

The Three Eras of Disney Princesses and Their Impact on Children's Perceptions

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Abstract

Disney princess films have changed the role of princesses and their personalities throughout the franchise, and this change and representation of princesses have also impacted the perception and beliefs of many contemporary children. The Princess franchise is divided into three eras, each reflecting on the societal change regarding women's societal role. So, as these eras present different representations of women, children and young women who view these films can develop different gender stereotypes. Most studies resulted in negative conclusions from Disney princess films. This research's significance is to compare the women characters portrayed in each era to women in the real world in society during the similar periods, and how these presentations of women impact children's perceptions even for their future.

Introduction

The release of the film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) in 1937 "is one of the most discussed films in animation studies, and one of the most historically significant films of all time" (Frome, 2013). This film created a whole new genre in the film industry and was initially the biggest money-making film after its release date. According to the Guinness World record, it was released in the following dates, "1944, 1952,

1958, 1967, 1975, 1983, 1987 and 1993", and it took "\$184,925,486 at the US box office" (Guinness World Records), which was a huge amount of money during the time.

While making this film, Disney included many difficult film technologies such as multiplane cameras, creating a very realistic effect. Through the multiplane camera device, the wooded landscape in *Snow White* was made and achieved. The way the multiplane camera worked was with

“a high-rise structure that allowed a mounted camera” (Holliday & Pallant, 2021), which allowed it to film vertically even with a series of colorful backdrops. By looking into the production of Snow White, the construction of the background and the landscape from the film was possible through the combination of cel animation with the multiplane camera, later supporting “the studio’s drive towards a natural articulation of animation in three dimensions” (Holliday & Pallant, 2021).

Disney’s target audience does not only include children but also grown women who came of age watching these films. Disney’s market sells with the vision to inspire and help girls identify themselves with the characters and stories created. Disney Princess products such as dolls, games, and clothes are available for the more popular princesses and are all available for purchase in nearby stores, and in “almost every aspect of everyday life” (Heatwole, 2016). As mentioned, Disney’s “media production and merchandising is directed particularly at girls. Girls can wear authentic princess dresses..., dream of one day actually being married in Cinderella’s castle at Disneyworld” (Heatwole, 2016). Disney also contributed to other businesses by distributing princess dolls in McDonald’s Happy Meals or Disney princess-themed games on websites and gaming platforms. Disney has also been holding on to abundant power “through the construction and regulation of the nation’s media-cultural space” (Heatwole, 2016). Through this, Disney has ultimately created a media empire where

“Disney Princesses is now a franchise in and of itself, with new princesses being introduced to its canon with every film” (Heatwole, 2016).

Through marketing and media, Disney has become one of the most popular “sources of media involved in children’s everyday lives” (Dynes, 2021), as it is a constant entertainment that engages young girls to relate to characters. However, while many parents and adults can see Disney Princess films as a safe and appropriate source of entertainment, “it could result in children creating stereotypical views” (Dynes, 2021). Some individuals could argue that these films include representations of traditional female stereotypes, especially in the older films such, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty. Even “studies indicate that many young girls watch these movies repetitively and are influenced by the princesses” (Dynes, 2021). In addition, the girls who watch these movies are more likely to enjoy doing traditional activities, such as not challenging themselves to put effort into complicated tasks and comparing themselves to unrealistic body images. However, as gender roles evolve throughout generations, Disney has started to create more princess movies that portray female roles as independent from the stereotypical view. This leads to the ultimate research question for this paper which is, ‘What does the evolution of Disney princesses reveal about changing societal norms and expectations and how does it impact children’s perceptions regarding gender roles and femininity?’. This question covers the areas this

paper will be focusing on and will be explaining through secondary studies that help answer this question.

The Disney Princesses franchise has evolved through the years due to the change in women's societal expectations and rules from domesticity to independence, causing Princess traits to match the characteristics and personalities of women during that period. This evolution ultimately impacts the children's perception of gender roles and stereotypical beliefs, due to the mass representation of the ideology of a 'perfect women' based on societal expectations and rules regarding the real world.

Literature Review

There have been many articles regarding the success of the first Disney Princess film that allowed the creation and development of others. Frome (2013) summarizes the success of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937) financially while talking about criticism in representation.

