Children’s Perceptions of Gender roles as portrayed in Disney films

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Abstract

Researchers have found that young children create and internalize their own meanings of gender, based on the social cues of adults, their environments, and media around them (Derman-Sparks, 2001). The purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of gender role portrayals in Disney films on children’s gender role perceptions. It was hypothesised that there would be a significant difference in children’s gender role perceptions depending on the Disney film they watched. The Children’s sex role inventory (CSRI) was given out to a total sample of 51 participants, both male (N= 15) and female (N= 36). Participants were randomly allocated to a group, the experimental group viewed Frozen while the control group viewed Cinderella. Analysis of the data showed that there was a significant difference between children’s perceptions of gender role in relation to the CSRI scale. Results supported the belief that Disney films can “inspire at least as much cultural authority and legitimacy for teaching specific roles” to young children (Giroux, 1995, p.25).
1. Introduction

Disney films are becoming increasingly popular in the 21st century as evident from their marketing sales (Setoodeh & Yabroff, 2007) and young children are engrossed with the characters that they view in these films. As children grow and develop, they are taking in information and acquiring knowledge at a rapid pace. As children cultivate their cognitive abilities, they assimilate new information into their existing knowledge base and adjust to the new information by accommodating it to what they already know (Piaget, 1954). This development explains why young children are captivated by the characters that they view in Disney films. As such, it is important to understand that the characters portrayed in Disney films may influence their gender role perception. The gender stereotypes and gender biases that the children are shown in these films will have an impact on their perception of gender roles in society, with most children imitating the personality of the characters that they watch.

1.1. Perceptions of Gender in childhood

Bem (1983) developed the gender schema theory that suggests that children are developing their thinking and attitudes about the differences between males and females during the early childhood years. Pre-schoolers have been shown to reliably apply gender stereotypes when responding to questions about how their parents, teachers or peers would want them to play. Girls know they are expected to play with dish sets and baby dolls and boys play with tools, trucks and cars (Raag & Rackliff, 1998). Young children create and
internalize their own meanings of gender, based on the social cues of adults, their environments, and media around them. Adults in turn have a responsibility to ensure that those cues and messages create a healthy understanding of what it means to be male and female (Derman-Sparks, 2001).

Zosuls, et al (2009), examined the naturally occurring instances of gender labels as indicators of knowledge of gender categories in children by observing them during free play with toys. The results showed that 25% of children used gender labels by 17 months and 68% by 21 months. On average, girls produced labels at 18 months, one month earlier than did boys. These labelling results were used to predict changes in gender-typed behaviour with the two most strongly gender-typed toys (trucks and dolls). Children who knew and used gender labels were more likely than other children to show increases in gender-typed play with toys. This suggests that knowing basic gender information was related to increased play with strongly stereotyped toys.

As pre-schoolers have strong beliefs that boys and girls do different things, they would be expected to respond negatively to gender norm violations. For example, when young children were observed while playing with either a male or a female typed toy in the same sex peer, they were punished by the pair when playing with cross sex toys (Langlois & Downs, 1980). Children who cross the boundaries of what is considered gender appropriate may be at heightened risk for rejection, harassment, discrimination, and abuse (Pauletti, Cooper, & Perry, 2014). A meta-analysis showed that children from 5 to 10 years of age exhibit a peak in the rigidity of stereotypes, which supports the claim that stereotypes become more flexible with age (Signorella et al., 1993). This indicates that children’s awareness of
the differential status of sexes and gender discrimination are relatively late developing phenomena.

By helping young children understand the similarities of different genders, we can assist a child in promoting healthy behaviours, and bringing in new perceptions in order to choose more healthy identities.

1.2. Influence of portrayal of gender roles

The way things are portrayed in media have been shown to play 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. Slaby & Frey (1975), investigated the development of gender constancy and selective attention to same sex models of preschool aged children. The study findings suggested that young children’s perception of their own gender similarity to an adult model may develop in stages in conjunction with their cognitive understanding that gender is a fairly constant human attribute. In the study, all but one child completely understood gender consistency and stability which indicates that most children are aware of the differences between being a boy and a girl from a very young age and this understanding leads to the formation of their gender identity.

As children learn about the different gender roles, it becomes relevant for them to adopt the social rules concerning male appropriate and female appropriate behaviours. Kohlberg (1966), suggested that children’s rules for what is gender appropriate are not based solely on direct observation but rather, reflect their own interpretation of what they observe and what they are told. The process of forming and reforming social rules and fitting one’s
behaviour to these rules has been referred to by Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), as the process of self-socialisation. This process suggests that children begin to pay particular attention to the same sex model in an effort to learn the social rules appropriate for their own sex that is to begin to engage in self-socialisation (Slaby & Frey, 1975). Mischel (1970) also claimed that children attend to, learn from and imitate same sex models more than the opposite-sex models largely because they perceive same sex models to be more similar to themselves. As 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.

Several studies have looked at how the characteristics of Disney princesses are portrayed in contrast to that of the Disney prince. One such study performed a coded content analysis in order to identify and record each gendered behaviour or characteristic depicted in the films (England, Descartes & Collier-Meek, 2011). Stereotypically feminine traits were counted for every time a Princess appeared embodying these traits. Some traits considered to be feminine include tending to physical appearance, being physically weak, crying, and acting submissive (England et al., 2011). The study results showed the five most common attributes portrayed by the Princesses to be: affection, assertiveness, fearfulness, troublesomeness, and athleticism (England et al., 2011).

