

The Influence of Sex Role Perception on Career Aspirations and Self-Esteem in Children with a Preference for Disney Movies

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is Disney movies. While looking into the effect of these movies it is seen that the gender role portrayal in Disney movies has had a major impact on the sex role perception children develop. The study examines the influence of sex role perceptions on the career aspirations and self-esteem in children with a preference for Disney movies. Children aged 10 – 12 years (n = 398) are divided into two groups based on their preference for Disney movies and are studied for the following variables – sex role perception, career aspiration and self-esteem using Children's sex role inventory (CSRI), Career aspiration scale for children and Moray child self-esteem scale. Results show that the group which preferred Disney movies are more masculine and more feminine in their sex role perceptions. Masculine sex role perception predicts career aspiration 83% of the time in boys and feminine sex role perception predicts career aspiration 62% of the time in girls and androgynous sex role perception is not related to career aspiration both in boys and girls. This means that children are defining job roles with the stereotypical identity and aspire to have careers that fit with these stereotypes. Masculine sex role perception predicts 36% of self-esteem in boys and feminine sex role perception predicts 8% of self-esteem in girls. This shows that the sense of identifying with their own sex roles and abiding by it, children feel competent and good about themselves. Results display the evidence for the pervasiveness of Disney films and its potential outcomes on the sex role perceptions. The other significant influences on career aspirations and self-esteem sheds light on the extent of influence sex role perception has on the different domains in middle childhood.

Keywords: *Disney movies, Sex role perception, Career aspiration, Self – esteem.*

Media plays a significant role in children's perceptions of gender roles because children cannot distinguish between fantasy and reality (Baker & Ball, 1969). If a child is frequently faced with gender biases and gender stereotypes, this knowledge becomes incorporated and influences their perceptions regarding the role of a man and woman. Children are influenced by gender stereotyped role models that they see in media. They will also exhibit gender biased behaviours and develop biased attitudes that they see modelled in films.

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Since it has been suggested that media influences children's perceptions and that these perceptions are carried into adulthood, it can be assumed that the Disney films viewed by children can "inspire at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles, values and ideals than more traditional sites of learning such as a public schools, religious institutions and the family" (Giroux, 1995, p. 25). Many young children are exposed to various Disney characters through the films that may guide their creation of future self-images. Male and female characters are portrayed differently in Disney films, which further reinforces biased ideas about gender, social behaviour and societal norms. Numerous research has been conducted on elementary school children, between the ages of five and ten, to address the effects of stereotypical Disney images in the media. In many of the films, unrealistic representations of the ideal male and female figure are portrayed and young children often identify with these beloved characters, thereby affecting the way that they conceive beliefs regarding their future roles in society. The gendered images presented in Disney princess films may ultimately affect a young child's path to self-realisation. Therefore, films can be learning tools for children, especially because "film discourses engage viewers not simply in the active construction of knowledge but also in the construction of knowledge from a particular point of view" (Gainer, 2007, p. 365) Thus, children's media influences a child's socialization process and the gendered information children view may have a direct effect on their cognitive understanding of gender and their behaviour (Graves, 1999). Through consistent exposure, young children are taught that the socially accepted gender roles and body images are the ones depicted in Disney films and related media. To them deviating from those roles and choosing a different identity may result in unfavourable and detrimental hostility from their peers and society.

Movies and TV shows exerts an influence on the way young people develop work-related values and occupational aspirations. Cultivation theory (Gerbner et al., 1980) asserts that heavy viewers of TV tend to believe that the world portrayed by television represents an accurate depiction of the real world. Some jobs, though, may appear on television to be more exciting and glamorous than they are in reality. Wishful identification is a psychological process through which a person desires or attempts to become like another person such as a media character (Feilitzen and Linne, 1975; Hoffner, 1996). Young viewers may identify with movies and shows whom they perceive to be attractive, successful, and admired by others.

