Disney's Fairy Tale Love: The Heterosexual Construction

By Alyssa Demorotski

Growing up in our society, a girl dreams of finding her one true love. This concept is posted on the social networks and other social medias. One example of learning what to look for in a guy is through the media. Girls grow up watching Disney films about fairytales with the hidden message of heterosexual romance. Is this really the normalcy of girls? Heterosexuality being natural has been drilled into people's heads ever since they were young. The thing is, what is heterosexuality? Heterosexuality is not as normal as one would think. In Steven Seidman's book, *The Social Construction of Sexuality*, he references Adrienne Rich, the author of "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," who argues that heterosexuality is nothing, but a construction which is controlled by society (21). How can this be true? With heterosexuality being a social construct, the concept of heterosexual imaginary is more of the term for this understanding. People start to imagine situations and terms in their mind, then they start to believe those imaginations are true, whether or not they are true to begin with.

The first article I read was Carrie Cokely's "'Someday My Prince Will Come': Disney, The Heterosexual Imaginary, and Animated Films." The author investigates more of how the industry of Disney targeted audience is heterosexual families. Most families are able to experience the "Disney magic" through their television sets and/or movie theaters. She explains how heterosexuality is incorporated into the movies. This heterosexuality is considered to be normal a man and a woman whether being human or nonhuman fall for each other then later on get married and hopefully raise a family. The author uses the common princess and prince stories, since young girls are intrigued by these stories. The fairytale stories she ties into her research are *Cinderella* (1950), *Snow White* (1937), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *Pocahontas* (1996), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *Aladdin* (1992). These films help to see how the ideal heterosexual romances have been affected through the decades. She also uses the terms gender, racism, and class, which play a big part in the heterosexual culture for romance.

When Seidman cites Cokely in his writing within the text of *The Social Construction of Reality*, he proves the idea of how heterosexuality seems more like a social construction versus this

concept being normal to the human population, mostly towards the United States population. The idea is how girls become involved in heterosexuality at an early age. This idea comes from girls playing with Barbie and Ken while watching the Disney movies such as *Snow White*, *Cinderella*, and *The Little Mermaid*. This article by Cokely was a good one to incorporate into his writing about normal heterosexuality. The in depth message from Cokely I believe is the same from Seidman. Heterosexuality is constructed when the children are younger. Girls are influenced more since there are movies that reflect on romance between a man and a woman. For example, the examination of the songs sung by the Disney princesses helps girls to know there is a guy out there for her even if she has to wait for him (Cokely, 170-171). Let's just face the music; what girl does not like to sing-a-long to a song a popular song. Singing-a-long to a Disney song makes the experience more important for the girls. The girls do not realize that the song makes is socially constructed to make them want a guy. This is the start to the construction while other media later on the girls' life influences them more toward heterosexuality being the chosen path toward adulthood. Waiting is the crucial part of heterosexual romance. For example, Cokely points out that the songs imply they will wait for their "princes," thus time has past and the guy stumbles upon the "princesses" such as in Sleeping Beauty where Prince Philip follows Aurora's singing (172). After waiting for the day to meet her prince, the princess falls head over heels. This signals the girls that they will fall in love with a guy then presume to marry him when she is of age. When girls are older they want to find their true love then create their family; this is all a construction of heterosexuality is natural for our society.

The second article I read was "The Heterosexual Imaginary: Feminist Sociology and Theories of Gender" by Chrys Ingraham, who is the author of a famous book called *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*. She argues how heterosexuality is not normal for our population; this concept has been influenced socially by in fact our society. The author uses term "imaginary" to signify how heterosexuality is constructed. Thus, the new term heterosexual imaginary, which means "a way of thinking that conceals the operation of heterosexuality in structuring gender (across race, class, and sexuality) and closes off any critical analysis of heterosexuality as an organizing institution," comes into play for Ingraham (Cokely, 168). She explains how feminism helps to reveal how heterosexuality is kept alive to conceal other sexualities while disregarding them as deviant. Along with heterosexuality being socially constructed, feminism even helps to enlighten how gender

is considered as socially constructed within our society. A person cannot think about one without the other.

