If I were the Little Mermaid, I would just stay with mom and my family. [I would] Just send the boy [Prince Eric] away! There is a lot of other boys out there! Or I could just play with him in the playground or some place like that, and then, go home and stay with my family. I think that would be the best. Ariel married him [Prince Eric] because her father let her do that [marry]. [Ariel married her because] He [her father] made her legs at the end! If he didn't, she wouldn't marry him [Eric] and [would have] lived with her dad. But he allowed her to marry so she did it.  
(Interview summary)

To Heesun, Prince Eric was not the only person whom Heesun putting herself in Ariel's place could marry because "There are a lot of other boys out there." Therefore, Heesun did not have to marry Prince Eric and separate from her family; instead, she could "send the boy away" and choose another man, who would make it possible for Heesun to marry without leaving her family. Moreover, Heesun had another option which was considered "the best" way of effectively dealing with two different situations—that is to say, marry and stay with her family or play with him for a while and then go home and stay with her family.

However, for some of my informants, who could not easily decide to give up marrying Prince Eric and wanted to marry, the dilemma of marriage with a man or staying with one's family seemed to be more complicated. Even though they were concerned about missing their families because of marriage, they also saw exploring new worlds, having novel experiences, and living with a man whom they loved as being fun and bringing happiness. As Jisoo said, "I don't wanna miss them [her family] but...I am going with him [Prince Eric]. I think [living on] land would be more fun. The ocean is fun, too, but the land is more like... there are lots [of things] to see and play. It's fun."

One of the girls, Joona, showed such a conflict:

If I were Ariel, I should ask my mom. I want to go, but my mom would miss me too much and I would, too...So I have to ask my mom first. If she says I can go, I'd go. If she says no, I'd just live with my mom. But ...I want to get married. I think that [marriage] would be cool. To have a party and to wear a pretty dress...that would be wonderful!

To Joona, who was very often dressed in pink and said "I am so pretty" to herself, reflecting on her image in a mirror, marriage would be "cool" and "wonderful" since she

could enjoy “a party” and have “a pretty dress.” In other words, for Joona, marriage was interpreted as a synonym for a nice party and wearing beautiful dress. In this regard, even though her first priority was her mother and her permission to marry, Joona could not completely abandon her dream of a wedding.

From this perspective, some of the girls started to think of certain ways by means of which they could get disentangled from such a complicated matter as much as possible. Like Heesun, who thought of alternatives to her marriage in an earlier remark, Narim and Haana also discussed how to deal with the two opposite situations in question—leaving home to marry or staying with their families.

Narim explained her opinion, saying “I would go to live with Prince Eric because my mom and dad have my little sister! [laughs].” Haana also laughed and said, “But your sister will grow up just like you. And then if she [Narim’s sister] says she wants to go away with a prince, your mom and dad will be all alone. And also if you go with the prince, do you think you wouldn’t miss your mom? That’s a problem. When I would go with the prince, I would come back very often to my mom and dad or have my mom and dad live in my house together.”

Obviously, Narim thought that her leaving with a man would not make her parents feel too sad. After all, although they would be losing Narim, her parents would still “have my [Narim’s] little sister.” Thus, Narim, who had a boyfriend at that time and talked about him from time to time, expected that her younger sister’s presence would allow her to leave her parents without making them overly sad. However, Narim’s idea was challenged by Haana, who also had a younger sister. First, Haana thoroughly considered that Narim’s parents would be “all alone” when Narim’s sister left. In addition to this, Haana pointed out a more serious “problem”: their feeling of missing their parents. As a

result, feeling concerned not only for her parents' emotions, but also for her own, Haana proposed certain ideas, such as frequent visits to see her parents or living with both her parents and her prince together.

However, one of Haana's suggestions, living "all together in my [her] house," met with another objection, which was made by Narim. Listening to Haana, Narim cried, "Haana, if you would live with him and your parents in your home, what about the prince's parents? They [the Prince and his parents] would miss each other!" Haana answered:

That's right, Narim! They would, too! It would be too hard for the prince to come to our house by himself. He would miss his mom and dad. Well ...then I wanna bring the Prince's mom and dad, too [laughs]. So all our families could live together! [laughs].

Discussing various ways to solve their difficult situations, Narim and Haana found that the Prince might have problems similar to theirs. They assumed that the Prince also had a family, in spite of the fact that the movie did not contain a scene that showed or mentioned his family. In thinking about the Prince's family, the flow of these two girls' conversation went from their families and situations to those of the other—in this case, those of the Prince. These two girls concluded that living with Prince Eric as well as their parents would be "too hard for the Prince" because it implied the Prince's separation from his own family. By realizing that her happiness might cause another's misery, Haana quickly modified her idea by saying, "Bring the Prince's mom and dad, too." Like Narim and Haana, several other informants were concerned about the prince when they thought of bringing him to their imagined living places—namely, the sea world. As

a result, such concern was one of factors that made them hesitate to insist that Prince Eric live under the sea.<sup>10</sup>

Closing this discussion, Haana and Narim confessed their anxiety, which was connected to marriage and family once again.

Haana said, “Uh-um...when I am a grown-up, I want to get married like the Little Mermaid, too. But I’m a little worried that my mom and dad because they would be very sad. I have to leave them [if I would marry].” Raising her voice and smiling, Narim concluded, “But that will happen much, much later so it’s okay now.”

Even to these girls, who wanted to marry some day, their parents were still placed in the center of their worries. Leaving their parents and families was an important matter which these girls could not yield. Even though these girls clearly expressed their concerns about their families and their desires to live in their own way to get married some day in this study, many of them seemed hardly to discuss such perspectives with their parents.<sup>11</sup> Such concern thus seemed not to be completely removed despite any possible alternatives of maintaining both marriage with a man and staying with family.

One may said that these girls’ conflicts between their will and their parents’ expectations of them possibly resulted from the fact that they were too young to think of their own marriages as having priority over their parents and families. However, their interpretations of marriage in Disney films can be more understandable under consideration of Korean cultural context. As mentioned earlier in this study, the matter of marriage is seen as one of salient values, which often represented American social expectations and beliefs in Disney films (see “Social Values in Disney Films” in Chapter I, pp. 28-31). As Bellah and his colleagues (1996) astutely observe, marriage is

considered a symbol of a person's—particularly a female's—autonomy and independence because she is supposed to leave one's home and family and find his or her own way of life. From this point of view, childhood is often considered a “preparation for the all-important event of leaving home” in American culture (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1996, p. 57).

However, as the scholars just mentioned have indicated in their work and as my informants have shown in this study, while the concept of “leaving home” is encouraged in American culture, Korean culture has often seen it as problematic and as suggesting the forsaking of one's family, duty, solidarity, and humanity.<sup>12</sup> As a result, to the girls in this study, marriage was not merely considered an essential way of achieving individual desire and needs, which is characteristic of individualism. Rather, it was seen as a complex matter with which these girls had to deal without losing their love for either their parents or spouses.

Their different conceptions of marriage, in part, derived from these girls' understanding of their parents' high expectations of and devotion to them (see “Korean Migrants and Their Culture” in Chapter I, pp. 52-57). Therefore, like many other Korean children, leaving their parents, who have sacrificed their whole lives for them, seemed to them to constitute betrayal, immorality, and guilt, even though these girls might learn and accept such American individualistic values as independence and autonomy quickly more than their parents.

