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PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER IN YOUNG CONSUMERS OF ANIMATED FILMS

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Judy Berry, Johnathon Hudson, Elaine Hudson, Johnathon

Hudson Jr., and Kaitlynn Hudson. Thank you for your enthusiasm and care throughout

my education.

This thesis is also dedicated to all those who started the important conversations, sparked

the great debates, and spoke the difficult truths.

This work would not be possible without those intrepid individuals who changed the way

we think and speak of ourselves.

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ABSTRACT

PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER IN YOUNG CONSUMERS OF ANIMATED FILMS

April 12 , 2012

Katherine Barnes

The purpose of this study was to investigate the gender stereotyping of two animated films by boys and girls (N=25). Based on Bem's (1983) gender schema theory, it was hypothesized that children would stereotype *Aladdin* as being for males and *Pocahontas* as being for females, based on the gender of the lead character. Interviews with participants (five to six years old) revealed that they did not gender stereotype the two films. A majority of both boys and girls liked the two films and felt they were for boys and girls. However, they did not think a girl could rescue another girl when asked to imagine different plot scenarios. They were more likely to believe a boy could save another boy. This study demonstrated that boys and girls relied on gender schemas in their interpretation of animated film.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Male and female dyads seem static in our cultural arrangement of binary

formation. Even within animated film where reality has the potential to be challenged,

audiences are presented with traditionally stereotypical gendered roles, attitudes, and

behaviors (Byrne & McQuillan, 1999; Douglas, 1994; Tanner, Haddock, Zimmerman &

Lund, 2003; Towbin, Haddock, Zimmerman, Lund & Tanner, 2003). Since the 1930s,

when *Snow White* was released, animated films have been a media staple. Disney, Pixar,

DreamWorks, and other film studios have produced some of the most prolific and

endearing characters, which children and adults alike have come to embrace. Although

there has been a recent surge in studies that show how forms of media that target children

portray male and female characters, how young audiences interpret these portrayals has

been relatively unexplored (Smith, Peiper, Granados, & Choueiti, 2010). Because

cinematic images often become cultural icons with symbolic significance, it is important

to investigate how children (the target audience) interpret films.

Numerous content analyses have documented the disparity between male and

female representation in film and literature aimed at young consumers. When males and

females are depicted, studies often find that the portrayals tend to be stereotypical and

traditional, despite progressive changes in reality. Most researchers agree that media

impact children's developing beliefs and values (Eschholz, Bufkin & Long, 2002; Tanner

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et al., 2003; Towbin et al., 2003; Smith, 2010). Children learn about morality, social norms, and gender roles from different sources, including media portrayals. Moskalenko (2008) writes that "morality is acquired through the process of socialization when children learn in their experience with peers, from observation of adults, and by instructional stories, such as fairy tales" (p. 301). Children learn about character roles, which individual characters they identify with, and the consequences of being "good" or "bad".

However, content and textual analyses often ignore how audiences consume media and assume that people are passive receivers of messages found in media content (Gill, 2007). Passively absorbing media content and accepting its portrayal as realistic has been explored in cultivation theory, which states that those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect common messages in the fictional world of television (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). One example of cultivation found that heavy viewers of television in Belgium where more likely to believe young people were substance abusers (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). This survey was based on numerous content analyses that revealed frequent portrayals of drug usage on television (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Conversely, some studies suggest that young audiences are rejecting messages found in mainstream media because they contradict with their own realities (Ward, Day, & Thomas, 2010). This study attempted to show that children are not just passive receivers of messages in animated film; rather that they are interpreting the films based on the lenses of gender.

Hypothesis

The purpose of this study is to investigate the different responses of boys and girls to animated films and the ways they interpret representations of male and female characters and activities: what is the relationship of gender schema to children's readings of films and the ways they do or do not identify with characters in films? To understand how children interact with animated films, participants in this study were interviewed following a preview of two animated films. Using Bem's (1983) gender schema theory as the theoretical framework, this study investigated if young consumers of animated films interpret animated films using gender schemas. Gender schema theory suggests that individuals learn about the different ways in which males and females are classified, and then adjust their own behavior to fit these classifications (Jones & Greer, 2011).

Based on previous research, which found children gender stereotyped films, this study investigated the different responses between genders as to whether they perceive animated films as being targeted to either males or females (Oliver & Green, 2001). To better understand how children align films by gender, they were asked to explain why they believe a film may have been made for a male audience or female audience. The following hypotheses were examined:

H1: Male participants will favor the film with the male lead while female participants will favor the film with the female lead. Also, males and females will assign the film with a male lead as a "boys'" film, and both males and females will assign the film with a female lead as a "girls'" film. Thus showing that

children display sex typing, or the adoption of likes and dislikes considered appropriate for their gender.

Based on Bem's (1993) concept of sex typing, children should identify with characters of the same sex based on the limited, and homogenized, versions of males and females they processed within the dominant culture. If children process gender within the social community, then participants should align themselves with characters within the films that they identify with, essentially replicating Bem's (1993) concept of sex typing.

The participants were asked about specific actions within the animated films and whether they attributed the actions to the character's sex. Bem (1993) explains that historically, sexual differences in behavior and thought has been influenced by the sexual division of labor (males are warriors, females are caregivers) and psychological gendering (collection of traits that are labeled masculine or feminine) (p. 34). Based on the idea that animated films act as tools of social learning that reproduce dominant ideologies, these set of questions explored whether male and female viewers associated actions with the character's sex.

H2: Male and female participants will identify with same-sex characters and will interpret actions and behaviors through gender schemas.

The goal of this study is to supplement the numerous content analyses that have found a disparity in male and female characters within media targeted for children. If males and females are portrayed disproportionally and stereotypically, what effect does that have on children? Mead (1934) writes that children take on the role of other and

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view their performance from the point of view of others (Coser, 1971). This genesis of consciousness of the self is based in communication with society. If the maturation process of children involves them taking on the roles of others and eventually, the attitude of the whole community, then it is important to investigate the roles that are being presented by the media and targeting children.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Lenses of Gender

Gender in Western culture, predominantly the United States, has promulgated

certain beliefs and understandings about what it means to be a man and a woman.

Despite cultural shifts such like technological advances in medicine, women's liberation,

and changing family dynamics, there remains elements about sex and gender in our

society that reproduce traditional male power and female subjugation. Mary Pipher

(1994) wrote about the lives of adolescent girls in her book titled, *Reviving Ophelia.*

Pipher (1994) describes girls' issues in Western culture based on her work as a clinical

psychologist. She writes that girls struggle with mixed messages rooted in cultural

messages. These messages include, but are not limited to the following: "Be beautiful,

but beauty is only skin deep. Be sexy, but not sexual. Be honest, but don't hurt anyone's

feelings. Be independent, but be nice. Be smart, but not so smart you threaten boys. "

(Pipher, 1994, p. 35-36). Pipher (1994) writes that girls are taught in early adolescence to

relinquish their true selves and to achieve social acceptability through their physical

appearance.

Where girls feel pressure to be kind and pretty, boys have been taught to be

aggressive and not express emotion. Feirstein (1982), who wrote *Real Men Don't Eat*

Quiche, uses humor to defend traditional masculinity by providing a litany of what 'Real Men' do and do not do: "Unlike his predecessors, today's Real Man actually can feel things like sorrow, pity, love, warmth, and sincerity; but he'd never be so vulnerable as to admit them." (Kimmel & Messner, 1989, p. 33). Another aspect of masculinity in Western culture is sexuality. Men and boys construct their sexuality through their understanding of what is masculine and any sexual issue is an issue with their self-image as men (Fracher & Kimmel, 1987).

Bem (1993) notes that assumptions about sex and gender are entrenched in our discourse and social institutions, and these assumptions reproduce throughout time, regardless of social change. So what are the elements of gender and sex in Western cultures that are so fecund they reproduce with seemingly impervious power? Bem (1993) identifies them as hidden assumptions about gender and sex. Bem (1993) refers to these assumptions as the 'lenses of gender' and these lenses shape how members of a society perceive and conceive of their social reality (p. 2). The following section will discuss Bem's (1993) three lenses of gender and how members of a dominant Western culture have come to see social reality through them.

The first lens Bem (1993) identifies is androcentrism, or simply stated, male centeredness (p. 40). de Beauvoir was writing about this very concept in 1949 in *The Second Sex*. de Beauvoir (1949) states that men and women define themselves differently because *man* is the prototype used to define all human beings whereas *woman* is something other. Man is the natural representation of human beings while women are defined by their differences from man, such as their reproductive organs. A woman must start by stating that she is a female because all other aspects of her definition follows,

while a man exists without any statement because he does not need to explain being a man- he just is. Being a man, according to de Beauvoir (1949), is not abnormal while being a woman is. This natural existence is something a man does not have to define or explain but a woman has to define herself as "the other". The idea of "Subject" and the "Other" suggests that men and women see each other as different beings. The man is established as the dominant one because of an idea of innate superiority. The female is seen as superfluous and is given the role of an inferior being. This idea suggests men and women interact based on roles of superiority and inferiority.

