

Original Paper

The Exposure to Animated Movies and Constructing Adolescents' Perception towards Gender Role

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Abstract

This study aims to know the Egyptian adolescents' perception towards gender roles; coinciding with the evolution of the female lead animated movies. Being affected by the third and the fourth wave of feminism in American society and its effect on Egyptian adolescents; since animated movies are mainly American produced. The study found that Egyptian adolescents perceive the female role in the society to be independent decision-maker and has her own rights, reassuring that women hold much more work-load than men and her biggest enemy and fighter is the society itself, not her capabilities, while animation movies from 2012 till 2018 hold more muscular personality traits and behavioral traits than feminine ones.

Keywords

animation, adolescence, perception, gender roles, gender stereotyping, femininity, androgyny, masculinity, feminism

1. Introduction

New generations are growing up in an environment saturated with different kinds of media; which impact our children, especially that media access became much easier through cell phones, which affects child's perceptions and attitudes about various aspects within the society, like gender stereotypes; as gender roles in society has become one of the most recent yet; an important issue that concern many people; especially after the spread of the third feminism movement and breaking major

gender stereotypes inherited by the Egyptian society.

Research Problem

This study focuses on the portrayal of females that changed throughout time, from the old female lead animation movies in the 1990s till present; coinciding with the third and fourth wave of feminism, and their influence on the perception of adolescents in Egypt ranging from (13-17) years-old, regarding gender role, especially that Egypt does not participate in producing or creating the most popular animated movies with new technologies, but, it receives them from abroad adding translation or dubbing to the movies in Arabic language. This topic provoked the researcher as it was observed that the new generations hold different attitudes and behaviors towards gender roles, accompanied by a rebel against the old Egyptian traditions.

Study Objectives

- 1) To know how the Egyptian adolescents, perceive gender roles and gender stereotypes.
- 2) To explore if Animated movies may affect adolescents' opinions and perceptions regarding gender stereotypes.
- 3) To know if the Egyptian adolescents believe in women's capabilities.
- 4) To predict the society's gender roles in the near future, and women statues in the Egyptian society.

Study Significance

- Media, with all its different genres, has huge effects on our perception and way of thinking; in a way that cultivates gender perception, especially animated movies that are now a very important genre of media; occupying top ranks in the worldwide box office. Foreign animation movies hold different messages that have been sent to our audiences and our adolescents, in particular, that cannot be underestimated.
- Egyptian society had been criticized by being Americanized and holding foreign culture different than the Egyptian culture; especially young generations.
- The media of the present time reflects the gender role expectations found in the American culture. Since that most animated movies are not produced in Egypt they only aired on the television with Arabic translation or dubbing, we should focus more on those movies as the cultural background, customs and traditions are different from the Egyptian culture which will lead to holding different messages by the Egyptian adolescents, Americanizing the Egyptian culture from an early age.
- Egyptian children and adolescents watch foreign cartoons and are affected by it, that was emphasized by research. Awad (1997) reported that the presented cartoons on Egyptian TV channels were foreign animated cartoons with 97.4%, while the Egyptian animation productions were only 2.95%. The foreign animated cartoons on Egyptian child channels were presented in Arabic language dubbing with 93%, while they were presented with their original foreign language with only 6.8%.

- There weren't any Arabic or Egyptian animation movies with females lead characters that were produced in the time of the study.
- The Arabic literature needs more research about gender roles compared to foreign literature and studies.

Review of Literature

The literature review is divided into two main sections:

1) Media Influence in Constructing Perception

- a) For Children and Adolescents
- b) For Gender Roles

2) Gender Roles in Animated Movies

Media Influence in Constructing Perceptions for Children and Adolescents.

Padilla-Walker (2007) stated that during adolescence age, the amount of time spent with their family is reduced and spending much more time with themselves when they watch unsupervised media content. Research has stated that adolescents from the ages between 10-18 years spend around 8 hours consuming media, and TV alone takes from 3 to 4 hours (Roberts, Föehr, & Rideout, 2005).

Media plays an integral role in forming the life of children (Jordan, Hershey, McDivitt, & Heitzler, 2006; Šramová & Pavelka, 2017). Children learn about morality, social norms, and gender roles from different sources including media portrayals in which they receive.

Mass communication and mass media are significant factors by which children form their own view of the human world (Šramová, 2014); in addition to the family, peers, and schools that provide interpersonal, group and institutional communication (McQuail, 2010; Young, 2003). Traditionally, parents, teachers, friends, and clergy have had the responsibility for the socialization of children; however, in today's world, the mass media play an ever-increasing role in this socialization process (Signorielli, 2001).