When Cokely cites Ingraham within her work on Disney's princess films, she provides an explanation of how heterosexuality is socially constructed using imagery from the Disney films itself. She uses the imagery as examples of how heterosexuality is constructed at an early age for people. The idea, which is being presented, is how heterosexuality stays afloat along the surface within our society. Thus the concept is deemed natural for relationships to blossom among the population. I believe this article was another good one to include in her work with the construction of heterosexuality. The idea of heterosexuality all ties into the works of Seidman and Cokely as well as the idea of heterosexual imaginary. People assume that heterosexuality does not separate from other concepts of gender, class, and race. They may be socially constructed by they can indeed be separated. For example, one must separate the notions of gender and sex to understand both of them within our society (Ingraham, 213-214). Growing up a person has learned that sex and gender seem similar, thus constructing the similarities between these two concepts. This dichotomy enables that heterosexuality is normal for the parties, male and female, or man and woman to engage in romance together. The thing is that the romance needs to be heterosexual, same race, only two people within the relationship and same social class or there will be some ridicule amongst the people involved. This is demonstrates how the heterosexual imaginary is important within our society. Another example of how heterosexual imaginary is formed by asking people how they instinctively knew how to become a man or a woman (Ingraham, 216). Normally children will learn it from the parents; the fathers will teach the boys how to be masculine while the mothers will teach the girls how to be feminine. Also, the media helps the children to know how to behave and act within their sex, thus making the gender be connected to the sex of those children. Disney films as discussed above are key examples of the media's influence. On the other hand, there are some occurrences that parents do not teach their children to be one or the other. These parents let their children do what they want while being instructed to do the learning for a specific character trait.

Carrie Cokely's article made me realize that I need to look deeper within the context of every thing I read and watch when it comes to the media. Society plays a big part when it comes to what you should be doing, saying, and paying attention to certain aspects of life. The media is a reflection of society; it is

even controlled by society. One idea I have learned was that I have watched *Pocahontas* about ten times thus far; I would never have realized that her and John Smith were never to get married because of their racial statuses. I thought they were not going to get married because he left to go back to England for business. John Smith leaving Pocahontas, of course, reflected society's views on interracial couples. Another concept I have learned that the Disney films show how the times have changed for sexuality and relationships. The movie *Pocahontas* showed a lackey who would be defined as gay, but not clearly stating he was or was not. On the other hand, the older films such as *Sleeping Beauty* the prince follows the voice of Aurora then proceeds to dance with her. Thus, making known this is a heterosexual couple falling in love seems the norm, which we have talked about in class.

In Chrys Ingraham's article, I have come to realize that just gender and sex needs to be separated from each other. These concepts are socially put together, thus making them seem they belong together as well. They help to realize how not to imagine heterosexual is the normality, thus to open our minds of sexuality. Believing that both of them go together is formed by the idea of heterosexual imaginary. This concept made me aware that I should not believe every thing I hear, read, or watch; this ties into what is discussed above about Cokely's article. I used both of these articles since they went together so well. Now these articles have helped me to understand that heterosexuality is not natural; the idea is constructed by society. I have opened my eyes more toward other sexualities before, even my own. I have come to understand myself. Heterosexuality even makes known that the tales we have grown up to read and watch were fairytales, not real life circumstances.

Within the past few years, Disney has started to show how girls do not need a guy to be happy or obtain love from them. The newest movie by Disney is called *Frozen* where sisterly love is demonstrated to break the icy spell (2013). Although there were guys within the movie, these two girls were the lead roles, which demonstrated that girls are able to rule a country. This movie would be an example of how the times are changing. Thus, presenting that heterosexuality is a social construction. Should girls really wait for our "prince" to appear? Do girls really have to kiss "frogs" before finding our "prince" or should we teach our little girls that they could be their own self without having to depend on a male? I definitely say we need to teach girls to not have to feel the need to depend on a guy's love, therefore being continuously swept away in a patriarchal society. We have come so far within our society;

hence all we need to do is keep moving forward to loose sight of such social constructions. The above explained above is absolutely the continuation of a revolution we have been fighting for the last few decades. We must continue this fight!

Works Cited

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