Bem (1993) argues that not only does the lens of androcentrism affect how men and women interact, but also shapes cultural discourse such as religious ideology, philosophy, and even psychoanalytic theory (p. 43). For Bem (1993), androcentrism, or the male-perspective, has underpinned Western thought and given preference to a male point of view, a male reference point, and a male standard. This underpinning has essentially shaped the minds of men and women, leaving women as the *other* and thus, disadvantaged.

The second lens Bem (1993) identifies is gender polarization. Bem (1993) defines gender polarization as the omnipresent way in which society organizes itself around differences between genders (p. 80). Gender polarization exists by providing scripts for males and females to follow and by effectively labeling a person who deviates from these scripts as aberrant. Judith Lorber, (2005) who writes about degendering in her book titled *Breaking the Bowls*, recognizes gender polarization as a ubiquitous binary system of social organization that creates inequality (p. 4). For Lorber (2005) the system of putting people into gendered positions, or creating scripts for people to follow, are

reinforced by culture, religion, knowledge systems, and media. This system makes the construct of gender differences seem natural which creates a link between sex (one's genitalia) and one's character and sexuality (Bem, 1993). Gender polarization imposes the male-female difference on all aspects of the social world, including media. The media reinforces gender differences and inequalities and takes advantage of these differences in order to target consumers, for adult media, romantic books and films ("chick lit" and "chick flicks") target female audiences, while action films and pornography often target male audiences (Kimmel, 2008, p. 238). In animation, the princess-type character has targeted young girls and the hero/action figure has targeted young boys. Gender polarization has imposed gender differences in media and the media has taken advantage of the varying and distinct groups to gain profit.

The third, and final, lens Bem (1993) identifies is biological essentialism. Biological essentialism works in conjunction with androcentrism and gender polarization by legitimizing them as natural. Scientific knowledge has traditionally supported the differences between men and women as rooted in hormones that shape male and female brains and bodies to aggression and nurturing natures (Imperato-McGinley, 1979a, 1979b; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Money & Ehrhardt, 1972; Phoenix, Gerall & Young, 1959). Bem (1993) calls in to question the subjectivity of scientific knowledge which has, historically, been used to rationalize inequality; she uses the example of a statement from 1854 in which Africans were thought to be fit for slavery because of their "intrinsic race character" (p. 7). Bem (1993) claims to not know definitely, either way, if biological differences really exist between the sexes outside of the obvious anatomical differences, however, she does argue that scientific "proof" of differences should be

considered in context (p. 37-38). Lorber (2005) writes that "[...] biology itself is socially constructed as gendered. Sex differences do matter, but the way they matter is a social phenomenon." (p. 23).

Bem (1993) argues that these lenses work in two ways; first, by channeling females and males into different and imbalanced life situations through social forces in which they are fixed and second, by being entrenched in a society, the individual internalizes and constructs an identity that matches (p. 3). With these forces exposed, how do children internalize and construct gender identity? There are several theories on gender development, which will be discussed to better understand how children cultivate their identity and adopt gender roles, attitudes, and behaviors.

Gender Schemas

Gender development in young children has been explained using three main theories: psychoanalytical theory, social learning theory, and cognitive-developmental theory (Bem, 1983). Psychoanalytic theory is attributed to Freud who theorized children became sex-typed through the awareness of anatomical sex differences and the eventual identification and adoption of the characteristics of the parent of the same sex. Social learning theory, on the other hand, stresses the idea that children learn through a system of rewards and punishments, which they receive for appropriate or inappropriate sex behaviors (Bem, 1983). Bandura (1985) wrote that it is unlikely that a young boy or girl will behave as such based solely on observing an adult of the same sex, rather they are indoctrinated into masculine and feminine roles through a myriad of models such as teachers, peers, their neighborhoods, and through the media. Meaning, children learn, not

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through their parents alone, but through a complex pattern of culture which is regulated by a social system of conduct.

Cognitive development theory, in contrast to social learning theory, places gender development in the social realm and out of the individual mind. If gender behaviors and attitudes are learned through modeling, then children are passive receivers of gender cues and are not actively forming their own identities. Bem (1993) cites Jean Piaget (1932) and Lawrence Kohlberg's (1966) theory of cognitive development of gender, which states that children are cognitively processing the social world around them and gender is an obvious and natural way to categorize people (p. 113). Bem (1993) criticizes Kohlberg's (1966) theory because, although Bem (1993) recognizes that children actively participate in gender identification and build rigid rules for both themselves and others around these perceptions, Kohlberg's (1966) theory failed to recognize that children are processing these rigid rules within a social community (Bem, 1993, p. 114).

Bem (1983) introduces another theory called gender schema theory. Gender schema theory "proposes that sex typing derives in large measure from gender-schematic processing, from a generalized readiness on the part of the child to encode and to organize information—including information about the self—according to the culture's definitions of maleness and femaleness" (Bem, 1983, p. 603). Gender schema theory marries social learning theory, where modeling is provided by the social community, and cognitive development theory, where the child uses their own cognitive processes to develop gender schemas.

Since media forms echo and construct cultural ideas, the tendency to ignore

female characters and stories can be seen as detrimental to developing healthy and

egalitarian ideas about gender. Susan Douglas (1994) asserts in her book, *Where the*

Girls Are: Growing Up Female with The Mass Media, that gender representation does

matter. For Douglas (1994), it would be imprudent to ignore or discount media studies,

to trivialize them would be to ignore the influence the media has, an influence which

promotes white-male heterogeneity, consumption, and complacency prompted by fantasy

(p. 11). Media studies have uncovered gender tropes, characterizations, and relationships

but they often neglect to identify exactly how the media influences viewers. The debate

over media's influence is not a simple one: Does media simply reflect our already

existing society or do they influence and promote certain behaviors and attitudes in

society? For Kimmel (2008), the question of the impact of media is not what the media

is doing, but how we are interacting with it as consumers:

> It is not the media itself, but rather the interaction of consumers and media that
> remains the constitutive force in gender relations. We bring our selves—our
> identities, our differences—to our encounters with various media; and we can take
> from them a large variety of messages. We need to also consider the way we act
> on the media, the way we consume it, actively, creatively, and often even
> rebelliously (p. 238).

Audience interpretation is at the center of the debate of the influence of media.

Are audiences simply receivers of a dominant ideology perpetuated in the media or do

consumers of media actively maneuver through the myriad of movies and television

shows offered to them based on personal taste and mood? Historically, researchers have

discussed media consumption in terms of television viewership. Fiske and Hartley

(1978) contend that television functions as social ritual which expresses the concerns of society. Fiske and Hartley (1978) viewed culture as a complex process by which meanings and definitions are socially constructed and they situate television within this complex process "as a human construct, and the job that it does is the result of human choice, cultural decisions, and social pressures." (p. 17). Images on television are symbolic representations of the value our society, in general, places on people and lifestyles. Essentially, Fiske and Hartley (1978) believed television was constructing messages that exemplify or assume the nature of our society's basic structure.

Fiske and Hartley (1978) described audiences decoding of television based in three general ways, the first is called "deferential/aspirational response", where audience members accept the existing social structure that is shown on television and they see this as an accurate portrayal of reality (p. 104). The second is the "negotiated response" where the audience accepts, for the most part, the images they are presented, but may realize there are exceptions in reality (Fiske & Hartley, 1978, p. 104). Third is the "oppositional response" where audiences reject the ideas that are being presented based on alternative beliefs (Fiske & Hartley, 1978, p. 104). Fiske and Hartley (1978) wrote that "oppositional response" was an important safeguard against the direct influence of television (p. 195).

Fiske and Hartley's (1978) description of audiences decoding of television typifies the divergent perspectives in theory. Whether or not media reflects or reproduces cultural behavior and ideas is just the beginning of the discussion on media influence. The discussion of audience participation and interpretation is another area of inquiry in itself. Theory on audience behavior in viewing television and films seems to separate

into two groups: theory that suggests audiences are passive receivers and theory that

suggests audience are active participants (Adams, 2000). The question surrounding the

two theories involves whether consumers of media are actively deciding what to watch

based on needs and gratification, or if there was mass viewing because that is what is

offered. Carter (1960) suggested that active viewing followed a three part model in terms

of the process of choosing what to view:

> 1. Selection— Knowing alternative choices and actively deciding on what to
> watch based on such factors as expectations, knowledge, needs, personal opinion,
> and expected benefits or behaviors.
>
> 2. Cathection—Reaction to what they are seeing which leads the viewer to an
> emotional reaction. This can be described as nostalgia, identification with a
> character, positive feelings associated with an assumed relationship.
>
> 3. Reinforcement-- Cathection leads to an adaptation of beliefs and behaviors
> based on what they have seen. This reaction influences the viewer's next program
> selection (Carter, 1960).
>
> Adams (2000) found that when audiences in focus groups were engaging

elements of both active and passive theory. While people did watch television when they

had the time (an element of passive theory) they were also selecting specific programs

which reflected their preferences and mood (signs of active theory) (Adams, 2000).

