

Media Criticism

The Powerful Message of Emotion and Relationships in Disney's *Frozen*

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Introduction

In this paper I will be discussing the various relationships in the movie *Frozen* released in 2013 and written by Jennifer Lee. This piece of media was originally intended for children around the ages of 5-12 but caught the attention of the older generations due to the underlying message that it conveyed. While this piece of media was released over eight years ago its powerful message still captivates its viewers, demonstrating the power of the message being portrayed. The viewers learn throughout this movie the battles of family, love and loyalty, which are all important lessons to expose young children to. This movie's message is one that can benefit many children and adults, by focusing on an authentic message differentiating itself from the other Disney princess movies focused solely on romantic relationships. This is demonstrated through several relationships established between characters and how those relationships develop throughout the film as a result of hardship and adventure. The establishment of these growing and changing relationships is important, because people are not always kind, family is not always going to agree, and there won't always be love at first sight with the famous HAPPILY EVER AFTER.

Summary

In the kingdom of Arendelle we find two sisters Elsa and Anna Princesses of Arendelle. Their parents had died in a boat wreck when they were children, making each other the only family they had left. Elsa was born with magical powers that can be used to freeze things, while Anna just wants to be with her sister and open the gates of the Palace. In fear of hurting Anna, Elsa shut her out due to an accidental injury caused by her powers when they were younger. When the time came for Elsa's coronation, Anna had reconnected with her sister and established

an automatic love connection with a Prince named Hans. Anna was desperate for a human connection after being shut out by her sister for nearly her entire life, and shortly after they decided they were going to ask Elsa for their blessing to get married. Elsa respectfully declines this request, sending her and Anna into an argument in front of the entire kingdom. Elsa gets upset and ends up putting the kingdom of Arendelle into an eternal winter. She then escapes into the woods hoping to find peace, control, and understanding of her powers, while Anna takes a journey after her to find her and bring her back home. On the way Anna meets Kristoff, a Royal Ice Master and Deliverer in the deep mountains of Arendelle. He helps her find her sister and along the way they get to know each other and become good friends. Once Elsa is found she insists she wants nothing to do with her sister or the crown and prefers to remain where she is. Anna trying to convince her to leave made Elsa explode in anger causing her to accidentally strike Anna in the heart with her magic, making her become ice cold and weak. Kristoff knew just the people to ask for help and they told her the curse in her heart would only be broken with an act of true love. Anna, thinking she is in love with Hans, has Kristoff rush her back to Arendelle to have “true love’s kiss” break the spell. PLOT TWIST, Hans ends up being the bad guy, and even though he knew what happened to Anna, he would rather let her die and blame it on her sister Elsa, so that he can become the ruler of Arendelle. Meanwhile, Kristoff decides to turn around because he realizes he is in love with Anna and as she sees him running towards her she spots Hans with Elsa. Elsa ends up escaping from prison in the tower and runs into Hans who tells her that Anna is dead and that it was her fault. As Hans raises his sword to end Elsa; Anna with the little strength she has left puts herself between them as she completely freezes, saving Elsa and breaking the sword. As Anna sacrifices herself for her sister showing a true act of love the curse on Anna’s heart is broken and Arendelle escapes the eternal winter. Not only did this

act of love rekindle the bond between sisters but also sparked a new bond between Anna and Kristoff. The film ends with the town of Arendelle celebrating their release from the curse and the promise of keeping the gates open for everyone to be together again.