Reflecting on my participants' significant consideration about their parental love and devotion, I have also wondered if their conflicts between the pursuit of their desire



and obeying their parents might be even more severe because they tended to adapt faster than their parents did: my informants have been involved in American society and its culture every day as the result of their schooling whereas their parents' exposure of American culture was very limited. As a matter of fact, their parents did not have particular relationships with American families or communities, and their participation in the events or the activities of their children's schools were also low partially because of their linguistic and cultural barriers. Like the Korean-American parents in Kim (1994)'s study, these parents strongly held onto their Korean socio-cultural values—for example, obedience to elders and reservations of individual needs—in contrast to these girls, who were encouraged to have American social values such as independence and self-reliance. From this perspective, like Narim, many of the informants of my study tended to defer or avoid expressing their thoughts, concerns, and aspirations regarding marriage by saying “that [their marriages] will happen much, much later so it's okay now.”

### **Reflections: Being a Princess through a Philosophical Lens**

This chapter has shown my informants' various perspectives and continual struggles with the notions of being royals by discussing the social paradigms of becoming a king or a princess, as well as the hidden gender inequality in a princess's marriage in a Disney film. From their perspectives, social class in Disney films seemed to inevitably represent as being entangled with patriarchic hegemony. Moreover, these girls interpreted a princess's marriage by reflecting on their families and Korean culture, in which marriage is considered complicated because they tried to meet their parental

expectations and at the same time pursue their own interests. Therefore, my informants' discussion of a Disney princess's obstacle in marrying revealed not only Disney's distorted gender representations, but also important Korean cultural values—parental love and a strong family bond, in this case.

In addition, my informants had interesting interpretations of the concepts of being royals—particularly, being a princess—which was connected into their own ethnicity and nationality. By attempting to understand a princess's ethnicity, these girls revealed their speculative and philosophical perspectives. At first, several girls' responses seemed to demonstrate their insufficient attention to or interest in a princess's ethnicity. For example, when I asked if it would be great to have Korean princesses in the three Disney films covered in this study or in some other Disney films at large, my informants said either “I don't know” or “It doesn't matter.” Jisoo said, “[Laughing] I don't care [about a Korean princess in a Disney film]. It [the character of a Disney princess] can be anyone. And I don't really think about things like that.” Ahjin agreed, saying, “It [no Korean princess in the films] is okay to me, too. Anyway, there's the Snow White. She was a Korean. She looked like me and she was cute like me, too [laughs].” These two girls were not likely to seriously consider the issue of Korean protagonists in American popular culture—Disney films in this case. Ahjin even seemed to make fun of the idea, saying that the Snow White was Korean because her physical features and personality were similar to Ahjin's (see also “What Does a Princess Look Like?” in this chapter, pp. 207-213).

When their discussions deepened, however, their actual intentions or meanings which were embedded in their first indifferent responses were disclosed. In a discussion of *Mulan*, for instance, Sunjoo explained her point of view more clearly. As I noted earlier in this chapter (see the same section previously mentioned above in this chapter), to Sunjoo, who did not find any similarities between Mulan and herself, a character in a movie was different from Sunjoo even if that character would have been a Korean. That is to say, she could not completely identify with a Disney princess regardless of the princess' nationality because "She couldn't be me [Sunjoo]. And no one can be the same as me." Therefore, to Sunjoo, no princess in films could be a substitute for her unique self, so "it doesn't matter whether a princess is from Europe or China."

Minhee provided a similar point of view by discussing Ariel's marriage in *The Little Mermaid*. She said:

It's really sad to think that the Little Mermaid would leave where she used to live and go with the prince to some country like England to live. If she just stayed at home, it would be nice and not sad. But that is for me, not for Ariel. We [Ariel and Minhee herself]...and all of us are different. We can't be the same. (Interview summary)

To Minhee, Ariel's "leaving and going with the prince" was not seen as "nice" but as "sad." In spite of her beliefs and thoughts, Minhee did not want to compel Ariel to stay homes, which would be right "for me [Minhee], not for Ariel." Minhee thoroughly believed that each individual could have a different life, values, and expectations since "all of us are different."

Heesun interpreted Ariel's decision to marry in a similar way. That the movie ended with Ariel's marriage was interpreted as a "happy" moment, in spite of Heesun's different perspective on her marriage:

I liked the ending [of *The Little Mermaid*] 'cause the Little Mermaid was happy, the prince was happy, and everyone looked happy! They all had smiles on their faces in the end. I wouldn't leave with the prince...but I don't have to compare me to her. I am Heesun and she is Ariel. And all is good here [in the movie] because everyone's happy!

Heesun considered the ending of the movie good because she thought that if Ariel and other people in the film—not Heesun herself—were content with her marriage, then everything was as it should be. As Heesun articulately pointed out, she did “not have to compare” herself to Ariel since “I am Heesun, and she is Ariel.” Therefore, Heesun's dissatisfaction of or doubts about Ariel's marriage was not a factor which influenced Ariel's life and her decisions. In this way, Heesun simply closed this discussion by expressing her detached point of view: “all is good here because everyone's happy.” According to these girls, then, their selves could not be regarded in the same light as those of others because an individual self should be unique.

Their views on different selves also showed when my informants spoke of Aladdin's three wishes. The wishes were discussed in a conversation with Jisoo. When I listened to Jisoo's great wishes, which were mostly used for the poor, I asked her why Aladdin did not use his wishes as she did hers. Then she replied with a smile:

But Aladdin let the Genie go. So he, too, used one wish for someone else like me. That's *huge* for him, I think. Uh-um...it is sometimes really hard to use all of your wishes for others. It [using all wishes for the poor] could be much harder for Aladdin 'cause he liked Jasmine so much at that time. That [Aladdin's using his wishes] was all he could think about. So

it [using wishes for others] wasn't easy for him at all. But me, actually, I don't like Jasmine that much [like Aladdin did] [Laughs]. We [Aladdin and Jisoo] all have different lives and...[we are] just different!

Put differently, like Minhee in the previous discussion, Jisoo did not think that a film protagonist—namely, Aladdin—should have the same wishes as hers. Instead of expecting her ideas to be Aladdin's, Jisoo attempted to understand Aladdin by deliberating on his situation, which might hinder him from using his wishes for others. Jisoo also appreciated Aladdin's last wish, which was used for "letting the Genie go," because she considered it "huge for him [Aladdin]," who, unlike Jisoo, was preoccupied with Jasmine in the movie. Jisoo's empathy for Aladdin was likely resulted from her belief in the fact that "[we are] just different," as the other girls noted earlier. Because Jisoo understood that every person has his or her own life, therefore, it was natural for her to believe that we can not think, act, or wish in the same way.

Jisoo's philosophical thoughts of an individual's different life were found in another intense conversation. When discussing the absence of most of the Disney heroines' mothers, she deliberately thought about different ways of living.

You know...some people don't marry but still have a child. Maybe they [the Disney heroines] could be like one friend of mine. His mom didn't marry but she still has two children. Marriage sometimes doesn't work very well. So it couldn't work for their [the heroines'] parents, like my friend's parents for some reason. My mother and my father sometimes have a fight, and they talk about divorce. When your parents have a fight, if you are an older kid, you have to leave the room and get away from them because they need some time. Just leave them alone and let them fight. You know...everybody can't like each other. Or...one person doesn't like the other, then...that person can't pretend to like the other person. How could we do that? All of us have something [are] different and every princess [in Disney films] has different families. Uh-um...it [marriage] is just like a game. We can't play a game that everyone likes.

