

Gender stereotypes of superheroes research paper



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The research on the gender differences between male and female superheroes falls under the gender research from sociological, psychological and political points of view. There are some amounts of research conducted on coloring books, comic books and cartoon characters in order to see the ways by which gender differences are depicted.

Some researchers focus on the issue from a theoretical point of view while some others have focus on the effects of these gender stereotypes depicted in mass media organs. Yet some other works give their primary focus to practical applications of comic books in classrooms to teach various subjects such as race, equality, gender, patriotism and American history among others.

My topic is based on the debate on gender indifference when it comes to portrayal of women in the media. The research will examine a number of comic books and the remarks given by different researchers.

According to many researchers, superheroes are known to influence a child's development in terms of upholding their moral values hence the fact the most male superheroes are portrayed as having more strength than the female counterparts makes it a major concern for researchers. It is evident that girls are not innately weak beings neither should they be portrayed as sexual icons with very unnatural figures that are not obviously like those of a normal girl.

Against this background, our hypotheses of the research will be: (1) Males will appear more often than females. (2) Both males and females will be

depicted in gender-stereotypical roles. (3) Males will be depicted in more active states than females.

Libby and Aries (302) state that “ the way in which we perceive the world around us is not merely a neutral registration of some external reality. Instead, perception involves an active construction that incorporates our past memories and expectations as well as the current context”. The stereotypes have turned against women regarding them as weak beings, cowards, and talkative characters who have a much lower status in the society than men.

The most notorious for promoting gender stereotyping are mostly the social institutions. Since the advancement of media technology that has been incorporated as part and parcel of our every day living in regards to how we involve ourselves with socialization. Entertainment programs such as films, cartoons and dramas are always having a common expectation from the members of the society perpetuating these stereotypes.

It is a common thing that children get to start watching cartoon while they are very young and they watch them almost every time given the opportunity. From many researches that have been conducted, the male characters in cartoons are always superior and dominant beings as opposed to the female (McCabe et al197).

A research conducted by Siegfried and Strand (14) affirms that the cartoon world is a man’s world. While another study conducted by Aiken (74), clearly describes the male characters as also the dominant characters as she describes them as being “ chase-and-pratfall”.

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Eick (3), a researcher and the author of " Gender Stereotypes in Children's Television Cartoons," is in support of the fact that male characters were always being the position of power in such character roles as policemen, superheroes and scientists and they were never shown as characters who could perform roles that include cleaning, cooking nor even have instances where they would show emotions through crying. It is noted that in almost all cartoon programs the male characters are portrayed as strong and dominant characters as compared to their female counterparts who are seen as vulnerable, puny and always depending on the male characters.

The creators of the cartoon have their target audience which is mostly around the age of two to possibly eighteen years of age (2-18) an age bracket that considers a child's growth. Most of the children have no way of differentiating reality from fantasy hence the stereotypes that develops around this age tend to last longer in the children's minds as they gradually develop and become mature.

Hence, cartoons portray cultural narrations that can be used to enlighten the young ones and show who they are and who they can end up being. The society is responsible for defining the roles for the two genders. From my point of view, superheroes are neither good nor bad; am convinced in this by the views that have been expressed by several scholars from previous researches.

In 2010, Aiken conducted a research on superheroes basing her referencing on comic books. Aiken's aim of conducting the research was to find how meaningful super- heroes were in terms of teaching children history in the

classroom environment. According to Aiken (41), there are many ways through which school curriculums can be incorporated with comics to suite students learning ability.

Aiken found out that comics that are related to superheroes have significant impact in regards to the history of U. S. in the twentieth century. She suggests that the comic characters, such as Captain America, Wonder Woman and Spiderman could be used to show the people that they can improve themselves to be better people in the society “ desire for heroes and for somebody to show us that we can be our better selves” (45).

The comic project book founded through the teachers college at the University of Columbia has been helpful for both the students and the teachers. Students are getting involved in comic works especially via the internet through the help of their teachers. The most notable point is that with time, more teachers are embracing comics today and they use these comic books to their advantage and to the advantage of their students in their classrooms.

Baker and Raney (25) conducted a research concentrating on the gender-stereotypical behaviors portrayed by male and female superheroes in cartoons. They conducted an analysis from 160 hours of recorded programming to watch about 70 characters. The main aim of the analysis of the study is to find out how the different gender characters are being portrayed through stereotypic roles (Baker and Raney 33).

