Memorandum

To: Professor J. Matthew Clarke

From: Cody L. Strange

Date: 10/28/2020

RE:

Introduction:

Pretty as a Princess 2016, by Sarah M. Coyne, Jennifer Ruh Linder, Eric E. Rasmussen, David A. Nelson and Victoria Birkbeck. This study focuses on the long-term effects on Gender Stereotypes, Body Esteem, and prosocial behavior from watching Disney princesses by preschool and kindergarten boys and girls.

Thesis of Article:

The study proved the following: Increased exposure to female gender-stereotypical behavior is related to more female gender-stereotypical behavior. Princess engagement was not related to body esteem. Princess engagement was not associated with higher levels of prosocial behavior for girls.

Summary of Article:

Pretty as a Princess was created on three hypothesizes, the first being, “Exposure to Disney Princesses will be associated with heightened adherence to female gender stereotypes both concurrently and over time” (Pretty as a Princess, Sarah M. Coyne, 2016). This Hypothesis was based on the Social Cognitive Theory of Gender Development, this hypothesis stated that children learn gendered behaviors from their peers, and the more the peers are rewarded for their behavior the more likely the children will learn from them. This theory would suggest that “Disney Princesses may be a particularly potent model for the learning of gendered behavior in children” (Pretty as a Princess, Sarah M. Coyne, 2016). The main points of evidence used to test the Hypothesis were a series of gender preference and activity tests. The tests would see how often boys and girls who engaged with Disney Princesses engaged in higher levels of gender stereotypical activities and preferences.

The second Hypothesis, “Disney Princesses would be related to poorer body esteem in girls, both in the short term and long term” (Pretty as a Princess, Sarah M. Coyne, 2016. This Hypothesis was based on the “thin ideal” of Disney Princesses, this meant that Disney Princesses represented an unrealistic kind of beauty that was superior to all other forms of beauty while simultaneously being unattainable. This intern would lower the body esteem of girls who watched and looked up to the Disney Princesses (Pretty as a Princess, Sarah M. Coyne, 2016). The study did tests on children and their parent’s body esteem of said children. They tested them before and after watching Disney Princess movies to see what effects they might have on body esteem.

The last Hypothesis, “Engagement with Disney Princesses will be associated with heightened prosocial behavior” (Pretty as a Princess, Sarah M. Coyne, 2016)

This Hypothesis was based on the social cognitive theory and the general learning model. Together they stated that media characters are modeled on behaviors and traits meant of the viewers, and the viewers learn behavior, attitudes, and beliefs based on the media they participate in. This was tested by having the parents and teachers of children rate the prosocial behavior of their children before and after watching Disney Princesses. (Pretty as a Princess, Sarah M. Coyne, 2016)

Opposition:

Disney may want to disagree with the study for two reasons. The first being that their Princesses are pushing gender-stereotypical behavior. This is popularly viewed as a negative thing and therefore Disney could suffer blowback because of it. But this study also shows that children are not learning the “positive” behaviors and lessons that Disney is trying to teach the kids.

I cannot say for certain whether parents would have problems with this study or not. While some believe gender-stereotypical behavior is a terrible thing, many other parents would disagree. Parents are still teaching their boys to act like boys and girls to act like girls. This has largely to do with the culture many people grow up with, and the Christian religion that dominants the United States.

Evaluation:

While I do believe that the study was a success for its evidence supporting its hypothesis and then the overall thesis, I do have some problems with it. I do not believe that the study considered enough outside variables into consideration. Mainly in part with the gender-stereotypical behavior, I am not sure that the study considered the way the parents were raising their kids. The study doesn’t consider the idea that parents are the ones pushing gender-stereotypical behavior. This is shown in part by the study when it shows that parents who mediate the kids after watching the Disney Princess movies show even more gender-stereotypical behavior. It may be that the parents are the main source and not the Princesses, though a study would have to do to further research this as I do not have substantial proof. But that is the issue, it could be a plausible reason, but the study didn’t cover it, so it is an unknown variable. Other problems may include that the length of the study was only 1 year, the audience wasn’t as diverse as it likely should’ve been, and the number of kids for the study was only a few hundred. But beyond these minor problems, I believe the study did a great job of going about its research on the hypothesis it set before itself.

Conclusion:

In the end the Pretty as a Princess study was a success, it proved that Disney Princesses increase engagement in gender stereotypes. While proving that neither body esteem was decreased, nor prosocial behavior increased. It did so with sound evidence and gives way for more research to be conducted on the topic.