When one person really likes to play but the rest of them don't like it, then we can't play. There could be many reasons why that person doesn't want to play. That person maybe...doesn't like that game or doesn't know how to do [play it]...or even doesn't like to do [play] at just that time because we change our minds every day. Then we have to find a new game.  
(Interview summary)

During this conversation, Jisoo expressed her opinions in a composed way about the issue of families, which she thought depended on each person and his or her different way of living. As a matter of fact, the absence of strong mothers in Disney films has often been criticized by scholars for their “subversion” (Zipes, 1983) of positive female authority (see “Gender” in Chapter I, pp. 31-35). However, Jisoo’s point of view was quite different from those of the Disney scholars. Jisoo interpreted the absence of mothers in Disney films as a representation of the various family paradigms in a given society. Drawing on examples from her own life, Jisoo emphasized that a family could be differently constructed for “some reasons.” In order to support her idea more clearly, Jisoo even used the metaphor of marriage as a “game.” By fully understanding her parents’ domestic differences, Jisoo regarded that marriage resembled a game, which could be played only when each participant agreed to play it. That is to say, as it was very difficult to play such a game which pleased all of the participants, marriage was also a great challenge in “working for” everyone. From this point of view, Jisoo paradoxically asked, “How we could do [have] that [the similar family life patterns]?” because she strongly believed that “all of us have something different.” Therefore, to Jisoo, Disney heroines without mothers were not seen as emblems of weak, negative, or absent female power, as several scholars have argued. Instead, it was interpreted as

important issue to understand since it manifested each individual's different familial or marital tendencies.<sup>13</sup>

My informants' thoughtful consideration of themselves and others, including the Disney films' heroines, brought me back to some philosophers' (e.g., Egan, 1988; Haynes, 2002; Leeuw & Mostert, 1987; Matthews, 1984, 1994) arguments. They have claimed that children are able to pursue epistemological questions with less fixed ideas, beliefs, and assumptions than adults' because of their lack of knowledge about the world. The girls in this study showed quite different and genuine perspectives—particularly, their unique selves—from those of adult scholars in understanding cultural messages and seeing the world. According to Mulvaney (1993), since many adults use their existing frames of references, it can be difficult for them to imagine, infer, and evolve an idea for in the different way in which my informants did. From this point of view, a child tends to think of and interpret a cultural message more freely and creatively than an adult does. As I have continually mentioned throughout this study, therefore, numerous scholars have analyzed Disney films and their impact on children not by considering children's perspectives, but their own. For this reason, the possibility of children's—more specifically, my informants'—being able seriously to ponder an idea in popular culture may very often be neglected by these *adult* scholars.

In sum, several girls' simple answers to the film heroines' ethnicities or their insufficient verbalizations of them, such as “I don't know” and “It doesn't matter,” could be differently interpreted. That is to say, their responses might not merely come from their indifference or lack of sufficient cognitive development, which could prevent them

from identifying themselves with film characters or understanding the cultural messages of different ethnic or racial groups. Rather, it could reveal certain of their perspectives, by means of which they contemplated themselves as being different from the film heroines. Reflecting on their unique selves also allowed them to have truthful empathy for each heroine and her peculiar situation in Disney films.

Based on my informants' ideas and perspectives, which have been scrutinized throughout this study, the next chapter will discuss the implications of this study for young children and their education. In particular, I will explore these implications in the next chapter by emphasizing three major questions: What are the most significant factors to consider in reflecting on my informants' understanding of Disney animated films? What factors should be reconsidered in these girls' interpretations of Disney films and those of Disney scholars? How can we, as early childhood educators and professionals, effectively use popular culture for young children's learning? In trying to answer these questions, I will start by addressing some of the important findings of this study.



## Chapter V

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Since the four Disney movies covered in this study have no queens or only a queen whose role was insignificant, our discussions of who could be a ruler were focused on a king rather than a queen. In addition, two films in this study had princesses as heroines. Therefore, in analyzing my informants' discussions, either a king or a princess will be mostly examined in this section.

<sup>2</sup> This description of humans as fish eaters was originally used by Triton, Ariel's father, who accused humans of such crimes at the beginning of the film.

<sup>3</sup> However, children of particular American racial groups, such as Afro-American children and Hispanic-American children, may interpret parental love in a similar way in which Korean children do, even though the studies I mentioned indicated American children in general.

<sup>4</sup> One factor, the Prince's inability to swim and breathe under water, was already discussed in the previous section (see "Different Body and Different Place: Princess Ariel's Problem" in this chapter, pp. 214-220). As for other factors, these girls, for instance, noted the presence of the bad Ursula under the sea and no possible way to make the Prince a merman.

<sup>5</sup> When I met their parents and shared my thoughts about these girls' desire to get married, many mothers were quite surprised. Some of them said to me: "Did she say that? Has she already thought about that [marriage]? [Frowning] It's too early! When I

was little like her, I've never thought of that kind of thing"; "Oh, really? Do you think she is interested in boys? Did she say she has a boyfriend? My daughter has been never interested in boys because...you know...she has to study"; or "No, it isn't true. I think she lied. She always says she wants to stay with me. When I talk about marriage and leaving...those kinds of things, she just cries and says, 'No, mommy, no! I really wanna stay with you forever!' [Smiling] She can't live without me."

<sup>6</sup> As an example of such community-based cultures, Bellah and his colleagues speak of Japanese culture. Even though they insist that such a conception was found in traditional Japanese society and that this situation has changed recently, this point of view toward leaving home is still a huge part of community-based societies.

<sup>7</sup> My informants' ideas of reasons for the absence of Disney protagonists who were mothers were quite varied. They supposed that Ariel's mother died early of a difficult delivery, a shark's attack, or sea witch's magic, or that she was alive but was not shown in the movie because of her divorce, shyness, or love with a human. In addition, according to these girls, Jasmine's mother could also be dead because of her old age, a difficult delivery, or Jafar's bad trick.

## Chapter VI

### Final Thoughts: Looking Back and Ahead

This dissertation was an attempt to discover how young Korean girls interpreted American popular culture—in this case, Disney animated films—by exploring how their understanding of cultural messages differed from the views of several critics who have analyzed Disney films. Moreover, I examined how their interpretations could be influenced by and reflective of their age, socio-cultural background, and personal experiences. To accomplish this goal, the dissertation illustrated the girls' perspectives on three major themes: the characteristics of attraction in romantic love, understanding sexual messages and the construction of sexuality, and the depiction of royal characters and their attendant struggles. In their discussion of these three themes, these girls' responses were sometimes similar to each other, but at the same time, each girl possessed an individual logic or set of experiences by which she supported or objected to a particular value depicted in the films. Thus, the girls used all of their knowledge and experience to understand particular film scenes and scripts in detail.

Given the foci of this dissertation, this chapter discusses the implications and suggestions of the study by addressing its significant findings. First, I discuss my informants' perspectives on Disney films by juxtaposing them with the Disney critics' arguments regarding the issues of race, social class, and gender. In this chapter, then, I

explore the Korean socio-cultural influences in my informants' understanding of American popular culture. Finally, I provide some implications and suggestions for parents, early childhood teachers and teacher education programs, and researchers by emphasizing children's diverse interpretations of popular culture.

## **Review of the Study**

### **Children's Making Meaning regarding Race and Social Class**

This study revealed that some of my informants accurately recognized certain racial representations—for example, particular colors, tones of voice, and facial features, all of which were differently chosen in Disney films depending on whether a character was seen as a good or bad person by Disney films. In spite of their recognition, however, my informants did not apply Disney's racial and ethnic representations to any kind of perceived reality. That is to say, the perception of the relationship between people's skin colors and their personalities in the films as being transferable to reality seemed to be quite unconvincing to these girls. This perception could have developed because several of my informants had had experiences with different ethnic groups by having friends or learning about the other cultures in school (see "Good people: Those Who Can Be Love" in Chapter III).