Holliday and Pallany (2021) continues to talk about the success in technology used to develop the realism in the movie using multiplane cameras. In addition, Heatwole (2016) and Dynes (2021) discusses the marketing achievements and Disney merchandise's popularity among children and young women and the idea of imitating the princesses' stereotypical actions using princess merchandise. Dynes also mentions the constant creation of stereotypical beliefs that impact children in their everyday lives.

Rose (2018) talks about the numeric data on women during the second World War and the positive effects on their husbands going to the war. Cornell (2010), Barber (2015), and Vaizey (2011) also mentions the impact the war had on women during the 1940s, but also talks about the typical "American housewives" ideology and the ideal women being left at home to take care of their family. Hendricks (2019) mainly talks about the negatives of women and their domesticity at home. Women were supposed "to make sure to be home" to take care of their children and husbands. In the first era of Disney Princesses,

For the second era, women started to gain strength in their position in society with the support of each other and the public. Goldin (2023) explains the history of feminism in the 1970s to 1980s and specifically their labor forces and their rights. Women took on diverse jobs compared to the first era, and "their opportunities increased" allowing more women, also married, to work in different labor forces. Sultan (2016) and Stover (2013), talks about the princess representation and comparison of the princess films during the second era to the real-world events. Stover, as well as Garabedian (2015), also states that the romance in the film changed as falling in love with a prince is not the initial ending to the films unlike the first princess films.

Following the history, Tertilt, Doepke, and Voena (2012) tells the situation with present day women as they now fully have equal rights as men and more freedom in terms of their actions and rights. Sumana (2022) also talks about "the idea of girl

power” in our current society, comparing the two films, *Moana* and *Brave*, to see the mirrored ideas in the films. Liu and Yang (2021) discuss the romantic connections in the third era’s princesses as they are now “free from their dependence on men”.

Kovia (2022) explores the “Cultivation Theory” and how viewers have a long-lasting impact through the knowledge they gain from media and how humans “perceive the reality” around them. Dynes (2021) adds to this and explains how adults remember and get affected by what they learn and see since childhood. Coyne, Linder, Rasmussen, Nelson, and Birkbeck (2016) did two studies with the same group of people to see the change in their perspective after years of watching Disney films. The first result came out negative, as the children created a stereotypical mindset on how they should act compared to the princesses, while the second result was surprising since the same children got a higher body esteem, creating a positive alternative in the affects of Disney princess films.

The Different Eras of Disney Princesses

Disney’s Princess line includes the three eras within the films made since the 1930s. The eras are categorized due to the corresponding role of women in society during the generations in the real world. The first era, also known as, ‘The Domestic Era’ was from 1937 to 1966 representing the domestic life of women. The next era, called ‘The Rebellious Era’ takes place from 1989 to 1999 showing women progressively

standing up for their rights. Lastly, there is ‘The Independent and Girl Power era’ from the 2000s till today, since women now have equal rights as men and many more free opportunities. This research paper will look into one film for each era analyzing their representation in films and comparing the change.

Era I- The Domestic Era (1937- 1966)

During the 1940s, when World War 2 started, “roughly 6.7 million additional women went to work” (Rose, 2018). Out of this number, around four million women worked in war-related industries, replacing masculine jobs since many men served in the war. In addition, during the war, many advertisements of women in America were published claiming their responsibilities in the victory of the second world war. “The U.S. government and the advertising industry believed American housewives to be as vital to the war’s success as “Rosie the Riveter” (Cornell, 2010). This argued to the public that many women, also known as housewives, played a major role in America’s victory, which glorified and elevated their status and role in society.

However, this encouraged many women “to remain in a sphere of domesticity during” (Cornell, 2010) the war. Along with advertisements during the war, many magazine articles were published, which also “encouraged women to stick to traditional conceptions of gender roles, with women being above all wives and mothers.” (Vaizey, 2011). Many of these magazines were written exclusively by men and

gave titles like *Good Housekeeping*, *Ladies' Home Journal* to influence women to devote their lives to being housewives and mothers. Also, as soon as the war ended and men came back from war, "women were expected to leave their jobs to stay home with the children" (Hendricks, 2019), therefore home was where they spent most of their daily lives. Especially after World War II, in the 1950s, women were kept at home with only children and were advised that "there was no fulfillment outside the home" (Hendricks, 2019), this was called 'domestic containment'. "Some became involved with the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) at their children's school, a sewing group, or some type of women's club. But they had to make sure to be home after meetings in time to have dinner on the table when their husband arrived." (Hendricks, 2019) Their lifestyle and life-fulfillment were in the end to keep their husbands happy. They even had to present themselves with freshened up makeup and hair before their husbands arrived home.