Evaluation ---

The Childhood Relationship between Elsa and Anna

In this movie there are a lot of different relationship dynamics that viewers can learn from. The most considerable and distinct relationship is the relationship between family, sisters to be exact. The simplest of fights or arguments can be the most hurtful and long lasting especially with a sibling. The depth of the sister's relationship in the film *Frozen* is established from the start. After losing their parents in a fatal shipwreck they should have been able to lean on each other in time of need but instead, fear made them remain in separate rooms for the remainder of their childhood only solidifying the detachment between the two. This in a normal scenario would be very crucial to the family dynamic if they were not princesses, or possessing magical powers that could possibly kill someone. This dynamic can be harmful in many ways. First, they both grew up alone instead of getting the love and emotional support from each other after the loss of multiple family members. In addition, this is also detrimental to their emotional growth due to lack of exposure to the outside world, as a result of closing the gates in seclusion after their parents died. "Death within a family, especially sudden death, exposes a basic dynamic tension of family systems, as grief occurs within a family on multiple levels, that is, individual, familial and societal. The individual, although experiencing grief autonomously, does in fact project and propel his or her symptoms onto the other members of the system or family. This is likely to result in conflict and divisions within the family, as each person is perhaps seen by the others as not coping adequately, as preoccupied with irrational thoughts, wallowing in

self-pity or prolonging the grieving process. The internal 'workings' of the family are subsequently placed under a terrific strain.” (Handsley, S. 2001) In this film we see this exact thing happening. With loss families should be coming together, but they are growing apart as they grow older, without each other.

The Relationship between Anna and Prince Hans

Flash forward to both sisters in early adulthood, and the time has come for Elsa to become queen. During this time Anna is ecstatic to be able to meet new people and hopefully find the human connection she has been longing for. The next questionable relationship we see in this movie is the relationship between Anna and her new love interest Hans. They meet for a total of five minutes at the coronation of her sister Elsa and they decide they should get married. This isn't providing the healthy relationship growth that has been proven to assist in happy marriages. This is relevant in real life, where people get married after only knowing someone for a short time due to a feeling of “Love at First Sight”. We have seen in research that this type of relationship and behavior are associated with divorce and low satisfaction in relationships. It is much easier to get out of a relationship before marriage than to get married and end up having to divorce. The negative consequences of marrying at an early age may be due to psychological immaturity, unstable employment, and a truncated spousal-search process. With respect to the duration of marriage, divorces occur more often in the early rather than the later years of marriage (White, 1991). We see this in all sorts of relationships and situations, but they all usually end in the same way. Most of these relationships begin in a flame of love and passion and end in a flame of hate and regret. We even see this portrayed in Disney movies that target children as the main audience. So why did they include this in a children's movie? To provide insight to children that it's not realistic to fall in love at first sight and end in a happily ever after

in most fairy tales. You don't fall in love with someone in ten seconds and then marry that person and your life is all rainbows and butterflies, it's just not realistic.

The Relationship between Anna and Kristoff

The next important relationship we see in this film is the relationship between Anna and Kristoff. They met on the journey to find Anna's sister Elsa after she set the city of Arendelle into an everlasting winter. He was a trusty companion who has a reindeer named Sven and is along for their entire journey. Anna has Kristoff take her to find her sister and along the way they learn about love and friendship, and how getting to truly know someone is important. As they are on the journey to find Elsa they learn that Anna actually doesn't know anything about Hans and she is supposed to be marrying him due to assuming it is true love. Kristoff protects Anna and makes sure she stays safe for the duration of their trip and when she falls under the spell of her sister's icy hands he knows exactly who can help her and how to reverse the spell. Of course in true Disney fashion the antidote was an act of true love which usually is true love's kiss. He rushes her back to the castle to Hans to break the spell, but Hans ends up being the bad guy. In the end Kristoff realizes when it is almost too late that Anna is special to him and returns to make sure her curse is broken. Dyadic withdrawal from social networks primarily has been explained by newly formed couples' need to establish intimacy, presumably at the expense of time spent in other close relationships such as friendships. (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009) It is important to note that building relationships will last longer if you get to know each other in the friendship phase. Like Anna and Kristoff have developed. This being an important lesson for children because if we didn't stress the importance of developing intimate relationships they

would not learn the importance of friendship and later on in life the importance of a romantic relationship.