Their discussions, however, did not explicitly disclose their struggles with the biased social assumptions toward Koreans or Asians living in the United States. Their points of view were thus very different from those of children in some other studies (e.g., Connolly, 1998; Olsen, 1997; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992; Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2004).

According to these studies, young minority children faced with the American racial hierarchy, in which white Americans are privileged in a position of superiority as “true Americans” (Lee, 2003, p. 457) when they interact with their peers in school experiences. Rather, most of these studies dealt with Disney films’ ethnic presentations by excluding themselves from their discussions. Put another way, since many of the girls in my study were not American, Disney’s strained assumptions of certain ethnicities in American society were not likely to be a significant issue for them (see “Good People: Who Can Be Loved” in Chapter III).

Instead of completely identifying themselves with Disney’s white heroines, the girls of my study reflected on racial matters in the films in a way in which their philosophical perspectives were expressed: everyone is different. Based on such an idea, my participants attempted to understand each heroine’s situation by avoiding completely merging their individual perspectives with that of a particular heroine. As a result, as I mentioned in Chapter V, these girls neither wanted to have a Korean heroine in the films nor did they become particularly attached to the Asian heroine Mulan in one of the Disney films.

As for Disney films’ depictions of social class, these were not fully discussed by the informants. According to them, they had not seriously deliberated about such matters before. Thus, they had a hard time understanding the concept of an unequal social hierarchy and power distribution, both of which were implied in the Disney films in question. They understood these aspects of the films mostly by focusing not on social structure or the social status quo, but by concentrating on an individual’s ability as a way

to determine his or her social status. One of the possible reasons for these girls' insufficient attention to differences in social class could be the homogeneous socio-economic conditions of the Korean middle-class in which they were raised. As a result, their experiences with different social stratifications seemed to be very limited, indirect, and superficial. The point is that my participants' lack of knowledge of different social classes tended to prevent them from fully realizing the significance of such issues in the Disney films.

### **Children's Constructing Gender Identities through Understanding Popular Culture**

My informants' ideas and concerns about gender and sexual identity were a salient issue throughout this study. These girls' responses were quite different depending on their developmental levels. For instance, most of the younger children did not completely understand the sexual messages in the Disney films, whereas several older girls comprehended them to some degree because of their certain amount of knowledge of sexual matters (see "Children's Age and Interpreting Sexual Messages" in Chapter IV).

For my participants, even though film heroines' faces were pretty, they were too thin to be normal. From this point of view, most of the girls in the study emphasized a person's good personality instead of his or her positive physical appearance. Moreover, some girls stressed the superiority of their own ethnicity by comparing smart, as well as beautiful, Korean women to Disney princesses (see "What Does a Princess Look Like?: The Nationality of a Princess" in Chapter V). Many of the girls in my study also understood that Disney films depicted unrealistic female bodies. As a result, unlike the

immigrant girls in some studies (Acosta-Alzuru & Kreshel, 2002; Espiritu, 2000; Kimmel & Aronson, 2000; Lee, 2001; Lee & Vaught, 2003), my informants did not perceive American white heroines in Disney films as an ideal and a normative standard for beauty by longing for altering their physical appearances. As I noted in the previous section, my informants seemed to be more influenced by nationality than by ethnicity, confirming Woodward's (1997) argument that "the difference between national identities lies in the different ways in which they are imagined" (p. 18). More precisely, many of my informants were not Korean-Americans, but Koreans, and therefore these girls' different nationality did not lead them to strongly feel that they had to look like the Disney white heroines who were depicted as "Americans."

However, they did fail to recognize the objectification of female bodies in Disney films, which has been one of concerns of several scholars (e.g., Bowlby, 1985; Faludi, 1991; Giroux, 1997, Kasturi, 2002). Although some of my informants pointed out that Disney's representations of female bodies objectified females, most of the girls in this study hardly seemed to see such a depiction as being problematic or wrong. Furthermore, several girls in my study experienced a sense of conflict when they found a discrepancy between their beliefs and reality in interpreting the manifestation of gender in Disney films. For example, their strong belief in inner beauty was challenged when they attempted to understand the male points of view in Disney films, in which the physical attractiveness of females seemed to be valued more than the heroines' personalities. Thus, though these girls never abandoned their faith in inner beauty, the males' perspectives in Disney films did confuse them when they discussed the important

characteristics of romantic love. Disney's presentations of marriages also led some girls in the study to conclude that a woman's gender in and of itself can be the cause of their difficult situations no matter how high the women's social classes were (see "A Princess' Marriage Barriers" in Chapter V).

In short, it was a challenge for many of the girls in the study to maintain their own perspectives on female sexual images and identities. The processes of their discussions of Disney films, therefore, showed their struggle in determining who they were as females. In order to deal with these conflicts, they sometimes firmly rejected, felt frustrated with, or negotiated with an idea. By doing this, they raised new questions and were thus continually adjusting their identities of themselves in various ways. In other words, by creating, reconstructing, and transforming their identities, my participants never stopped forming their female subjectivities throughout the course of my study. As Foucault (1966) might have put it these girls' identities were reified through a process of constant wrestling, questioning, and reconstructing: the presence of their struggle with a social ideology and hegemony could be evidence in and of itself that they were experiencing the ongoing process of building their subjectivity.

### **Korean Culture in Children's Interpretations of Disney Films**

Another important finding of the study involved Korean cultural influences on the informants' perspectives. My informants' responses were, first, related to Korean society's great emphasis on education; in Korea, a person's educational level is considered crucial in his or her potential for success in society. Although Korean society



is changing, so that it tends more and more to focus on a person's physical appearance and sexual attractiveness—particularly among female adolescents and young female adults (e.g., Cho, 2002; Lee, 2002a)—education is still greatly valued in Korea.

In addition, my informants' views on the importance of intelligence seemed to be in marked contrast to their antagonism toward being sexual. As was mentioned earlier, the sexuality of females, at least traditionally, is devalued in Korea (see “Reflection: Being Sexual in Korean Culture” in Chapter IV). As a result, even when my informants thought of romantic love in a way that had nothing to do with a sexual relationship, they were likely to see females as being “wise mothers and good wives” in families, rather than as sexually attractive lovers in romantic relationships.

Furthermore, several girls' hostile responses to being sexual reflected the Korean cultural perspective on children's sexuality. Stated more precisely, childhood in Korea is looked upon as a period of preparation for becoming a competent adult, so it focuses only on a child's education and academic success, not the child's interests in physical appearance or sexuality. This is particularly true of the girls in my study who were elementary school students, because good academic performance is one of the most important responsibilities for these girls in elementary school. As a result, their understanding of Disney films was influenced by their tension over and apprehension about academic success, rather than their desire to become sexual, which is considered part of the adult domain in Korean culture.