Where active viewership gives credit to the audience for selection, the theory does not

claim that what is being offered continues is or is not a reflection of the dominant culture,

which Fiske and Hartley (1978) argue. Active viewership places audience participation

in the realm of personal likes and dislikes and the seeking out of media that reflects these

tastes.

Passive theory, on the other hand, suggests a simple stream of images that

originates from television and film, which then extends to audiences who consume them

without thought. Fiske and Hartley (1978) described this type of audience decoding of media as "deferential/aspirational response", where audiences accept what is presented on screen as reality (p. 104). Passively absorbing media content and accepting its portrayal as realistic has been explored in cultivation theory, which states that those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect common messages in the fictional world of television (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). One example of cultivation found that heavy viewers of television in Belgium where more likely to believe young people were substance abusers (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). This survey was based on numerous content analyses that revealed frequent portrayals of drug usage on television (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010).

This study was interested in how children perceive, or interpret, character roles based on gender schemas. This line of inquiry helps to reveal if children are accepting the existing social structure presented in film or if they are interpreting gender and gender roles based on their own realizations of exception in reality or even, the rejection of images based on a different beliefs. Based on previous research on media studies, research has shown that audiences engage in both passive (viewing what is offered and accepting images as truth) and active (selecting what to watch based on needs and interpreting images based on opinion) viewing behaviors.

Media Research

There is pioneering research that was conducted in the 1920s and 1930s to draw upon to understand better the interplay between audiences and the way they "act on the media" (Kimmel, 2008). Beginning with some of the earliest media studies conducted in the United States and Canada (The Payne Fund studies), the following research showed

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how early moviegoers were influenced by film. Lowery & DeFleur (1995) write that

when the results of the Payne Fund studies were published, some embraced the results as

confirmation of their worst fears; that movies were negatively influencing audiences,

especially children. Although the methods and designs of the studies conducted almost

eighty years ago would not necessarily be feasible today, the Payne Fund studies are

attributed to leading the way in mass communication and setting a precedent in

investigating issues of public concern.

Holaday and Stoddard (1933) conducted surveys of adults and children using 17

films as their source of stimulus. They found that, when tested on information found in

the films, audiences of all ages retained a considerable amount of knowledge. The

researchers concluded that motion pictures led to retention of information better than

laboratory experiments that dealt with memory (as cited in Lowery & DeFleur, 1995, p.

26). van der Molen & van der Voort (1997) conducted a similar study almost sixty years

later using children and news stories which resulted in similar findings. The researchers

found that children who were exposed to stories on television exhibited higher levels of

recall than those children who read only the printed version (van der Molen & van der

Voort, 1997, p. 87). Recall of the news story was especially pronounced when the

information was conveyed both verbally and with visual aids (van der Molen & van der

Voort, 1997, p. 87).

Probably one of the most significant Payne Fund studies was Blumer's (1933)

attempt to uncover how audiences actively and creatively consumed film through

interpreting text written by consumers of media. Blumer (1933) conducted a large study

to measure how films affected audiences' habits of imitating behavior found in films, in

childhood play and daydreams, as well as the effect of film on their general lifestyle (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Using autobiographical accounts, participants were directed by a set of guidelines to write honest and open experiences about their interest in movies during childhood. The sample included university students, high school students, and some office and factory workers. Structured questionnaires were given to 1,200 schoolchildren. The researcher found that a great number of the participants cited the movies as a source of influence on their play (such as character imitation) (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). Adolescent females were influenced by clothing styles and hairstyles. Mannerisms, such as smoking a cigarette, were associated with sophistication in age and taught boys how to properly light a cigarette in such a way that expressed their masculinity (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995). The study found that films provided a model on how to relate to the opposite sex romantically and how to fantasize about adult roles (being an adult and having adventures), and thus incited emotional responses (fear, sorrow, anger, etc.) (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

More current studies conducted on media and its effect on viewers has shown similar results. Moskalenko (2008) writes that, from folklore, children learn the differences between "villains" and "heroes" and their roles in relationship to the group. The heroes, according to Moskalenko (2008), sacrifice themselves for the benefit of the group while villains benefit themselves at the expense of the group. Not only do children learn about villains and heroes, right and wrong, but they are also learning that beauty is superlative. Bazzini, Cutin, Joslin, Regan & Martz (2010) used the concept of "what-is-beautiful-is-good" stereotype to investigate whether children's judgment of peers would be influenced by animated films with high or low beauty-bias and whether a character's

life outcome would be positively or negatively correlated with their attractiveness. The study was based on previous research which found that the greater the physical beauty, the higher levels of romance and the better life outcomes (Bazzini, et al., 2010). Results showed that physical attractiveness was significantly correlated with higher intelligence, greater moral virtue, and lower aggression (Bazzini et al., 2010). The researchers also found that primary characters, among the human characters in the twenty-one films, rated higher on goodness, and male characters were rated as more attractive than female characters (Bazzini et al., 2010). The second part of the study involved six to twelve year olds rating peers after having watched a film with highly physically attractive characters, and a film with low physical attractiveness (Bazzini et al., 2010). This was to assess whether children would use the PA stereotype (beauty equals goodness) when judging peers (Bazzini et al., 2010). The main effect was that children across age groups rated the attractive target more favorably than the less attractive target regardless of which film was shown; children preferred the attractive target as a friend (Bazzini et al., 2010).

Oliver & Green (2001) examine gender differences in children's response to short animated segments in an attempt to better understand audience's emotional response and perceptions of animated films. Rather than just looking at gender disparity in animated films, they wanted to investigate whether children (ages three to nine) responded gender stereotypically to a sad film and a film with a lot of action (Oliver & Green 2001). Based on cognitive models of gender-role development, where children are motivated to emulate same-sex models and social learning, where children develop gender-related characteristics through a reward and punishment style system, the authors speculated that children's responses to animated films would follow previous adult studies (Oliver &

Green 2001). They hypothesized that more females than males would enjoy sad videos segments, and have a sad reaction, while more males than females would enjoy and have less fear than females when it came to action video segments (Oliver & Green 2001). They also hypothesized that children would stereotype entertainment, in that *Beauty and the Beast* would be categorized as a female film and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* would be categorized as a male film (Oliver & Green 2001). The researchers found that females expressed more sadness than males and that expression of sadness increased with age (Olive & Green 2001). Almost 65% of the sample reported that *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was more appealing to boys because of the fighting and aggression. Surprisingly, a little over 62% of the sample rated *Beauty and the Beast* as appealing to either gender. Of the 31.6% respondents who stated that *Beauty and the Beast* was more appealing to females, attributed this to the main character's sex being female (Olive & Green 2001).

Gender and Media

The Payne Fund studies found compelling evidence which seems to support that there is an interaction between viewers and what is portrayed on the screen. But how is gender specifically being portrayed on the screen? The following studies have found that females in television and film are often portrayed in stereotypical roles or ignored completely. African-American and older women fare far worse in representation than their male counterparts. While representation in the media conveys social existence, exclusion (or underrepresentation) signifies nonexistence or "symbolic annihilation" (Tuchman, 1978). Not showing a particular group or showing them less frequently than their proportion in the population conveys that the group is not socially valued. This phenomenon has been documented in a range of outlets—from television (Tuchman,

1978) to introductory sociology textbooks (Ferree & Hall, 1990) to animated cartoons (Klein and Shiffman 2009).

Television and Film

Studies have shown that in television programs for all ages, two-thirds of the characters were male and cartoons and television that target children used males three times more often than females (Baker & Raney 2004; Signorielli & Bacue 1999; Smith & Cook 2008; Thompson & Zerbinos 1995). Barner (1999) found that males outnumbered females 59% to 41% in educational television. Bazzini et al. (1997) and Rothman et al. (1993) both studied gender in films from the 1940s through the 1980s and found that well over half of the characters were male (64%-75%). Animated films have been found to exclude female characters altogether or include a single female character as an accent to a male's posse; the inclusion of a single female character within the main character's gang has been labeled the "smurfette principle" (Pollitt, 1991).

Smith et al. (2010) looked at 101 top-grossing G-rated films released in the United States and Canada from 1990 to 2005, to investigate gender portrayals in films that target young audiences. The authors contend that the reoccurring trend of males outnumbering females in media could affect females' schemata for gender; stories about males and boys are more important than their own (Smith et al., 2010). The authors found that, out of the 3,039 single characters, 72% were male, out of the 47 films with a narrator, 83% were male, and 85.5% of the characters were White (Smith et al., 2010). The authors write that female characters were significantly more likely to be portrayed as a parent than males, and males were significantly more likely to be without a relationship

than female characters (Smith et al., 2010). The authors contend that these results promote the sexual double standard where being single and free is acceptable for males but not for females (Smith et al., 2010). Surprisingly, Smith et al. (2010) found that females scored higher on likeability and demographics, with female characters being portrayed as intelligent and with better motives than male characters and in terms of occupation, there were no differences in the types of employment portrayed based on gender.