The study noticed that over the years, the prince characteristics changed to become more androgynous and while the princess characteristics included more masculine characteristics, there were still some female stereotypical actions depicted. Thus, it can be concluded that when children view these strongly gendered Disney films, “it would help to reinforce the desirability of traditional gender conformity” (England et al., 2011, p. 565). Although the results supported the hypothesis of the study, there are some areas of this research that might have affected the findings. England et al. (2011) research only examined
the Disney princess movies which does not represent all Disney movies as each film focuses solely on different princesses and their specific personalities. This study is limited because it does not address the effect that viewing these gendered content would have on a child’s perception of gender roles. It would be interesting to have children view these films and give their opinions on the differing prince and princess characteristics that are portrayed.

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).

1.3 The effects of gender portrayals in Disney films

Many young children are exposed to various Disney characters through the films that may guide their creation of future self-images. 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, there by affecting the way that they conceive beliefs regarding their future roles in society.

Zipes (2003) stated, “Fairy tales written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were intended to teach girls and young women how to become domesticated, respectable, and attractive to a marriage partner and to teach boys and girls appropriate gendered values and attitudes” (p. 714). Lefkowitz & Huesmann (1980), acknowledged that “Viewers, especially children, imitate the behaviour of television characters in much the same
way that they learn social and cognitive skills by imitating their parents, siblings, and peers” (p. 343). Since the Disney characters are a source of attraction for many young children, they often hold the character’s values to a high esteem. In doing so, they aspire to imitate the roles that the princes and princesses portray and use these stereotypical depictions as a model during their own identity formation.

Male and female characters are portrayed differently in Disney films, which further reinforces biased ideas about gender, social behaviour and societal norms. The gendered images presented in Disney princess films may ultimately affect a young child’s path to self-realisation. For example, Cinderella depicts the ideal princess who has a tremendously thin waist and a beautiful face. She has large eyelashes and a blushing face, features that can be described as attractive. Young girls can perceive these features as being society’s ideal of beauty as they are exceedingly impressionable individuals, who often seek to discover their identity by observing the media that surrounds them in their everyday lives. Even though young girls are exposed to different kinds of body images throughout their daily lives, consistent exposure to ideal images in the media can cause them to adopt these images as reality.

Recent Disney films such as Frozen show girls how to be independent and how to defend against the patriarch but there are no role models for boys in the films. The male characters in Disney all serve the same purpose which is to save the princess by using violence. Degutis (2011) conducted a survey to find out about sexual violence. Results from the survey show that one in five American women have been sexually assaulted in one time in their life. While children’s films are not the cause of this staggering statistic, it is important to understand that these male sexual offenders might have been influenced by something they had seen in their lifetime, be it from other adults or from the media. Ward (2002) argues that
the Disney animated feature film are so powerful that they “can shape the way children think about who they are and who they should be” (p. 5). As such, male children might perceive what is shown to them by the male heroes in the films as the way they should behave. They would then believe that their purpose was to defeat the villain with violence and then collect their reward which in past Disney films is a woman who has no friends and doesn’t speak (Stokes, 2013).

Most researchers support the theory that the Disney franchise and its animated characters have a lasting impression on a child’s developing psyche. Giroux and Pollock (2010) suggest “animated films operate on many registers; one of the most persuasive is the role they play as the new ‘teaching machines’ as producers of culture” (p. 164). 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.

1.4. Bem’s sex role inventory (BSRI)

Sandra Bem, challenged the assumption of bipolarity by constructing the BSRI and theorized that the constructs of masculinity and femininity are conceptually and empirically distinct (Hoffman & Borders, 2001). Bem (1979), explained that the purpose for constructing the BSRI was “to assess the extent to which the culture's definitions of desirable female and
male attributes are reflected in an individual's self-description" (p. 1048). She argued that an individual could possess a number of traits from each scale and that one could demonstrate varying degrees of such traits in response to different situations.

The BSRI is a self-report measure that characterises a person’s personality as masculine, feminine or androgynous. It is composed of 60 adjectives; 20 items are considered positive masculine characteristics, 20 are considered positive feminine characteristics, and the remaining 20 are a mixture of positive and negative characteristics that are considered neutral. The BSRI produced alpha co-efficient, correlations for internal stability of the questionnaire and other researchers have also found comparable alpha co-efficient as well. Bem contends that androgynous scorers on the BSRI can adapt well in different contexts but has no data to support this claim (Hoffman & Borders, 2001). Bem countered this critique by creating the gender schema theory which attempts to explain how individuals come to use gender as an organising category in life (Bem, 1985). She used the BSRI to research this and the she collected were supportive of her hypothesis that the merging of male and female traits would enable a person to be a fully functioning and adaptive human over an emphasis of gender stereotypes. The BSRI also includes a social desirability score in order to verify that the androgynous score is valid.

Soon after the development of the original version of the BSRI, Bem (1979) constructed the BSRI Short Form. It contains 30 of the original 60 items. Bem's purpose in developing the short form of the BSRI was to address concerns related to poor item-total correlations with the Masculinity and Femininity scales as well as issues raised by factor analyses (Lenney, 1991). Although the Short Form is generally viewed as more psychometrically sound than the Original Form (Payne, 1985), Bem (1981a) "strongly recommend[ed] the continued use of the original 60-item inventory" (p.32) because of her
belief that it predicted behaviour better than the shorter version. Despite the psychometric issues, the BSRI spurred notable changes in the way femininity and masculinity were conceptualized (Hoffman & Borders, 2001).