Media Influence in Constructing Perceptions for Gender Role

A lot of researches had focused on how television would influence aggressive behavior, while other researches focused on how media became a socializing agent of gender roles.

Ey (2016) has conducted a study about sexualized music media and adolescent's perspective towards gender role and self-identity development. The research results posed questions about gender-power relations, which were emphasized by Peterson (2010), that adolescents build acceptance of male dominance while they still at the age of developing gender role and socio-sexual identity. The consumption of movies influences the audience's gender-based attitudes and beliefs, emphasized by Matyas, (2010) who conducted a textual analysis of nine Disney animation movies, stated that popular movies may include kinds of storylines which are having negative effects on the attitudes and behaviors of people in regards to gender role.

Gender Roles in Animated Movies

Animated cartoons are the most media genre children and adolescents are exposing to, it's the gate that opens them up to learn about a variety of subjects which indeed affect their attitudes and behaviors (Schiau, Plitea, Gusiță, Pjekny, & Iancu, 2013). Children and young viewers are more capable to absorb the socializing effects presented on television, especially those shows presented on children's television channels and animated programs because they might find difficulty in telling the difference between fantasy and reality (Miller, 2003). Not only that but also, children tend to resemble animated cartoon characters more frequently than their own family members (Gilbert, 1998). Cartoons are tools for entertainment to children and young viewers, which may include wrong messages and information despite the educative aspect of those cartoons (Gökçearslan, 2010).

Research has proved the presence of gender stereotypes in different kinds of media; animated movies are no exception. Animated movies encompass over 80% of children's worldwide programming (Götz & Lemish, 2012). Animated shows have fallen into portraying old gender stereotypes (Banet-Weiser, 2004; Burguera, 2011). Research has proved that females were portrayed in animated programs as passive and dependent on the male characters, and are less likely to be the lead character (Baker & Raney, 2007; Götz & Lemish, 2012), they are more likely to be part of a team than the leader (Burguera, 2011; Götz & Lemish, 2012). Studies have consistently reported that females are vastly underrepresented in children's animated programs (Baker & Raney, 2007; Klein & Shiffman, 2009; Thompson & Zerbinos, 1995). Male dominance was clear in almost all of the stories and a male bias was demonstrated in the main characters and titles (Michael, Bakar, Ibrahim, Veerappan, Noor, Heng, & Yann, 2012).

Theoretical Framework Gender Schema Theory (GST)

Gender Schema Theory (GST) is a cognitive theory that was first created to clarify the role of gender in organizing meanings, proposed by psychologist Sandra Lipsitz Bem in 1981.

Gender schema theory assumes that children get information from their social environments and the surrounding culture, which emphasis gender, gender differences, and gender roles, so children encode and process into networks of mental associations which help them to understand their world better. By doing that, they develop schema or cognitive structures that represent information about the world and themselves; which help in organizing information and guide perception, evaluation, and encoding of new information. (i.e., into feminine or masculine categories).

2. Method

Variables of the Study

Independent Variable: Gender role in Animated Movies

Dependent Variable: Adolescents' Perception of Gender Role

Mediating Variables: Peers, Cultural and Religious background

Research Questions

- (1) How do Egyptian adolescents perceive gender role stereotypes?
- (2) How do Egyptian adolescents perceive the differences between the heroine's character traits from old till recent animated movies?
- (3) Do Egyptian adolescents believe that those independent female characters they perceive in American animated movies can exist in Egyptian society?
- (4) Do Egyptian adolescents believe in Egyptian women's capabilities?
- (5) How do Egyptian adolescents see the feminists or the independent women?

Qualitative Research

This study will use **the focus group discussion** tool that would fit perfectly to collect the data and information the researcher seeks to get to understand the adolescents' gender role perspective. Since this study focuses on the adolescence stage; focus group discussion will help in collecting all the data required to measure the gender-role perspective of the Egyptian adolescents from different socio-economic levels ranging their ages from (13-17) years old.

This study will use the **BSRI Bem Sex Role Inventory (1974)**, in designing the focus groups' questions. Hoffman & Borders (2001), the BSRI consists of 60 personality characteristics that are divided into; twenty stereotypically feminine, 20 stereotypically masculine, and 20 gender-neutral.

Sample

The sample of the current study is a nonprobability sampling. Samples were taken from the capital Cairo, consisting of Egyptian Educated Students range from 13 to 17 years old from different schools' categories which reveal different social classes, including females and males. N=100. It's divided into three categories; a) an international school, b) private school, and c) a national school.

Focus Groups Questions Form and Measurements

Questions of the focus groups are designed according to the variables of the study. In addition to the **BSRI** test to measure the level of femininity and masculinity of the participants in the study.