Eschholz et al. (2002) conducted a content analysis of fifty popular films from 1996 to investigate attributes of leading actors. The researchers found that only 20% of the lead characters were African American or Hispanic, that action/adventure films were more likely to over represent males, and both female and nonwhites were more likely to be under the age of 30 (Eschholz et al., 2002). Bazzini et al. (1997) found similar results in their study of 100 top-grossing films between 1940 through 1980, where 81% of characters were over the age of 35 years-old. Eschholz et al. (2002) also found that males were more likely to be portrayed as employed (93%) than female characters (75%). They also discovered that when characters were portrayed as having children, females were significantly less likely to work outside the home, further supporting traditional family roles (Eschholz et al., 2002).

Stories

Children's books and stories have also been of interest to researchers who want to investigate gender portrayals in media that target young audiences. Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) write that children stories are part of a set of cultural products which

are useful in teaching values and play a part in social assimilation. Much like television and film, stories within children's books play an important role in the portrayal of social norms, values, and morality. Because stories are a primary source of gender representation in our society, it is important to know how males and females are being portrayed. The following studies looked at fairy tales and children's books to uncover any bias in character representation.

Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz (2003) studied feminine beauty ideals in the Brothers Grimm fairy tales in order to expose how beauty ideals are maintained in cultural products. The authors recorded the number of times male and female characters were referred to as beautiful or handsome, with particular emphasis on variations by age (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). Although they found physical attractiveness was mentioned for both males and females, there were five times more references to a female's beauty than males per story and fewer references of beauty for older characters (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). Using discourse analysis, they found that beauty was often associated with goodness in 31% of the stories and ugliness was associated with being evil in 17% of the stories (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003). The authors contend that these stories perpetuate feminine beauty ideals and continue to do so; 25.6% of the stories have been adapted into books or movies (Baker-Sperry & Grauerholz, 2003).

Much like the popular animated movies produced by Disney, Caldecott-winning children's books have been targeted by researchers because of their status as the "most distinguished American Picture Book for children published in the United States"— an

award that would only increase the popularity and sales of any storybook ("Caldecott Medal "). The following studies investigated gender in award winning children's books.

Weitzman, Eifler, Hokada & Ross (1972) analyzed gender in children's books and found that male characters outnumbered females three to one in Caldecott (1938-1972) and Newbery (1922-1972) award-winners, as well as Golden Books. Gooden and Gooden (2001) updated a content analysis by LaDow in 1979 (based on the Weitzman et al., 1972 study), where the sex of the main character, illustrations, and title were analyzed in 83 Notable Books for Children from 1995 to 1999. Surprisingly, the authors found gender parity when comparing male and female primary characters (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). The researchers also found that female characters, both human and animal, were less likely to be depicted alone in an illustration than male characters and were shown in traditional gender roles (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). Anderson & Hamilton (2005) found in their content analysis of 200 prominent children's picture books, that fathers were largely underrepresented and when they did appear, displayed withdrawn behavior and were ineffectual parents. Czaplinski (1972) calculated the number of males and females in the text and pictures of Caldecott-winning books from 1940 to 1971. Czaplinski (1972) found that of the Caldecott-winning books from 1940 to 1971, males accounted for 65% of characters mentioned in the text and 63% of characters represented in the pictures. Davis and McDaniel (1999) updated Czaplinski's study using Caldecott-winning books from 1972 through 1997, and found that males accounted for 61% of characters mentioned in the text and 63% of character portrayed in pictures.

McCabe, Fairchild, Grauerholz, Pescosolido, Tope, (2011) further investigated gender representation in a wider variety of children's books (5,618 total), including but

not limited to Caldecott winners, and found similar results. The researchers found that males are represented more frequently than females in titles and as central characters. For instance, on average, 36.5% of books each year include a male in the title compared to 17.5% that include a female (McCabe, et al., 2011). Boys appear as central characters in 26.4% of books and girls in 19%, but male animals are central characters in 23.2% of books while female animals are in only seven point five percent (McCabe et al., 2011). According to McCabe et al. (2011), gender bias demonstrated in children's books can be classified as "symbolic annihilation" which essentially is the denial of existence of women and girls by ignoring or under representing them in cultural products (p. 198).

Animated Film

Studies have shown that live-action films, educational television, and children books have a history of gender bias, with males being more likely to be primary characters. Animated films, such as those produced by Disney and Dreamworks are immensely popular with young audiences and have been shown to demonstrate the same bias (Hare & Barnes, under review). Wells (2006) argues that, while animation is the least regarded art form, its technique and appeal has been "apparent in the post-modern elevation of popular culture" (p. 79). Buchan (2006) writes that "cinema is a place we recurrently slip into, to allow ourselves that most pleasurable experience of being moved, intellectually, affectively and emotionally, by what unfolds on screen" (p. 16).

Compared to live action films where the physical world is corporeal, a physical reality that can be touched, animated films are representational drawings of "a world" and not "the world" (Buchan, 2006, p. 21). Buchan (2006) touches on the unique capabilities

of animated films; the animated film can inhabit unfeasible places, bend or defy the laws of physics, and represent those experiences not known in our world. Consequently, animated films have the potential to challenge reality, to question and disrupt the status quo. In this respect, what responsibility, if any, do animated films have concerning the perceptual and psychological effects on viewers? Buchan (2006) suggests that the animated film's attractiveness is in its ability to create an illusion, an attraction moving out towards the audience, and that character development is not necessary. This perspective would seem to suggest that animated films hold no responsibility politically or socially, that the aesthetics are imperative.

The Power of Disney

Disney films have often been the target of research because they are considered the most popular, reaching larger audiences around the world (Bazzini et al. 2010; Fouts, Callan, Piasentin & Lawson, 2006; Lacroix, 2004). Disney created the first full length animated film (*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*) in 1937, thus becoming the oldest, if not the most prolific, producer of animated films. Disney films create cultural icons; characters who inspire emulation and adoration. Griffin (2000) writes about how Disney distinguished his works from others by merchandising products and how the Disney moniker and characters became part of super-sufficient corporation which successfully made entertainment a corporation. Griffin (2000) spells out some of the ways Disney came to power, emphasizing the staggering interplay of entertainment and business:

> For example, the popularity of the theatrical feature *Aladdin* was tied to a number of other related areas: miniature action figures of the film's characters; tie-ins with Burger King, which put images of the characters on plastic soft drink cups; the score from the film released on CD, as well as a children's album narrating the

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story; the release of the feature on home video, and eventually on the Disney channel; a new show/restaurant in the "Adventureland" section of the theme parks, as well as "Aladdin" parades down Main Street; Little Golden Books' picture book of the story; an animated TV series based on the characters; the selling of original cel work done for the feature; and a CD-ROM based on the film (Griffin, 2000, p.205).

These are just a few of the ways Disney is incorporated into our lives through entertainment and product immersion.

Giroux (1999) wrote that Disney has successfully created products in which consumers are emotionally and materially invested. Audiences are no longer limited to a single viewing at the movie theater; they can live out their fantasy through product immersion and repeated exposure via television, DVD's, and video games (Giroux, 1999; Wohlwend, 2009). Fouts (2006) further supports Giroux's (1999) idea that Disney films are the "new teaching machines" by asserting that full length animated films are more likely to cultivate a sense of familiarity and identification with characters and multiple exposures to the films will have a greater impact on a viewer's attitude and understanding of the world (p. 16). Giroux (1999) states: "Disney films inspire at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles, values, and ideals than more traditional sites of learning, such as public schools, religious institutions and the family"(p. 25). Gillam & Wooden (2008) writes that Disney films are one of the most effective teaching tools offered to children in America.

Douglas (1994) accuses Walt Disney of "buttressing" stereotypes for boys and girls. She breaks down the quintessential female Disney character as either the "masochist" or the "narcissist" (Douglas, 1994, p. 29). These two types of characters represent the good and bad girls, the beautiful and virtuous princess (Cinderella, Sleeping

Beauty, and Snow White) or the older, vindictive, and conniving competition (the evil queens, stepmothers, or witches) (Douglas, 1994). Those "good" female characters who are not princesses, are asexual fairy godmothers and those "bad" female characters were usually jealous and vain (Douglas, 1994, p. 30). Douglas (1994) recognizes that the argument could be made that Disney, much like other producers of pop culture, were just reflecting the culture of the 1950s and 1960s. However, she argues, Disney was not guiltless; the company was vigorously underscoring stereotypes and assumptions about women and girls (Douglas, 1994).