In the Domestic Era, which considers films, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), all follow the same pattern in terms of the character's role in the film. In these early princess movies, the general outcome of the story includes the hero, as a prince, who always rescued the female character, the princesses, who were portrayed as just a mere shadow. In other words, they all wait for miracles to happen, mostly ending up with a prince who saves them from a bad or evil situation.

The Disney Princess, *Snow White and the Seven*

Dwarfs was a film that included many representations of women in America who were "once seen as only child-bearers and were to remain in the home" (Barber, 2015). While the film includes a happy ending as well as joyful characters and fun music, it represents the female character, *Snow White*, as a stereotypical house woman, portraying "the societal views of what was expected of females and their gender roles" (Barber, 2015). As *Snow White* lives in the small home with the seven male dwarfs, there are many where viewers see her doing the domestic work. Tasks consisting of, "doing the dishes, cooking, cleaning, and being a mother figure for those" (Barber 2015) dwarfs. This portrayal of *Snow-White* pictures the typical expectations of women during that time period, creating an idea of domesticity.

Era II- The Rebellious Era (1989-1999)

In the early 1960s, women were supported and encouraged by public opinion to go out and take on active roles in the workplace and politics, even in the highest-level positions. The majority of America, according to a study, believed that by the 1960s "married women could be employed for pay even if her husband could support her" (Goldin, 2023) and they believed the country would run and be governed better with women involved in political positions. By the early 1970s, most wanted women's status to be strengthened, and soon the public majority was in favor and supporting the women's movement, also known as the women's liberation movement. However, even with the amount of support and

consideration the public had for women rights, it was not until “the 1990s did a majority of Americans believe that women should be granted equal role running businesses, industry, and government” (Goldin, 2023). In addition, Americans did not favor the term and concept of feminism, one reason being that the movement taken place had become “too radical”. There were also two terms used in the 1970s, one was the term, “feminists” which was used in expressing equality, while “anti-feminists” were arguing for the traditional way like differences between men and women as well as protection. Before the 1970s, during and after World War 2, many women didn’t have a voice in the labor market as well as in their own home, they also were treated poorly like mentioned in the first era. While they were “discriminated against in both low and high level jobs” (Goldin, 2023), their opportunities increased from 1970 to 1974 which opened them to being employed, yet they still had limitations. There were still improvements on opinions for women rights in the 1970s. “Vast majority of Americans, both men and women, and around 85% of those who had graduated college, saw no problem with a married woman working for pay” (Goldin, 2023), increasing the participation rates for women in the labor force in the 1960s as well. The rate had increased rapidly, and by the 1980s, most age groups below the age of 50 who were married could take on new, more, and different labor works throughout this period.

The second stage of princesses reflected the ideas of that time, also known as the ‘Rebellious Era’

because of the characters’ characteristics and goal driven actions in the storylines. In this era, the princesses in the films all eventually fight for what they dream of. While there are male characters in the films, they do not act as the main source of rescue, but rather play a major role in the reason why the princesses take action to go against rules and values. The ‘Rebellious and Era’ includes the films *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Mulan* (1998), and many more.

In 1998, *Mulan* was released which was considered the last Disney princess movie in this second era. While she isn’t exactly a princess or from royalty, Disney believed that “she [deserved] the title for single handedly saving China from the Huns” (Sultan, 2016). *Mulan* is known for being rebellious because she went against the country's laws and disguised, “herself as a man in order to protect her feeble father and to honor her family name” (Sultan, 2016). She is also not feminine compared to the other female characters in the movie. *Mulan* refuses to put on makeup or act polite like a woman in the tradition represented in the film. Most importantly, she rescues the country, serving as a hero. She sends a message and shows “the positive aspects of never giving up, not being restricted to gender roles” (Sultan, 2016), which directly represents and mirrors women's movements and acts for gender equality in the real-world.

