

The Impact of Disney Movies on Children's Perceptions of Traditional Gender Roles and Sexist Stereotypes

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Abstract: Disney movies have been a much-researched topic, especially for studying the impact of children's perceptions of traditional gender roles and sexist stereotypes. Disney movies often portray women as needing rescue, weakness and passivity from male characters. These movies perpetuate traditional gender roles but also largely limit the roles women can play in society. Therefore, this review will examine various studies that examine the impact of Disney movies on children's perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes, and further discuss how to counter these negative effects. Children are easily and deeply influenced by the characters and plots portrayed in movies, they gradually internalize the idea that men should dominate and women should be submissive in their daily lives. This perception can negatively affect children's interpersonal relationships, which can lead to harmful behaviors and attitudes, such as gender-based violence and discrimination. Parents and educators need to be aware of these issues and further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of Disney movies on children's attitudes and beliefs.

Keywords: Disney movies, gender roles, sexist stereotypes, children, perception

1. Introduction

Disney princess movies have long been one of the favorite genres for children and families, with each movie featuring a central female character, the princess, and a male character with whom the princess is romantically linked. The gender stereotypes in these movies have also raised the concerns of many scholars and researchers. The impact of Disney movies on children's perceptions of traditional gender roles and sexist stereotypes has been the subject of research and discussion. While these movies can provide entertainment and educational value for children, they can also perpetuate harmful stereotypes and influence children's perceptions of gender and interpersonal relationships. Teenage heroines are frequently seen in Snow White, Cinderella, Princess Aurora, Ariel, and Belle. Women are frequently depicted in a somatic triad of body shapes and aging pictures. A middle-aged beauty at the height of her sexuality and power represents female wickedness. Pear-shaped, elderly women who have passed menopause are attracted by feminine sacrifice and care. Disney's animated women are penitence, multi-layered depictions of admiring slaves, sinister bosses, and nice girls [1]. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend how Disney films affect kids.

The theme of this article is the impact of Disney movies on children's gender roles and stereotypes. It focuses on the plots and characters of three Disney animated movies, *The Little Mermaid*, *Snow White* and *the Seven Dwarfs*, and *Cinderella*. Children are easily and profoundly influenced by the

characters and plots portrayed in the movies, and movies with gender stereotypes can limit children's beliefs about what men and women can and should do. This study aims to raise awareness of the potential impact of media on children's beliefs about gender roles and expectations. To enable parents and educators to be more critical and attentive to the media children are exposed to and to make informed decisions about the content they consume. By examining the ways in which gender stereotypes are perpetuated in Disney movies, people can better understand areas for improvement and work to create more inclusive and empowering stories for children.

2. *The Little Mermaid*

Ariel, a young mermaid, is the protagonist of the Disney film *The Little Mermaid*. She wants to be a person and to reside on land. She makes a deal with a sea witch to exchange her voice for legs in order to walk onto dry land and attempt to win the heart of a human prince after falling in love with him. However, the Prince is unaware of the Little Mermaid's sacrifice and instead falls in love with a human princess. In the end, she must choose between living with the prince as a human, or returning to the sea and her family. Ariel is portrayed as a curious and adventurous young mermaid eager to explore the human world. However, her wishes are often limited by her father, King Triton, who wants her to adhere to traditional gender roles and remain within the confluence of her underwater kingdom. The examination of the movie reveals how the narrative upholds particular gender norms and standards. The Little Mermaid's sacrifice for the Prince can be seen as an example of the "Cinderella complex" mentioned in previous analysis, which assumes that women depend on men for a happy life. Additionally, the Prince is portrayed as the ultimate goal for the Little Mermaid, reinforcing the idea that a woman's happiness and fulfillment is dependent on a man's affection. Autonomy and independence are challenging for women due to the cost of conforming to impossible ideals in a male-dominated system. Like many women, Ariel faces a double bind cultural expectation of choosing between voice or access but not both [1]. The relationship between the Little Mermaid and the Prince serves as a vehicle for reinforcing certain gender roles and expectations.

3. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

A princess named Snow White is forced to flee from her wicked stepmother, the queen, who is envious of her beauty, in the Disney animated film "*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*." Along with the seven dwarfs, Snow White seeks sanctuary in a cottage in the woodland. The poisoned apple that the queen feeds Snow White causes her to fall asleep and transforms her into an elderly woman. The dwarves return and chase the queen, causing her downfall, and Snow White is awakened by a kiss from the prince who has been looking for her. In the movie, the main female character, Snow White, is portrayed in the story as a passive, submissive, and subservient male character. She is doing household chores, such as cooking and cleaning, and is depicted as needing rescue by the male characters. The movie's villainess, the evil queen, is portrayed as a jealous and vain character, obsessed with Snow White's appearance. This reinforces the stereotype of women competing with each other and being jealous [2]. Among other things, the movie places great emphasis on Snow White's external beauty, which is her most important trait. Snow White is repeatedly described as the fairest in the land, with her beauty being a central aspect of her character. The evil queen's jealousy towards Snow White's beauty drives the plot of the movie. Also, Snow White's appearance was a central aspect of her relationship with the prince, as he fell in love with her beauty at first sight. This reinforces the stereotype that a woman's value is determined by her appearance.