Given the widespread use of the BSRI in adult populations, a children’s version of the inventory would be highly useful to developmental researchers interested in using the BSRI to examine the changing influences of sex typing and androgyny from middle childhood through adulthood (Boldizar, 1991). The development of the children’s sex role inventory (CSRI) added a new alternative for those researchers interested in examining sex typing in children from a multi-dimensional perspective. The theoretical assumptions of the CSRI were consistent with those of the BSRI. The development of the CSRI was also based on the assumptions that, by early elementary school years, children can discriminate between these culturally defined sex role attributes and behaviours (Huston, 1983) and that these knowledge can serve to organise children’s understandings about their own gender-related personality attributes and behaviours (Boldizar, 1991).

Huston (1983), suggested that young children’s emerging role identity is especially likely to reflect cultural prescriptions of gender stereotypes. The items for the CSRI were adapted directly from the BSRI and thus includes 60 items as well. The data obtained from the CSRI indicated that many “observed sex differences in cognitive and behavioural performance can be accounted for by sex role socialisation processes in which girls and boys come to identify with congruent sex roles, the larger question that remains unanswered is how these socialised roles interact with sex to produce different paths of development for boys and girls” (Boldizar, 1991, p.514).

As children’s self-concepts become less based on physical or behavioural attributes and more based in psychological attributes (Harter, 1983), it has become possible to expand
the study of sex typing in children to incorporate the self-perception of gender related personality dispositions that are not relevant to the study of sex typing in young children (Boldizar, 1991).

1.5. Children expressing themselves in drawings

Children's drawings provide a window into their thoughts and feelings, mainly because they reflect an image of his/her own mind (Thomas & Silk, 1990). Drawing and its relationship to children’s development has been one of the areas of interest to many researchers since the 19th century (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1987). Barnes (1893), analysed the drawings of 6,393 children ranging from ages six to sixteen years. From the data obtained, Barnes made several deductions and some are as follows: “For the young child, drawing is a language, a means of expressing ideas in which symbols and conventional forms are used” and “the courage to express their ideas through pictures increases to the age of thirteen or fourteen years” (Barnes, 1893, p.451).

Children's drawings have an order of development, and that accompanies the development of motor skills, emotional development, psychosocial development and the development of perception. Children draw what they know in their own style. In other words, the perception functions, sensibility, emotions and motor functions interact, and there, the factor of social experience is added and the picture is drawn onto paper (Farokhi & Hashemi, 2011). Children have different ways of expressing themselves and make meaning out of the world around them, therefore the medium of drawing affords children the opportunity to make their thoughts and emotions known to the adult world (Anning, 1999). The images depicted in children’s drawings originate from their memories of specific objects, people, animals, or environments, the events created purely through their imagination; and observations of real-world objects in everyday life. Children consequently attempt to recreate
these images through drawing (Wu, 2003). Drawing helps children to organise their ideas thereby constructing meaning from their experiences.

Several studies have used children’s drawings as a part of their research as it provides an insight into the mind and life of a child while also developing the child’s “confidence in initiating their own learning dispositions through drawing” (Anim, 2012, p. 43). As older children develop their knowledge of gender roles, they become less susceptible to priming from other sources such as society and the media (Bazzini, Curtin, Joslin, Regan and Martz, 2010). Considering the factors that influence the things that children draw can give researchers comprehension into a child’s psychological development. Oğus (2010), discussed several factors such as child specific factors which includes age, maturation and intelligence, they also discussed in detail the child’s environment which includes the school, family and peer groups and its influences on what they draw and how they perceive things.

Another study by Tzampazi, Kyridis and Christodoulou (2013), used children’s drawings to explore the occupational preferences of 150 kindergarten and elementary school children. In the study, the children were told to draw what they would like to become when they grow up and to justify that choice. The analysis of data showed that for the majority of the sample, their choice of occupation expressed a specific feeling, for a smaller percentage this choice expresses a certain playfulness, while for only a few does their choice express the desire for further knowledge and profit (Tzampazi, Kyridis & Christodoulou, 2013).

The strength of the study was that they took into account the fact that the career choices of children are limited by their experiences so far and although they cannot be realistic, they offer researchers the understanding into how children perceive the structures of society and how they learn about work and the roles within the community they live in (Tzampazi, Kyridis & Christodoulou, 2013). For Musgrave (1967), a child gradually realizes
what possible roles are available to them and adopts a self-perception of their abilities that reduces the alternative roles from which they will have to choose (Barton, 2012). The results of the study showed that the family affects the career preferences of children, especially if some of them choose the career of a parent or of other relatives. It seems that the family affects mainly the younger age groups. Moreover, the sample reveals the influence of the media, considering that some children chose a TV hero as representing what they would like to do in the future. The results indicate that although the media has such a huge influence on young children’s perceptions of gender roles, their family and community also play a part in developing their perceptions.

Drawing is an alternative, nonverbal communication method for children. Drawing enables children to materialize their ideas and emotions; it is a tool used by children to record their perceptions, emotions, and experiences. “Analysing children's drawings has always been as a systematic measure to evaluate children's perceptions and attitudes towards their environment” (Farokhi & Hashemi, 2011, p.2223). In addition, drawing assists children in verifying the differences between their sensory world and reality, and opens up a boundless space in which they explore the unknowns or their fantasy world (Hsu, 2014).

1.6. Rationale

From reviewing these studies, it can be understood that Disney films can be used as a tool to help young children navigate the ever changing gender roles in society. Research on the topic of gender role perception in children has shown that over time, the different portrayals of gender stereotypical behaviour to children can lead them to perceive gender roles to be. Although there are many studies investigating the influence of gender portrayals on children’s perceptions of gender roles, most studies focus solely on the portrayals of the
female gender and not the male. 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.

