Gender, Dress, Society: Movie Character

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Abstract

This paper will discuss the purpose and the importance of dress for the character Cinderella in the movie “Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Cinderella”. The movie conveys the story about a young girl named Cinderella, who was played by Brandy Norwood, and how her life changed drastically when her father died. She was forced to live with her mean step mother and step sisters and become their servant. Watching the movie, you can see that her surroundings and lifestyle effects the way she dresses. For example, in the beginning of the movie she dressed in rags because she was a servant for her step mother and step sisters and at the end of movie she was in a beautiful white wedding dress for her wedding. The way she dressed throughout the movie made it easy to interpret and to understand Cinderella’s circumstances and lifestyle.

Keywords: Dress, lifestyle, step sister, step mother, Cinderella

One will discuss the character Cinderella’s overall dress in the movie called “Rodgers and Hammerstein Cinderella”. The movie illustrates how Cinderella, who is poor and lives with her ill-mannered step mother and two steps sisters, ends up meeting her prince charming with the help of her fairy Godmother. (Iscove, Hammerstein, & & Freedman, "Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella", 1997) Cinderella has been a part of our lives for many decades and a lot of movies today use her story line to convey an urban version of how someone can have nothing in life is still and be capable of succeeding through hard work and dedication. Brandy, who is an African American R&B singer, played the role of Cinderella in the movie and she is well known for wearing her hair in box braids. The social perception for princesses are women who have straight hair and are Caucasian. “The social perception is a general term and includes several specific processes: categorization, impression formation, impression management, stereotyping, and prejudice.” (Lennon, Johnson, & Rudd, 2017, p. 68) This movie changed the perception of that cultural ideal by having a black girl with box braids play the role of Cinderella. In the beginning of the movie she was in a scenic village carrying boxes for her step mom and step sisters. She was wearing a brown, cardigan with a light brown polo draped dress with brown shoes. Cinderella step mom and steps sisters are very selfish and mean, therefore they only spend money on themselves and they treat Cinderella like a slave. That it is why she is dressed in rags and in dull brown colors and everyone else in the village is dressed in vibrant and bright colors. The costume designer made her costume look less eye catching from everyone else in the village.

As the movie continues, the Prince’s parents are forcing him to have a ball, so he can find his princess and get married. He decided to have the ball so that he can make his parents happy. Cinderella’s step mom and steps sisters went to the ball and locked Cinderella in her room to prevent her from going and meeting the prince. In this scene, Cinderella was in her room/ kitchen wearing a few body modifications. Body modification is defined as a change made directly to the body itself, either temporary or permanent. Cinderella was in an apron, and a brown head scarf, along with the same outfit that she wore in the village except she wasn’t wearing the brown cardigan. She was singing about her not being able to go to the ball and she was imagining herself at the ball in a beautiful dress dancing with the Prince. (Lennon, Johnson, & Rudd, 2017, p. 2) Moments later, her fairy Godmother arrived and told her that she needed to go to the ball to meet the Prince, but she was afraid that he may not like her for herself because she’s WAS servant. (Iscove, Hammerstein, & & Freedman, "Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella", 1997) This shows how the implicit personality theory is used in this scene because Cinderella thinks that the Prince wouldn’t consider her worthy enough to be his princess because of her characteristic and lifestyle. “According to the implicit personality theory our impressions of people consist of specific traits and additional traits that we anticipate the person will have.” (Lennon, Johnson, & Rudd, 2017, p. 102) Her God mother made a magical spell for her to wear a beautiful light blue dress. The top of the dress had little rhinestones on it and it was off the shoulders. The bottom of the dress was made from tulle fabric which gave it a nice puffy and elegant look. She also wore light blue gloves to match the color of her dress. From the head down, she had her hair up with little curls coming down on the sides, and she was wearing a tiara on her head, with a diamond necklace. She also wore glass shoes to compliment the garment. Her makeup matched her dress as well. The makeup artist used blue eyeshadow and a neutral lipstick for her lips. In this scene she was on her way to the ball riding in a pumpkin carriage with white horses.

Towards the end of the movie the Prince was looking for her around the village and he made every woman try on the glass slipper that she wore to the ball to find her. When he finally found her, he saw that the shoe was a perfect match to her foot and they kissed. (Iscove, Hammerstein, & & Freedman, "Rodgers and Hammerstein's Cinderella", 1997) The movie then fast-forwards to their wedding day. She was wearing an all-white dress that was looked similar to the dress that she wore to the ball, it was off the shoulders as well and puffy at the bottom. From her head to her neck, she used body supplements for her wedding day. “Body supplements are additions of items to the body, such as jewelry, clothing, and accessories.” (Lennon, Johnson, & Rudd, 2017, p. 3). She had her hair up in a bun that wasn’t too big and she had on a tiara with a veil, to match her dress and the tiara was made out of diamonds and she wore a pearl/diamond necklace with small diamond earrings. She wore white gloves to match her garment and she wore the same glass shoes that she wore to the ball. Her makeup way very soft and subtle, as she didn’t have too much eyeshadow on her eyelids, and she had on a nice natural lip gloss.

This movie portrayed Cinderella in a different way by using an African American actress with box braids to play the role. Box braids is a popular hairstyle in the black community and it has been around for centuries. It was good that they didn’t take that away from her character because it gave younger black girls a role model to envy and admire. (Dirshe,2018) Her overall dress helped the audience to capture her personality and life in each scene of the movie. In the beginning of the movie she wore a tan polo draped dress that looks like an 1800’s housekeeping uniform to convey that she was less fortunate and that she was a servant. Towards the middle of the movie when everyone was preparing themselves to go to the ball, she was in her room sad that she wasn’t attending. Then her fairy God mother came and helped her get dressed with a magical spell, which made her look very nice for the ball in an elegant light blue dress. And at the end of the movie when she was getting married to the Prince she was wearing white, which gave the audience the idea that she was getting married. The classic color for a bride to wear on her wedding day is white. Based on the different events that occur in this movie the costume director dressed Cinderella accordingly for these events. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Cinderella is a very moving and innovative movie and it captures a classical Cinderella in a unique way for everyone to enjoy.

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