As middle childhood is the time they start to develop career aspirations, media has a larger role to play on the decision. The current study focuses on students in the middle childhood because, according to Gottfredson's (1981) theory of circumscription and compromise, by the time youngsters reach early adolescence, they have ruled out a number of potential occupations that they believe are inconsistent with their gender role. Thus, a typical early adolescent is likely to have narrowed his or her career options, but not actually selected a career. This narrowing process is important because, according to Gottfredson, once certain types of careers have been eliminated, they are not likely to be considered in the future. The aim of this investigation is to learn more about the types of careers in terms of sex-typing that were still in the pool of options for the children. In theory, virtually all careers and all levels within those careers should be available to both males and females, but this availability is not always perceived as being realistic. This perception arises, in part, from the influence of gender role stereotypes on the attitudes of both males and females towards appropriate behaviours, particularly in the realm of occupational choices.

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Children's social world expands considerably as they enter school and gain new friendships with peers. Through social interactions, children begin to develop a sense of pride in their accomplishments and abilities. Children who struggle to develop this sense of competence may emerge from this stage with feelings of failure and inferiority.

By feeling competent and capable, children are able to also form a strong self-concept. Researchers who have documented racial and gender biases in media depictions of reality have long speculated about the implications for children's feelings, beliefs, and attitudes.

Researchers have looked at the relative strength of the masculinity and femininity dimensions in relation to psychological well-being. The traditional congruence model holds that psychological well-being is fostered only when one's sex role orientation is congruent with one's gender; the androgyny model proposes that well-being is maximized when one's sex role orientation incorporates a high degree of both masculinity and femininity regardless of one's gender; the masculinity model posits that well-being is a function of the extent to which one has a masculine sex role orientation. Research has found that gender-role identity is linked to self-esteem (Baruch & Barnett, 1975; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Kleinplatz, McCarrey & Kateb, 1992). Still further research is required to confirm these findings which suggest people rely on their gender appropriate behaviours and characteristics to evaluate their self-esteem.

The current study will research the portrayal of both genders in Disney films and how it can shape how children perceive the way each gender should behave. With a greater understanding of these roles in children's perceptions and stereotypical behaviour, we can help children cope with the constantly changing gender roles and the pressure of societal values. Research on the relationship between gender and its portrayals in the media suggests that by avoiding over consumption of biased films it is possible to break the cycle of a possible gender bias in children. This study aims to give insight into the role media portrayals play in developing children's perceptions of gender roles and its effect on self-esteem and career aspirations children develop over time.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

Descriptive Survey Method was followed by the researcher for this study.

Objectives

1. To study the relationship between the sex role perception and the preference of movies in children.
2. To study the sex role perceptions of children who prefer Disney movies.
3. To study the difference in career aspirations in children whose sex role perceptions are masculine, feminine and androgynous.
4. To study the difference in self-esteem in children whose sex role perceptions are masculine, feminine and androgynous.
5. To study the relationship between sex role perception and self-esteem.

Hypotheses

1. There will be no significant difference in the masculine sex role perception in boys who prefer Disney movies and boys who don't prefer Disney movies.

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2. There will be no significant difference in the masculine sex role perception of boys who prefer Disney movies and boys who don't prefer Disney movies.
3. There will be no significant difference in the feminine sex role perception of girls who prefer Disney movies and girls who don't prefer Disney movies.
4. There will be no significant difference in the androgynous sex role perception of children who prefer Disney movies and children who don't prefer Disney movies.
5. There will be no significant relationship between masculine sex role perception and masculine career aspirations of boys who prefer Disney movies.
6. There will be no significant linear relationship between masculine sex role perception and masculine career aspiration of boys who prefer Disney movies.
7. There will be no significant relationship between feminine sex role perception and feminine career aspirations of girls who prefer Disney movies.
8. There will be no significant linear relationship between feminine sex role perception and feminine career aspiration of girls who prefer Disney movies.
9. There will be no significant relationship between androgynous sex role perception and masculine career aspirations of boys who prefer Disney movies.
10. There will be no significant relationship between androgynous sex perception and feminine career aspirations of girls who prefer Disney movies.
11. There will be no significant relationship between masculine sex role perception and self-esteem of boys who prefer Disney movies.
12. There will be no significant linear relationship between masculine sex role perception and self-esteem of boys who prefer Disney movies.
13. There will be no significant relationship between feminine sex role perception and self-esteem of girls who prefer Disney movies.
14. There will be no significant linear relationship between feminine sex role perception and self-esteem of girls who prefer Disney movies.
15. There will be no significant difference in self-esteem between boys with masculine and androgynous sex role perception who prefer Disney movies.
16. There will be no significant difference in self-esteem between girls with feminine and androgynous sex role perception.
17. There will be no significant gender difference in androgynous sex role perception among children who prefer Disney movies.
18. There will be no significant gender difference in self-esteem among children who prefer Disney movies.