Previous research gives insight into the roles of both the society and the film industry in changing children’s perceptions of gender roles. Children’s drawings will be used in the present study to investigate children’s perceptions of gender roles. With a greater understanding of the roles of the films in forming children’s perceptions that can lead to unacceptable behaviour 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 can break the cycle of a possible gender bias in children.

In the current study, it is hypothesised that there will be a significant relationship between children’s perception of gender roles as portrayed in Disney films. Similarly, it is hypothesised that there will be a significant relationship between portrayals of gender and children’s drawings of gender roles. This study aims to give insight into the role that media portrayals play in developing children’s perceptions of gender roles as well as how it can be used to combat gender stereotypes that children might be exposed to. Overall, the results and findings from this study should contribute to the literature within all fields that deal with children.
1.7. Hypotheses:

1. It is hypothesised that there will be a significant difference in the perception of gender roles between the experimental group who viewed the modern Disney film, Frozen and the control group who viewed the traditional Disney film, Cinderella.

2. It is hypothesised that there will be a significant difference in the perceptions of gender roles among males and female participants in relation to the scales of the Children sex role inventory (CSRI).

3. It is hypothesised that there will be a significant difference in the perceptions of gender roles between the groups in relation to the drawings completed.

4. It is hypothesised that there will be a significant difference of gender role perceptions between the older and younger participants in relation to the drawing scores.

5. It is hypothesised that there will be a significant difference in the perceptions of gender roles among male and female participants in relation to the drawings completed.
2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

Purposive sampling was used to gather questionnaires and drawings from a total of 51 participants. Two primary schools formed the experimental and control group. Each school was randomly assigned to a group. Informed consent was obtained from the participants' principal and parents prior to the experiment. Twenty-six students (26 girls) formed the control group. Twenty-five students (10 girls and 15 boys) formed the experimental group. The participants were ranged in age from 9 to 11 years of age (M = 9.75, SD = .79). No incentives were given.

2.2 Design

The research design used was a true experimental mixed methods design. This design was used in order to apply both qualitative and quantitative methods to the research problem. Purposive sampling was used in selecting the participants. The dependent variables were the children’s sex role inventory scale (CSRI) and the drawings which were coded. The independent variables were gender perception and the Disney films watched. The demographic variables were age and gender. A between subjects design was also applied to the participants in order to eliminate any bias. Random assignment was used to allocate each group of participants to either the control or experimental group.

2.3 Apparatus
A projector connected to a Dell computer was used in the classrooms to show the Disney films. Cinderella and Frozen DVDs were shown to the participants. Drawing Paper with instructions and colouring pencils were handed out to the participants.

2.4 Materials

Information sheets and consent forms containing information about the research study, the benefits and risks of participating, voluntary participation and contact information of the researchers were sent out to the parents of the participants.

Children’s sex role inventory

As a part of the study, each participant filled out a questionnaire. The questionnaire used is called Children’s sex role inventory (CSRI) by Boldizar (1991). The items for the CSRI were adapted directly from the Bem sex role inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974). The CSRI version used was the shorter version which included 30 items which were presented in a repeating pattern of one masculine item, one feminine item and one neutral item. Each item on the questionnaire was worded as a statement about the self and participants were asked to rate themselves according to "how true of you" each item was on the following 4-point scale: 4 = very true of me, 3 = mostly true of me, 2 = a little true of me, and 1 = not at all true of me. If a participant’s masculinity and femininity score is above the median of 4.9 then they would be classified as androgynous on the BSRI scale.

To establish construct validity of the CSRI and to demonstrate that the CSRI and the BSRI (Bem, 1974) were roughly equivalent measures of masculinity and femininity, the two scales were administered in counterbalanced order to a group of 47 adult men and women.
The correlation between the BSRI and CSRI M scales was .86, and the correlation between the two F scales was .89 (ps < .001).

A sheet of instructions and information was included at the start of each questionnaire.

### 2.5 Procedure

All participants were told that the purpose of the study was to investigate how children’s perception of gender roles can be influenced by the portrayal of gender in Disney films. Each group were tested on separate days due to practical considerations. A teacher was present in the classroom during each session. Each session started with the participants viewing ten minute clips from a randomly assigned Disney film.

The experimental group viewed clips from Disney’s Frozen and the control group viewed clips from Disney’s Cinderella.

Both groups were asked not to make noise or distract each other in anyway during the viewing of the clips. After viewing the clips, participants were given questionnaires to fill out in their class groups.

The time limit for completing the questionnaire was 20 minutes. Participants were told that there were no right or wrong answers and to fill out the questionnaire as honestly as possible. The participants then had a free drawing session which lasted 15 minutes where they were told to draw what they thought the role of a man and a woman was.
After all the research was conducted, the participants were debriefed on the aim of the study. The participants were then asked if they had any questions and thanked for participating in the study. A token of gratitude of sweets was given to each child at the end of the study.

*Coding of the drawings*

A coding scheme was developed by the author after reviewing the past research on gender roles perception drawings of children as well as gender role portrayals in Disney films. All coders were undergraduate Psychology students who were blind to the aim of the study. Each coder was asked to rate the children’s drawings on a scale of 1-5 on accuracy as well as how stereotypical the role drawn was. A score of 5 indicated that the child accurately drew the role of a man and a woman, a score of 3 indicated that the participant drew a moderately accurate picture of a man and a woman and a score of 1 indicated an inaccurate representation of what the participants were asked to draw.

