



## Brief research report

## Appearance-related themes in children's animated movies released between 2004 and 2016: A content analysis

Jennifer A. Harriger<sup>a,\*</sup>, Kelsey N. Serier<sup>b</sup>, Madeline Luedke<sup>b</sup>, Sienna Robertson<sup>b</sup>, Ashley Bojorquez<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup> Pepperdine University, United States<sup>b</sup> University of New Mexico, United States<sup>c</sup> Duquesne University, United States

## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 4 January 2018

Received in revised form 15 June 2018

Accepted 15 June 2018

## Keywords:

Children

Media

Animation

Movies

Appearance

Body size

## ABSTRACT

Research suggests that children demonstrate an awareness of cultural messages regarding appearance; specifically, that thinness is desirable and fatness is objectionable. In 2004, Herbozo and colleagues published research examining the content of popular children's movies. This widely cited study has provided the foundation for various studies examining the impact of media on children. The purpose of the current study was to extend the findings of Herbozo et al.'s (2004) research to include more recent movies. Two independent coders viewed the 25 top-grossing U.S. animated feature films since 2004 and indicated the number of appearance-related themes present in each movie. Movies in the current study contained significantly more appearance-related themes focused on male muscularity and the role of personal control related to weight compared to earlier films. These findings are consistent with cultural trends and demonstrate the importance of continued examination of children's media influences.

© 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

It has been suggested that media are the most effective communicators of American sociocultural ideals regarding appearance (Clay, Vignoles, & Dittmar, 2005), and exposure to ideal body images via media results in increased levels of body dissatisfaction in females and males ranging from preadolescence to adulthood (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006; Grabe, Ward, & Hyde, 2008; Leit, Gray, & Pope, 2002). Although media messages regarding the ideal body are not necessarily novel, Western culture has become more focused on appearance over time (Engeln, 2017), and the stigmatization of higher-weight individuals has increased in recent years (Shentow-Bewsh, Keating, & Mills, 2016). Exposure to such messages has been linked to poor self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and reduced psychological functioning in adults and children (Harriger, 2012; Puhl & Latner, 2007). While less research with younger children exists, children as young as age three demonstrate a preference for thin and an aversion to larger bodies (Harriger, Calogero, Witherington, & Smith, 2010), and this preference may be shaped by media exposure (Sands & Wardle, 2003).

Much of the research focused on media, especially in the adolescent and adult literature, examines real-life characters or images; however, programming targeting younger children often features animated characters (Klein & Schiffman, 2005). Children identify with and learn from the animated characters they observe, and exposure to appearance-related content at a young age can play a vital role in the formation of beliefs about appearance and body size (Harriger, 2012). Cultural messages regarding the ideal body are present in children's animated movies (Herbozo, Tantleff-Dunn, Gokee-Larose, & Thompson, 2004) and cartoons (Klein & Schiffman, 2006), and internalization of these messages can lead to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating in children (Harriger, 2012; Klein & Schiffman, 2006). Successfully characterizing the content of children's current animated media would be an important step in furthering our understanding of the influences of appearance-related media on young children's body image.

Herbozo et al. (2004) conducted a content analysis examining popular children's movies released between 1938 and 1998 (for a complete list of movies please refer to the Herbozo et al. (2004) article) and found that the majority of children's movies (but not books) contained appearance-related messages emphasizing cultural ideals regarding appearance (i.e., thinness for females and muscularity for males). Additionally, many movies portrayed higher-weight characters negatively (Herbozo et al., 2004). To our knowledge, no studies have examined appearance-related messages in more recent children's movies. Klein and Schiffman (2005), (2006) eval-

\* Corresponding author at: Social Science Division, Pepperdine University, 24255 Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu, CA 90263, United States.

E-mail address: [jennifer.harriger@pepperdine.edu](mailto:jennifer.harriger@pepperdine.edu) (J.A. Harriger).

**Table 1**

Types of appearance-related themes (see Table 2) represented in each movie.