Korean family values were another matter on which my informants were focused. As a result, when they watched each Disney film in this study, they often discussed

parental love, such as Triton's love for Ariel, the Sultan's caring for Princess Jasmine, Maurice's courage in protecting Belle, and Mufasa's affection for Simba, all of which have rarely drawn Disney reviewers' attention. My informants did not understand a parent's behavior and actions in a Disney movie only according to the actual scenes and lines. Instead, they also interpreted them according to their assumptions about a parent's devotion to and sacrifices for a child (see "Familial Matters Relating a Princess's Marriage from Children's Perspectives" in Chapter V). Hence, many girls' perceptions of their parents' expectations and devotion might have led them to consider their first priority in life not romantic love, but their families, who had supported them, as well as sacrificed and lived for them. As a result, since their desire for leaving their families made these girls feel guilty or even immoral, marriage was not considered a "happily ever after" ending: rather, it was a matter of grave concern to these girls in my study (see "Marriage and Separation Anxiety from Family" in Chapter V).

### **Children, Popular Culture, and Education: Implications and Suggestions**

Keeping the major findings of this study in mind, I now provide some suggestions for young children's parents, early childhood education teachers and teacher educators, and researchers. I do this by emphasizing how children actively engage in expressing their varied ways of interpreting the Disney films. This section, first, addresses the effective use of popular culture by means of which parents and teachers can understand children's current interests. I also discuss the needs of connecting American perspectives on American popular culture to those of the other social and cultural locations. In doing

so, this section concentrates on the fact that American popular culture can be differently interpreted depending on its various audiences and their contexts. Finally, I provide some suggestions for further studies.

### **Korean Parents of Young Children**

As I noted in Chapter II, I had some major conflicts with Korean parents in carrying out this study. These conflicts occurred primarily because many of them concluded that their children did not have time to watch or anything to learn from Disney animated films. Therefore, these parents did not want to waste their children's valuable time during which they could be studying academic subjects or engaging in other kinds of intellectual activities, for example, lessons in music and sport. I certainly understood them and their transnational situations: it was necessary for them to ensure that their children were academically successful, for such success could lead their children to socio-economic success in both Korea and the United States (see "Korean Children, Korean Culture and American Society" in Chapter I).

In spite of my full understanding of the views of these Korean parents, I felt it reflected a lack of consideration for their children's perspectives and positions. Most of them thought of their children as passive, naïve learners, who, as Buckingham (1990) points out, should be protected by adults from all social ills, including bad Disney films. In other words, their children should learn only the knowledge and information that are rigorously selected by adults (see "Popular Culture and Society" and "Children and Society" in Chapter I). However, children—at least, my informants—were able to do

more than one might expect. The young girls in my study did not merely sit in a chair watching a film without any intellectual engagement; they also reflected on, analyzed, and criticized a film's cultural message. Do we, then, generally underestimate our children's capacity? As some scholars (e.g., James & Prout, 1997; Walkerdine, 1997) have pointed out, we perhaps conceive of childhood as a time which should be a period of naivety and innocence, by forever *hoping* that children should not perceive the actual conditions of social reality (see "Notions of Childhood and Popular Culture" in Chapter I). For this reason, we should seriously consider the possibility that we may be afraid of our children's mentioning some vulgar elements in popular culture, with which we do not want to deal.

I, for one, do not believe that we Korean parents have done our best for children, not because we want them to feel the extent of our sacrifice and devotion. On the contrary, I believe that our intentions initially and always stem from our wishes for better lives for our children. However, if our parental expectations and devotion are truly for the children's lives, it is time that we sincerely consider what our children's interests and needs are *at present*, instead of merely emphasizing what should be needed for their future (Edward, Gandini, & Forman, 1998; Qvortrup, 2001). This is so because their present childhood is as important as their adulthood in the future in making their lives better and meaningful. We need to respect their childhood desires and interests, rather than to force them to yield them because of their preparation for adulthood. Therefore, listening to our children's ideas about popular culture allows us to discuss their points of view with them and share their concerns in a more spontaneous way.

It is important to consider, however, that our attempts to think with our children are not merely designed to understand our children and their concerns. Rather, these attempts should also be a way to contemplate our own lives as parents, as several of my informants' parents did. When all the interviews for this study had been completed, I gave some of each girl's opinions to her mother.<sup>2</sup> After distributing these transcriptions, I got several phone calls from the informants' mothers, who wanted to express their appreciation for them. Many parent indicated that they had learned many things about their children and their thoughts of which they had not previously been aware. More precisely, these parents expressed admiration for their children's marvelous ideas, thoughts, and understanding about others and moved by how they saw the world in the process of interpreting popular culture. In addition, they sometimes felt sorry that they had not fully understood their children's worries or suffering. My point is that, like these parents, the rest of us also have a great chance to reflect on our own parenting once again when we find a way to listen to our children.

### **Early Childhood Teachers**

This week, we were supposed to bring some of our stuff to school for "Show and Tell." Many boys have had *Yu-Gi-Oh* cards and *Power Rangers*...those kinds of stuff. So the teacher was so mad at them and told us, "Do not bring these kinds of things any more! These are not good. Bring your stuff that is really important to you!" After that, we couldn't bring them any more.

The comments just quoted are part of Jisoo's narrative in my study. As I mentioned in Chapter I, popular culture is not considered "really important" to our children and their

learning by adults, schools, and society at large. Thus, it was still excluded from Jisoo's kindergarten classroom, which dealt only with so-called official knowledge. Considering the teacher's statement above, some fundamental questions have occurred to me: How was the teacher sure of her claim that popular culture was not important for children? What is "really important" for our children and their lives? Who decides such a matter? What should teachers teach and what should our children learn in schools? What is the ultimate purpose of the education of young children?

Like many other educational fields, early childhood education has considered children's socialization one of the most important goals of schools. As was indicated earlier in this study, such socialization can be accomplished through the cultural legitimacy inherent in high culture or official knowledge as it is conveyed in schools, and through which students internalize an existing social hierarchical system (see "Introduction" in Chapter I). From this perspective, judgments about what is desirable and "really important" for young children and how to achieve it for part of socialization, which includes preparing for their adulthood, are made by society, not by the children themselves in early childhood education.

This situation extends to young children's ideas and interest in the classroom. My informants' responses revealed that the schools considered their interest in popular culture worthless. When I asked the girls in this study if they have discussed popular culture in school, all of them laughed and said, "No! That is school! We can't talk about that kind of stuff at school." Then I asked again why we could not talk about it and what they thought of the discussion of popular culture in classrooms. They said, "I don't know.

But school is a different place from any other place,” “Well, I think we are going to school to learn math, English, or science. [They are] Very serious stuff. But this kind of thing [popular culture] is really fun. So people think...it is like...too much fun to have in school,” or “It would be very fun [if we could talk about popular culture at school]. I don’t know why we don’t talk about it, but it is not that important to talk about at school like the other subjects...because we can do [discuss] it at home.” Even though they did not completely elaborate on the reasons why popular culture had not been discussed in their classrooms or schools, my participants’ perceptions about what should be learned and taught at school, according to their experience and impressions, meant that school should be a place to deal only with “very serious” subjects, not those concerned with “fun.”

The above statements of these informants raised different questions: What were the implications of these “fun” subjects for teachers? Why are children prohibited from having “fun” in schools? As Grace and Tobin (1997) argue, prohibiting their fun in schools might occur because young children’s fun and pleasure is produced not by teachers, but “by and for the children, in their own way and on their own terms” (p. 177). That is to say, I wonder if teachers are perhaps concerned about losing their status as authority figures in school knowledge, if they allow children to initiate activities that prove enjoyable. Put another way, teachers of young children may be concerned that their ability to control and regulate children’s knowledge and experiences will be undermined (see “Popular Culture and Education” in Chapter I).

