Disney movies

Entertainment, Movie

Stereotypes are generalizations and overgeneralizations about the member of a group; sometimes being positive, more often negative, having a resistance to change (Ziebarth, 2009). " The Disney organization does not create the stereotypes, they simply reflect them" (What about Women in Disney Movies? , 2008). Disney movies, however, are filled with stereotypes, ranging from social stereotypes to racial stereotypes. Although Disney movies are filled with an abundant amount of different stereotypes, the most common stereotypes seen in Disney movies are gender stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes are when a group is generalized based on gender (female or male). In Disney movies the most common area to see gender stereotyping is within the main characters—the princesses. " The Disney princesses are cookie-cutter heroines, who are always curvaceous, have the same attractive features (regardless of race) and rarely take physical risks" (Media Awareness Network, 2009, Para. 7). For example, in Cinderella she is forced to do housework, a task that is commonly instilled onto women who are being stereotyped.

This act of making the heroines to do housework is seen throughout numerous of Disney movies; including, Snow White and Sleeping Beauty. The reason that this act is so shocking is because it teaches kids, through film, that women are supposed to be the ones in the kitchen, scrubbing the floors, instead of getting a job (something that has never happened in a Disney film). Disney movies and their gender stereotypes are also sending messages to the young girls watching the movies. A message that is frequently told to young viewers through Disney is to " keep quiet and be beautiful" (Maio, 1999, Para 2).

This message is shown in the movie Little Mermaid, where Ariel gives up her voice and depends on her looks to win the heart of her prince. Winning the heart of a prince is a very common trait in Disney movies, but this trait is the most offensive to women because of how much gender stereotyping occurs. For instance, in The Little Mermaid, Ariel will do anything to make the prince fall in love with her. She even gives up her voice so she can have legs (Maio, 1999). In almost all Disney movies, the princesses leave their previous lives to join the life of their princes, changing their entire personalities for a man.

For example, Cinderella was a woman who enjoyed nature, but changed her ways to please Prince Charming. Stereotypes are seen frequently in Disney movies; however, the most abundant stereotype is gender stereotypes against women. Women are always portrayed as the damsels in distress, never the heroines, and Disney needs to change the way they are portraying women in order to stop the influencing of young minds that that is the way in which women should be treated. Stigmatization Stigmatization is seen today as a mark of disgrace or inferiority.

Groups that are most commonly stigmatized are the physically disabled, " little people," obese people, old people, and sick people. Although Disney does not stigmatize all of these groups, they do commonly make reference to them and the stigmatizations they hold. Villains are a key supplement to a good Disney movie, however these villains are presented a way in which something is always wrong with the villain, which, in turn, puts them into a stigmatized group. For example, in the film Peter Pan, the villain Captain Hook does not have a hand, putting him into the group of disabilities.

Children watching this film start to interpret disabled people as evil. " Journalist Paul Glastris speaks of the blow to his self-image at finding himself, at fourteen, being fitted for a prosthetic arm and discovering a mural of the limbless and evil Captain Hook menacing the pretty and good Wendy and Peter Pan" (Shapiro, 2009). Then there are the villains which are made to portray evil through their actions of stigmatization, such as Cruella Deville in 101 Dalmatians. Cruella portrays the stigmatization that smoking stigmatizes evil.

This stigma is good in that it makes kids believe that smoking is bad, but it also is incorrect of Disney because many children have parents who smoke and they might start to believe that their parents are evil as well. In Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, the queen is first presented as cold and cruel. She then transforms into an elderly women, who tries to kill Snow White. With a wart on her nose, the queen completes a common stereotype-that old people are senile and evil. Ursula, from The Little Mermaid, is another example of stigmatizing the villains.

First of all, she is portrayed as overweight, a huge contrast to the slimming figures of the mermaids. Even the colors that surround Ursula are dark and gloomy. Besides villains, a group that is severely stigmatized in Disney movies is little people. In Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, an entire group of people are being stigmatized. The word choice which Disney chose—" dwarfs"—is offensive to all little people because it is a word which is discriminating to them (Ebert, 2005). Dwarf is an offensive term to all little people, and Disney made it seem that the seven dwarfs were not able to survive without the help of Snow White.

Stigmatization is extremely common within the Disney films—especially within the villains of the movies. Disney should refrain from stigmatizing groups of people within their movies because children can learn from what they watch on T. V. and watching a group of stigmatized people on T. V. be portrayed as " evil" makes them believe that a group is always going to be " evil. " Race Racial profiling is a form of discrimination based on race (Ziebarth, 2009). Racial profiling is common within the Disney films. Where it is most commonly seen is within movies where two races are mixing, such as in the movie Pocahontas.