Lacroix (2004) was also critical of Disney's portrayal of female characters in a study on the "orientalization" of Disney heroines. Lacroix (2004) challenges some Disney reviewers who claim that the films have been systematically sanitized of violence, sexuality and political struggle. The author contends that female heroines have been created so that their sexuality is emphasized, especially in the characters of color (Lacroix, 2010). Using Said's (1978) terminology, the orientalization of women of color, the author looked at five Disney films and their representation of gender and cultural differences (Lacroix, 2010). The author used textual analysis of Disney heroines (Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, and Esmeralda) to assess the representation of gender and race in popular animated films (Lacroix, 2010). Ariel and Belle are presented as slender and capable but less athletic than later characters such as Pocahontas (Lacroix, 2010). They are both constructed in the same manner as classical porcelain skin tones and delicate feature of earlier heroines like Snow White and Sleeping Beauty (Lacroix, 2010) (220). Lacroix (2010) found that Pocahontas and Esmeralda were shown as athletic and more voluptuous than Belle or Ariel (suggesting sexual maturation) and that the

costuming of the women of color emphasized their bodies more than that of Ariel or Belle. Not only did Lacroix (2010) find that female characters of color were portrayed as athletic and exuded more sexuality, their skin color also affected personality traits and romantic outcomes. For Belle and Ariel, their whiteness is not crucial to the plot or decisions they make within the story, therefore their whiteness is rendered invisible (Lacroix, 2010). Pocahontas's race, along with Esmeralda's, is in contrast to the whiteness of their love interests (their ethnicity is seen as the sources of their strength and independence) (Lacroix, 2010). The two bi-racial couples (Pocahontas and Jon Smith & Esmeralda and Phoebus) do not get married but Belle and Ariel are assumed to have marital intentions with their romantic partners.

Dundes (2001) writes that, while Disney's interpretation of Pocahontas does not follow the traditional princess archetype, she is still portrayed as self-sacrificing. Rozario (2004) analyzed the Disney princess archetype and found that the princess is usually responsible for the kingdom through her marriage (Sleeping Beauty, Aladdin, and The Little Mermaid). In her discussion of fairy tales, Lieberman (1972) makes the argument that traditional fairy tales uphold traditional values, and instead of introducing feminist ideas, original fairy tales actually "acculturate women to traditional social roles" (383). As argued by Byrne & McQuillan (1999) in *Deconstructing Disney*, domesticity is a goal for Disney's heroines, using examples such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Beauty and the Beast* to prove their point. Snow White domesticates the Dwarves; both the Beast and Gaston offer Belle a domesticate role as wife. Jack Zipes (1994), in "Breaking the Disney Spell," agrees with this view of the recurring theme of the domestication of Disney women. He describes Disney's heroines as "helpless ornaments

in need of protection, and when it comes to the action of the film, they are omitted" (Zipes, 1994, p. 37). Dundes (2001) makes that case that even though Pocahontas rescues John Smith and is not required to marry him in order to save her people, she does have to sacrifice of herself for the benefit of her village. For Dundes (2001), Disney's version of Pocahontas reinforces the limited roles women have in society and supports gender specific behavior such as self-denial and an ethic of caring.

Tanner et al. (2003) conducted a thematic analysis of 26 full-length Disney films to investigate how families are portrayed in animated films. The authors contend that children learn about family relations through observation of their own families and media sources (Tanner et al., 2003). They coded the films based on three categories: families, parents and couples, asking a series of questions on how they were represented in each film (Tanner et al., 2003). Ultimately, they found that 30.8% of the films portrayed traditional families, 42% of the films had representations of both mothers and fathers, and of the single-parent portrayals, 60% of the time it was a single father (Tanner et al., 2003). When mothers were depicted, the authors found that 58.3% of the mother-figures were portrayed as primary caregivers while films with father-figures were more likely to follow a theme of aggression and protector (Tanner et al., 2003). Smith et al., (2010) found similar results in their study of G-rated films where females were significantly more likely to be depicted as a parent than males were. The authors concluded that Disney animated films were conveying four themes which are likely to influence child development concerning families: "[...](1) family relationship are a strong priority, (2) families are diverse, but diversity is often simplified, (3) fathers are elevated, while

mothers are marginalized, and (4) couples are represented based on traditional gender roles (Tanner et al., 2003, p. 366).

Towbin et al. (2003) also looked at gender, race, age, and sexual orientation in the same 26 Disney full-length films and found that males characters expressed their emotions through physical interaction (12 out of the 26 films), males were portrayed as losing control over their senses in the presence of a beautiful women (15 out of 26), and 19 of the films portrayed males as strong and heroic. The researchers found that in 15 of the films, a female's beauty was valued over her intellect and in 11 of the movies, they found that female characters were portrayed as helpless and in need of protection (Towbin et al., 2003). In 15 of the 26 films selected, female characters were portrayed in domestic roles and likely to marry (Towbin et al., 2003).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The unit of analysis for this study was five to six year olds. Participants were recruited from a kindergarten class in a local, public elementary school. The classroom was chosen based on a previously established relationship with a teacher at the elementary school. A sample of 25 students was chosen for both the time allotted and the availability of resources.

The full design and implementation of this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) under case number (11.0537). Also, this study was approved by the Accountability, Research, and Planning Department from the school district in which the participating classroom is located. Permission was obtained from the school's principal, the students' teacher, and the students' parents. Consent forms were required for all participants. Although all students were allowed to view both segments of the animated films (without consent), only those students who had parental consent were interviewed. All interviews were conducted within the classroom during normal school hours. Film segments were between eight to ten minutes in length. Each interview lasted between five to ten minutes, depending on the participant's response. The film segments were shown on different days, but at the same time during the day. Interviews were recorded using a digital tape-recorder.

A list of the 100 top-grossing animated films since 1980 was obtained from boxofficemojo.com and entered into SPSS. The top-grossing animated films were chosen for this study based on their popularity. The films were then coded according to their rating, the gender of the primary character, and whether the primary character was human-like in portrayal. Films which used non-human characters (such as aliens, animals, toys, or cars) were not included in the selection. Using the random selection option in SPSS, a G-rated film with a female lead was selected, followed by a G-rated film with a male lead. *Aladdin* was selected for the film with a male-primary character and *Pocahontas* was selected for the film with a female-primary character. Although many films studios were represented in the list, Disney films had produced the greatest number of films over the years and had a greater chance of being randomly selected.

The film segments were chosen based on the climactic scenes where the primary characters demonstrated heroic behavior. Film segments were between eight to ten minutes in length each and shown immediately preceding the interviews. In the film *Aladdin*, Jafar has taken over the kingdom and imprisoned Jasmine and the Genie in his palace. Aladdin escapes from a frozen wasteland to save them. This requires Aladdin to use both physical force (a sword fight) and intelligence (tricking Jafar into becoming a genie). In the film *Pocahontas*, John Smith is set to be executed on the verge of a battle between the Virginia Company men and a group of Native Americans. Pocahontas decides to throw herself over John Smith to prevent him from being executed. John Smith is inadvertently shot and Pocahontas gives him medicine before he leaves for

England. While Aladdin uses more physical strength and cunning to defeat the villain, Pocahontas uses intuition and pacifism to prevent war and save John Smith.

Interviews

In this study, a standardized open-ended interview was used to obtain information from five to six years olds concerning their perceptions and opinions about gender when presented with animated films. Because this type of interview was utilized, cross-interview analysis was used rather than case-by-case analysis. Interviews were conducted within the classroom and recorded using a digital recorder. Following the completion of the interview process, each interview was transcribed into a word document. The transcribed interviews were then indexed and coded. A coding system was developed so that individual responses could be classified into a standardized category and then studied in aggregate. Every interview was coded and entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

In order to get a better understanding of children's perspective on animated films, interviews were conducted. The goal of interviewing children, rather than just their parents, was for the children to provide their own opinions, rather than having an adult interpreting their viewpoints on their behalf (Danby, Ewing & Thorpe, 2011). Research has shown that children were more likely to communicate responses when researchers engage in questioning while articulating their thinking (Brooker, 2001). This method was used when asking children about their opinions on the animated film segments (e.g., Aladdin returned to the palace to save Jasmine. Do you think a girl could have done that? Or, do you think a girl could rescue a girl? Why or why not?). Another tool that was

used to assist the children in engaging with the interviewer is cue cards. Studies have shown that concrete materials (like stickers and drawing pictures) are useful in providing a shared meaning for the interviewer and participants (Nigro & Wolpow, 2004; Christensen & James, 2000; Danby & Thorpe, 2006). Using similar procedures, this study used cue cards to assist participants in their response and to help the interviewer obtain a better understanding of the participant's opinion. Each participant was asked, "How much did you like the movie?", whereupon they were provided a visual aid (smiley face, a neutral face, and a frowning face) to complement their verbal response. When asked, "Who is this movie for?" participants could choose from a picture of a boy, a girl, or a boy and a girl together (see appendix B). Each response was coded using a number sequence.

Table 1. Picture representation and code sequence for the question, "How much did you like the movie?"

Code	Picture	Response
1	☺	"I liked the movie."
2	☺	"The movie was okay."
3	☹	"I did not like the movie."

An interview guide was constructed to ensure the same basic line of inquiry is utilized for each participant. Patton (2002) writes that an interview guide is essential when an interviewer wishes to keep the interactions focused, but also allow individual perspectives to emerge. A combination of questions were asked of the children; demographic and opinion/values questions. Basic characteristics such as age and sex were asked to locate the respondent in relation to other participants and in relation to the type of responses they gave. Opinions, or values questions are used to understand the cognitive and interpretive processes of the participant by asking, "What do you think?"

(Patton, 2002). These questions will be discussed in further detail in the following section.