All coders independently coded drawings of the groups and their evaluations were compared with that of other coders. If their scores and evaluations were more than 50% similar then the drawing codes were used.
3. Results

3.1 Data Analysis

IBM SPSS version 22 was used to perform all statistical tests. The data was tested to determine whether it was normally distributed and a Sharipo-Wilks test indicated that they were normally distributed. Descriptive statistics such as the mean, median and Standard deviation were used. A probability level of .05 was used for all statistical tests.

The data was analysed using an Independent Samples T-test to investigate the differences between the experimental and control groups and their gender perceptions on the Children sex role inventory scale (CSRI) and the drawings completed.

Table 1. Showing Descriptive analysis of variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender of respondents</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of respondents</td>
<td>9.75</td>
<td>.79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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3.2 Hypothesis 1:

To test hypothesis 1 which predicts that gender portrayals in the Disney films have an effect on children’s gender perceptions.

An independent samples t-test was conducted using the independent variable of Disney film and the dependant variable of Perceptions of gender from the masculine, feminine and neutral scores of the CSRI.

Table 2. : An independent Samples T-test table, displaying the differences between the groups gender role perceptions, in relation to their total scores on the CSRI scale.
Table 2. Shows that participants who viewed the Cinderella film had higher mean scores than those who viewed the Frozen film. As shown above, there was a statistically significant difference between the group’s perceptions of gender roles from their results on the CSRI items. Therefore the null can be rejected.

The median score for each participant on the CSRI scale scores were totalled and divided by 10 in order to get the groups median scores. The median for the masculine items from the experimental group was 5.2 which is above the desired median of 4.9, also their median score for the feminine items was 6.6 which is also above the desired median. Therefore, the participants in the experimental group would be considered androgynous on the CSRI scale.

Moreover, the median score for the masculine items of the control group was 6.3 which is above the desired median of 4.9, the participants in this group also scored a median of 9.4 on the feminine items. Therefore, the participants in the control group would be classified as androgynous on the CSRI scale

3.3 Hypothesis 2:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Frozen</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>-.29</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>-.043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinderella</td>
<td>2.65</td>
<td>.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>-4.1</td>
<td>32.1</td>
<td>&lt; .001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinderella</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral items</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frozen</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>.33</td>
<td>-2.68</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinderella</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This hypothesis contends that there will be a statistically significant difference in gender role perceptions among males and female participants in relation to the scales of the Children’s sex role inventory (CSRI).

Table 3: An independent Samples T-test table, displaying the differences between males and females gender role perceptions, in relation to their total scores on the CSRI scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Masculine Scores</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>.5</td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>.855</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Feminine Scores</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>2.89</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Neutral Scores</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>.020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>2.62</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. shows that females had higher mean scores than males for the total masculine, total feminine and total neutral items on the CSRI scale. There was a statistically significant difference between male and females perceptions of gender role from the total feminine and neutral scores.

3.4 Hypothesis 3:
To test hypothesis 3 which hypothesises that there will be a significant difference in the perceptions of gender roles between the two groups in relation to the drawings of a man and a woman.

An independent samples t-test was conducted using the independent variable of group and the dependant variable of drawing scores. The results showed that there was not a statistically significant difference between gender role perception of the experimental group for the drawing of a man (M = 4.24, SD = 1.64) and the control group’s drawing of a man (M = 4.19, SD = 1.02) (t (49) = .12, p = .902, CI (95%) - .73 - .81). Therefore the null hypothesis can be accepted.

There was also no statistically significant difference between gender role perception of the experimental group for the drawing of a woman (M = 3.88, SD = 1.81) and the control group’s drawing of a woman (M = 4.62, SD = .69) (t (30.74) = -1.9, p = .067, CI (95%) -1.52 - .05). Therefore the null hypothesis can be accepted.

3.5 Hypothesis 4:

To test hypothesis 4 which predicts a statistically significant difference of gender role perceptions between the older and younger participants in relation to the drawings. The criterion variable used was drawing scores while the predictor variable was age. A chi-square test for association found that there was a moderate positive non-significant relationship between participants ages and their male gender role drawings (X² (10, N= 51) = 14.7, p = .144). Therefore the null hypothesis can be accepted.

A chi-square test for association found that there was a moderate positive non-significant relationship between participants ages and their female gender role drawings (X² (8, N= 51) = 12.9, p = .117). Therefore the null hypothesis can be accepted.
Figure 1. Showing Participants age and their male gender role drawing scores. Results obtained from a cross tabulation that showed participants aged 9 drew the most accurate drawings of a male role while participants aged 10 drew the least accurate drawing of the role of a female.
Figure 2. Showing Participants age and their female gender role drawing scores. Results obtained from a cross tabulation that showed participants aged 9 drew accurate drawings of a female role while participants aged 11 drew the least accurate drawing of the role of a female.

3.6 Hypothesis 5:

To test hypothesis 5 which speculates that there will be a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of gender roles among male and female participants in relation to the drawings completed. The independent variable used was gender and the dependent variable was drawing scores. An independent samples t-test found that there was not a statistically significant difference between male gender role drawings of males (M= 4.06, SD= 1.81) and females (M= 4.3, SD= 1.1) (t (20.3) = .46, p= .652, CI (95%) -.79 – 1.24). Therefore the null can be accepted.

An independent samples t-test also found that there was a statistically significant difference between female gender role drawings of males (M= 3.25, SD= 2.02) and females (M= 4.71, SD= .62) (t (16.32) = 2.84, p= .012, CI (95%).37 – 2.55). Therefore the null can be rejected.

