

The Effects of Disney Princess Movies on Girls



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Introduction

Personally, before this project, I thought that the Disney princesses were foolish. People have been watching Disney movies for nearly 100 years and through the course of this project I realized that they are actually really foolish and my beliefs were affirmed. Since the Walt Disney company started in 1923 (Gillies), its movies have become very widespread and pervasive. My question is, have Disney princess movies affected girls? In this essay I will show that watching princess movies affects girls' independence and body image. I will first give a background of Disney and their princesses, then show how the princess films might affect girls and then describe how to evaluate them.

Background

The first princess movie the Walt Disney company produced was Snow White, in 1937. It was the first animated feature film to come out of the U.S. (Disney). Next came Cinderella, in 1950. Then Sleeping Beauty in 1959. Thirty years later in 1989 The Little Mermaid came out. Then in 1991 Beauty and the Beast. The very next year in 1992 Aladdin came to theaters. Then Pocahontas, in 1995. But this was not the last one, more and more princess movies are produced by Disney every few years.

Snow White is about a girl who runs away from an evil queen because the queen wants to kill Snow White. When she meets 12 dwarfs she is happy to cook and take care of them. Then a prince comes and saves her.

Cinderella is about a girl that has no independence. She is pushed around by her stepmother. Cinderella is just like a slave for her stepmother. She sneaks off to a ball and a prince falls in love with her. They live happily ever after.

Sleeping Beauty is about a girl named Aurora. She is cursed by an evil witch, Maleficent, so that she will die when she turns 16 by pricking her finger on a spinning wheel. So she is sent away to live in the woods, away from Maleficent. She accidentally meets a prince and falls in love. Maleficent tricks Aurora to do the curse but instead she falls into an eternal sleep. The prince kills the witch and kisses Aurora to wake her up from her curse. They get married.

The Little Mermaid is about a mermaid named Ariel who wants to be human. She falls in love with a human prince. So she gets turned into a human by Ursula, an evil sea witch. But Ursula takes Ariel's voice and puts it in a seashell. Ariel becomes human and meets the prince, they almost kiss. So Ursula turns herself into a beautiful girl and makes the prince fall in love with her. But Ariel stops her and gets her voice back. But she turns into a mermaid again. The prince kills Ursula with a boat. Ariel and the prince say good bye. But Ariel's dad sees them so happy and turns Ariel into a human so she will be happy. They live happily ever after.

Beauty and the Beast is about a girl named Belle. She is pushed around by various men in the film. She gets captured by the Beast. The only way he could become human again is if he found true love. Belle gets to know the Beast and falls in love. Gaston (an evil man that wants to marry Belle) and his gang go to kill the Beast. But Belle runs and gets there first. Gaston is about to kill him when Belle

kisses the Beast and he turns back into a human.

The movie Aladdin is about a princess named Jasmine in the Middle East. Her father wants her to marry but she doesn't want to. Jasmine and Aladdin meet. Jafar (the king's evil advisor) wants to become the ruler; so he arrests Aladdin and he is sent to the dungeon. Aladdin gets a magic lamp and rubs it, the genie comes out and asks for three wishes. Aladdin wishes to come out of the mess and he also wishes to be a prince (he thinks that Jasmine will marry him if he's a prince.) Jafar brainwashes the king and prince Ali (aka Aladdin) meets the king and he likes Ali. Jasmine and Ali fall in love. Ali tells the king about Jafar. Then Ali and Jasmine plan to wed. But Jafar comes up with an evil plan, but the plan backfires and he turns into a genie. Jasmine's father, realizing that Jasmine is happy, says that she can marry whoever she wants.

