

Project Description:

I plan on writing a research paper that will look at early animated princess/fairytale Disney films and their representation of the feminine, masculine and gender roles played in heterosexual relationships. I will be looking at *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Pocahontas*, *Aladdin*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Mulan*. After having watched each of these, I will address each one in terms of (a) what does this film say about femininity? In terms of clothing, speech and mannerisms, how are females presented in this Disney film? (b) what does this film say about masculinity? In terms of clothing, speech and mannerisms, how are males presented in this Disney film? (c) how does this film promote heterosexual relationships? What types of roles are females resigned to in this film? What does this film teach about males and their roles in life and relationships? (d) how might this film affect children and their gender roles? After having addressed these, I will use journals articles that relate directly to Disney films and critiques of them, as well as works by authors about relationships and typical gender roles assigned to men/women. I will also use information regarding how receptive children are to the information and address possible opinions being put forth by Disney.

Working Thesis or Position:

I believe that the earlier animated Disney films (i.e. before 2000) that told stories of princesses and fairytales will have effects on children and how they understand and act upon specific gender roles. Not only do these films establish "heterosexual" as the norm, but they teach children about what it means to be feminine and masculine. However, these gender categories are the only two that are presented in Disney films. Because of this, children are forced to identify with one of the other and subsequently emulate what they see on the screen. Once they have been taught what femininity and masculinity mean, they will attempt to fulfill those roles (i.e. resigning themselves to a life of waiting to be saved or a life of constantly saving women). Disney movies, while they may seem harmless, can carry heavy messages that might one day affect children's gender performances or their real-life relationships.

Relevance to Career Goals:

I don't really have any specific career goal in mind at this point, but whatever I do, I want to be involved in film. I absolutely believe that it is important to be aware of what messages are being dispersed by media. I think this paper will be a great opportunity for me to look at a specific area of film

and its effects (that may not be overtly present). Furthermore, I like the idea of looking at something that is meant for children and seeing what types of effects that might have on the target audience. To me, being media literate means being able to discern information from a certain agenda. I think that more often than not, we (as an audience) take whatever we are given by TV, film, books, etc. for granted. We think that because someone in a position of some sort of power is saying something, it must be true. When in fact, we need to delve deeper into what the medium is saying and how. In this instance, Disney films are clearly targeted at youth and children. These films come with some pretty value-laden themes and messages that deserve someone taking a look at. Like I said, I don't know exactly what my career goals are right now, but I do know that whatever I end up doing I'm going to be media savvy.

Annotation

Hurley, Dorothy L. "Seeing White: Children of Color and the Disney Fairy Tale Princess."

The Journal of Negro Education. 74. 3 (Summer 2005): 221-232. JSTOR. JSTOR.

8 February 2009. <<http://www.jstor.org>>

The article examines children of color and the effects that the Disney princess fairy tales have on how they see themselves and how they understand the world. This relates directly to my paper in that Disney's representations of females and female lead characters effect how children come to understand the world in terms of sexes/genders and the roles they are taught to take.

Holmlund, Christine. "Tots to Tanks: Walt Disney Presents Feminism for the Family." Social

Text. 2 (Summer 1979): 122-132. JSTOR. JSTOR. 8 February 2009.

<<http://www.jstor.org>>

The article examines a few films released by Disney in the 1970s and takes a look at how femininity/masculinity is presented to a youth oriented audience (mannerisms, dress, actions, etc.). This article relates to my paper by addressing what types of ways Disney designates female and male on screen and how the audience perceives these supposedly innocuous messages.

Adler, Patricia A, Steven J. Kless and Peter Adler.

"Socialization to Gender Roles: Popularity

Among Elementary School Boys and Girls." Sociology of Education. 65. 3 (Jul., 1992):

John Q. Student – Capstone Proposal

169-187. JSTOR. JSTOR. 8 February 2009.
<<http://www.jstor.org>>

This article is a study that shows what sorts of things make male and female school children popular among their peers and how they come to understand femininity and masculinity. I plan to compare this study's results with Disney fairy tale stories to see if Disney presents some of the same stereotypes of what is masculine and feminine.

Wallowitz, Laraine. "Reading as Resistance: Gendered Messages in Literature and Media." The English Journal. 93. 3 (Jan., 2004): 26-31. JSTOR. JSTOR. 8 February 2009.

<<http://www.jstor.org>>
This article looks specifically at how gender is constructed through media to send a message about what it means to be male or female. My paper is addressing this within Disney movies so I can use this article as a basis for how to spot certain gender-assigning mechanisms in the films.

Galician, Mary-Lou. Sex, Love and Romance in the Mass Media: Analysis and Criticism of Unrealistic Portrayals and Their Influence. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

This book looks at the kinds of damage that fairytale princess films can do to us (in relationships, etc.) if we take the message the movie is making as a given. The author advocates "dis-illusioning" yourself in order to understand the message and also promotes ways of being media literate.

Lee, Lena. "Understanding Gender through Disney's Marriages: A Study of Young Korean Immigrant Girls." Early Childhood Education Journal. 36. 1 (August 2008): 11-18.
Ebsco. 8 February 2009.

<<http://ejournals.ebsco.com.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/direct.asp?ArticleID=4C84A559325BC195D958>>
This article looks at how young ethnic females living in the US understand gender and gender roles based on things like how Disney portrays marriage in its films. My paper will address all young females in the US and the understanding of gender and how it might be affected by Disney films.