

ANTH 1001.01 Princes, Wicked Stepmothers, and Good Men: Disney and Gender

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W 2:10-3:25pm (ten weekly 75-min. sessions: 1/11-3/22)

Course Description

The day a child is born, it is immediately swathed in blue for a boy or pink for girl. But what does it mean to 'be a boy' or to 'act like a girl'? We learn the rules governing our gender from many different sources: parents, friends, books, television, and movies.... Perhaps one of the most influential yet unexplored sources for many Americans are animated Disney films. Why Disney? Walt Disney has shaped the American way of life since the early 20th Century and represents a major cultural force in the United States today. As a multi-national corporation, Disney controls and produces a vast array of products including television networks, films, live entertainment, theme parks and even communities. These products are consumed by hundreds of millions of people around the globe and both impact and reflect our conception of gender.

Psychological studies have demonstrated that children absorb ideological messages and incorporate them into their own worldview- so what are the messages about gender in these films that so many millions of children watch on repeat? In this class, we will use a combination of texts and animated Disney movies to explore the construction of both masculine and feminine gender roles. A second goal of the course will be to examine the historical context of the messages and how they have, or have not, changed over time. How does Cinderella, the model housewife and female of the in1950s, relate to Elsa? Do we still value Prince Charming, the man of action but few words, or is it sensitive but strong Hans?

Throughout the course, we will use other sources of contemporary media, from magazines to television shows, to explore the impact of these Disney ideals on our lives and how we 'do' gender.

Evaluation

In addition to class participation (40%), students will write two Reading Responses (1-2 pages each) to two Disney films of their choice and the related course readings (30%). The final project will consist of re-writing an older Disney prince or princess into modern-day society. Each student will give a presentation on their translation of the Disney character (15%) as well as a brief (2-3 page) write-up of their 'new' character and why they chose to reinvent the character as they did (15%).

Required Reading

No required text. There will be articles posted to Blackboard that discuss the week's topic and film.