Most of these informants said that they had “fun” during the discussions of Disney films. However, the meaning of their “fun” was not merely the profane pleasure of “sensual desire” and “corporeality” in Bourdieu’s terms (1984). At the same time, their engagement in “vulgar and superficial” popular culture was not an “easy” activity. They attempted to articulate their perspectives on the Disney films and wrestle with certain socio-cultural issues by participating in serious interactive processes—such as careful listening, commenting, assenting, and debating. These processes helped them to express different ideas and obtain knowledge and information that they had not been aware of previously. For example, when some of the girls in the study brought *Pocahontas* into their discussion, they did not only talk about what they thought of the film. They also integrated their existing knowledge and understanding of the film with their new learning and information, which were products of their own research; that is to say, they went to a public library or a bookstore to find some books about the history of Native Americans during the colonial period. Their discussions of a Disney films thus prompted their interest in learning that would lead them to a more profound understanding of certain issues. From this perspective, my informants’ having fun with popular culture seemed to extend their desire to learn about a phenomenon, an event, or a fact that was present in a cultural apparatus. If these girls’ enthusiastic desire to learn, then, can be considered “having fun,” why don’t teachers want to see such desire every day in classrooms?

In addition, it was truly amazing to discover how openly and respectfully these young participants could discuss serious social issues. Even when they disagreed with an



idea, they did not lose their patience; they paid attention to, listened to, respected, and rethought others' points of view by considering possible reasons for such an idea. Thus, these girls were able to take a critical look at social phenomena and be tolerant of different perspectives. Given the young participants' abilities to discuss and reflect on a matter in a Disney film, the introduction of popular culture into classrooms could be closely related to one of ultimate goals of social studies: to help young children evaluate a cultural text by themselves and encourage their critical perspectives in considering important issues and in understanding various points of view. In other words, classroom discussions of cultural texts can lead children to "work against social, economic, and psychological constraints and ideologies [that] keep us from creating a more just and humane reality" (Goodman, 1998, p. 57).

Finally, when exploring popular culture in early childhood classrooms, it is important to respect and affirm each child's interpretation of the cultural text since such an interpretation arises from children's narratives of their own experiences. By focusing on minority children's ways of thinking and living, teachers can attempt to give a voice to all children who make decisions about their learning. Ultimately, this "voice" can lead a more democratic and equal society (Freire & Giroux, 1989; Giroux & Simon, 1988; Goodman, 1998; Kenway & Bullen, 2001).

### **Teacher Educators**

Although considering popular culture an important source to teach and understand our children has been discussed for the last three decades, the pedagogical use of popular

culture is still absent not only in early childhood teacher education but also in teacher education programs in general. As Zevin (2000) and White (2003) insist, many preservice courses still focus on the transmission of knowledge without reflecting on other aspects of schooling and children's actual lives.

As a result of my teaching elementary preservice teachers, in particular, I have experienced first hand these student teachers' limited exposure to the critical perspective of possibly including popular culture in school curriculum. When I introduced this idea into my classrooms, I have found that the concept of popular culture as a pedagogical tool is seen as inexperienced and even as unnecessary by many of my twenty-year old preservice teachers. For this reason, my classroom has often been the site of their confusion over and resistance to using popular culture in schools. These students consider popular culture not part of the public or educational domain, but part of the individual domain, in which the preferences or choices of either an individual child or a parent plays an important role. Therefore, my preservice students tend to hesitate to deal with such "private" matters in schools in the same way that both preservice and inservice teachers have in several studies (Dyson, 2001; Flores-Koulish, 2005; Lambirth, 2003; Marsh & Millard, 2000; Weber & Mitchel, 1995).

Keeping such a reluctance to use popular culture in mind, I have wondered if this tendency may result from teacher education programs that have ignored the possibility of using popular culture as curriculum. Teachers with no previous learning experience of a certain method—in my students' case, popular culture—tend to feel incapable of and uncomfortable with using such a method, and thus many of them simply rely on the same

instructional format which they have received when they instruct their own students (Peck & Connell, 1991). The point is that many teacher educators are likely to maintain and support only official knowledge by avoiding other ways of teaching, such as teaching through popular culture. From this perspective, when preservice teachers have not had any chance to look closely at society and its ideologies by means of popular culture, their future students might not have such a chance, either. If the critical approach of integrating popular culture with teacher education programs is not provided for preservice teachers, it is likely that they will not explore and criticize popular culture with their students.

Assuming, then, that teacher education programs constitute the last moments of learning for preservice teachers before they take the first step of actually being teachers, teacher educators should provide ways to examine new theoretical perspectives and various teaching methodologies, including the use of popular culture. By doing so, teacher educators can experiment with a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1962) which can adequately reflect the modalities of children's complex lives and diverse environments in society today. Put another way, teacher educators need to be more actively involved in developing new approaches for "new-century schools" (Morrell, 2002, p. 1), and therefore, teachers of young children who are different from the children of past generations (Mahiri, 2000; Scholle & Denski, 1995). In this way, using popular culture in teacher education programs can be an attempt to create new and encouraging curriculum for teacher education.

## **Researchers**

It is remarkable that many scholars have accused Disney films of bias toward particular ethnicities, genders, or social classes (see “Social Values in Disney Films” in Chapter I). The fact is that the current tendency of Disney animated films is seemingly changing, even though it is questionable if the change comes from Disney’s sincere reflection on its past distorted representation of certain social groups; since the new millennium, Disney animated films have adopted biological organisms other than humans as film protagonists more than ever—animals, aliens, and monsters.<sup>1</sup> By producing such racial- and gender-neutral characters, Disney tends to avoid the kind of criticism that has been rigorously applied in the past to Disney films’ human protagonists. In this sense, several scholars’ efforts to carefully criticize and analyze Disney films may have had certain impact on in Disney movies’ current productions. From this perspective, several Disney critics’ content analyses were quite valuable and necessary to attempt.

However, as some scholars (e.g., Dyson, 2003; Tobin, 2004; Trousdale, 2004) have argued, many of these analyses simply missed children’s perspectives on Disney films and drew conclusions without listening to their voices. Moreover, these studies have ignored children’s ideas on popular culture because they assume that children’s cognitive capacity is not adequate for reflecting on cultural messages (see “Children and Society” Chapter I). Confounding such expectations and assumptions, the girls in my study were not simply passive receivers who absorbed every cultural message of the films without reflection or analysis. Rather, like the children in Dyson’s (1997, 2003) studies, they were creative participants who were actively engaged in understanding those

products: they reframed and recreated a cultural text by actively selecting and organizing its elements by means of their own experiences, assumptions, concerns, and desires. My informants were thus able to “appropriate cultural material to participate in and explore their world, especially through narrative play and story” (Dyson, 1997, p. 181). From this point of view, these children were part of an active social agency that developed and expressed its own way of understanding popular culture (e.g., Christensen & Prout, 2002; Corsaro, 1997; Corsaro & Miller 1992; Thorne, 1993; Qvortrup, 2001).

Given my informants’ establishing their meanings of popular culture, it is indispensable for researchers to pay attention to children’s own interpretations of these films. This is so because, without paying the proper attention, scholars will only make various assumptions about the films and their effects on children. How can we, as researchers, make better popular culture, improve education, and bring about a better society and world for children if we do not listen to children’s own words and thoughts about these matters, but merely have academic discussions among ourselves and create theories? Researchers of popular culture in further studies need to discern a child’s unique perspectives which provide valuable insights into such culture.