Disney is not necessarily discriminating against a race through film, but Disney is making a point of portraying race and culture through film incorrectly based on stereotypes. Aladdin is an original Disney movie which brought racial profiling into question. Simply starting with the names of the characters brings question about race into view. The two most questioned names were Aladdin and Jafaar, names which were supposed to symbolize the poor Middle Eastern culture, are names that originally originate from Russia.

Also, since this movie was supposed to be in a Middle Eastern city, the characters all had a dark complexion. The dark complexion was correct on Disney's part; however, what was incorrect was that all the facial features were European. By having the incorrect facial features with the dark skin tone it teaches children that they can sort people by race solely on a person's skin color. Aladdin was portrayed as simply a " white man was a dark tan" (Disney's Protrayal of Culture and Race in Film, 2009). Another Disney film which had racial profiling in it is The Lion King.

In The Lion King, white actors played the voices along with African American actors. The fact that Disney had an interracial cast was good, but the white voices played the " good guys" and the African American voices were used for the " bad guys" shows how Disney uses voices of different races to interpret a message of fear and terror. For example, in The Lion King, Whoopi Goldberg does the voices for the hyenas in the movie, the savage animals (she made no direct comment on this, but her publishers say she was extremely disappointed with the Disney production company that they would do this).

Disney not only racially profiles against the African American group however, in The Little Mermaid Jamaicans are the targeted group. Sebastian, a servant to a white mermaid, has a Jamaican accent. Jamaicans are stereotyped as being " druggies" or " lazy," and in the song Sebastian sings, he continually says that Ariel should stay under the sea so she doesn't have to work all day (Media Awareness Network, 2009).

This racial profiling places the impression that all people with Jamaican accents are lazy, and Disney is placing this impression on their young viewers. In 1995, Disney made an attempt to be appealing to a variety of cultures by making the film Pocahontas. However, the Disney crew was reluctant to make a film through the eyes of a different race, and the Disney crew actually did a sensitivity training in order to understand the movie from a different races view (Riedemann, 2007). What the Disney crew did was mix two cultures into one movie.

In the storyline of the movie racial profiling occurs when the Caucasians do not agree with Pocahontas intermingling with them because they believe she

is a " savage. " Although Disney did an attempt at making a non-racial movie, their attempts failed incredibly in this movie. Race has been seen throughout Disney history, starting with Aladdin, to the most recent, Pocahontas. Although the intentions of Disney has changed about race—in Pocahontas, Disney tries to intermix race—the ending message has commonly been the same: races are different and have their own personalities which are not to be mixed.

Breaking the Barriers While it is quite obvious that Disney has done some blatant labeling throughout the years, Disney has attempted to step outside the common stereotyping. In the movie Mulan, the main character doesn't rely on anyone but herself. A positive message was sent out to girls of all ages when they watched this film: If you want something done, do it yourself. This was one of the first films Disney created where the female was not dependent on another man.

No prince charming came and rescued her, no ogres saving the princess from the tower, no man provided a safe haven for Mulan. Instead, Mulan had to toughen up and fight her own battles. With this, an extremely significant message was presented to young girls. It only took Disney sixty-one years to do this. However, one dormant messages, still exist. Mulan is shown as having to change her appearance in order to do something she is passionate about. This shows young viewers that they cannot do anything without fitting into the proper stereotypes of society.

In attempts to make the films more appealing to all the races, Disney has incorporated Arabs, Native Americans, and many other ethnic groups in their films. However, it wasn't until the year 2009 when an African American

princess was introduced. Deneen Brown, of the Washington Post, recalls her childhood experience, " Hollywood never gave us someone who looked like us" (Brown, 2009). Black girls across the nation were able to experience someone looking like them live " happily ever after. " Disney has made leaps and bounds in the last sixty-one years, their biggest accomplishment being an African American princess.

However improved Disney is now, it is hard to forget the moments in The Little Mermaid where Ariel surrenders her voice for a man or in 101 Dalmatians where the villain is never seen without a cigarette in hand. Disney has made many mistakes when making their childhood classic movies, by portraying stereotypes, having stigmatization, and finally racial profiling. Although Disney cannot go back and remake the movies to change the mistakes they made, parents and caretakers and can become aware of these elements in Disney movies and explain to children what is fictional and what is fact.