The princesses in the post-feminist era shows how women “are entirely autonomous agents” (Stover, 2013), who are not limited in their actions because of any inequalities or tyrannies. Disney

ultimately used this concept to construct the narrative of these princesses' films, by "creating a world where heroines are trapped" (Stover, 2013) and the ability to break out eventually shows their happily ever after. Belle specifically states, "I want so much more than they've got planned" (Stover, 2013), talking about her expectations as well as the idea of marriage. However, these princesses handle situations even with their love life differently than the previous princesses. "Belle, Jasmine, Meg, Tiana, and Pocahontas all reject... suitors who would come into conflict with their goals" (Stover, 2013), proving that finding true love in their lives are not their primary goals to be happy.

While their story of finding true love might have evolved throughout the films, their ultimate destination for a fairy tale ending was always expected to be in the domestic sphere. As time went on, the Disney Princess reflected on the second era of feminism, their main concerns being "documenting sexism in private as well as public life and delivering a criticism of gendered patterns of socialization" (Garabedian, 2015). The patterns are demonstrated in the first few films of the era, as the female characters experience "the need to be free of societal bonds" (Garabedian, 2015), however, all these stories end with a happily-ever after and allows women to go back to the domestic life such as a "docile princess or subservient wife" (Garabedian, 2015).

Era III- The Independent and Girl Power Era (2000-present day)

"In today's developed countries, by and large, women enjoy the same legal rights as men", which is a far change from the first era and even before when "women were considered property of men... and had no intrinsic rights of their own" (Tertilt & Doepke & Voena, 2012). Women have gain rights to have full control of their own body, therefore having laws that are "against rape and domestic violence, thereby granting women" (Tertilt & Doepke & Voena, 2012) the control. Women also have rights considering properties, child custody, and divorce. In America specifically, women in the 20th century gained "full equality in the labor market", improving the rights of owning and controlling their own objects and bodies. In addition, divorce laws were a lot more relaxed towards the nineteenth century, and many women in America who were married were granted "access to some form of property and earnings protection" (Tertilt & Doepke & Voena, 2012). The state of Maine was also the first state that allowed married women to own separate properties in their own names by the mid 1940s. While the economic rights of women were mostly complete by 1900, there were still political rights for women to be fulfilled.

Lastly, the third era of Disney princess films consider the films Frozen (2013), Brave (2012), Moana (2016), and other films that were released from the 2000s to the present. In this third era, reflecting on the progress of women's rights throughout history till the present, demonstrates and portrays "the idea of girl power". These films portray the female characters as "confident, brave,

and smart” (Sumana, 2022) as they are able to make their own decisions and solve problems without the help of others, especially male figures. In these films, it reflects on women's power as these princesses are not scared or afraid to do anything and they also have strong traits as they face challenges both mentally and physically. They also empower the male figures as they are portrayed more powerful than them and protect them using their natural or magical powers. This era is ultimately named the “Independent and Free-spirited era” labeling the princesses with abilities that reflect on women from the 2000s till today.

Both films, *The Princess and the Frog* and *Tangled*, include princesses, Tiana and Rapunzel, who each have their own goals, and they strive for something that isn't ultimately related to love. In the story plot, “Love is only a chance event for them, and the appearance of a male protagonist is only an accident” (Liu & Yang, 2021). This new evolution of women's role is based on the societal change and progress of feminist movements from the 19th to 20th century. Even though both characters do find the male characters they are attracted to, this was never the reason why they continue to live their life. Reflecting on real life social change and development, women in the films “are finally free from their dependence on men” (Liu & Yang, 2021) and don't need them to be saved or have marriage as their ultimate life goal.