Variables

The independent variables are

1. Preference of movies
2. Sex role perception.
3. Gender

The dependent variables are

1. Career aspirations
2. Self-esteem

Key operational definitions

Disney movies

Disney movies includes both animated and fantasy movies released theatrically under the Walt Disney Pictures banner. It ranges from "Snow white and Cinderella" from 1950 to "Finding Dory" in 2016. (Anaba, 2016).

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Children with a preference for Disney movies

Children who watch more than one hour of Disney daily are defined to have preference for Disney movies.

Sex role perception

Perception of culture's definitions of desirable female and male attributes. (Boldizar, 1991)

Career aspiration

A career aspiration is a path that an individual wants his/her career to follow later in life. (Purvis, 1967).

Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a positive or negative orientation toward oneself; an overall evaluation of one's worth or value. It is the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to himself as an object. (Moray, 1970).

Participants

Purposive sampling is the method used for the study. A sample of 398 was obtained that included 200 children who had a preference for Disney movies and 198 children who didn't have a preference for Disney movies.

Tools used

S.No	Name of the questionnaire	Author and year	Variable measured
1.	Children's sex role inventory	Boldizar (1991)	Sex role perception
2.	Career aspiration scale for children	Cameron Purvis (1967)	Career aspiration
3.	Moray child self-esteem scale	Moray (1970)	Self-esteem

Data collection

A pilot study was done on 40 children to identify the movies they watch in their free time. Pilot study was done on the students of 6th, 7th and 8th standards of two private schools. It was found that majority of the students watch Disney movies in their free time. Permission was sought from the principals of two schools and the class teachers for the pilot study and for the distribution of survey questionnaires. Three questionnaires along with the informed consent form were distributed to the students of 6th, 7th and 8th standards in XYZ schools and data was collected.

Statistical analysis

1. t-test was used to identify the difference in the sex role perception in children who preferred Disney movies and children who didn't prefer Disney movies. It was also used to identify the difference in self-esteem among children with various sex role perceptions, gender difference in sex role perception and self-esteem.
2. Pearson correlation was used to identify the relationship between sex role perception and career aspiration and self-esteem in children who prefer Disney movies.
3. Simple linear regression was used to identify the causal effect of sex role perception on career aspiration and self-esteem.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 t- test for masculine sex role perception between boys who prefer Disney movies and boys who don't prefer Disney movies.

	Movie preference						t
	Preference for Disney			No preference for Disney			
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	
Masculine sex role perception	31.9	6.05	62	25.7	5.42	62	5.967**

** $p < 0.01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two-tailed

The independent sample t – test indicates that there is a significant difference in the masculine sex role perception between boys who preferred Disney and boys who didn't have a preference for Disney, $t(124) = 5.967$, $p < 0.01$. The present finding is consistent with the finding of the study by Anaba who found that children who watched Disney movies had more sex typed perception of their sex roles.

Table 2 t- test for feminine sex role perception between girls who prefer Disney movies and girls who don't prefer Disney movies.

	Movie preference						t
	Preference for Disney			No preference for Disney			
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	
Feminine sex role perception	32.4	6.04	69	21.04	5.21	68	11.506**

** $p < 0.01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two-tailed.

The independent sample t – test indicates that there is a significant difference in the feminine sex role perception between girls who preferred Disney and girls who didn't have a preference for Disney, $t(137) = 11.506$, $p < 0.01$. The present finding is consistent with the finding of Coyne who found that girls are heavily influenced by Disney princesses and are more likely to limit themselves to experiences that are perceived as feminine. (Coyne, 2016)

Table 3 t- test for androgynous sex role perception between children who prefer Disney movies and children who don't prefer Disney movies.

	Movie preference						t
	Preference for Disney			No preference for Disney			
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n	
Androgynous sex role perception	22.3	7.66	53	27.5	7.13	54	3.579 ^{NS}

NS – not significant.

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The independent sample t – test indicates that there is no significant difference in the androgynous sex role perception between children who preferred Disney and children who didn't have a preference for Disney, with a t value of 3.579. Though the means didn't differ significantly, children who didn't have a preference for Disney are found to have a higher mean for androgynous sex role perception compared to children who had a preference for Disney.