There is another area of study that has often been neglected by the Disney critics—namely, local culture and its influences on children’s interpretations of Disney films. As I noted earlier in this study, American popular culture for children has been denounced because it tends to produce and maintain specific forms of American cultural power and hegemony for children across the world by means the cultural imperialism (see “Disney in the World” in Chapter I). American popular culture for children has

usually disseminated American cultural messages to other countries, thus contributing to the so-called “Americanization” of children while America remains relatively unaware of the other countries’ cultural products. For example, Disney animated films have been criticized for their pretense as a pure, sacred place for children, in which cultural homogeneity and historical purity are emphasized, while ignoring complex socio-global issues—like the cultural differences and struggles of various groups—by representing only the white American middle class’s social norms. In other words, it is often thought that American popular culture has a great and sometimes harmful influence on children’s minds and perceptions in its portrayal of America. In addition, American popular culture has been denounced for universalizing a certain form of childhood as natural and ideal by means of the globalization of culture and the easy access that children have to the media (Kasturi, 2002). American popular culture for children thus is considered a great influence on children’s minds and their perceptions in other cultures in that it represents American social ideologies.

It is plausible that Disney’s various products are considered an important form of popular culture not only for young children in the United States, but also for those in many other countries. Therefore, various studies of the Disney movies are sometimes persuasive in their critiques of the relationship between popular culture and social ideology. However, their perspectives are often “too narrow” (Kroes, 1999, p. 464) to understand children’s interpretations of a cultural text by overlooking the fact that the children interact with and are influenced by their socio-cultural circumstances. In this

way, several scholars have too often argued that the other countries' children merely aspire to American culture, which is seen as pure and ideal.

However, the dynamic of globalization of popular culture is not a simple, one-sided process in which cultural artifacts always flow from one site—namely, the United States—to another—for example, Korea. Instead, the two cultural sites always influence each other in the process of the globalization of popular culture. Since reading a cultural text is not only a personal reaction to it, but also a socially situated practice, a reading of such a text is inevitably related to the “con-texts” within which texts are seen as social productions (Derrida, 1976, 1978). Thus, the various meanings attributed to a piece of American popular culture have often been modified by and negotiated with different audiences (Götz, Lemish, Aidman, & Moon, 2005; Robertson, 1994)—transnational children, in case of my study. As a result, depending on each reader's different situation and experiences, a cultural text will have a variety of different meanings and uses (Fiske, 1992). From this perspective, popular culture can't be examined without considering the context into which it is produced, circulated, and consumed (Derrida, 1976; Hall, 1980).

Thus, children's understanding of a Disney film is complicatedly entangled with social, cultural, economic, and political aspects in a local context that will be different from those of the United States. The point is that children's global consumption of the same kinds of cultural texts—in this case, American popular culture—does not necessarily signify that all children will interpret them in exactly the same way. Each country and its people have different purposes for consuming American popular culture (e.g., Dortner, 2001; Lemish, Liebes, & Seidmann, 2001). From this standpoint, local

socio-cultural factors have a significant impact on children who interpret American popular culture and decide what is relevant and appropriate for them to adopt in the messages that such culture conveys.

Therefore, by believing that Disney films have Americanized children in other countries and these children interpret American popular culture in a similar way, many scholars of Disney films have ignored each country's local culture and its influence on children's views on Disney films. Their perspectives tend to see the other countries' people as those who passively receive all aspects of American popular culture without their own estimation and judgment on it, and thus are easily assimilated and controlled by American culture. From this point of view, such perspectives can be seen as another form of American imperialism since they are likely to consider that people in different countries are homogeneous, inferior, and illiterate and their local influences are completely eliminated in the process of Americanization.

The concept of Americanization in cultural studies should thus be reconsidered by thoroughly reflecting on how children living in a given society or culture consume, localize, and specify American popular culture. This is so because children in a particular country or a different culture attempt to "integrate global cultural forces with their unique cultural world to create a meaningful and relevant world for themselves" (Götz et al., 2005, p. 201). In other words, studies on children's popular culture, including Disney films, need to pay careful attention to the fact that a cultural text can be turned into a different social text and a new cultural practice depending on each child's experience, culture, and life in a different socio-cultural context (Agger, 1992; De



Certeau, 1984, 1988; Derrida, 1976, 1978, 1984; Fiske, 1992). In short, research on American popular culture should emphasize comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between an American cultural text and diverse audiences in a given context by examining more critically how children who come from different countries or cultures establish their own meanings of American popular culture.

Based on this study's process and major findings, I discuss some suggestions for future research. First, as I previously mentioned in this section, studies of popular culture should be attentive to the voices of children. Before making decisions about what is good or bad for children in relation to popular culture, studies of children's popular culture should include the viewpoints of children and consider how each child can possess a unique understanding about the same piece of popular culture and view it differently from other children. It is crucial that the analyses of children's popular culture should consider not only the impact of social expectations and values but also incorporate children's perceptions about and appreciation of it since such popular culture is primarily intended for children, not adults or society at large.

In a related matter, further research should consider the fact that children's cultural contexts and social backdrops are diverse and distinctive. As this study did, future studies can be developed in order to understand the relationship between minority groups of children and the children of other countries, as well as their socio-cultural environments. By doing this, the studies can explore how children and the specific socio-cultural contexts in which they live have influenced one another, and thus examine critically how these "micro and macro worlds" interact with each other (Goodman, 1998).

In this manner, future studies should find a way to advocate “a critical approach to multiculturalism” (McCarthy, 1993) by means of the cultural diversity of school knowledge, as well as how its various relationships to socio-cultural, economic, political factors outside of school, can be dealt with. Based on such a concept of multiculturalism, therefore, further studies should attempt not only to localize and scrutinize popular culture by understanding one of the various socio-cultural groups of children and their perspectives in the United States. These studies should also connect the United States to the rest of the world—in case of this study, to Korean society.

In addition, a study could examine how a research process of young children evolves by focusing on the development of an adult researcher’s relationship with them. Even though many of young informants of this study were willing to share and express their ideas with me, all of them did not always want to discuss them from the beginning of our meetings. Rather, it has taken time for them to show their serious concerns, personal secrets, and intimate attitudes to me, as an adult researcher. As a result, an important consideration of the process of adult researcher-young informant relationships would be a valuable area of investigation for further studies.

Finally, further research should pay attention to how and when a child’s perceptions of cultural messages can be changed, developed, or maintained in a given society or culture—in this case, Korean culture. It is important to note that, as my study showed, each child has his or her perspective about how to interpret a cultural text and this perspective is influenced not only by his or her socio-cultural environment, but also by the child’s age and experiences. For instance, when discussing the important factors

of attractions in romantic love, several informants of this study strongly insisted inner beauty—namely, good personality—more than physical attractiveness. However, considering Korean youths' increasing interest in physical appearances in current Korean society, these informants' perspectives might be different when they become adolescents. Therefore, it is useful for a study to discern what makes a child interpret certain messages of popular culture which are different from or similar to those in his or her early childhood.

## Chapter VI

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For example, the protagonists have been aliens in *Monsters, Inc.* (2001), fish in *Finding Nemo* (2003), cars in *Cars* (2006), and animals in *Brother Bear* (2003), *Home on the Range* (2004), *Chicken Little* (2006), and *The Wild* (2006).

<sup>2</sup> In order to protect the informants' credential discussions and to respect their feelings and opinions about sharing their ideas with their parents, I first, asked them if I could provide their perspectives to their parents by allowing them to read the transcripts. When giving the transcripts to my informants, I also said that if any part of the transcripts made these girls feel uncomfortable to share with their parents, I was willing to eliminate them.