This third wave of feminism introduces the diverse and different definitions feminism can

have at once. The important term created during this time period was “Girl Power” which was employed to recognize the empowerment of females. The term Girl power explains how ‘feminine’ and ‘empowered’ are not antonyms; girls can make their own decision, speak their minds, raise their voice, and be aggressive” (Sumana, 2022), all while performing the normal attitudes of feminist and the production. Girl power also demonstrates the strive and increase in women's power in society and helps deny the typical social speculations on the perception of femininity. This singular term, which empowers women in this era, has made an impact in behaviors and attitudes on women's daily lives, and “has played an essential role in shaping society's perception of women” (Sumana, 2022). The princesses from this era are not concerned in revealing their weakness or becoming a threat, “instead their weaknesses are used as opportunities for self-awareness” (Sumana, 2022) so they overcome their own challenges and problems, and it also shows that they know who they are and how to take care of themselves.

Frozen (2013) became the next big film after the first films of the third era, portraying not one, but two princesses as main characters. In *Frozen*, the film “contains instances of strong female leadership and examples of gender equality” (Lueke, 2014). While there are princes and male characters that alter the storyline of the two princesses, Elsa and Anna fight back by trusting each other in the end. This is also a unique Disney princess film, since the kingdom is saved

by not love for a prince or a man, but love for sisterhood and family. Even though there is a relationship between Anna and Kristoff, this does not affect the rescue of the kingdom. Unlike Anna, Queen Elsa decides to be independent, and “she rules the kingdom without the assistance of a male and her qualifications to rule... are never questioned” (Lueke, 2014), since the villagers and children all look up to her as their protector and ruler. In Frozen, “the ideal woman portrayed in this film is a confident, driven, intelligent... [a] person who is not afraid to stand up for what she believes and always advocates for following her own heart” (Lueke, 2014).

Impact on Children’s perceptions

There are many theories that speculate and support views about how media can influence children. Many of the information people gain are through television shows or film industries and influence the way “we perceive the reality around us” (Kovis, 2022). The theory named, Cultivation Theory, explains how the focus of people on digital media can have a long-lasting effect on their societal beliefs and actions. This theory was first studied in 1960 when professor, George Gerbner, decided that people 's perception of reality is changed by the direct exposure of television. After his claim, “theorists used longitudinal studies and surveys to identify individuals' beliefs of reality, with the amount of media they consume being the primary variable” (Kovis, 2022). Gerbner’s theory explains how the media people watch and consume allows audiences to start to believe in “power structures”

or “dominant ideologies” (Kovis, 2022) being presented on television. Today, as the study goes on, many people also study the impact of not just media but streaming sites, online advertisements, and video games. For example, the media portrays the “cultural, ethnic, religious, and other social minority groups” (Kovis, 2022) based on the storyline or character traits. However, this representation ultimately creates lasting stereotypes through society and “can have dangerous effects when used irresponsibly” (Kovis, 2022). This type of media representation can form stereotypes like mentioned and can also lead to discrimination and change in people’s attitude towards certain groups. Children’s media also includes all the contents above that can directly influence how the young kids “perceive the world around them” (Kovis, 2022).

Adding on to the cultivation theory mentioned before, “it is important to consider how children develop gendered identities, attitudes and behaviors” (Dynes, 2021), as there are theories that are separated into two domains, the biological and the sociological. There is also the gender schema theory where especially children are instructed and influenced through the media on the rules and norms on what it means to be a girl or a boy, educating them on what is ‘right’, or ‘wrong’ behavior based on their gender. Mainly Disney, as most parents think of it as a safe entertainment source, results in the creation of stereotypical views by children themselves. Especially the first era princesses, since their actions are all based on the women in the 30s,

unlike the present-day princesses, who are independent and free of doing their own things. Not only for princesses and young girls, but also to young boys. Young boys also look up to the male heroic characters such as princes or side characters who are muscular and strong, thinking they must be built into that body one day. Overall, the influence children get from Disney characters and story plots can lead to children having long impacts. "What humans learn and experience throughout their childhood will have an impact on their future" (Dynes, 2021), stating how important childhood perceptions can be. While Disney does look into changing the stereotypical traditions, the movies that portrayed those socially expected behavior are still popular among present young generations.

