

I. INTRODUCTION - Since the moment toddlers were able to sit still (and sometimes before that), they have been watching Disney films. Over time, new animation techniques have been employed, but the classics remain as favorites. Most famously, earlier Disney films are fairytales, recounting adventures of a prince and his journey to save the princess from danger. These films, favorites of both sexes, subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) show and teach boys and girls about what it means to be masculine and feminine, respectively.

THESIS- While some maintain that these films do not have negative effects and are meant solely to entertain, research shows that Disney princess movies influence both sexes by teaching them what it means to be masculine and feminine. But since children cannot discern entertainment from overt gender representations, Disney films are often a place where they learn what society expects when it comes to their sex and gender roles.

II. BODY- Quick history of early Disney films, each of the eight Disney-declared princess movies examined, general findings, anomalies, effects these films have/might have on children.

A. In order to effectively examine the Disney princess films, one must first understand some background history on Walt Disney himself and why he chose to create films that are most

often based around fairytales or fairytale like settings.

1. Disney's first films
2. *Snow White* and what sort of creative control

he had in that

3. Where his ideas for films generally came from
4. Possible reasons for film ideas

- a. Was it just about the money?

B. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, made in 1937, was the first princess film released by Disney and thus, has important information about general trends, ideals, beliefs and representations of princesses, princes and evil characters that continue to show up in the rest of the Disney princess films.

1. Princess Snow White

- a. Pale white skin, black hair, thin, attractive voice, gentle, caretaker of the seven dwarfs, pure/virtuous, kind to woodland creatures

2. Unnamed Prince

- a. Handsome, strong, rides a horse, carries a sword, his kiss has the power to wake the dead

3. The wicked Queen

- a. Afraid of Snow White's beauty, jealous, tries to kill her, a non-descript pale face with a frown, disguised as an older, ugly witch-like character, shows no positive qualities

4. Implications of representations for children

a. Femininity is represented as pure, passive/submissive, traditionally beautiful and caretaker (within the domestic sphere)

b. Masculinity is represented as traditionally handsome, strong, and protective of females

C. *Cinderella*, made in 1950, is almost identical in its representations of females as in *Snow White*, but in this film, the prince has a larger role.

1. Cinderella

a. Traditionally beautiful, thin, blonde, attractive voice, caretaker (of the house/domestic sphere), gentle, friend to farmland animals

2. Prince Charming

a. Traditionally handsome, strong, rich/wealthy, power status, decides on the woman he wants instead of his parents deciding, seeks out the woman who left her slipper

3. Wicked Stepmother/Ugly Stepsisters

a. An older woman, unattractive, gray hair, constantly sneering, powerful only because of what her husband left her when he died, essentially on a power trip

b. Stepsisters- buffoonish, brunette/red head, young and immature, constantly bickering, more like

children than Cinderella

4. Implications for children

a. Children understand femininity the same way they would with the representation of Snow White.

Furthermore, they understand that the femininity that Cinderella portrays is the *right* kind, in contrast to the other females presented in the film (a sort of "I'm not that, so I must be this" syndrome).

b. The names of the characters are loaded.

D. *Sleeping Beauty*, made in 1959, is one of the most passive representations of femininity in Disney princess films; not only can she not take care of herself, but it is once again left up to the man to save the day and her life.

1. Princess Aurora

a. Traditionally beautiful, thin, blonde, attractive voice, friend of woodland animals and good fairies

2. Prince Phillip

a. Traditionally handsome, rides a horse, carries a sword, strong, fights evil, his kiss awakens Aurora

3. Maleficent

a. Has horns, sorceress, transforms into dragon, in cahoots with evil animals, curses Aurora

4. This is the last Disney princess film released before Disney's death.

5. Implications for children

a. Aurora is incredibly passive and submissive, waiting for someone to come and take her away.

b. Masculinity is being able to physically fight and defeat a dragon.

E. *The Little Mermaid*, made in 1989, is the story of a young mermaid dissatisfied with her underwater life and decides to trade her voice for a chance to live on land with humans.

1. Ariel

a. Young red head, busty, attractive voice, curious about the world, wants to explore both the ocean and land

2. Prince Eric

a. Dark hair, blue eyes, tall, muscular, traditionally handsome, strong in his own right, defeats Ursula in the end (with the help of Ariel)

3. Ursula

a. Fat, octopus-like woman, older, gray/white hair, raspy voice, jealous of young Ariel, uses magic spells to get what she wants

4. Implications for children

a. Although this is the first time we see one of the Disney princesses start to stand up for herself (during the final fight), she is still saved by Eric in the end.

Even more disconcerting is that for most of the film Ariel is mute, as if to say, women really have no voice.

b. Ariel is wearing nothing but a bra while she is living underwater. Disney is sexualizing these princesses even in animation.

