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Some Day My Prince Will Come: Archival Analysis of The Disney Prince, Relationship Portrayal and "Happily Ever After"

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Abstract

Disney is one of the largest distributors of media to children, portraying romance, love, and the happily ever after endings in its popular collection of animated films (DiPirro 2007). The purpose of this study is to examine the Disney Princes and the phenomenon of chasing after a Prince for that "happily ever after" ending. Previous studies have explored aspects of the Princess and her story. This research investigates another side of this franchise. The hypothesis of the current study is that Disney Princess movies will end in "Happily Ever After" with Princes that display no character development in the earlier films, and minimal change between the earlier and later films. The current research method includes a combination of observational and quantitative analysis of eleven of the Disney franchise Princess movies from Snow White in 1937 to Frozen in 2013. Descriptive statistics, t-test and trend data, will be utilized to explore changes in the "Prince" characters over time. While watching the movies, relevant quotes will be recorded that depict the character's personality and portrayal as well as some more general observations about how the film is depicting the Prince and the relationships that will be included in the study. The results indicate that the hypothesis was partially supported, with most of the Disney Princess movies ending in "Happily Ever After" scenarios. However, while the prince character becomes more complex as time goes on, he is still traditionally masculine and is a part of an outdated, gendered love story.

Introduction

Previous research discussed gender roles of each of the prince and princess characters. Disney encourages their desired audience, children, to relate to their characters and internalize the messages that are being portrayed by their "role-models" when it comes to themes such as body image, gender roles, and love (England et al. 2011). Other studies have shown there is a positive association between the viewing of Disney movies and romantic beliefs (Hefner & Kretz, 2021). Wohlwend (2009) explored how girls may be influenced regarding gender identity, gender roles, and other expectations by receiving and playing with Disney princesses dolls as young girls. Bethmann (2017) discussed the Disney prince, claiming that they each have different personalities, some silly, shy, pompous, and some quiet. However, one thing that they all have in common is that in the end they are considered heroes and very beloved.

Purpose and Hypothesis

The purpose is to examine the Disney Princes and the phenomenon of chasing after a Prince for that "happily ever after" ending. Most previous work has focussed on the princesses, therefore this study focuses on the Prince. The hypothesis of this study is that Disney Princess movies will end in "Happily Ever After" with Princes with no character development in the earlier films, and minimal change over time.

Methods

Descriptive statistics as well as t-test and trend data will be utilized to test the hypothesis. Each of the movies will be coded for their main character traits with a modified version of the system outlined by England et al (2011) on a possible scale of 0-19/19. While watching the movies, relevant quotes will be recorded that depict the character's personality and portrayal as well as some more general observations about how the film is depicting the prince and the relationships will be included in the analysis. The movies were categorized and evaluated by three eras.

Results

t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means

	Variable 1 (Masculine Traits)	Variable 2 (Feminine Traits)
Mean	0.715	0.18083333
Variance	0.011536364	0.01889924
Observations	12	12
Pearson Correlation	-0.215177981	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	11	
t Stat	9.647207467	
P(T<=t) one-tail	5.28616E-07	
t Critical one-tail	1.795884819	
P(T<=t) two-tail	**1.05723E-06***	
t Critical two-tail	2.20098516	

Disney Prince Quizzes

Discussion

The t-test results indicated significant differences between the means of masculine and feminine traits ($t(11)= 9.65$, $p= 1.05723E-06$). The hypothesis was partially supported as most of the Disney Princess movies end in "Happily Ever After." The Princes are traditionally masculine and are a part of an outdated, gendered love story, despite the introduction of some complexity with time.

Era 1: Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella
- All movies here follow a similar plotline: a masculine, handsome, nameless prince whom they have only just met and barely know sweeping a girl off her feet. They fall head over heels in love, get married, and live happily ever after.
- The princesses fantasize about the day they'll meet their prince, who only really needs to be a prince in order to win their affection.
- Although each princess is slightly unique, the majority of their narratives as a character is geared towards finding a happy ending (Whelan, 2012).

Era 2: Little Mermaid, Beauty and the Beast, Aladdin, Pocahontas, Mulan
- Beauty and the Beast is the first of Disney Princess movies that shows the development of a relationship, compromises, and ultimately leads to falling in love, not at first sight.
   - Despite that point of progress, the movie still had the spell broken with a non-consensual kiss and they of course live happily ever after.
- There is emphasis placed on the princesses ending up with a man whom she actually loves.
- These princes transition to being slightly more complex characters.
- While there is some progress, the ultimate goal still remains to find a suitable partner for marriage and their happily ever after still seems to be dependent on finding a man (Johnson, 2015).
- The masculine traits of these Princes each increase over the course of time, showing that the Prince still needs to possess these masculine characteristics in order to be considered a Prince and desirable.

Era 3: Princess and the Frog, Tangled, Frozen
- Frozen is another transition point!
   - We see a situation that does not work out the way it was "supposed to" and how heartbroken Anna is, however short-lived.
   - While he is similar to other "Disney Princes" in that his physical appearance, Kristoff is much more quirky, hardworking and does not really have any interest in the fact Anna is a Princess, potentially showing a new type of male character emerging in Disney.
   - There is a slow development of a real connection between the two as partners and friends before even a tinge of romance.
   - This is the first story that has affirmative consent about kissing between two characters.
   - However, as much as Princes in this era have more personality, they are still more of a side piece that the woman needs to have her "happily ever after."

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