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Passively Ever After : Disney's Cinematic Abuse in Beauty and the Beast



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Abstract

This thesis examines the manner in which Disney's Beauty and the Beast cultivates stereotypes and gendered behaviors consistent with domestic violence and thereby encourages viewers to accept and tolerate abuse against women. Chapter 1 includes a literature review highlighting gender themes and the film's influence on children. I argue that due to the dangerous, constricting, and sexist gender roles encouraged by the Walt Disney Corporation, films like Beauty and the Beast prime young girls and boys to react to social situations and encounters in a way that mirror the characters' reactions. Because of the films' entertainment value, most of the characters' inappropriate, stereotypical, and often violent behaviors either go unnoticed or are passively accepted. The violence does not have to be blatant nor physical to have a detrimental effect. Passive and indirect acts of violence, such as bullying, ostracism, and criticism, pave the way for physical violence (Muscio, 2010). Therefore, a central argument of this thesis is that our culture desperately needs to broaden the way we conceptualize violence. The chapters that follow provide a unique feminist critical analysis that draws upon domestic violence literature to argue that Beauty and the Beast is an example of cinematic abuse. I propose that cinematic abuse occurs when viewers accept the dominant readings encouraged by films like Beauty and the Beast and are thereby coerced into entering into metaphoric domestic violence relationships with Disney. As I dissect the themes and scenes within the film, Walker's (1979) book, *The Battered Woman*, is used to support the argument that cinematic abuse victims (viewers) and abusers (the film) mirror the behaviors and reactions of actual domestic violence victims and abusers.

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