Ethical Considerations

Since this study's participants are adolescents then, consents were approved by their parents that their children join the focus group. Also, the confidentiality of the characters who speak in the focus group, like their names or any information about them will not be revealed in the study.

3. Results

Recent Animated Movies That Had Been Watched

They were all updated with animation movies, as the researcher showed the animation movies' posters in front of the students and they all watched those movies before through different means, as some of

them watched those movies in the cinema and others on television. They were all updated with the final releases of the animation movies and sitcoms too. The national school participants were much updated with most animation movies more than other schools.

The Change in the Animated Movies

The majority agreed that there are differences in the character of the main heroine, despite the same conditions and standard of life they might have but, mainly the female character has changed to be more independent, assertive, forceful, brave, adventurous and wants to explore the world, she doesn't need a man to rescue her anymore and she's not waiting for the prince charming. They all didn't accept the idea of the prince survival kiss in snow white to give her back life and strongly criticized that concept. Despite that the boys' responses were almost the same, they agreed that there are differences between old and recent animated movies, they said: "*girls now in the movies are more like fighters*". The most highlighting comment was from the national schoolboys as they said about Merida in Brave that "*she's most likely to be a man if she shaved her hair, because of her attitude*", in the old movies they saw; the characters are more naïve. On the other hand, in recent movies, they want to be independent to achieve something big for themselves away from romance and prince charming.

These results suggest that the Egyptian adolescents are updated and aware of all the new animation movie releases which weren't expected to be that updated within all social segments.

The Possibilities of Movies to Happen in Reality

Participants were asked about how far those animated movies would be in real life, the majority answered that it's mostly fantasy and including superpowers, but some actions can be achieved in real life. Saladino (2014) demonstrated that girls of today are turning their lives from the expected gender roles to the career motivated and adventure. Golden & Jacoby (2018) demonstrated that the nature of animated movies especially, the female lead animated ones, has changed as the mass media were exposing to the young audience a limited and static image for women (England et al., 2011; Linn, 2009).

Participants were asked which is closer to reality, regarding the difference in the heroine animated movies, the majority agreed that in real life women are being responsible and independent and they are facing their own battles.

Housework Duties and Domestic Work

The majority of the sample has both working father and mother, and the majority also answered that their father is spending more time at work than their mother, but even the working mother is responsible for the domestic work and the father can help her in doing it. The majority agreed that women are holding more load and pressure as they do much more work compared to men. The final result that all social segments agreed upon was; women are more pressured and have much more work whether she's working from home or not, but none of them proposed the idea that men can exchange

some of women's duties.

Society's Hero

The majority disagreed that the man is the only hero as they answered; the man won't achieve anything without the woman, except for some group of private school boys answered yes the man is the hero most of the time as he is considered the financial resource in the house giving him the upper hand and responsibility for the house, also women can't act easily outside her home. The boys' groups mainly were convinced with the idea that men can take the responsibility of owning a house with an income and can do perfectly well in dealing with other people, while women can't do any of that. The answers indicated how Egyptian adolescents acknowledge the importance of women in society and her important role.

Egyptian Women Capabilities

The girls said women can do and achieve whatever they want, and it's not as difficult as it was before, A woman can fight for what she wants and she will get it whatever happened, as the stereotypes in the society started to change. On the other hand, boys had different opinions as they all agreed at first and said yes then they justified their answer as physically, women can't endure what men can endure.

The Adolescents' Perception of Egyptian Women Now

The participants choice of pictures that represent Egyptian women indicates that they see women as a working one, as the least number of the whole sample picked the woman in her home doing nothing. Most of them saw women as a working member in the society, which might lead to the acceptance of the women position in the society.

On the Real Ground; Acquaintance Independent Women in Egypt

The prominent notice of this question from both genders in all groups is that whoever is speaking about an independent woman or a strong woman they knew they spoke proudly and passionately, which might lead that those persons would support other women in the future to achieve what they want.

Decision Making is a Right or a Rebel For an Egyptian Woman

The answers emphasized that woman's decision should not affect her children and her family as she can't neglect taking care of her children or the housework, because it would be a rebel, but if she wanted some change in her life as her career it's totally up to her. Also, boys' groups from different social segments were welcoming women independence, as long as these women aren't from their family.

The Egyptian Adolescents' View For Independent Women

The answers of the participants showed that most of them praised and liked the strong independent woman, except a very small group who thought she hates men and she will never get married, but the majority thought independent women are brave and can handle responsibilities.