F. *Beauty and the Beast*, made in 1991, once again sees the princesses being slightly more active in their own destiny, but Belle is inevitably saved by the Beast.

1. Belle

- a. Traditionally beautiful, thin, attractive voice, intelligent, wants to travel the world, looks for adventure, caretaker of her father, friend to animated household/kitchen objects

2. The Beast/The Prince

- a. After getting to know the beast better, he is kind hearted, somewhat gentle, interested in Belle, strong, protective

3. Gaston

- a. Loud, obnoxious, egotistical, full of himself, very muscley, selfish, somewhat flamboyant, jealous, not very intelligent

4. Implications for children

- a. It is disturbing that while the female is expected to be traditionally beautiful, the prince character can

literally look like a beast but is still considered to be a catch.

b. Belle essentially drops her aspirations of traveling the world in order to live with the newly transformed Prince across the woods.

c. This is the first time we see direct mention to the princess's intelligence.

G. *Aladdin*, made in 1992, is the first time we see non-white characters, including the prince and princess, in a Disney film. Furthermore, it is the first time we see the female is actually a princess in her own rite, with power and status, whereas the male has to work for it.

1. Princess Jasmine

a. Beautiful in an exotic kind of way, thin, attractive voice, knows what she wants, witty, watches over her father, friend to large cats

2. Aladdin

a. Attractive in an exotic way, poor but resourceful, kind, friend to monkeys, wants to be powerful and respected

3. Jafar

a. Thin, creepy, older man, pseudo-gay, sorcerer, wants to marry Jasmine for the power and status

4. Implications for children

a. Being anything but white is not highly regarded. The film rarely expands on the different way of life in this foreign land.

b. No matter who you are or what your situation is, you can have power and status.

H. *Pocahontas*, made in 1995, is the second Disney princess film where we see a princess of color; it seems that as the princess/fairytale tradition continued, they wanted to "color" up the characters.

1. Pocahontas

a. Attractive in an exotic way, strong willed, attractive voice, knows what she wants, is one with mother nature, attracted to the unknown, friend of small woodland creatures

2. John Smith

a. Traditionally handsome, blonde hair, strong build, gentle, can fight with his hands, carries a gun

3. Governor John Ratcliffe

a. Fat, greedy, power hungry, searching for gold at any expense, pseudo-gay

4. Implications for children

a. Native Americans are friendly.

b. This is the first film where the prince/princess do not end up together at the end.

c. It seems that the hint of misogyny is too much for people that they had to separate the lovers by the end of the film.

I. *Mulan*, made in 1998, is the only Disney princess film that attempts to comment on the gender roles of men and women in society.

1. Mulan

a. Attractive in an exotic way, wants to help her family, strong willed, attractive voice, friend to insects

2. Captain Li Shang

a. Strong, good teacher, uses weapons with skill, gentle at points, unaccepting of Mulan being a female at first, obeys orders

3. Shan Yu

a. Large man, sneering smile, evil eyebrows, wants power and status

4. Implications for children

a. You have to be/look like a man if you want to gain respect and status.

b. Even after acknowledging that a woman can accomplish the same things that a man can, Mulan returns home to her life of domesticity. The "prince" follows her and they end up together.

J. Having examined multiple articles and papers on the effects of the Disney princess movies on children and their ideas of gender roles, femininity and masculinity, I will incorporate their findings into my paper to support my thesis that the Disney princess films are not solely entertainment and almost always have an underlying message.

1. How boys and girls are socialized into gender roles

a. Start with the basics and then draw comparisons to Disney films and the effects they could have on children

2. How Disney presents femininity/masculinity to children

a. The characters appearance, the character's mannerisms, the character's action/lack of action, speech, plot, how the film ends

b. The princesses are generally attractive (traditionally or exotically), with a good voice, a desire to be a caretaker (of others of the house) and are friendly with non-traditional people (fish, talking objects, animals, etc.)

c. The princes are traditionally handsome, strong and protective of females.

d. The evil characters are either older, unmarried women or older, gay-type men.

3. Gendered messages in media and literature

a. How they are sent and received

4. Disney gendered marriages

a. How women understand gender roles based
on Disney films

5. Are these portrayals unrealistic?

6. How do the portrayals relate to the time in
which the film was made? Have things changed much since then?
Are these ideas still pervasive in today's society?

III. CONCLUSION

A. Analytical Summary

1. Disney's history

2. The general findings of the eight Disney princess films
regarding femininity and masculinity

3. How these findings relate to gender roles and studies of
them

4. Answer the question- Are these films more than just
entertainment?

B. Thesis reworded

C. Concluding Statement