After the analysis which involved the analyzing of the characters manifestation individuality, different traits personal behavior and the super

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heroic functions of the characters, the result confirmed that there is indeed a great difference between female characters and male characters in regards to how they depict their emotional feelings, how tough they are, their strategy in solving problems and coming up with solutions.

From the research, the female characters are depicted as more emotional and attractive characters while the male characters are depicted as tough and superior characters.

According to Fitzpatrick & McPherson (129), male characters in coloring books are depicted as more active, presenting some gender neutral behaviors and as superheroes, adults and animals. Female characters, on the other hand, are portrayed as children and human beings. They collected 56 coloring books, in which 38% of the books were directed to females, 34% of them were directed to males and 29% of them are appropriate for both genders (131).

While men are portrayed as strong and mature, the female gender is seen as more submissive, vane and composed. Mostly women are seen doing roles such as cooking, cleaning, being concerned with makeup activities, sitting and always looking outside the window as boys play.

A study by Siegfried and Strand (250) shows how today's culture is setting the views of the youth concerning gender stereotyping in our communities. In their study, they were able to gather about 56 coloring books. In their conclusion, the male gender appears more often than the female gender. In almost all books, both males and females will be represented in gender-

stereotypical positions. Most obviously the males will be represented in more active states than their female counterparts.

Another survey conducted by Eick (2) analyzing four popular TV cartoon characters portraying their sex stereotype to prove which of the genders was more superior to the other.

The analysis is based on the number of male versus female characters, the physical characteristic of each individual character, the ability to solve a problem individually as either male or female and both males and females will be represented in gender-stereotypical positions. The outcome showed a remarkable account of indifferences between the portrayal of both the female and male cartoon characters.

Most notably is that the male characters were many in numbers than the female counterparts and all the time they had the same job character in bodily aspects and were recognized as the usual stereotypes. The female gender was not under any circumstance the main people who solved the problems or were be referred to as heroes. Instead they were portrayed and drawn with tiny waists and short skirts while the men looked and played their part more confidently and even the way they dressed showed that they had confidence.

The study is meant to show how women and men are portrayed individually and what effects each character role has on the comic reading audience. The goal of the study is to find out which comics if any had stereotypic influence on either the male or the female character. This research being a scientific research with a defined problem needed accurate data.

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The research will be conducted using both secondary data from various well known scholars and websites and primary data that will be obtained from the immediate people and sources. I will identify different remarks from authors who have researched upon this matter and clearly defined them.

The research above is an exploratory type of research whereby the researcher conducts research with the aim of shedding light on a problem/issue which has not yet been well defined. When a researcher embarks on this type of research, the researcher can therefore make accurate and more justified conclusions.

This type of research will use secondary sources of data and qualitative approaches to describe data. The advantage of using qualitative analysis techniques is that the data can give an indication as to why, how and when certain phenomenon occurs.

The research design will act as the glue that will hold the study together and give credence to the research. The research design employed in this research would be a randomized experiment /true experiment design. This is the most preferable design to utilize as the interest of the research is to establish a cause-effect relationship between careers and self image.

Based on this design, it will be structured to show how women and men are portrayed individually and what effects each character role has on the comic reading audience. It will be able to show how all major parts, sample populations, and research methods work in tandem to address the central question.

The media has the ability to influence the public's thinking capacity especially for the children learning process. The media is responsible for making people have a certain perception about something and this account for the reason as to why we view men in a certain way and women in a totally different way.

We can conclude that the media stereotypes leave tracks of associated characteristics in human perceptions. As noted above almost all cartoon programs and comic book characters show the male characters as strong and dominant characters compared to female characters who are seen as vulnerable, puny and always depending on the male characters.

The reason why the media should change the stereotypes in it is perhaps the misjudgments that have taken place in the past because of stereotypes that withhold senseless judgment. The mass media plays a major role in an individual in making his or her judgment especially during a child growth stage and teenage years.

Teenagers are always influenced with what they see on television and what they hear or learn from the mass media. Previous studies have confirmed that a higher percentage of children and teenagers would do things simply because they saw it on television or heard it on the radio. Noting that even the advertising industry always use gender stereotypes in their advertisements in one way or another as they try to convince their target market to buy their product.

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