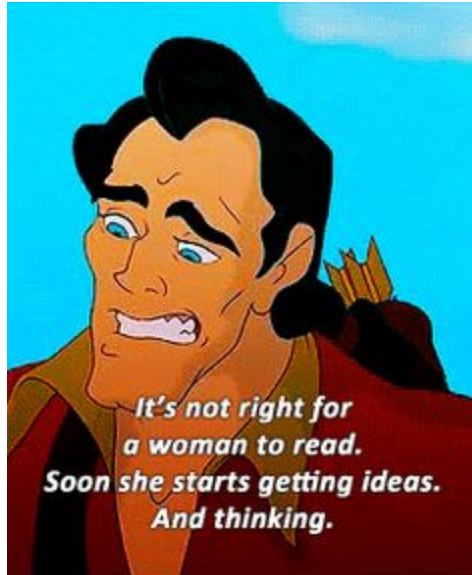
Pocahontas is about a Native American girl who is the daughter of the chief and meets an Englishman named John Smith, they fall in love. But the Native Americans and settlers don't get along. John Smith is about to be executed when Pocahontas steps up and tells them all that they must make peace. But one Englishman doesn't think so and is about to shoot the chief when John Smith steps in the way and gets shot. He has to go back to England because they don't know how to treat his wound. The settlers go back to England and the Native Americans get left alone. One of the many problems with this movie is that it is also teaching kids that the settlers made peace with the Natives and left them alone.

Effects on girls

Some similarities among the Disney princesses are that most Disney princesses are born into power rather than attempting to achieve power themselves (Disney's Influence On Girls). Also the princesses think they need to be saved by a man to be happy and therefore, never stand up for themselves. Like how in Tangled, Rapunzel is unhappy and never goes out of her tower, until "her man" comes to save her. It is not only in Tangled but in all of the Disney movies. It is just very prominent in Tangled.

Most princesses have an evil step mother that they need to vanquish. (Disney and Gender) Tangled, Cinderella and Aurora are some. This could make girls think that something terrible has to happen-like their mother dying- before anything "good" happens in their life.

According to Peggy Orenstein in her book called Cinderella ate my Daughter on page 23, "princesses avoid female bonding. Their goals are to be saved by a prince, get married" and "Their values derive largely from their appearance." A good example of this is Ariel, she gives up everything for a man because she thinks she needs one. This could make girls focus on love and how they look, and forget that their own intelligence matters too.

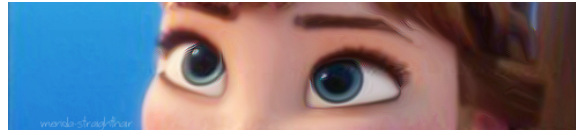
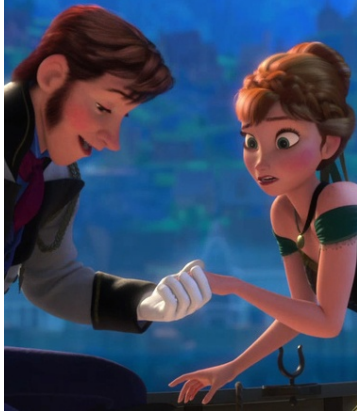


(This is Gaston from Beauty and the Beast who doesn't believe in a woman's intelligence)

Disney movies are communicating four main qualities about women that are not true and that all the Disney princesses have. The website [filmandmedia12](#) lists “(a) A woman's appearance is valued more than her intellect, (b) Women are helpless and in need of protection, (c) Women are domestic and are likely to marry and (d) Overweight women are ugly, unpleasant, and unmarried.” A good example of this is Ursula from The Little Mermaid. Ursula is a big evil half octopus woman that is alone. “The princesses are good singers, wealthy, and many of them seem to thoroughly enjoy household chores, such as cleaning. They have seemingly perfect lives and their beauty only helps them advance in life.” This may make girls believe that they need to be beautiful, need to be protected, married and/or wealthy.