3.7 Drawings

The drawings were examined for the different types of occupations whether it was a vocational roles, civil service roles, sport related roles, retail roles or entertainment roles. In addition, the drawings were coded on whether they were stereotypical of the gender drawn.

The occupations considered Vocational were priest, teacher, nurse, doctor, builder, hairdresser, carpenter, chef, make-up artist, scientist, animal worker, food related workers and mother. The retail occupations were receptionist and shop assistants. The occupations
considered civil service related were police officers, fireman, bin man, maid, air hostess, traffic warden and train driver. The occupations considered sports related were athletics, jockey and basketball player. The occupations considered entertainment were model, singer, rock star and producer.

Experimental group drawings

Vocational roles such as builder were drawn as predominately male and one female. There was one female priest drawn, one male carpenter, three female nurses, one art teacher with no gender specified as well as one female teacher. There were two female housewives drawn as well as one female hairdresser, one male food worker, one female animal worker and one male and one female scientist.

The civil service roles drawn by this group included four male policemen and three female police women with angry expressions. A male bin man and two firemen were also drawn. The entertainment roles drawn depicted one female singer while the retail roles depicted two female shop assistants and one male sports store attendant. The sport related role drawings were portrayed as two male athletes with visible ab muscles, sport equipment and weights.
Figure 3. shows athletes drawn by two different girls aged 11 in the experimental group.

Uncommon role drawings by the participants in this group included a role such as queen which was drawn by an 11 year old girl (see Appendix F for drawing), Olaf, the snowman, three professional PlayStation player depicted as all males and a male thief.

Control Group Drawings

The vocational roles drawings included portrayals of six male and one female builder, two male and six female teachers, five female and two male nurses, two male and female artists, three female hair dressers and two female make-up artists. There were also two male and one female doctor as well as one male and one female priest drawn. A chef was another role drawn showing four male chefs and one female chef. One male and female childminder was also drawn.
Figure 4. Shows a drawing by a ten year old girl of a female and a male chef cooking together.

The civil service drawings showed two male policemen, one fireman, one female maid, one male traffic warden and one female air hostess. The sport related role drawn was of one female jockey. The entertainment roles drawn were of four female model and one male model, one female rock star and one male producer.

The retail occupational roles drawn showed a male receptionist and three female shop assistants. Less frequently drawn roles included a business woman and a male president (see appendix G for drawings).
4. Discussion

The aim of this study is to research whether children’s perceptions of gender roles is influenced by the gender portrayals in Disney films. Previous research suggests that the characters in children's animated programs have historically been portrayed as appearing, behaving, and communicating in gender-role stereotypical ways (England et al., 2011). Based on the vast literature investigating the effects of stereotypical gender role portrayals in children’s media, it was hypothesised that there will be a statistically significant difference between children perceptions of gender roles as portrayed in the traditional and modern Disney films.

It was also hypothesised that there will be a statistically significant difference in gender role perceptions among male and female participants in relation to the items on the CSRI scale. It was hypothesised that there will be a statistically significant difference in the perceptions of gender roles between the two groups in their drawings of a man and a woman. Another hypothesis predicted that there would be a statistically significant difference in gender role perceptions between the older and younger participants in relation to their drawings. Finally, it was hypothesised that there will a statistically significant difference in perceptions of gender roles among males and female participants in relation to their drawings.

4.1 Findings

The first hypothesis found a statistically significant difference between the group’s perceptions of gender roles with respect to the items on the CSRI scale (Boldizar, 1991). The control group watched the traditional Disney film, Cinderella while the experimental group
watched the modern film, Frozen. Despite the fact that the experimental group watched the less traditional portrayal of gender roles, they scored less means on all the items on the CSRI in comparison to the control group. This shows that despite some societal changes in adult sex roles in society, stereotypical behaviours and beliefs among children have remained relatively constant over time as hypothesised by Slaby and Frey (1975).

The second hypothesis proposed that there would be a significant difference in the gender role perceptions of male and female participants in relation to their scores on the CSRI scale. The results showed a non-significant difference between males and females perceptions of masculinity according to CSRI but a statistically significant difference in their perceptions of femininity on the CSRI scale. These results may be due to of the lack of diversity in the portrayals of males in the Disney films as suggested by England et al., (2011).

The median scores of each participant on the CSRI scale was also calculated. Each group scored above the desired median of 4.9. Therefore the participants would be considered androgynous. According to Bem (1979), an androgynous person would be an individual who does not fit into a typical masculine and feminine gender roles of their society but have a balanced identity that includes attributes of both genders. The control group made up of all females obtained higher median scores than the experimental group which suggests that they are more androgynous and more flexible in both mental and physical traits. An interesting avenue for future research would be the consideration of the influence of context on children’s gender role perceptions.

**Drawings results**

The drawings were coded in order to observe whether the participants understood what was asked of them and whether their perceptions of gender was influenced by the
Disney films they viewed. A few of the participants didn’t and most of the participants in the experimental group drew a man first on the sheet which could be perceived as males being the dominant gender. This might also have been as a result of the phrasing of the instruction given but surprisingly the control group drew the women first on the sheet.

Analyses of the third hypothesis revealed a non-significant difference in the perceptions of gender role between the two groups in relation to their drawings. The drawings of male roles were stereotypical for both groups. Males were drawn in roles like builders, policeman, fireman and sport related roles. Most of the women drawn by the control groups were in what might be considered stereotypical roles such as shop assistants, models, make-up artists, nurses and teachers but there were also untraditional roles drawn such as a female jockey. Meanwhile, the experimental group were less flexible in their female gender role drawings.