4. Discussion

Henfer, Firchau, Norton, and Shevel (2017) indicated in their study that there is a transition in Disney animated movies over time, from classic animated movies through transitional to modern films. Heritage (2015) analyzed *Snow white* who was waiting for the prince charming survival kiss was an indicator of the lack of culturally gendered language features. *The Little Mermaid* which also contains a lack of cross-gender spoken interaction it had a shift in societal views which can be observed as Ariel appears to have gender-neutral fascinations, as opposed to stereotypical female interests, to be changed in *Frozen* which differs from both *Snow White* and *The Little Mermaid*. There are interesting differences in culturally gendered language features of males and females in comparison to both movies. That diachronic change demonstrates that modern women are more linguistically equal to men, in comparison to older animated movies. Furthermore, the princess's interests also changed, from being an expert on housework to exploring and meeting people.

Mulan as a princess animated movie broke the traditional gender roles in which the princess is waiting for the perfect marriage (Morrison, 2014). Morrison (2014) demonstrated that the older animated movies with female lead character were presenting women the main goal is finding true love and seeking for marriage only; as in *Tangled* despite that princess Rapunzel was presented as smart, resourceful, adventurous and wanting to achieve her dreams, the movie ended in romance like all other female lead characters (Mulan, Belle, Jasmine, and Ariel). This reinforces the negative idea that a woman can find her happy life only through marriage.

Lueke (2014) stated in her research that the princesses in animated movies throughout time reflect the women states quo in that era; as in *Snow White* resembles the hardworking attitude in the 1930s, *Cinderella* maintains a positive attitude for self-preservation, *Pocahontas* advocates herself by pushing societal expectations, *Merida* in *Brave* refuses to conform to traditional expectations, finally, *Anna* and *Elsa* in *Frozen* hold very strong personalities that don't fear success. Hine, et al. (2018), in their study where they compared Disney animated movies from the 2000s till 2010s and the results. The outcome of the movies is not romantic as it used to be in older animated movies. Vágnerová (2018) conducted a research where old animated movies and their remakes were analyzed; *Cinderella* (1950) and *Cinderella* (2015), *Sleeping Beauty* and *Maleficent*, *The Beauty and the Beast* (1991) and (2017), to study the differences that were made in both movies. In the remakes, the heroines are seemingly empowered through their ambitions. In the old *Cinderella*, she needs to look physically perfect to be liked by the prince and to get married, which is a message that would be read as disempowering and negative from the modern point of view.

Barnes (2012) proved that it's important to understand the interpretation of children regarding gender and gender roles in animated movies to uncover the role of the gender schema in the society, also, understanding how children and young audiences interpret female roles in animated movies is

necessary to induce a change in the female portrayal in media. Many studies throughout the years have documented the impact of media messages in constructing children's perception of gender roles. (Frueh & McGhee, 1975; Halim et al., 2013).

The first research question aimed to know how Egyptian adolescents perceive gender role stereotypes and the results of the study revealed that most of the sample (with different social segments and genders) agreed that the society has changed; women are more independent and are working now beside men, women are unstoppable, but the housework and childcare is still her responsibility alone without any interference from men, which is not right in their opinion, and it puts women under huge pressure and workload. Women can't dress like men or wear whatever they want because they will be harshly criticized from the society. Finally, society would be incomplete without both men and women participate together in society.

The second research question aimed to know how Egyptian adolescents perceive the differences between the heroine's character traits from old till recent animated movies. The results of the study revealed that the Egyptian adolescents were very aware of the change in the characteristics of the female heroines of the animated movies, as they described the old heroines to be naïve and looking only for true love, survival kiss from the prince charming, despite that in the recent movies some female heroines were having a weak point and they were trying to get rid of it in the movie. The recent animated movies with female lead character are now more independent, assertive, fighter, brave, adventurous, wants to explore the world, forceful and most importantly: the story doesn't revolve around the romantic outcome, the princess is not waiting for the prince anymore to rescue her, instead she is the rescuer.

Studies revealed that there is a pressure on adolescents to conform to Western views, as the results suggested that participants from adolescents were negatively influenced by the stereotypical portrayal of media messages. (Spurr, Berry, & Walker, 2013), which the current study claims that recent animated movies with more independence and powerfulness of the female lead characters influence the perception of the adolescents toward gender roles.

The third research question aimed to know if the Egyptian adolescents believe that those independent female characters they perceive in American animated movies can exist in the Egyptian Society and the results of the study revealed that the majority of the sample believed that movies can happen in reality; regarding the actions of the heroines but not the situations itself, the majority of the sample also said that they know at least one woman, they can call a strong and independent woman; most of the girls are seeing their mothers, grandmothers and elder sisters independent, achieve what they are dreaming of, holding huge responsibilities and take their own decisions alone without a man's interference. All the participants from different genders and social segments were talking proudly on any strong woman who can do or achieve her goals. While some of the boys in the sample don't believe in the capabilities

of girls in their same age to do what heroines in the animated movies did in the movies and if they did the society will criticize them.