Table 4 Pearson's coefficient of correlation between masculine sex role perception and masculine career aspirations in boys who prefer Disney movies.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>R</i>
Sex role perception	70	31.9	6.05	0.915**
Career aspirations		30.2	5.99	

** $p < 0.01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two tailed.

The Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) revealed a strong correlation between masculine sex role perception and masculine career aspiration, $r(70) = 0.915$, $p < 0.01$. The current finding is consistent with Charlton's finding, suggesting that the masculine sex role perception boys develop in the middle childhood does have a relationship with the career aspirations they develop.

Table 5 Linear regression for relationship between masculine sex role perception and masculine career aspiration in boys who prefer Disney movies.

<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>ANOVA</i>	<i>Variable loading significantly</i>	<i>Beta value</i>
Career aspirations	0.838	351.54**	Sex role perception	0.915

** $p < 0.01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two tailed.

Linear regression indicates that masculine sex role perception predicts 83% of masculine career aspiration in boys who prefer Disney movies, $R^2(70) = 0.838$, $p < 0.01$. This finding supports the claim of the present study stating that masculine sex role perception contributes to masculine career aspiration in boys who prefer Disney movies.

Table 6 Pearson's coefficient of correlation between feminine sex role perception and feminine career aspirations in girls who prefer Disney movies.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>R</i>
Sex role perception	77	32.4	6.04	0.793**
Career aspirations		28.4	5.86	

** $p < 0.01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two tailed

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The Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) revealed a strong correlation between feminine sex role perception and feminine career aspiration, $r(77) = 0.793, p < 0.01$. This finding is consistent to the study by Maphosa suggesting that the feminine sex role perception girls develop in the middle childhood does have a relationship with the career aspirations they develop.

Table 7 Linear regression for relationship between feminine sex role perception and feminine career aspiration in girls who prefer Disney movies.

<i>Dependent variable</i>	<i>R²</i>	<i>ANOVA</i>	<i>Variable loading significantly</i>	<i>Beta value</i>
Career aspirations	0.628	126.6**	Sex role perception	0.793

** $p < 0.01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two tailed.

Linear regression indicates that feminine sex role perception predicts 62% of feminine career aspiration in girls who prefer Disney movies, $R^2(77) = 0.628, p < 0.01$. This finding supports the claim of the present study stating that feminine sex role perception contributes to feminine career aspiration in girls who prefer Disney movies.

Table 8 Pearson's coefficient of correlation for relationship between androgynous sex role perception and masculine career aspirations in boys who prefer Disney movies.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>R</i>
Sex role perception	30	22.3	7.66	0.281 ^{NS}
Career aspirations		21.9	10.7	

NS – not significant

The Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) revealed no correlation between androgynous sex role perception and masculine career aspiration.

Table 9 Pearson's coefficient of correlation for relationship between androgynous sex role perception and feminine career aspirations in girls who prefer Disney movies.

<i>Variables</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>R</i>
Sex role perception	30	22.3	7.66	0.002 ^{NS}
Career aspirations		15.5	5.41	

NS – not significant

The Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) revealed no correlation between androgynous sex role perception and feminine career aspiration.

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Table 10 pearson's coefficient of correlation for relationship between masculine sex role perception and self-esteem in boys who prefer Disney movies.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	R
Sex role perception	70	31.9	6.05	0.606**
Self-esteem		30.7	6.15	

** $p < 0.01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two tailed

The Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) revealed a moderate correlation between masculine sex role perception and self-esteem, $r(70) = 0.606, p < 0.01$. The present finding is consistent to Connell's study, suggesting identifying more with their sex role boosts their self-esteem.

Table 11 Linear regression for relationship between masculine sex role perception and self-esteem in boys who prefer Disney movies.

Dependent variable	R²	ANOVA	Variable loading significantly	Beta value
Self-esteem	0.367	39.4**	Sex role perception	0.606

** $p < 0.01$, significant at the 0.01 level, two tailed.

Linear regression indicates that masculine sex role perception predicts 36% of self-esteem in boys who prefer Disney movies, $R^2(70) = 0.367, p < 0.01$.