To better assess how participants attribute action to a character's sex, questions about specific scenes within the films were asked. The following questions were asked to assess gender schemes, or if participants identify certain acts as being mutually exclusive male or female:

Q1 Film with a male lead:
Aladdin returned to the palace to save Jasmine. Do you think a girl could have done that?
Or do you think a girl could have saved Jasmine?
Why or why not?

Q1 Film with a female lead:
Pocahontas saved John Smith. Do you think a boy could have done that?
Or do you think a boy could have saved John Smith?
Why or why not?

Q2 Film with a male lead:
Did Aladdin fight the snake with a sword because he was a boy?
Or do boys fight with swords because they are boys?
Why?

Q2 Film with a female lead:
Did Pocahontas give John Smith medicine after he was shot because she was a girl?
Or do girls give boys medicine because they are girls?
Why?

Researchers have found that children wish to be consulted about issues that involve or pertain to them and not just those that fit the researchers' agenda (Ewing et al., 2011; Stafford, Laybourn, Hill, and Walker, 2003). Questions in which the participant was asked to envision themselves within the protagonists' position in the films serves two purposes: first, to discover if the participant considers a particular action as sex appropriate as it pertains to their own identity and second, to engage the participant in

presenting their own perspective. The following questions were asked to assess how and

if children identify with characters:

> Q3 Film with a male lead:
> Aladdin tricked Jafar and turned him into a genie. Do you think you could do that?
> Why or why not?

> Q3 Film with a female lead:
> Pocahontas stayed with her family instead of going with John smith. Do you think
> you could do that?
> Why or why not?

Patton (2002) describes good questions as being "open-ended, neutral, singular,

and clear" (p. 353). The simple descriptions of the movie scenes provide context in

which the participants can express their feelings or thoughts and the follow up questions,

"Why?" is open-ended and neutral enough for them to describe their opinions.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The child interviews focused on two areas of inquiry: (1) Do children stereotype animated films based on gender? (2) Do children interpret animated films using gender schemas? Using qualitative analysis, open-ended questions were examined to find key phrases and statements which could be coded for further analysis. With each perspective having equal weight, the data was organized into meaningful groups. Repetitive and overlapping data were eliminated to create coherent themes.

Enjoyment of Films

Each respondent was shown a ten minute clip from two Disney films, *Pocahontas* and *Aladdin*. Interviews were conducted immediately following the showing of each film's clip. The one question that garnered the most consistent response was "How much did you like the movie?" Of the child participants, all but two reported that they liked the film *Aladdin* and all but five reported that they liked the film *Pocahontas*. When looking at gender, all of the male participants (100%) reported liking the film *Aladdin* as compared to two females who reported that the film was "ok". When one female participant was asked why she felt the film *Aladdin* was "ok", she responded that she did

not like cartoons anymore, that she preferred live action shows such as *iCarly* and *Victorious* (she gave the same response when asked about the film *Pocahontas*). The second female participant who said Aladdin was "ok" could not explain why she felt this way.

Males were less likely to report liking the film *Pocahontas*, with only 72.7% of males liking it as compared to 85.7% of females. Two males reported that they did not like the film *Pocahontas* at all. When asked why they did not like *Pocahontas*, the two respondents seemed distressed or confused by the ending of the film where John Smith is wounded and is taken back to England. The film does not explicitly state that John Smith lives or dies; the audience is aware that he is wounded and is taken away. Two of the males seemed to interpret John Smith's leaving and not staying with Pocahontas as a death sentence. When asked why they did not like the film, they responded: "Because the girl wanted the boy to not die" and "Because everybody was killed." The one female who thought the film was "ok" expressed the same concerns when asked why she thought the film was just "ok": "Because the boy died."

Table 2. PERCENTAGES OF MALES AND FEMALES WHO REPORTED THEY LIKED
THE FILMS *ALADDIN* & *POCAHONTAS* *(n=25)*

	Pocahontas	*Aladdin*
Male	72.7 % (n=8)	100% (n= 11)
Female	85.7% (n= 12)	85.7% (n= 12)

Assigning Gender

Oliver & Green (2001) hypothesized that children would stereotype entertainment, in that films like *Beauty and the Beast* would be categorized as a female film, and films like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* would be categorized as a male film. Over half of the respondents in that study did report that the film *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was more appealing to boys. They attributed this to the fighting that was prevalent in the film (Olive & Green 2001). When asked about *Beauty and the Beast*, over half of the respondents said the film would appeal to both genders (Olive & Green 2001). Those who reported *Beauty and the Beast* was more appealing to females said it was because the lead was a female. Based on these findings, it was hypothesized that young participants would identify *Aladdin* as a boys' film because of the strong male-lead character (Aladdin). Because Pocahontas is a strong female lead who does not marry the male protagonist, this study hypothesized that participants would perceive *Pocahontas* as a girls' film rather than appealing to both genders.

This study found that females (85.7%) were more likely to identify the film *Aladdin* as being for both boys and girls. Both males and females felt that the film was for boys and girls for two main reasons, because both genders would enjoy watching it (32%) and because there were both male and female characters in the film (32%). Four of the males out of eleven (36.4%), felt that the film was for boys. When asked why they believe *Aladdin* is for boys, two respondents indicated that they were unsure as to why it was for boys ("Because it's a boy's movie."), while two other respondents indicated that

it was a boy's film due to Aladdin's gender and the presence of three or more males. What is interesting about the latter response is that the participant perceived an imbalance in the male to female ratio in the film and perceived this difference to be important in who the film was targeting. With numerous studies revealing gender disparity in animated films and cartoons, the perception of this among young audiences could be detrimental to their concept of equality and value of both genders (Signorielli & Bacue 1999; Baker & Raney 2004; Smith & Cook, 2008; Thompson & Zerbinos 1995; Smith et al., 2010).

Two females felt that the film *Aladdin* was for girls. One female participant felt that the film was for girls because it had a princess (Jasmine) in it. This response indicated that the respondents perceived princess-type characters as being for females.

This study found that males (81.8%) were more likely to identify the film *Pocahontas* as being for both boys and girls. This finding challenges previous research, which found that boys were more likely to interpret films with female heroes as being explicitly for girls, especially if they sensed the hero was a "princess". One explanation could be that, based on Lacroix's (2004) description of Pocahontas's portrayal, male viewers see her as athletic and therefore an acceptable character to watch and emulate. Lester (2010) explains:

> Although they occupy similar social places as princesses in their own Native American and Asian cultural traditions, respectively, Pocahontas and Mulan—Disney enthusiasts point out—are Disney heroines, not official Disney princesses[.] (p. 295)

Over two-thirds of the females felt that the film Pocahontas was for both males and females (78.6%). The majority of males and females believed the film was for boys

and girls for two main reasons, because boys and girls would enjoy watching it (32%) and because there were both males and female characters within the film (32%). Almost a third could not identify why they thought this movie was for boys and girls (28% responded, "I don't know").

Two females (14.3%) felt that the film was for girls but neither could explain why they felt this way ("I don't know" or a shrug of the shoulders). One male responded that he felt it was for girls because "it had a girl in it" and one male felt it was for boys because "boys like it".

Table 3. PERCENTAGES OF MALES AND FEMALES WHO FELT THE FILMS *ALADDIN & POCAHONTAS* WERE FOR BOTH MALES AND FEMALES

	Pocahontas	*Aladdin*
Male	**81.8% (n=9)**	63.6% (n= 7)
Female	78.6% (n= 11)	**85.7% (n=12)**

Influencing Gender Schemes- Aladdin

When participants were asked if a girl could rescue Jasmine (or if a girl could rescue another girl), their responses were similar to each other's and easy to measure. Having just viewed the film where Aladdin rescues Jasmine, most participants found it difficult to imagine a different outcome. A majority of both boys and girls would laugh or giggle when asked to imagine a girl rescuing Jasmine. When asked if a girl could have saved Jasmine, well over half of the respondents (64%) said "no". When asked why a girl could not have saved Jasmine, 24% responded that girls need to be, or are supposed

to be, rescued by a boy. One explanation for this response could be that children rely on gender schemes to decide on appropriate behavior for males and females. Bem (1993) states that boys and girls develop preferences for activities that culture deems appropriate for their sex at an early age. Participants learn through modeling and their own cognitive processes that girls should be rescued by a boy. Another aspect to these responses is the heterosexual model in which children view male and female interaction.

Participants also cited that girls could not rescue another girl because they were not strong enough, or as strong as boys (12%). This response suggests that participants were being influenced by the assumption that girls are not as strong as boys which Bem (1993) describes is one of the lenses of gender: biological essentialism. Frequently, male characters assert their dominance, or express their masculinity, through establishing themselves as the protectors of the weaker sex (Boyd, 2004). The dominance over women, both physically and politically, is part of the heterosexual model commonly found in film. This model portrays males as fulfilling their dominate role as the active patriarch over a passive female (Boyd, 2004).

Table 4.. FREQUENCY OF RESPONSES BY GENDER: "COULD A GIRL RESCUE JASMINE?"