Conversely, the male characters in the movie, including the prince and the seven dwarfs, are portrayed as strong and brave, while the female characters are portrayed as soft and passive. This perpetuates the traditional gender roles of women as being unable to take care of themselves and

needing male protection. One study investigated how children understood and negotiated the nontraditional gender discourse promoted through the feminist version of the Snow White fairy tale. The feminist version of the movie does not end with the traditional prince and princess falling in love and getting married. Instead, a more modern ending is chosen, with Snow White choosing to live in a diamond mine with her friends. Investigating the surface girls made more use of marriage discourse to describe the ending of the story, while boys placed more emphasis on maternal discourse [3].

4. *Cinderella*

The Disney movie “*Cinderella*” tells the story of a young girl who lives under the abuse of her stepmother and stepsisters, but eventually wins the heart of a prince and marries him with the help of magic. The movie emphasizes and portrays the struggle of modern women against external odds. The “Cinderella complex” is widespread across time periods and contexts. Male characters are portrayed as adventure-oriented, while female characters are portrayed as being oriented toward romantic relationships. Many studies have shown that Disney movies often portray women as passive, weak, and in need of rescue by male characters, perpetuating traditional gender roles and limiting the roles women can play in society [1]. Gender stereotypical movies are often voted for and rated higher, indicating social acceptance of gender stereotypes [4].

5. Discussion

While these movies may provide beneficial educational and entertainment value for children, educators also need to be aware that they can lead to a range of problems by forming poor ideas about gender roles and relationships as children grow up. A diagnosis of the embedded potentials of multitextual iconographies in animation is encouraged by the semiotic layering in the formation of women's bodies in Disney animation, with cultural artifacts. Aiming to link viewer sympathies and loyalty with the beginning and end of the feminine life cycle, Disney's created bodies of women portray the middle as a perilous, consumptive, and transgressive territory [1]. While Disney movies such as “*Cinderella*” and “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*” can convey the truth of human interaction, they also introduce children to a world of stereotypes and plots [5].

The effects of these stereotypes can also extend to interpersonal relationships, as children may internalize the idea that men should be dominant and women should be submissive. This can lead to harmful behaviors and attitudes, such as gender-based violence and discrimination [6]. In the Disney movie character analysis, male characters spend significantly more time talking than female characters. Female characters are more likely to be portrayed as passive and submissive. Female characters need to rely on male characters for protection [7]. Female characters are more likely to be portrayed as victims, while male characters are more likely to be portrayed as powerful and militant [8]. Moreover, Disney movies can influence children's perceptions of gender and relationships and may promote harmful behaviors and attitudes [9]. Female characters in movies often play stereotypically female roles, such as housewives, while male characters are portrayed as stereotypically male roles, such as leaders and heroes. This can also have an impact on children's perceptions of gender.

For example, in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the heroine is rescued by the prince, perpetuating the notion that women are unable to care for themselves and need male protection. Similarly, in *Cinderella*, the heroine is rescued by the prince and finds happiness through marriage, reinforcing the notion that the ultimate goal of a woman's life is to find a man. These stereotypes can influence children's perceptions of gender roles and expectations, limiting their beliefs about what men and women can and should do. In addition, Disney movies often portray male characters as dominant, strong, and aggressive and female characters as emotional, nurturing, and passive. The

effects of these stereotypes also extend to interpersonal relationships, as children may be convinced to accept the idea that males should be dominant and females should be submissive. Such ideas can lead to harmful behaviors and attitudes, such as gender-based violence and discrimination.

Nevertheless, one study evaluated 61 movies from Disney. The findings suggest that for nine years, there have been few stereotypical gender portrayals of characters in Disney movies and that the inclusion of women in the production process has led to more portrayals of male and female characters [10]. In *Mulan*, the female protagonist breaks with traditional gender roles and becomes a warrior, challenging the notion that women should be passive and weak. In *Frozen*, female characters take the positive route and do not rely on male characters for deliverance. Disney breaks away from the notion of the damsel in distress and instead represents and even advances modern feminist ideals [11]. In conclusion, several studies suggest that Disney movies have a significant impact on children's perceptions of traditional gender roles and sexist stereotypes. These movies often reinforce harmful stereotypes of women and limit children's beliefs about what men and women can and should do. Although Disney movies try to create more inclusive and progressive stories, people need to be aware of these issues and further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of Disney movies on children's attitudes.

6. Conclusion

This paper analyzed three Disney movies: *The Little Mermaid*, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, and *Cinderella*. The research analyses examined Disney's portrayal of gender, all of which found a degree of gender stereotyping. Women are consistently portrayed as a physical trio of bodies, forms, and snapshots of aging, with teenage heroines depicted as Snow White, Cinderella, and Ariel. Female evil is embodied in middle-aged beauty at the peak of sexuality and authority. Female sacrifice and nurturing are drawn on older women (stepmothers, witches, etc.). Women in Disney animation are decoratively painted as good girls, bad women, and coddled servants. However, there are some limitations in this literature. First of all, earlier content evaluations used a tiny sample, concentrating mostly on Disney princesses or a select group of Disney films produced in association with other children's media. Second, the inferences that can be derived from these analyses regarding how Disney portrays gender are constrained by their concentration on a particular subsample of Disney characters (princesses and princes, ruffian, or parents). Future research will continue to pay attention to and analyze the content and characters of other Disney series, not only limited to these princess series movies, in order to improve the current shortcomings.

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