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## Reflective Essay

Does media influence an individual? Does it influence me? With these questions from Dr. Sochay's Media Communication course in mind, I started thinking about media in our culture and the Disney princess came to mind. Arguably, there's no bigger impact on society than that which affects children, and with "Let it Go" still being on the hearts and tongues of little kids everywhere, the effect of Disney princesses on young kids became my focus. *Frozen* and other recent Disney movies have been hailed as more feminist-friendly, but I wanted to know if research had truly seen changes in the way kids view gender and gender roles based on Disney princess movies.

My research began via Bethel Library's website. I first did a general search, using the scholarly articles option, with the terms "Disney" and "Princess." This yielded many results, over 1,849 using EBSCO Host to search all databases. I added the search term "gender", which severely limited my sources, bringing them down to around 20 results. Returning to the previous search, I limited the results to "full text" and "scholarly (peer-reviewed) journals." Wanting more recent research, I omitted any results from before 2000. This again limited my sources too far. In this field, however, I was able to find a few articles, including the one by Do Rozario.

I changed the search terms to "Disney" and "gender" and modified the publication date. I avoided reviews, dissertations, and non-academic periodicals. This and other slight changes to the EBSCO Megafire search, such as "Disney" and "girls" or "Disney" and "gender role," yielded other articles. I also searched MLA International Bibliography. This provided both articles by Bruce, focusing on the impact on both young girls and college students.

By the time I completed my research, I had around 20 possible sources that were available to me in full-text format. I started reading, keeping in mind my research question: does the portrayal of princesses in Disney movies affect kids' perceptions of gender and gender roles? Therefore, I had to first show that research suggests there is an effect from the media. Only then could I present information on *how* Disney movies affect the perception of gender. With these parameters, I discarded any articles that were not implicitly about Disney princesses. I also moved from my initial focus of children's perceptions of to focus just on young girls', as the majority of my research focused on that.

Having limited my sources down to around 14 different articles, I then read them, weeding out any secondary sources, as per the assignment description for this paper. This criteria left me with about ten strong articles regarding the media effects of Disney princesses in relation to young girls' perception of gender.

From these articles, I began taking notes, using MLA to organize my notes by author name and page number. This resulted in approximately 9 pages of quotes, summaries, or paraphrased statements as a review of the research literature. I began to outline the structure of my paper, focusing on the messages from Disney movies and the effects on children, before coming to recognize a few critical implications. Thus, my paper structure focused first on sources that used coding and analysis to identify gender roles and stereotypes in the film. The sources that fulfilled this category included Do Rozario, England, and Towbin.

Secondly, I used articles that detailed studies conducted with young children in relation to their perception of Disney princess movies. I checked to make sure the research was conducted by the author of the article, and that he or she focused on young girls somewhere between the

ages of three and ten. This involved interviews, surveys, or supervising and facilitating play among the children.

Lastly, the articles by Bruce and Towbin brought up critical implications of the effects on the college-aged grown-up Disney generation and the LGBTQ community. As a member of the Disney generation myself, I found Bruce's findings to be a direct commentary on society's perception of gender roles and the need for strong, feminist messages in kids' movies. Knowing that no study of gender is complete without some emphasis on the LGBTQ community, Towbin looked at the very few instances of such portrayals in Disney movies and noted that gender stereotypes are still portrayed, both those that comply with hetero-normative behavior and those that do not.

This research review paper both answered my own questions and improved my skills in using the library resources, which sounds like a "happily-ever-after" to me.