	Yes	No
Male	36.4% (n= 4)	**63.6% (n= 7)**
Female	28.6% (n= 4)	**64.3% (n=9)**

When participants were asked, *"Did Aladdin fight the snake (Jafar) with a sword because he was a boy?"* a majority (92%) of participants said yes. Only two females responded no but they could not explain why they answered the way they did. When asked why they felt boys fought with swords, eight respondents reported it was because boys want to be heroes and sword fighting was a way to get what they (the hero) wanted. What the hero wanted included: saving the princess, to become king, or to save the world, and to be safe. Males were also more likely to respond that boys fight with swords because they want to kill or fight with another character (27.3% versus 7.1% for females). Previous studies have reported that violent portrayals in media target male audiences and resulted in higher levels of aggression and a willingness to use violence as a means to solve problems (Condry, 1989; Gunter, 1994). The fact that boys were more likely to use words such as "kill" or "fight" suggests that male participants in this study did see violence as a means to solve a problem.

Two males reported that boys fight with swords because they are brave or strong, while only one female gave this response. One male respondent answered that boys fought with swords because "girls didn't know how to use swords." One female responded that Aladdin fought with a sword because "that's what boys do." Interpretation of sword fighting as a predominantly male activity demonstrates that boys see themselves as heroes and engaging in heroic behavior. This question also revealed a level of confidence that male participants had in male characters and their physical abilities to achieve their desired goal.

In order to assess whether young participants could identify with the lead through imagining themselves adopting the heroes' actions, the participants were asked if they

could trick Jafar and turn him into a genie like Aladdin did in the film. Males and females had an inverse proportion of responses with 63.6% of males saying yes, they could have tricked Jafar like Aladdin, while only 36.4% said they could not. It was the opposite for females with 64.3% saying they could not trick Jafar like Aladdin, while only 35.7% said that they could. Most of the respondents, both males (45.5%) and females (42.9%), could not articulate why they answered the way they did ("I don't know"). Of the males who said yes, 27.3% explained that they could trick Jafar like Aladdin because they would want to be the hero and that they were good "trickers". One male said he could act as Aladdin did because he was "smart enough" to trick Jafar. Females were more skeptical with 21.4% stating they could not have tricked Jafar because they were not powerful enough, they were not brave enough, or because kids are not strong enough.

Again, this study found that males displayed a higher level of confidence than females in their perceived ability to be the hero. Males and females interpret male roles as roles of power (boys fight with swords and boys defeat villains). Attributes such as physicality and intelligence seem to be interpreted as male attributes and male participants identified with this type of behavior.

Influencing Gender Schemes- Pocahontas

When participants were asked if a boy could have saved John Smith, or if a boy could save another boy, most participants responded "yes". Males (72.7%) were more likely to say yes than females (57.1%). Both males (36.4%) and females (42.9%) could not explain why they thought a boy could save John Smith ("I don't know"). Females

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were more likely than males to respond that John Smith could not be saved by a boy.

Females were also more likely to explain that boys needed to be rescued by a girl. One

female responded "because he [John Smith] was a boy, he needed a girl". Another

female responded that John Smith "was the boy", indicating that the story could have

only one male protagonist. This suggests that female participants' responses (that a

female needed to save John Smith) were based on the heterosexual model found in most

animated films rather than from a sense of female empowerment. Males (45.5%) were

more likely than females (28.6%) to say that a boy could save another boy (or man)

because boys are brave and/or strong enough. One male was adamant about the idea of a

man saving a boy, providing a personal anecdote about how his father had saved another

man in his presence. One female articulated that a boy could save another boy because,

"boys are a little bit stronger" and "if a girl can [save a boy] a boy can too".

Table 5. FREQUENCY OF RESPONES BY GENDER: "COULD A BOY RESCUE
JOHN SMITH?"

	Yes	No
Male	**72.7% (n= 8)**	27.3% (n= 3)
Female	**57.1% (n= 8)**	42.9% (n=6)

When asked if Pocahontas gave John Smith medicine because she was a girl, both

males and females were unsure. Some participants could not recall having seen

Pocahontas give John Smith medicine in the film. When they could not recall this scene,

they were asked why they thought girls might give boys medicine. Seven out of eleven

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males (63.6%) said yes, that Pocahontas gave him medicine because she was a girl. Almost half of the males could not explain why they answered the way they did (45.5%). Of those males who answered yes, four said it was because Pocahontas was "being nice" and because "she wanted to save John Smith". Two respondents said that girls give boys medicine to make them feel better or to help them. Only eight out of the fourteen females (57.1%) said yes, that Pocahontas did give John Smith medicine because she was a girl. The majority of females said Pocahontas gave John Smith medicine because "she wanted to make him [John Smith] feel better" or girls give boys medicine "to help them". Two females said they did not know why.

The act of giving medicine could be interpreted as a traditionally stereotypical role for women, where femininity is often affirmed by passivity and nurturing. Often female characters are seen as maternal figures, where their presences are meant to bring civility to the dirty, violent, and messy world inhabited by boys (Vint ,2007) This image of females as one-dimensional, where female happiness is achieved through maternal characteristics, seems to be popular in media portrayals. The act of giving medicine could be interpreted as a way for a female character to "take charge". However, it is unclear if participants in this study interpreted Pocahontas's behavior as taking charge or not.

In order to assess whether young participants could identify with the lead through imagining themselves adopting the heroes' actions, the participants were asked if they could have stayed with their family rather than leaving with the person they loved romantically. The majority of males and females said they would stay with their families rather than leave (90.09% and 85.7% respectively). Over half of the males and exactly

half of the females said that family was a better option because; "they are nicer", "they love me", and "they keep me safe." One male and one female expressed concern that leaving with John Smith would be dangerous and said they would not leave with him because he was a "stranger". Only one participant, female, responded that she would not stay with her family rather than leave with the person she loved romantically. When asked why she would leave, the respondent explained, "it would be nice" to leave with the person you fell in love with.

The reoccurring theme of "true love" is expressed in many films as the ultimate measure of happiness (Wynns, 2003). Females in many Disney films are expected to transition from reliance upon their families to that of their husbands. This type of behavior suggests that independence or singlehood is not appropriate for women. Participants in this study, both male and female, seem to contradict this traditional role of female dependence. Although Pocahontas does stay with her family and accept her role as an important member of her tribe, she rejects the notion that true love is the ultimate goal. Participants agreed that this was a desirable alternative over leaving with John Smith.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

This study found that children, ages five and six, were egalitarian in their opinion

of animated films with a male and female lead. The hypothesis that male participants

will favor the film with the male lead while female participants will favor the film with

the female lead was found to be untrue. Females liked the films *Pocahontas* and *Aladdin*

in equal measure and males showed a slight preference for *Aladdin*, but not for reasons

originally speculated. Males were more likely to dislike *Pocahontas* because they

believed John Smith dies and not because the lead character was female.

This study also disproved the hypothesis that males and females would assign the

film with a male lead as a "boys'" film, and both males and females will assign the film

with a female lead as a "girls'" film. This study found similar findings to that of Oliver

& Green (2001), which reported that 62.1% of children felt *Beauty and the Beast* was

appealing to both genders. This study found that both males and females reported that

Aladdin and *Pocahontas* are for boys and girls. In fact, more females reported that

Aladdin was for boys and girls and more males reported that *Pocahontas* was for boys

and girls. One explanation for these findings may be due to the respondent's age.

Gender development suggests that gender differences become prominent as children age (Oliver & Green, 2001). The participants being between the ages of five and six may have played a role in liking both films and reporting that both males and females would enjoy watching the films. Previous studies suggest that as audiences age (become adults) males and females enjoy different types of films. In studies interviewing adults, women reported higher levels of enjoyment of romantic dramas, tearjerkers, and sentimental fare while men enjoyed action adventures and horror films (Ang, 1990; Condry, 1989; Ganzt & Wenner, 1991; Oliver, 1993; Oliver & Green, 2001; Sparks, 1986). Future studies may attempt to investigate children's preferences as they age to see how their tastes progress over time.

When asked if Aladdin fought Jafar with a sword because he was a boy, most of the respondents in this study said yes. This could be accounted for by the prevalence of male violence already existent in animated film and cartoons. Thompson & Zerbinos (1995) found that, in children cartoons, male characters were more likely to use ingenuity, use aggression, and show anger than female characters. They also found that female characters were more likely to show affection and engage in routine services (Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). When asked if Pocahontas gave John Smith medicine because she was a girl, the answers were inconclusive; students could not remember this scene. This may be indicative of the importance of action within a film rather than behavior that Dundes (2001) calls the "self-denial and ethic of caring" that women have in society (p. 354). Future studies may want to look at audience perceptions and preferences of the different types of action and behavior in films; they may find that male roles are more favorable to that of female roles.

