

A STUDY ON THE PROMOTION OF GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE DISNEY MOVIE HERCULES AMONG CHILDREN

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ABSTRACT

The central purpose of the present research is to examine the traditional and preconceived stereotypes on gender behaviours and appearances portrayed in the Disney motion picture “Hercules”. The Disney motion picture Hercules comprises various samples of gender related metaphors throughout the plot that provides a depiction of traditional conceptions and ideologies of masculine and feminine gender roles. The paper discusses how these sex orientation and gender stereotypes are slowly injected into the contents of this simple humorous entertainment. While children are believed to learn and inherit the good qualities of the protagonists in the movie, they are also subjected to traditional gender related mannerisms and behaviours that these characters portray. This way the paper tries to provide a different conception to the audience towards these Disney movies, which are considered as mere children fantasies.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Disney’s huge contribution to children’s entertainment has resulted in the critical examination and research of gender stereotypes in its films. The stereotypical gender portrayals by this media giant feed confusing gender ideas to the younger generation along with entertaining them and making them laugh. These movies portray to its audience fancy princes and princesses crafted with stereotypical gender roles, body images and behaviours. Disney movies have been providing such wrong notions on gender roles since long time in almost most of its movies. Some of them are: Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Aladdin, Tangled, Sleeping Beauty, Frozen, Cinderella etc. Apart from such gender stereotypes Disney also promotes racial and class discrimination among the audience.

This paper analyses the movie “Hercules” for such metaphorical stereotypes. “Hercules” is an animated musical Disney fantasy. It is the modernization of a classic Greek myth and its eponymous hero is portrayed a perfect example traditional masculinity, while the female gender stereotypes in the movie also remain highlighted.

AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the research is to examine how the preconceived notions on the traditional stereotypes defining femininity and masculinity are promoted among children in the Disney motion pictures “Hercules” and “The Little Mermaid”. It also aims to analyse these gender stereotypes that have metaphorically concealed into humour and entertainment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

CONTENT ANALYSIS

The research is conducted using a qualitative method. The study is focussed on two selected Disney motion pictures “Hercules” and “The Little Mermaid”. The traditional gender stereotypes portrayed in these movies are examined critically. The qualitative content analysis research method is implemented in the research to analyse the data and the contents of the movie to help the researcher achieve the objectives enlisted above.

PARAMETERS

The contents of the Disney motion pictures “Hercules” and “The Little Mermaid” are qualitatively analysed to examine the portrayal of gender stereotypes in these movies, using a set of parameters. These parameters are:

- a) Character Behaviour
- b) Dialogues
- c) Body Image or Appearance
- d) Costumes
- e) Settings

ANALYSIS OF GENDER STEREOTYPICAL CONTENT IN “HERCULES”

CHARACTER BEHAVIOUR & DIALOGUES

The hero centred movie “Hercules”, as the title of the film suggests, sends gender stereotypical messages to its young audience throughout the plot. All the female characters here play the inferior roles of a traditional and beautiful wife, lover, slave etc. The male characters are portrayed dominant and strong with no emotional apathy, fear and sexual desires. They are displayed as heroes with zero weaknesses.

HERA

The stereotypical representations in the movie begin with Hera. The scene shows baby Hercules with his parents, Zeus and Hera. Hera is showering her child with motherly affection. And her portrayal throughout the film does not go beyond her role as a mother and wife. Her role can be summarised in the mere ten lines of dialogues that she speaks and all these dialogues are related to her motherhood, child. She is shown sobbing over her loss and her missing son in her second scene. She is seen hiding behind Zeus and then she falls

dramatically on the ground breaking into tears. In direct contrast to Hera's womanly reactions, Zeus is only angered by his son's disappearance.

MEGARA

Megara or Meg is also as an inferior and a weak woman portraying traditional gender stereotypes. She plays the role of a young, vulnerable woman. Her vulnerability and disability to think is well proved by her making a choice to surrender her soul to Hades. She is referred to as a "Damsel in Distress" in the movie itself. Though her role in the movie is quiet significant, she is portrayed powerless. She is a slave of Hades and works under him. She is controlled by him. She limits her extent of strength to being able to tie her own lace. She says "I'll be alright. I'm a big tough girl. I tie my own sandals and everything." This show how incapable she feels and makes herself appear. Hades establishes his dominance over her by using belittling pet names like "My little flower, my little bird, my little nut." Meg in most parts of the film is forced to play the role of a "femme fatale", seducing the enemies of Hades so he could defeat them. She is portrayed as a seductress. She sees selling her chastity as the only possible way to attain her freedom from Hades. She is wooed by his offer for freedom in return for seducing Hercules. This reveals how easily she falls prey to manipulation. Throughout the film she plays the role of a mere pawn with no dreams and ambitions.

HERCULES

Male characters are not exception to these traditional gender roles. Hercules also displays the gender stereotypes associated with male heroes. He appears as a white hero, physically dominant, strong, brave and courageous. Only when Hercules starts slaying monsters with Phil's training, then he is promoted to the status of a "hero". This is well proved in the lines of the Muses' song "He was a no one. A zero, zero. Now he's a honcho. He's a Hero." They say that he has become a hero in no time by slaying and winning over monsters. They also describe him as a "hunk" and a "gladiator". They quote that he is "sweet and undefeated" "An awesome ten for ten". These lines seem to reveal that only undefeated, strong, muscular, rich and handsome men can be a ten on ten or a complete hero.

