

Mean Girls at the Movies (Disney Edition)

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Intro

Stereotypes present in Disney films have recently begun to come under more criticism. One study involved children watching Disney movies to study the beauty-goodness stereotype. Some children watched low-bias films and some watched high-bias films, and the data showed that children who watched films with the bias associated beauty with goodness among their peers (Bazzini et. al, 2010). A separate study showed that preschool girls given princess costumes would change their behavior to be more “princess-like” (Golden & Jacoby, 2018). Another similar study found that girls behaved more stereotypically feminine when they spent more time interacting with the films (Coyne, 2016).

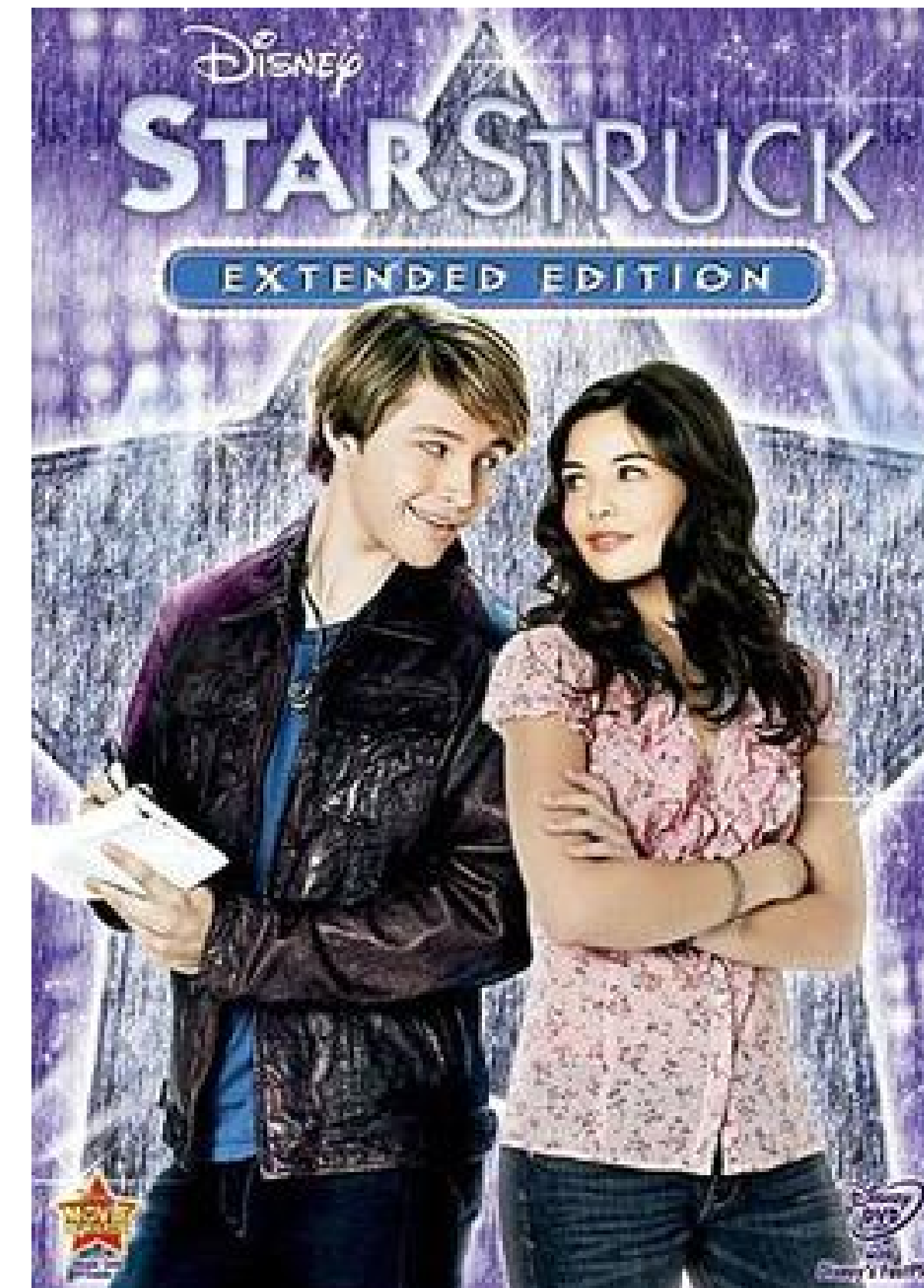
The stereotypes do not only impact princess films. One such study critiqued Moana and Zootopia specifically for having “feminist” protagonists who must take care of a male character (Seybold, 2021). Another study critiqued the use of ethnographic symbols in the films, using the Princess and the Frog’s portrayal of multiple African religions (Pérez, 2021). However, Disney also released a variety of non-Princess films under the umbrella of "Disney Channel Original Movies" that are rarely discussed.

Method

How often do Disney Channel movies have "mean girl" antagonists? To gain information for this project, a list of Disney Channel Original Movies from the years 2005-2015 was compiled from Wikipedia. All the movies were then analyzed to determine if they had a female lead from information on IMDb. If the films had a female lead, then their stories were analyzed to determine if there was a "mean girl" antagonist (also from IMDb). The "mean girl" was defined as a one-dimensional female character who mostly exists to criticize or inconvenience the protagonist.



Image Sources:
Starstruck Poster: "Starstruck (2010 Poster)." [Wikipedia, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/e/1/Starstruck_DVD.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/e/1/Starstruck_DVD.jpg)
Princess Protection Program Poster: "Princess Protection Program." [Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess_Protection_Program](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Princess_Protection_Program)



Results

Out of the 46 movies analyzed, 41 had a female main or supporting character (89.1%). Of the movies with at least one female lead character, 13 had "mean girl" antagonists (31.7%). Of the 46 movies, 28.2 percent had "mean girl" antagonists overall.

Works Cited:

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Discussion

In the modern day, discussions of female representation in movies are common. Many believe that representation is getting better. However, during this ten year period, around 1 out of every 4 Disney movies a person could watch involved stereotypical, one-dimensional depictions of women. These movies were seen by many teenage and pre-teen girls, and they undoubtedly impacted how they view the world today. Seeing these uninteresting caricatures of other girls could have made it seem like being a girl made someone inherently uninteresting. Though previous studies state Disney princesses, by being the heroes of their films, make girls behave more traditionally feminine, these films instead focus on subverting that expectation (Coyne, 2016). Now, being pretty can be seen less positively due its correlation with being uninteresting and shallow, which impacts girls' behavior (Golden & Jacoby, 2018).