Mead (1934) wrote about the formation of consciousness and self by describing children developing the ability to take on the role of other and to visualize their own performance from the point of view of others (Coser, 1971). As children grow, they learn to take on the roles of others through play, abiding by rules and socially standardized order, the children eventually mature and become member of that society which exercises control over their conduct (Mead, 1934). Bem (1993) writes that assumption about sex and gender influence how members of Western society perceive of their social reality. Therefore, according to Bem (1993), 'lenses of gender' shape rules and social standards, and children take on these rules through the process of play-acting. This study attempted to explore if children, through imagination, could envision themselves as the lead character. According to Bem's (1993) gender schema theory, children should model what is culturally defined as male and female, or in the context of this study, males should have identified with Aladdin, but not Pocahontas, and vice versa for females. This study found that males (over half) believed that they could trick Jafar just as Aladdin did in the film. Females did not believe they could (over half). The majority of both males and females could not explain why they felt the way they did. This could be explained by the lack of ability beyond simple role-playing; participants could not imagine being an animated character with special abilities and powers. Another explanation is that male participants have more confidence in their ability to be the hero, because they are presented as such in the media, only they cannot articulate this sentiment because they have not reached a certain maturity level. They do not know why they are confident in their abilities to be the hero, they just are.

When asked if they could have stayed with their family rather than leave with the person they loved, like Pocahontas, almost all of the twenty-five respondents said they would have stayed (n= 22). This question was meant to gauge if males and females could imagine themselves as being like Pocahontas, who demonstrated passivity and self-sacrifice. These attributes have been found to be typical among female, animated characters (Byrne & McQuillan, 1999; Dundes, 2001; Rozario, 2004; Zipes, 1994). The use of the term "family" generated an emotional response from the participants. Over half of the males and exactly half of the females felt that they could not leave their families because their family "loved them" or because they felt their family would keep them safe.

Overwhelmingly, participants in this study found it difficult, or impossible, to imagine a female character being saved by another female character. This finding could be attributed to the traditional portrayal of female characters (predominately "princesses") as delicate, slender (Lacroix, 2010) and as "helpless ornaments in need of protection" (Towbin et al., 2003, p. 31; Zipes, 1994, p. 37). These portrayals may have made it difficult for participants to imagine a female being heroic. Conversely, the participants had no trouble envisioning a male being rescued by another male. Over half of the males and females said, "yes", a boy could save John Smith, or a boy could save another boy. Males were more likely to believe a boy could save another boy than females. This may not be surprising considering males outnumber females in the media (Baker & Raney 2004; Signorielli & Bacue 1999; Smith & Cook 2008; Smith, 2010; Thompson & Zerbinos 1995). By numbers alone, males are shown more frequently and their portrayals often reflect strength and heroism (Smith, 2010; Towbin et al., 2003).

Their responses also reveal, not an absolute idea of males rescuing females, but the idea of heterosexual pairing among male and female characters. When asked why a girl could not save Jasmine, 24% of the respondents felt that girls needed to be rescued by a boy. When asked why a boy could not save Aladdin, 20% of respondents said it was because boys were supposed to be rescued by a girl. Bem (1993) wrote that "the privileging of exclusive heterosexuality" is a special case of gender polarization. Gender polarization provides scripts for males and females to include the favoring of heteronormative lifestyles. Female respondents especially, expressed an expectation of male and female pairing, but not necessarily of males rescuing females; females could rescue males as long as there was one boy and one girl involved.

Conclusion

Due to a small sample size, generalizations about the results in this study should be handled cautiously. A larger, yet less homogenous, sample may diversify answers and generate even more conclusions about how children interpret animated films. This study randomly selected two animated films with representations of a human female and a human male, further studies may want to investigate animated films with a shared lead between two females, two males, or even characters that are not humanlike. Diversity in character representation could result in more variability of responses.

This study examined the likelihood of boys and girls to gender stereotype animated films. Findings suggest that boys and girls as young as five and six years old do not gender stereotype animated films. This is inconsistent with research that shows media targets males and females differently and males and females enjoy different types of media. However, research has also shown that age is a factor in gender stereotyping,

with gender stereotyping increasing with age. Future research is needed to show at what age children begin to assign gender to films.

Understanding children's interpretation of gender and gender roles in animated films is an important step in uncovering how gender schemas play a role in society. Furthermore, understanding how children interpret female roles is necessary to inducing change in the portrayal of female characters in the media. This study found that boys and girls could not imagine a girl being saved by another girl, which suggests that female heroes may not be as marketable as stories with male heroes. If there is a female hero, children expect that character to be paired with a character of the opposite sex. Future research should explore children's interpretations of same-sex relationships within animated films.

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                                Animated Film Interview 2012

CODING KEY

This coding key contains codes for the analysis of interviews with respondents, five to six years of age, after viewing two segments of animated films (N= 25). The films were *Aladdin* and *Pocahontas*. The interview questions were concerned with the differences between males and females and their liking of the two films, whether they felt the film was for boys or girls, and gender schemas in relation to action within the films. The data were collected from one-on-one interviews by one researcher within a classroom setting. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using the following codes.

| Column Number	Variable Label	Coding Information		
A	ID	Student ID Number		
B	Age	Age of student		
C	Gender	Gender of student		
D	Like Film	**Like the Film** 01 – Liked the film 02 – Ok 03 – Do not like 99 – other		
E	FilmFor	**Who is this film for?** 01 –Male 02 – Female 03 – Both 15 – Don't know		
F	WhyFilmFor	**Why is this film for a girl?** 21-It has a Jasmine/girls/princess in it 15- Don't know	**Why is this film or a boy?** 11- It has Aladdin/boys (more) boys in the film 15- Don't know	**Why is this film for boys & girls?** 31- Both boys and girls do (would) like it/Both boys and girls watch it 32- Boys and girls are in the film/The film ends with a boy

			and a girl 15- Don't know
G	GirlSaveJas	**Can a girl save Jasmine?** 01 – Yes 02 – No 15 – Don't know	
H	WhyGirlSaveJas	**No** 21- Girls are not strong or as strong as a boy 22- Boys save people a lot/ that is what boys do 23- Girls need to be/are supposed to be rescued by a boy/Jasmine is a girl/ 24- A girl cannot save another girl/a girl would fail/A girl might die if she attempts to save a another girl	**Yes** 33- It is not real 34- That is just how the movie was made 35- Don't know
I	SwordBoy	**Did Aladdin fight with a sword because he was a boy?** 01 – Yes 02 – No 15 – Don't know	
J	WhySwordBoy	**No** 33- It is not real 34- That is just how the movie was made 35- Don't know	**Yes** 11- Girls don't know how to use swords 12- They want to be king/heroes/save the girl/save the world/get what they want/to be safe 13- Boys are strong/brave 14- Boys want to kill/fight/they are angry
K	TrickJafar	**Do you think you could have tricked Jafar like Aladdin?** 01 – Yes 02 – No 15 – Don't know	
L	WhyTrickJafar	**No** 33- It is not real 34- That is just how the movie was made 35- Don't know	**Yes** 11- I can be or want to be the hero/ I can trick Jafar 12- I am smart/I am brave/I am powerful
M	BoySaveJoSm	**Can a boy save John Smith?** 01 – Yes 02 – No	

		15 – Don't know	
N	**WhyBoySaveJoSm**	**No** 21- Boys need to be/supposed to be rescued by a girl/John Smith is the boy 22- Boys are not strong/brave enough 33- It is not real 34- That is just how the movie was made 35- Don't know	**Yes** 11- Boys can save boys/men can save men 12- Boys are brave/strong/nice/ 13- If a girl can, a boy can
O	**PocGiveMed**	**Did Pocahontas give John Smith medicine bc/ she was a girl?** 01 – Yes 02 – No 15 – Don't know	
P	**WhyPocGiveMed**	**No** 33- It is not real 34- That is just how the movie was made 35- Don't know	**Yes** 11- Pocahontas was being nice/wanted to save him/keep him with her 12- To make them feel good/to heal them/to help them
Q	**PocStayedFam**	**Pocahontas stayed with her family... could you have done that?** 01 – Yes 02 – No 15 – Don't know	
R	**WhyPocStayedFam**	**No** 21- It would not be nice to leave w/John Smith/Fell in love with him she should leave with him 33- It is not real 34- That is just how the movie was made 35- Don't know	**Yes** 11- Family is better option (they are nicer, they love me, I love them, they keep me safe, etc.) 12- Leaving with John Smith seems dangerous/he is a stranger

APPENDIX B

Cue card images

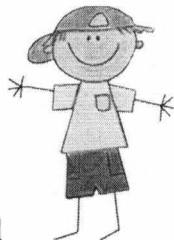
A. Boy
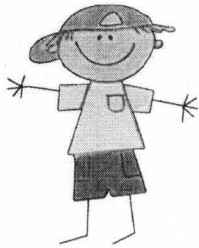
B. Girl

C. Boy and Girl

Table 1

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	11	44
Female	14	56
Age		
Five year old	13	52
Six year old	12	48
Liked Aladdin		
Male	11	100
Female	12	85.7
Thought Aladdin was for boys and girls		
Male	8	63.6
Female	12	85.7
Liked Pocahontas		
Male	8	72.7
Female	12	85.7
Thought Pocahontas was for boys and girls		
Male	9	81.8
Female	11	78.6

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