The fourth research question aimed to know how much do the Egyptian adolescents believe in the Egyptian women capabilities. The results of the study revealed that the Egyptian adolescents believed that woman can do whatever she wants even if she was facing obstacles and fights at first but then she will reach her goal. Society can be changed from fighting to supporting women; as in the past, women didn't go for work, but now there are plenty of working women, also in the past women couldn't hold weights and now women can and achieving championships in it. Despite that there's still a belief that women endure less than men; when it comes to physical activity. Egyptian adolescents also compared women's tolerance to men's and mainly agreed that men can't endure the domestic work aside with their job, while women can do both at the same time. Egyptian adolescents of the sample believed that women can be independent, particularly if she's single, she has more freedom than if she's having children. They also believed that society is limiting women from doing what men can do and that society is the women's huge obstacle and a barrier to her achievements.

The fifth research question aimed to know the Egyptian adolescents' opinion and view for the feminist or the independent woman. The study revealed that Egyptian adolescents' look towards the independent woman as a responsible one, who's brave, confident and has leadership abilities. The way they look to the strong woman as a well-educated one, inspiring and a role model, which indicates that the Egyptian adolescents admire the strong woman who takes her own decisions and depend on no one except herself.

Regarding decision making; the sample was divided into two groups: as some of them agreed that women can have their own decision without getting back to anyone, while the other group emphasized that women should get back to a man or a family member before taking any decision; which limit from the women freedom and independence.

Animated movies have a high and very powerful influence on young audiences all over the world (Lacroix, 2004). Animated movies are suitable to be used as learning material due to the existence of very exciting characters and songs which convey important messages to the audience. (Azmi, *et al.*, 2016). Since that studies have proved that media of the present time reflects the gender role expectations found in the American culture (Dill & Thill, 2007; Kahlenberg & Hein, 2010; Vecchiato *et al.*, 2014), the Egyptian adolescents might think of the feminist or the strong independent women as being defined and presented in the American produced animated movies; which the study claims to be combined with the Gender Schema Theory.

Future Research Recommendations

The current study results might show the near future of the Egyptian society as the adolescents are the youth of tomorrow, who shape the societal gender norms and societal beliefs; therefore, future research

may be conducted to measure the perception of Egyptian youth towards gender roles, and comparing it to the current study's results to know whether the perception has changed throughout time or not.

New animated movies with new ideologies have been announced by their creators and production companies to be released, which might hold beliefs that won't be common in our societies as some studies mention that Frozen might have double meaning while the hidden meaning would be sexual, therefore it's important to study all the new releases and the animation movies remake, as the remake is also another perspective of the movies like adding more feminine thoughts in the movie that would affect the society too. Recent researches stated after a linguistic and discourse-based analysis of the cartoon sitcoms that each of the analyzed shows contains a character whose sexuality is left purposefully and creatively mysterious or ambiguous. (like Stewie in Family Guy and Roger the Alien in American Dad!).

This research studies the perception of the Egyptian adolescents in the recent era; correlating with the evolution of the female lead animation movies, regarding gender roles, and proving that animated movies might have a huge influence in changing the gender role perception, so future research recommendations for studying the perception of adolescents after few years to measure the change of the adolescents' perception towards gender roles concerning animation movies and other sorts of media content.

5. Conclusion

Adolescents tend to imitate and adopt the ideas presented in the media they are exposed to, especially the media in which the adolescents and children are their main audience, like animation movies, as being proved by Bem (1981a) in Gender Schema Theory. The findings of the study revealed that Egyptian adolescents still hold some stereotyped thoughts about women, on the other hand, they believed in Egyptian women's capabilities. Egyptian woman had already reached a place where she can be successful and hold huge responsibilities, the only obstacle that would stop her is the society with its old and stereotyped traditions. The Egyptian adolescents were aware of all the changes that happened in the heroines of the animation movies, they believed that the recent heroines are closer to reality than the old ones, referring that girls are being affected by these movies, which make it easier for boys to accept the idea of changing stereotypical role of women in the Egyptian society.

Finally, the feminists and the independent women were seen as brave, strong, responsible and a good example, regardless of some negative opinions like; she's single and hating men, but still a minority and by spreading more feminist animation movies this minority will disappear.

These results were compatible with the women's year in Egypt when more women became ministers and hold more important positions in the Egyptian government.

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