The Disney princesses have lots of things in common such as, hair, perfect features, tiny waists, big eyes and a beautiful singing voices. Jasmine, Pocahontas and Rapunzel all have extremely long hair that is very unrealistic and never gets tangled. Even Rapunzel, who has hair so long she can use it as a rope. It is supposedly tangled and Rapunzel brushes her hair but it never really looks tangled. As for perfect features, all of the princesses have flawless skin. It's hard to tell if you're just skimming over a picture of them, but if you really look at all of them together, its just weirdly the same. Additionally, all of the princess have prominent hips but the ones that are really obvious are, Pocahontas (she has a hourglass figure), Jasmine and Ariel (Ariel has a **tiny** waist, so her hips look big). This could make girls feel like they have to look like that, to have perfect features, long hair, a small waist, amazing singing voice and/or big eyes. They think that they are not beautiful if they don't have all of the features of a Disney princess. This can also make girls go to unhealthy and extreme measures to be “beautiful” and just like the princesses, when they should just be happy about how they look and who they are.

The majority of the princesses have disproportionate eyes to their head size. This, and many other things are called gender dimorphism. Gender dimorphism is when some genders -in Disney it is mostly female- have disproportionate or out of proportion body sizes.



In the movie Frozen, it is very clear that Anna's eye is bigger than her wrist which is not true for a normal person. And also in the movie Brave, the hands of the king and queen are drastically different. This could emphasize that men are stronger and tougher than women because they are bigger and that women are frail and weak because they are small. It is hard to avoid gender dimorphism because it is not only apparent in Frozen but also in other films like Brave. Look at their hands!!

Lastly, all of the princesses have a beautiful singing voice. In all of

the Disney princess movies there always is a song that the princesses sing. A good example of this is in Tangled. Rapunzel sings about her dreams while her hair glows. She sings alone and with other people. I feel like the Disney Princess movies are screaming in my head "It is mandatory that all girls have these traits!" This is not true.

Independence

Most of the Disney princesses are princesses before they marry a man, and if they aren't a princess like Belle, Tiana and Cinderella then they marry a prince. In most of the Disney princess movies at least one person in the couple is a prince or princess before they get married. All of the princesses wait for a man instead of going and doing what they want for themselves. Almost all the princesses never stand up for themselves and/or wait for someone else (usually a man) to "save" them (Disney &

Gender). They seem to always rely on a man's protection instead of themselves. This happens not only in the princess movies but in others too. In the Lion King, when Simba runs away Nala and the other lionesses can not protect themselves from Scar and must wait for years until Simba returns to save them (Women, Race & Culture in Disney's Movies). This might affect girls and make them think that a man is the one that stands up for themselves and that they can't.

In the princess movies, if the princess asks for someone's help and they're not a man (a woman or a thing) then they **always** use magic to get what they want. As much as I love magic, Disney seems to use magic so the princesses in the movie get her goal instead of using hard work and determination. An example of this is when the fairy god mother in Cinderella helps her out. This also gives the impression that women cannot help other women by using their own intelligence or strength and that they must have some outside source of power, such as a man.

Ways to evaluate gender representation in a movie: The Bechdel Test

The Bechdel Test is a simple three question test popularized by Alison Bechdel. Alison Bechdel is a cartoonist/feminist, she had the Bechdel Test in one of her comic strips. The questions are: are there two or more women that are named in the movie, do they talk to each other and do they talk about something other than a man (Ted Talks). According to <http://disney-blog.com>, surprisingly, more Disney princess movies pass the Bechdel test than fail it. Remember, the Bechdel test is the very bare minimum of femininity that you can have.

Common Sense

Another way to evaluate gender representation in a movie is common sense. When you watch a movie ask yourself the Bechdel Test questions, but don't stop there. Other good questions are, How are the appearances of the women portrayed? And, do the girls in the movie stand up for themselves and make their own decisions?

Since the beginning of Disney in 1923 it has released about a dozen of the princess movies. Watching Disney princess movies affects girls independence and body image. It affects if they make their own independent decisions and stand up for themselves, and also their self image. If girls start to watch the Disney princess movies at a young age it could affect them in the long run. It also could affect what girls think are most important, girls might start to think that beauty is everything and that they need someone else to always help them. Girls could try to make themselves thinner, resulting in eating disorders and hurting their body. From seeing Disney princesses with no faults in the movies, girls could have serious self esteem problems and think that they are not worthy of anything unless they are wealthy, have a husband, a thin waist and a "flawless" body.

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