

Pocahontas Film Analysis

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Abstract

Films, whether animated or not, are known to have observations of social behavior. These observations can be subliminal or seen, along with being positive or negative signs of different social behaviors. Disney/Pixar is a popular corporation that shows many different forms of social behavior in their films, many being positive and negatives behaviors in each film. This can be seen in newer films along with older ones. The movie being discussed in this paper will be Pocohontas, which is a great film to see different social behaviors due to different cultures interacting in the film. The social behaviors seen in this film are both positive and negative, mostly negative until the problem is solved. The social behavior that will be discussed in this paper from the films are the following: Social Influence, Discrimination/Prejudice, and Aggression. Although two out of three of these behaviors are negative, there are solutions seen in the film that help each group come together and find harmony within each other.

Pocohontas Film Analysis

Pocohontas is a Disney film that was released in 1995. The film follows the story of Pocohontas, a Native American princess who meets John White, an Englishman who came to explore the New World. The two find friendship/romance in one another as they discuss their different cultures, Pocohontas' being more nature-oriented and John Whites' being more civilized-oriented (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995). Even if they are from different backgrounds and cultures, they showed that people from different cultures can learn from one another and live together in harmony.

Although they showed us this, there were definitely some roadblocks along the way. The reason why the English and John White came to the new world was to find resources such as gold as well as make new towns (such as Jamestown in the movie). Govenor Radcliffe, the main antagonist of the movie clearly shows that he was there for personal gain (Gold), and did not care for the Natives. He and the other Englishmen called the Natives "savages" and with the persuasion of Radcliffe, he got the others to start fighting with the Natives. The fighting caused more harm than good: the death of Kocoum, A Native tribe Warrior, along with John White being shot by the end of the film (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995).

Overall, the main point of the movie is that two groups who are different can learn from one another and live together. There is no need for violence just because two groups are different. Although the movie may not be historically accurate, it is accurate with different social behaviors. The behaviors that were shown in the movie are behaviors that we can still observe in today's world. The main three social behaviors that were shown in the film are the following: Social influence, discrimination and prejudices, along with aggression. Although these can be

considered negative social behaviors, the film shows us ways to counter the negatives and find common ground between two different cultures.

The first social behavior we see in the film and the one that is mostly shown is social influence. In its simplest form, social influence refers to the impact we and others have on the beliefs, feelings, and behaviors of others around us (Shields, 2025). This influence could be through actions, words, or even someone's presence. During the entire film, we see social influence working, mainly through actions of conformity, compliance, and obedience.

Conformity is “changing one’s behavior or beliefs due to pressure from others” (Shields, 2023). This can be both positive and negative, as it can cause people to help others or create biases and prejudices. In the film, we see this many times with both the Natives and Englishmen. Governor Radcliffe kept telling the others that the Natives were “savages” and were hiding the gold they were searching for, while the tribal chiefs of the Natives said that the Englishmen were here to harm not just them, but the land too. This led both groups to conform, comply, and remain obedient to their leaders, keeping them in power and causing harm and damage to the other group.

Power is also a major play with social influence. The more power someone has, the more influence they will have on others. Zhang and Ji (2015) discuss that power is different from culture to culture, meaning some cultures believe that power is considered a duty or obligation while others believe that it is obtained through work and money. We can see this in the film as Governor Radcliffe persuaded the others to follow his rules, even threatening to put anyone who did not listen on trial and even hanged due to it. This fear factor shows how much power Radcliffe has on his crew, even if said crew starts to notice the wrongs of Radcliffe after this (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995).

Although most of the group members stayed with their groups, we also see a few breakings of obedience and compliance as well. We see this mostly with Pocahontas and John White, sneaking away from their settlement/tribe to meet up with each other and learn more about each other's culture. When their people found out about this, we see Pocahontas become defiant of this due to knowing that was what she was supposed to do, while John White still had to sneakily see Pocohontas to warn her about Radcliffe due to being afraid of being trialed and hanged.

Another social behavior that is shown in the film is prejudice and discrimination. This is a big problem in the film, not with the Englishmen but with the Natives too. We see this the most in the film when the Englishmen stereotype the Natives as “savages” and consider them to be below them, even though they are also human. The Natives also have stereotypes of the Englishmen, believing they were going to hurt the women and children of their tribe, along with taking over their land in their pursuit of Gold. We also see this with John White as well when he first met Pocohontas, accidentally calling her a savage in front of her and called her people “uncivilized” (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995).

In the film, we can see that these prejudices towards each other were due to the other group being different, and specifically Governor Radcliffe believing that the Natives were hiding Gold from them. We can see this as the economic perspective. This means that groups are prejudiced over each other due to competition over scarce resources, this being gold in the film. This is also known as realistic group conflict theory, showing that survival can influence social behavior depending on how readily available resources are to them.

The final social behavior that will be discussed in the film is aggression. There are different forms of aggression, such as hostile and instrumental aggression. Hostile Aggression is

a more impulsive form of aggression that is driven by anger, while instrumental aggression is a more thought-out form of aggression due to it being a pursuit of another goal (Anderson & Bushman, 2002). We can see Governor Radcliffe use instrumental aggression due to believing the Natives were hiding gold and wanted the gold all for himself. Due to the Englishmen attacking the Natives first, the Natives retaliated back, causing more damage than good. Due to not reconciling and having these prejudices against one another beforehand, this led to the death of Kochoum who was a Native American warrior, along with John White being shot.

Unfortunately, aggression and prejudice towards different ethnic groups still occur today. This has always been an issue in not just the U.S, but in the world itself. Although the relationship between Native Americans and Whites has gotten better, there is still room to be improved. Findling and others (2019) conducted a research analysis on when Native Americans and White Americans felt discrimination in different domains such as healthcare, courts and interactions with the law. They concluded that native Americans reported more experiences of discrimination in healthcare, along with experiences of aggression/violence with police officers.

At the end of the movie each group reconciles with one another, with Governor Radcliffe sailing back to England to be trialed for the wronging he had committed during his time in the new world (Gabriel & Goldberg, 1995). John White is also forced to go back to England due to his gunshot wound he experienced during the climax of the conflict. Pocohontas stays with her tribe, waiting for John White to journey back to the new world.

The social behaviors that we saw in not just this film, but many other films are still seen today. These behaviors, whether positive or negative, should be a learning stone on how to handle certain situations and holding biases over people you have never met can cause harm to

relationships you could have with them. It's better to treat everyone equally and with respect so you can learn more than you would if you didn't.

References

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