Although some participants drew the same role for a man and a woman, there were significant differences in the female’s appearance with most females drawn in stereotypically masculine roles drawn with stern expressions on their faces in contrast to the joyful expressions of the males. This result correlates with Tzampazi, Kyridis and Christodoulou (2013) study which states that a child consistently exposed to negative gender attitudes can depict this gender with negative images in his/her drawings. These varying degrees of expressiveness in genders was consistent throughout the drawings and it would be an intriguing path for future research to explore.

A chi-square analysis performed showed on the fourth hypothesis a moderately non-significant relationship observed between the participants’ ages and their drawings of male and female gender roles. The drawings obtained showed a varying degree of information
with the younger participants being less stereotypical than the older participants. Age 9 participants drew very modern roles for both genders such as a male childminder, professional PlayStation players, scientists, models and chefs. Although some participants in this age group drew some stereotypical gender roles with two writing on the drawing sheet that “boys can be anything” and “women stay at home to take care of the kids” (see Appendix H for drawings).

Participants aged 10 and 11 from the experimental group drew more stereotypical roles for both genders. This discrepancy among the ages might be because of the participant’s differing developmental progression of stereotypes. As children get older and acquire confidence in their beliefs of gender, they aim replicate this in their drawings. This was supported by research conducted by Bazzini et al., (2010), who suggest that this progression might predict why the older participants were less susceptible to the priming of the non-traditional Disney films.

The fifth hypothesis suggested that there would be a significant difference in the perceptions of gender roles among male and female participants in relation to their drawings. An independent samples t-test exhibited a non-significant difference in gender role perceptions between males and females participant in their drawings of the male role. However, there was a statistically significant difference in male and female participant’s perceptions of the female role. The males scored lower means than the females and this might be because the females had more role models to draw from as most Disney films focus on the princess with less detail on the prince. This would lead one to assume that this lack of detail resulted in the male children having little male role models to examine. This notion is concurrent with that of Lefkowitz and Huesmann (1980) who suggest that children might
draw what they perceived imitates the behaviour portrayed by their same sex counterpart in the Disney films.

The drawings obtained in the study reveal that the media influences what children think, considering that some children drew a queen and the fictional snowman character “Olaf” as gender roles. There were several unexpected gender roles drawings such as female priests, chefs, maids and a female rock star. These unusual roles allowed the researcher to formulate that although children are influenced by what they view in Disney films, the careers of a parent or relative can also affect their developing perceptions of gender roles. Future research should carry out an empirical based analysis of each drawing in order to find out, which had the most influence on children’s gender role perception.

4.2 Strengths and Weaknesses of the study

A strength of the current study is that it is the first to research both male and female children’s perceptions of gender roles in relation to the portrayals of gender roles in a traditional and non-traditional Disney film. Another strength of the study is its use of a mixed methods design which can be used to increase the generalisability of the results. The design also allowed the aspect of the drawings to give insight into aspects that might have been missed if only a single method was used. A final strength was that the project was completed in the time necessary and it was successful because the films were easily accessible.

The first limitation of the study is the sample size. Participants were taken from two different primary school classes and the total number (N=51) may be considered small and would not be accurately reflective of their age population. The gender imbalance of the overall sample with more females (N=36) than males (N=15) may have impacted the
findings. As well as that, the control group being made up of all females might have had an effect on the results as they took instructions better.

A weakness of the study was deviant results acquired in the chi square analysis for the effect of age on children's perception of gender roles in their drawings. The results obtained were abnormal with a result of fourteen cells with an expected count of less than five. This result was a consequence of the majority of participants scoring similarly in the drawing scores coded and also with the many categories in the rating system. This can be amended in future research by formulating a new rating system for each category in the drawings.

In the light of the limitations presented in this study, a larger research project would be required to validate the findings attained in this study. Future research should aim to contain equal gender in each groups in order to measure the effectiveness of the CSRI. Conducting the present study served to pinpoint the areas for assessment in future research. From the findings, there is evidence of changing gender perceptions in children since the earliest research into this area was carried out.

4.3 Recommendations

This present study identified different factors that influence children’s perceptions of gender roles. Further study in relation to the impact of a child’s environment on gender role perception is crucial as current literature suggests strength for this assumption. There is very little research done on the effect of children’s age and the present study found a significant difference in children’s ages and their perception of gender roles from the drawings. It would be worth investigating the effect of age on how a child perceives a certain gender.

Future research can explore the origins and the consequences of individual children’s attitudes towards gender bias rather than simply their knowledge of gender stereotypes.
Future researchers should reassess the statements from both the BSRI and CSRI to ensure that they fit best with the changing gender perceptions of society. It would be interesting to further study gender role perceptions of children in relation to the Disney films that focus solely on the Princes rather than the princesses.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study can provide information that may help to provide insight into the effect of constant exposure to stereotypical behaviours. The significant findings in the difference between the groups who viewed different Disney films displayed evidence of the pervasiveness of Disney films and its potential for negative and positive outcomes of gender role perceptions. General limitations to this study include sample size, incorrect wording and uneven gender representations. However, there are many positives to be taken from this study as it shows that not only Disney films can have an effect on a child’s gender role perception. This study highlights the importance of a child’s environment and family on their gender role perceptions. As children are exposed to gender stereotypes on a daily basis, even when they are in the classroom, it is even more important to understand what types of media they are being exposed to and the content displayed in that media. Future research should continue to assess how gender role advancements in Disney films and the society can influence the development of children’s gender role perceptions.
References


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueOqYebVhtc


**Appendix A**

*Consent letter*

Dear Sir/Madam,

Your children have being invited to participate in a research study on children’s perceptions of gender roles as portrayed in Disney films. I am interested in whether the films children view can influence their perceptions of gender roles. This study will be supervised by a member of the Department of Psychology in Dublin Business School.
The purpose of the study is to understand how children perceive gender roles from the portrayals that they view. The study will take about 45 minutes of your time. The children will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire, watch some Disney film clips and then play with some toys. An example of a question on the questionnaire is: It's easy for me to make up my mind about things.