Table 12 Pearson's coefficient of correlation for the relationship between feminine sex role perception and self-esteem in girls who prefer Disney movies.

Variables	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	R
Sex role perception	77	32.4	6.04	0.284*
Self-esteem		30.4	5.52	

* $p < 0.05$, significant at the 0.05 level, two tailed

The Pearson's coefficient of correlation (r) revealed a weak correlation between feminine sex role perception and self-esteem, $r(77) = 0.284, p < 0.05$. The finding suggests that girls who are feminine in their sex role perception unlike boys have weak correlation with self-esteem.

Table 13 Linear regression for relationship between feminine sex role perception and self-esteem in girls who prefer Disney movies.

Dependent variable	R²	ANOVA	Variable loading significantly	Beta value
Self-esteem	0.081	6.56*	Sex role perception	0.284

* $p < 0.05$, significant at the 0.05 level, two tailed.

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Linear regression indicates that feminine sex role perception predicts 8% of self-esteem in girls who prefer Disney movies, $R^2(77) = 0.081$, $p < 0.01$. The present finding is supported by Sugawara's finding who showed that the contribution of sex role to general self-esteem was much greater for males than for females.

Table 14 t- test for self-esteem between boys with masculine and androgynous sex role perception who prefer Disney movies.

	<i>Sex role perception</i>						<i>t</i>
	<i>Masculine sex role perception</i>			<i>Androgynous sex role perception</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
Self-esteem	30.7	6.15	30	24.7	8.80	30	3.099 ^{NS}

NS – not significant.

The independent sample t – test indicates that there is no significant difference in self-esteem between boys with masculine sex role perception and boys with androgynous sex role perception. Though the result indicates no significant difference, the self-esteem of the boys with masculine sex role perception is greater compared to the mean of self-esteem of the boys with androgynous sex role perception. This adds on to the previous finding (table 10).

Table 15 t- test for self-esteem between girls with feminine and androgynous sex role perception who prefer Disney movies.

	<i>Sex role perception</i>						<i>t</i>
	<i>Feminine sex role perception</i>			<i>Androgynous sex role perception</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
Self-esteem	30.4	5.52	32	28.2	8.25	30	3.404 ^{NS}

NS – not significant.

The independent sample t – test indicates that there is no significant difference in self-esteem between girls with feminine sex role perception and girls with androgynous sex role perception.

Table 16 t- test for gender difference in androgynous sex role perception among children who prefer Disney movies.

	<i>Gender</i>						<i>t</i>
	<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
Androgynous Sex role Perception	24.6	7.55	30	21.4	7.82	30	1.577 ^{NS}

NS – not significant.

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The independent sample t – test indicates that there is no significant gender difference in androgynous sex role perception among children who prefer Disney movies. This might probably be because children differ in their early social experiences, peer group influence and parental influence that are not included as variables in this study.

Table 17 *t- test for gender difference in self-esteem among children who prefer Disney movies.*

	<i>Gender</i>						<i>t</i>
	<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	
Self-esteem	30.0	7.81	100	25.7	8.40	100	3.781 ^{NS}

NS – not significant.

The independent sample t – test indicates that there is no significant gender difference in self-esteem among children who prefer Disney movies. Children were studied as a whole, irrespective of their sex role perception. Results indicate that boys and girls don't differ in their self-esteem. It might be because of individual differences existing among children or other factors like the changing societal scenario where parental attitudes doesn't make children feel any different because of their gender.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Children who preferred Disney movies were more sex typed in their sex role perceptions.
2. Sex typed sex role perceptions contributed to having more sex typed career aspirations.
3. Sex types sex role perceptions contributed to unhealthy self – esteem (competence) in children.

Limitations

The study has a few limitations that are documented below,

1. Purposive sampling technique was used for this study. Participants were not randomly assigned for this study.
2. The scales that were used for this study were all self-report measures, so there is a question of social desirability with respect to the responses. Inventories that have lie scale built in could have been used to reduce this problem.

Suggestions

1. Other related factors to sex role perception such as parental influence, peer influence and teacher attitudes can also be included in future studies.
2. Parental occupations can be studied for its influence on career aspirations among children in further studies.
3. This study can also be done as intervention research, where workshops can be conducted for children after which pre and post sex role perception can be studied.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors clearly declared this paper to bear no conflict of interests

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