| Children's Movies               | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| <i>Big Hero 6</i>               | X | X | X |   | X | X | X | X |   |    | X  |    |    | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Brave</i>                    | X | X | X |   | X | X |   |   |   |    |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Cars</i>                     |   |   | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| <i>Despicable Me</i>            |   | X | X |   |   |   |   |   |   |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Despicable Me 2</i>          | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Dr. Seuss's The Lorax</i>    | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |   | X  |    | X  |    | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Finding Dory</i>             | X |   | X |   |   | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |    | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Frozen</i>                   | X | X | X | X | X |   | X | X |   |    |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>How to Train Your Dragon</i> | X | X | X |   | X | X |   |   | X |    |    | X  |    | X  |    | X  |
| <i>Inside Out</i>               | X |   | X |   | X | X | X | X |   |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Kung Fu Panda</i>            |   | X | X | X |   | X |   | X | X | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |    |
| <i>Madagascar 3</i>             | X | X | X | X | X |   | X | X |   |    | X  | X  |    | X  |    | X  |
| <i>Minions</i>                  | X | X | X |   | X |   | X | X | X |    |    | X  |    |    | X  | X  |
| <i>Monsters University</i>      | X | X | X |   |   | X |   | X |   |    | X  | X  |    | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Ratatouille</i>              | X |   | X |   | X |   | X | X |   |    |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Secret Life of Pets</i>      | X |   | X | X | X |   | X |   |   |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Shrek 2</i>                  | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |    |
| <i>Shrek the Third</i>          |   | X | X |   | X |   | X | X | X |    |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>Shrek Forever After</i>      | X | X | X |   | X | X |   | X | X |    | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |
| <i>The Incredibles</i>          | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X  | X  | X  |    | X  |    | X  |
| <i>The Lego Movie</i>           |   |   |   | X | X | X |   |   |   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |
| <i>Toy Story 3</i>              | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |    |    |    |    |    |    | X  |
| <i>Up</i>                       |   | X | X |   | X | X | X | X |   |    | X  | X  |    | X  |    | X  |
| <i>Wall-E</i>                   |   | X | X | X | X | X |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  |    | X  | X  |    |
| <i>Zootopia</i>                 | X | X | X | X | X | X |   |   |   | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  | X  |

uated the content of animated cartoons from all major animation studios from the year 1930 to the mid-1990s. They found that attractiveness was associated with socially desirable qualities, and thin characters were more likely to be portrayed as more attractive, intelligent, happy, energetic, loving, and prosocial than larger characters. Additionally, higher-weight characters were more likely to be depicted as unattractive, and the percentage of higher-weight characters declined significantly between 1960 and the mid-1990s.

In their analysis of gender role portrayals in Disney movies, England, Descartes, and Collier-Meek (2011) reported that more traditional Disney movies depicted higher levels of gendered attitudes towards the princesses and the princes than more recent movies. What is interesting, however, is that the depiction of stronger female protagonists in merchandizing is more feminized than the depiction in the movie itself (Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson, & Birkbeck, 2016). Another study found that girls with lower levels of body satisfaction had “higher levels of princess engagement” one year later. The authors hypothesized that young girls with lower body image may seek out Disney princesses as “appearance-related role models” (Coyne et al., 2016). While gendered attitudes in children's movies have shifted over the past several decades, no studies, to our knowledge, have assessed whether the prevalence of appearance-related content in more recent animated movies has changed as well. It has been asserted that the portrayal of the thin ideal in Disney princess movies (and we would argue appearance-related messages in other animated movies as well) may be one of the earliest forms of influence for young children (Coyne et al., 2016), which may convey the message that physical appearance is more important than other qualities.

While England et al. (2011) provide valuable information regarding gendered roles in more recent Disney movies, they did not examine appearance-related themes, include movies created by other popular companies, such as Nickelodeon, or include movies that featured non-human characters, such as *Toy Story* or *Cars*. The current study will examine appearance-related themes in popular children's animated movies released since the publication of the Herbozo et al. (2004) study, regardless of Production Company or types of characters portrayed. Given the increased obsession with appearance in Western culture (Engeln, 2017) and

the increased prevalence of weight stigmatizing messages in the media (Shentow-Bewsh et al., 2016), we hypothesized that the percentage of appearance-related themes would be higher in the current sample of movies compared to the sample of movies assessed by Herbozo et al. (2004).

## 2. Method

Content analysis was used to identify appearance-related messages in children's popular animated movies. The movies were obtained from Box Office Mojo's list of the top-grossing U.S. animated films and is presented in Table 1. We selected the top 25 movies from the list, excluding movies included in the Herbozo et al. (2004) analysis, movies released prior to 2004 when Herbozo et al. published their analysis, and movies currently in the theater when the list was obtained. The 25 movies in the final list were released between 2004 and 2016.

Two research assistants were trained to code the movies using the items created by Herbozo et al. (2004)<sup>1</sup>. The appearance-related themes can be found in Table 2. During the training, the coders, blind to the hypotheses of the study, were provided with detailed information and examples of the themes (provided by the first author of the Herbozo et al. study). Stunkard, Sorensen, and Schulsinger's (1983) Figure Rating Scale was used to determine whether characters were thin or higher weight. Coders viewed 10 movie clips ranging from 5 to 10 min, including clips from movies in the Herbozo et al. (2004) study, and were instructed to code whether each theme was “present” or “absent” as they viewed the clips (i.e., a “1” indicated the presence and a “0” indicated an absence of an appearance-related theme). After each clip, the first author facilitated a discussion regarding the rationale for the codes assigned and any discrepancies in the coding. During the training, the agreement percentages ranged from 90 to 97% across all themes. Upon completion of the training, the coders viewed

<sup>1</sup> The original list of themes included the terms “obesity” or “obese”. In an effort to use less stigmatizing language and avoid medical terminology, we changed the terms to “higher weight.” All other wording remained consistent.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7262970>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7262970>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)