Relationship Between Anna and Olaf

When Anna and Elsa were little girls they would play in the ballroom, and Elsa would use her powers to make it snow. In this room they also created a snowman named Olaf, who was made with Elsa's magic. This relationship reminds us that our childhood is important even when we are adults. Imagination is something we think of only children using on a daily basis, but adults also use it in everyday life. The building of model airplanes and machines, making of new constructions, sketches, and activities in young naturalists clubs— all of these forms of technical creativity for children take on enormous significance in that they direct the interest and attention of the children to a new area in which human creative imagination may operate. (Vygotsky, 2004) We have to use our imaginations on how to solve problems and create new ideas for all aspects of life, even as adults. When children at a young age have what we refer to as a “wild” imagination this is actually an asset . This means that they are letting their brains access all the information they already maintain and creating something new out of the knowledge they know. Watching a film like this is especially important for young people to watch and see young people in movies using their imaginations. From an early age children need to be presented with rich opportunities to engage with the world in different ways, to enable imaginative connections to be made between past and present experience. (Prentice, 2000)

Relationship between Kristoff and Sven

The relationship between Kristoff and his reindeer Sven, is not the typical relationship we see in Disney films between Disney characters and their pets. The movies usually involve the princess having a pet sidekick of some sort, not a character who has their own perspective or voice. This is similar to the relationship between Anna and Olaf; he is a character of imagination created with magic, yet he also talks and has his own point of view. This is not a characteristic that other animals in Disney Films have with the exception of a few. This special bond we see between Kristoff and Sven is not the typical everyday relationship but it is something that viewers can relate too with their pets. The relationship between human and animal is something that has been studied and can be very beneficial to not only the mental health of the family but also for individual members. Recorded use of pets as therapeutic agents dates to 1699 when John Locke advocated "giving children dogs, squirrels, birds, or any such thing as to look after as a means of encouraging them to develop tender feelings and a sense of responsibility for others' ". (Parshall, 2003).

Overarching Method

The overall message in this film that the creators were trying to get the audience to see is that family is important and sisterly love is just as special as the bond between a princess and a prince. This film wanted to be different from other Disney Princess films by showing that the love found in family will always be stronger than love at first sight. Anna didn't want her sister to marry Hans because she barely knew him, that is the protective sister telling her to think it through before making a life altering decision.. This is not something we see in the other Disney films, we don't see Ariel's sisters telling her not to marry prince Eric. In almost every Disney movie the princess has to give up something to be with the Prince and in this movie this just isn't the case. Disney demonstrates how the depiction of sisterly love in Frozen and the portrayal of

motherhood in Maleficent as more important than romantic love establishes a deviation from Disney's prior portrayal of female characters while parodying "traditional" gender depictions. (Crosby, 2016) All the relationships and even the characters in this movie are not like the traditional Disney princess movie characters. Elsa has magical powers vs usually the evil villain keeping them from the prince or the fairy godmother who is helping the princess get to be with the prince. Another point is that Elsa and Anna are both royalty in this movie instead of the man being the Royal Ruler. There are two main male characters and there is usually only one. This film has rejuvenated a new era of power for not only women but also for the various evolving relationships that are now more common than when some of the original Disney Princess movies were written and made.

Conclusion

While watching movies and films is entertaining it can also be a learning tool, edutainment to be exact. Edutainment is learning from watching content in movies, tv shows or even from books, magazines and other media related sources. The several relationships and challenges that the characters face along the way throughout the film, can teach children how to balance these relationships and all of the craziness life throws at you. Family, friends, and enemies are always going to be a part of life and it is important to teach children from a young age that no matter what, your family and friends will be there to help you out of any situation you put yourself in or get yourself into. We see that even though families fight like how we see the relationship of Elsa and Anna start out in the film, they only want the best for them. If Elsa didn't care about Anna she wouldn't have locked herself away to keep her safe, and she would have just let her marry any random guy who looked her way. Vice versa, Anna did the same for Elsa. She could have just let her go and be in the woods and she could have taken the crown,

instead she put her own life and the potential future of her country in the hands of a stranger all just to save her sister. We see this relationship between Sven and Kristoff as well, they have been together since they were children and would do anything for each other to keep each other safe and happy. The different relationships we see evolve and grow are important learning tools for children and adults. These relationships that viewers could encounter or already have, are important to learn at an early age, because things don't always end up picture as perfect as Disney likes them to be. There will always be a way to make sure you have your happily ever after. It just might not be the way that all of the other Disney movies end.

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