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Mar. 1990- Feb. 1994

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

### **Indiana University**

**Bloomington, IN**

Graduate Assistant

Jan. 2006- May 2006

- Assisted sophomore cohort early childhood education classes.
- Co-Taught Music and Movement and Multicultural Education in Multiliteracies in Early Childhood Education.”

### **Indiana University**

**Bloomington, IN**

Assistant Instructor

Aug. 2004- May 2006

- Taught an undergraduate course, “Elementary Education in a Pluralistic Society.”
- Facilitated students’ field experiences.

### **Indiana University**

**Bloomington, IN**

Graduate Assistant

Aug. 2005- Dec. 2005

- Assisted distance education graduate seminar of infant and toddler care using video conferencing.
- Facilitated students’ discussions and projects.

### **Indiana University**

**Bloomington, IN**

Teacher Assistant

Jan. 2004- Apr. 2004

- Assisted graduate level classes, “Elementary Social Studies Curriculum” and “The Culture of the Classroom.”
- Facilitated the students’ discussions and their field experiences in elementary schools.
- Supervised student teaching.
- Provided feedbacks to the students’ papers and their final projects.

**Campus Children's Center**

Teacher (Part-Time)

- Taught 4 to 6-year-old (kindergarten) children.
- Developed and assisted afternoon activities and programs.

**Bloomington, IN**

Jan. 2004- Aug. 2004

**Harmony School**

Assistant Teacher

- Taught early childhood program and the first and second grades of the elementary school.

**Bloomington, IN**

Sept. 2003- Dec. 2003

**Bloomington Developmental Learning Center**

Teacher

- Taught 3 to 4-year-old children.

**Bloomington, IN**

May 2001- Sept. 2001

**Sookmyung Women's University**

Associate Instructor

- Taught and coordinated undergraduate French courses.

**Seoul, Korea**

Mar. 1997- Feb. 1998

**Myung-Sung Kindergarten**

Teacher (Part-Time)/Language Art Coordinator

- Taught 5 to 6-year-old children
- Coordinated and developed English curriculum and assessment for 3 to 6 year-old children.

**Seoul, Korea**

Aug. 1994- June 1998

## **RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

### **Indiana University**

**Bloomington, IN**

Graduate Assistant

Aug. 2005- Dec. 2005

- Assisted funded research grant for infant/toddler care.
- Assisted a workshop for early childhood education professionals.

### **Indiana University**

**Bloomington, IN**

Research Assistant

Oct. 2003- Dec. 2003

- Conducted research literature review about the identity of white male pre-service teachers.

### **University Elementary School**

**Bloomington, IN**

Researcher

Feb. 2003- May 2003

- Research Title: Korean Cultural Awareness of an American Teacher

### **Korean Women's Studies Association**

**Taegu, Korea**

Research Assistant

Jan. 1998- Jun. 1998

- Research Title: The Childhood of Korean and French women Writers and their Families
- Conference Title: Women and Literature in Social Contexts

### **Sookmyung Women's University**

**Seoul, Korea**

Research Assistant

Jan. 1998- May 1998

- Symposium Title: French Women Writers' lives in their Autobiographies

### **Korean Women's Studies Association**

**Seoul, Korea**

Research Assistant

July 1996- Dec. 1997

- Conference Title: Feminine Writing in Korea, France, and America

- Research Title: Korean Women and their Childhoods in Literature

**Sookmyung Women's University**

**Seoul, Korea**

Graduate Assistant/ Research Assistant

Aug. 1995- June 1997

- Assisted four grant projects with faculty members and various studies.
- Supervised and coordinated student teaching internship programs.
- Assisted the course of French Women's Literature.
- Research Title: French Drama in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and French Romanticism

### **PUBLICATION & THESES**

Goodman, J., Klossner, J., Lee, R. L., Wenzel, A., Garcia, S., & Hsu, M. (forthcoming).

Curriculum development in historical perspective. In F. M. Connelly (Ed.), *Sage handbook of curriculum and instruction*.

Lee, R. L., & McMullen, M. B. (2006). Social ideology and early childhood education: A comparative analysis of Korean early childhood teacher education textbooks written in 1993 and 2003. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood* 7 (2).

Lee, R. (1999). *The self in autobiography of Marguerite Yourcenar: The effects of Buddhism*. Unpublished thesis. Paris VIII University. Saint Denis, France.

Lee, R. (1996). *The study of the human resistance and love in Albert Camus*. Unpublished thesis. Sookmyung Women's University. Seoul, Korea.

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>American Educational Research Association</b><br>Title: Korean Girls' Understanding of Gender in American<br>Popular Culture                             | <b>San Francisco, CA</b><br>April 2006 |
| <b>JCT Conference</b><br>Title: Korean Girls and Gender in American Popular Culture   | <b>Bergamo, OH</b><br>Oct. 2005        |
| <b>Curriculum and Pedagogy</b><br>Title: Korean Girls' Concept of Love in Interpreting<br>American Popular Culture  | <b>Oxford, OH</b><br>Oct. 2005         |
| <b>American Educational Research Association</b><br>Title: A Comparative Analysis of Korean Early Childhood<br>Education Textbooks Written in 1993 and 2003 | <b>Montreal, Canada</b><br>Apr. 2005   |
| <b>Midwest Association of the Education of Young Children</b><br>Title: Play, Toy, and Young Children   | <b>Kansas City, MO</b><br>Apr. 2004    |
| <b>Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children</b><br>Title: Child-Centeredness in Different Cultural Contexts                                  | <b>Indianapolis, IN</b><br>Mar. 2004   |
| <b>American Association of Advanced Curriculum Studies</b><br>Title: Korean Culture and American Elementary Education                                       | <b>Chicago, IL</b><br>Apr. 2003        |



## PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Human Diversity & Understanding Committee Panel** **Bloomington, IN**

Templeton Elementary School

Dec. 2005

- Presented the issue of linguistic & cultural diversity in American schools.
- Discussed & suggested how to approach culturally diverse families.

**Korean Science Elementary Teacher Training Programs** **Bloomington, IN**

Dept. of Curriculum & Instruction of Indiana University

July 2005- Aug. 2005

- Assisted in develop program curriculum, schedule, and activities.
- Acted as project translator.
- Guided Korean teachers' individual works for their final products.

**Cultural Diversity Panel**

**Bloomington, IN**

Graduate program course, "Human & Diversity" in Indiana University

Mar. 2005

- Discussed cultural diversity in American education.

## SCHOLARSHIPS, GRANTS, & LEADERSHIP

**Daisy Jones Fellowship**

**Bloomington, IN**

School of Education, Indiana University

2005-2006

**Indiana University Travel Grant**

**Bloomington, IN**

School of Education

2004-06

**Scrivner Award**

**Bloomington, IN**

School of Education, Indiana University

2004

<b>French Government Scholarship</b> French Ministry of Education and Culture	<b>Paris, France</b> 1998-2000
<b>Selected Student for Double Ph.D. Degree</b> Sookmyung University & Paris VIII University	<b>Korea &amp; France</b> 1998
<b>Outstanding Student Scholarship</b> Sookmyung University	<b>Seoul, Korea</b> 1993, 1996-97
<b>French Language &amp; Literature Alumni Scholarship</b> Sookmyung University	<b>Seoul, Korea</b> 1992
<b>The President of Student Council</b> French Language & Literature Department	<b>Seoul, Korea</b> 1992

### **MEMBERSHIPS**

American Educational Research Association  
National Association for the Education of Young Children  
Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children  
Midwest Association for the Education of Young Children