ZEUS

Zeus, the ruler of Greek Gods is portrayed as a male with great power, strength, dominance, pride and supernatural powers. Just like the Muses sing about the heroism of Hercules, they also glorify Zeus for his similar acts of slaying the monstrous Titans. Zeus is portrayed conceited and he often boasts about his power and great strength. He displays his dominance and control over his wife throughout the plot. Zeus fulfils traditional masculine stereotypes by portraying a lack of emotional apathy. In the scene where Zeus and Hera find that their baby has been abducted, Hera sobs and weeps on Zeus' shoulders. Contrary to her emotions, Zeus is enraged by his loss. He doesn't seem to be affected by the loss of his son as much as he is weighed down by a feeling of defeat and inferiority.

PHILOCTETES

Phil portrays women as incompetent and weak, both physically and intellectually. He tries to promote his own abilities by belittling women. He makes disparaging comments about female abilities and intellect. While listing out his achievement to Hercules he sarcastically says “Who do you think taught Jason to sail? Cleopatra?” By this Phil tries to portray that it is impossible for women to excellence in his profession of training heroes. He belittles their intellectual skills. He seems to refer to women as mere objects of beauty and no intellect.

BODY IMAGE

Gender stereotypes are also exhibited through the way the characters are made to appear. Traditional body image expectations are highlighted in the characters of the film. Hera is portrayed as a fair, slim and tall woman with long, curly, golden hair, the stereotypical characteristics that define beauty for any Goddess or wife of a powerful God.

Megara is portrayed as a fair, slim woman with long brown hair. She is purposefully provided a much sexualised appearance. Several references of “her curves” are made throughout the movie. She is merely portrayed as an object of desire and Hades uses her beauty and curves to bait his enemies.

The male characters are not spared of these traditional body images either. Hercules, the hero is portrayed unrealistically built and muscular. He is a tall, fair young man with blue eyes, square jawline and golden hair, exhibiting unimaginable strength and power. The Muses sing songs emphasizing his masculine physique. They sing “Folks lined up just to watch him flex; and his perfect package; in a pair of pretty pecs.” He is referred to as the favourite flavour of women.

Zeus, Hercules’ father also looks unrealistically strong and muscular. Like the portrayal of Hercules, Zeus is also shown tall, strong, fair and as having blue eyes. He looks the same even after years.

The antagonist, Hades has an appearance exactly contrary to these superheroes. He is a dusky, tall and stout man with blue hair and sharp nails. He possesses no blue eyes.

Phil is a trainer of heroes. In spite of possessing a great intellect, strength, courage and skills, Phil is still taunted for his appearance and for being a dwarf. He is referred to as “shorty” by Meg. The way he looks seems to outdo his experiences and achievements.

COSTUMES AND SETTING

Associating female with pink is one of most traditional concepts of Disney movies. This concept seems to have been implemented in this plot too. Hera during all her appearances in the plot is clad in a long, shimmering pink

dress. All her scenes are set up in Mount Olympus. The setting looks exuberant and is filled with lively colours. The setting is brightly lit.

Meg is made to wear a calm shaded purple dress. Unlike Hera, Meg's attire is simple and it doesn't glitter, perhaps, because her status has been reduced to that of a slave.

Hercules and Zeus also wear shiny capes and carry a polished sword. Their muscular physique is highlighted. These heroes or god-like characters appear to glow with an aura of divinity.

Evil characters are often associated with black, greyish tint and other harsh colours. Hades following this rule wears a black cape. He being the ruler of underworld often appears in a gloomy, dark and cold setting with dingy walls.

FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

The research focusses on the subject of promotion of traditional gender stereotypes and roles among children in the Disney motion picture "Hercules". Gender roles in society decide how we act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct ourselves based upon our assigned sex. The movies "Hercules" is analysed for such gender stereotypes. This analysis is carried out employing several qualitative parameters like, character behaviours and dialogues, body Image or appearance, costumes and settings have been set up based on which the contents of "Hercules" have been thematically examined.

This Disney motion picture presents gender stereotypical content in the portrayal of their characters. All the characters in the movie exhibit gender stereotypical physical and behavioural mannerisms. These films follow a portrayal of its heroes in a stereotypical manner. They also provide a representation of traditional femininity in their female characters like Hera, Megara etc.

The movie does not stop with traditional feministic gender roles. They also highlight instances and characters which encourage traditional masculinity. Hercules portrays gender stereotyped physical and behavioural traits. Phil and Pegasus also promote masculine superiority referring to women as incompetent. Zeus is also portrayed as a personification of strength, heroism etc. Hades is also shown bossing over Meg, threatening her and belittling her exposing his superiority.

Hence this analysis interprets how the characters of the movie extensively deliver mixed messages about the roles and gender behaviours of men and women in the society, to its young audience.

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