There are no specific risks related to this research. By allowing your child to participate in this research, you are helping us better understand how children’s perceptions are formed by the things that they view. The information gathered in this will be used to inform researchers on how children form perceptions about gender roles. Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity.

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary; you are free to withdraw your child at any time. If you require any more information about this study, or would like to speak to one of the researchers, please call (0XX XXXXX) or contact my research supervisor Dr. Patricia Frazer (XXXX@XXXX).

I have read and understand this information and consent for my child to participate fully in the study under the conditions stated above.

Signed: ___________________________
Date: ___________________________

**Appendix B**

**Information Sheet for Participants**

**Introduction**

You are invited to take part in this research study to Children’s perception of gender roles as portrayed in Disney films.
Before you decide whether to take part, it is important that you understand what the research is for and what your children will be asked to do. Please take time to read this information and discuss it with others if you wish.

About the study

The purpose of the current study is to examine both male and female children’s perception of gender roles as portrayed in Disney films as well as to understand how portrayals of gender roles in Disney films changed over time.

We are inviting your children to take part in a study which will last approximately 45 minutes. During this time your children will be asked to fill out a short questionnaire, watch some Disney film clips and then draw some pictures.

If you choose to let your child take part in the interview, the school will pick a suitable time, date and location for the study and I will travel to meet you.

Benefits & Risks

We hope that the results of this study will be used to form an undergraduate degree research project. We do not anticipate any specific risks.

Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary; if you agree to participate you are free to withdraw from the study without having to give any explanation.
Confidentiality

No material which could personally identify you will be used in any reports on this study. Any identifiable information will be removed from the transcripts so all data will be anonymised. Information will be stored securely on password protected computers in the Department of Psychology in Dublin Business School. Only members of the research team named on form will have access to the data.

Results

The information gathered from this study will be used to help the researcher understand how children’s perceptions can be shaped by the things that they view.

General Information

More information about the study can be obtained from me. Your children do not have to answer all the questions asked on the questionnaire and they may stop the study at any time.

Appendix C

Children’s sex role Inventory
Are you a: Boy OR Girl ☐
How old are you? 9 ☐ 10 ☐ 11 ☐

Circle ONE according to “how true of you” each item was on the following 4-point scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all true of me</th>
<th>A Little true of me</th>
<th>Mostly true of me</th>
<th>Very true of me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I can control a lot of the kids in my class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I care about what happens to others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I never know what I’m going to do from one minute to the next</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. When a decision has to be made, it’s easy for me to take a stand</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am a warm person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I always do what I say I will do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am a leader among my friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I am a kind and caring person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I feel bad when other people have something that I don’t have.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. When I play games, I really like to win</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. When someone’s feelings have been hurt, I try to make them feel better</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. I like acting in front of other people 1 2 3 4
13. I am sure of my abilities 1 2 3 4
14. I like babies and small children a lot 1 2 3 4
15. I am a moody person 1 2 3 4
16. I stand up for what I believe in 1 2 3 4
17. I am a gentle person 1 2 3 4
18. I am always losing things 1 2 3 4
19. I am good at sports 1 2 3 4
20. I am a cheerful person 1 2 3 4
21. It’s easy for me to fit into new places 1 2 3 4
22. It’s easy for me to tell people what I think, even when I know they will probably disagree with me 1 2 3 4
23. When I like someone, I do nice things for them to show them how I feel 1 2 3 4
24. I have many friends 1 2 3 4
25. I make a strong impression on most people I meet 1 2 3 4
26. I like to do things that girls and women do 1 2 3 4
27. People like me

28. I am good at taking charge of things

29. It makes me feel bad when someone else is feeling bad

30. I like to do things that other people do

Appendix D

Debrief Sheet

In this research, I wanted to find out the different ways that children view what a man and a woman should do. I wanted to find out what type of jobs you think they should have and how you think they should behave. I also wanted to see if the Disney clips you watched changed the way you thought a man or a woman should act.

So, in this experiment, you watched some Disney film clips then you were asked to fill a questionnaire which measured how you understood the different ways a boy or a girl can act. After this you were asked to draw what jobs you believe a man and a woman should have.

This research was designed to increase psychologists understanding of the different elements that affect the way children view and accept things.

The only people who will have access to the data that was collected today are myself and my supervisor. All the data will be kept in a secure area and on a password protected computer. Random codes will be used to type up your answers on the questionnaire. Your answers and drawings will remain anonymous in the research paper.

Thank you for taking part in the study. If you have any questions, you can ask me now or ask your principal to e-mail them to me.
Appendix E

Drawing Sheet

Are you a:  Boy  OR  Girl

How old are you?  9  10  11

What type of jobs do men and women have? Please draw a picture of what you think a man or a woman should do.
Appendix F

*Drawing of a fireman and a Queen drawn by a girl aged 11 in the experimental group.*
Appendix G

*Drawing by two girls in the control group aged 9 depicts a business woman and a president.*
Appendix H

*Writing on drawing sheet by girl (9) and boy (9) in the experimental group*