The Disney princess brand might have caused and influenced young girls to be vulnerable to negative effects they are presenting. The overall princess line "has drawn criticism for glamorizing characters who essentially are passive and need to be saved by men" (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016), allowing audiences to create certain ideologies. This ideology comes from the first era films as their storylines heavily reflect on women during the 1930s-1950s, living with their husbands or men under their rules. There are a few content analysis that revealed the amount of strong messages Disney movies have put regarding gender and stereotypical actions. The movies in the first era have remained very popular to the 20th century and therefore the message that these films portray are relevant to

discuss in today's world as well. The traditional gender roles and stereotypes portrayed by the three films include, "physically weak, affectionate, nurturing, helpful, fearful, submissive" (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016), ultimately impacting girls' expectations and beliefs. For example, there was a little research done to examine the effects of watching the princess media. The study was based on young girls who had been avid fans of Disney for over 3 years. These girls revealed results such as having the princess storylines "in their own personal play but also showed highly gendered expectations" (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016). This result gives evidence that the representation from Princesses influence the behaviors and attitudes of these young girls. In addition, these films have also resulted in changing adult women's self-identification, so for those who identified themselves as a princess, "reported less desire to work, expected more traditional divisions of household labor, and placed greater value on superficial qualities" (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016), presenting traits from characters daily.

Children, especially young girls, get affected by Disney's films and how they present the female princesses. These effects are mostly negative and can ruin young girls' mental health on their own body. Disney movies typically include "fair-skin-tones and slimmer bodies" and "less diversity is shown with regards to ethnicity, body type, or overall appearance" (Blasko & Pohlman &

Ayedun & Spoerer & Strassheim & Yu, 2022), as most of them do follow the general concept of a 'perfect' woman. Based on a study, it has been shown that children as young as five years old can have dissatisfaction with their own body, comparing their size and features to animated Disney princesses. Since, most of these children grow up "with Disney princesses as idols", they tend to try and look more like their favorite princesses. There have been movements, like the body positivity movement, throughout history regarding the effect of media on young women's bodies, and theories, such as social comparison theory, that were concluded to analyze how media causes women to compare themselves. A study also concluded the evolution of Disney's princesses' features and the changes. "Results indicated Disney female characters before 2012 had big eyes, perfect lips, and amazing hair" (Blasko & Pohlman & Ayedun & Spoerer & Strassheim & Yu, 2022) making them attractive to the viewers. However, after 2012, these features slowly became imperfect and more natural, showing the impact on different movements considering children's negativity about their own selves and women's insecurities and self-dissatisfactions.

Another study towards women who are ages 20-37 has found that "women who watched Disney princess films as a child are influenced when it comes to their standards and expectations of their own love narratives" (Minor, 2014). For this study, the researcher asked 15 questions about "their perspective on love, marriage and the Disney

princesses." (Minor, 2014). For example, one of the questions asked the participants on their belief on fairy tale endings and whether that is possible in real life. Out of the 40 responses, 60 said yes and 40 said no. While this result is nothing harmless, it does have a "tremendous [effect] on kids" (Minor, 2014), since whatever parents tell their kids, they will eventually believe it. Children will have this idea or belief from their parents, thinking that their lives are going to be a happily-ever-after with a prince (husband), and that their lives are going to end like a fairytale creating the ultimate life goal of eventually finding the loved one.

Similarly to the other claims and studies, another analysis also concluded that the films of Disney princesses send out multiple messages regarding gender identity. Also, questions from parents have been made asking whether these films are 'safe' for their children. Including the merchandise and branding of Disney, the study explains how the brand may make young girls "vulnerable to potential negative effects" (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016). Within this study, there was a study done to 3 avid princess fans, which "revealed that these girls not only used the princess storylines... in their own personal play but also showed highly gendered expectations" (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016). Children, especially young girls, are also seen to act out gender stereotypes using the opportunity to dress up and play with toys from the Disney Princess merchandise line. In addition, the social

cognitive theory proves how gender development of these children is affected by the Disney Princess films since they perceive ideologies on how they should act properly based on their gender. Especially the exposure of the princess products is encouraging these stereotypical gender-typed behavior. This behavior is seen in kids in school when peers “engage in direct tuition by reinforcing gender-typed toy selection and affiliation with same-sex play partners” (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2016).

The same theorists and researchers examined and studied the exact same girls five years later to see the difference or similarities from their thoughts and influence from Disney princesses. This new study found out how in the multiple documentations of the effect on children from Disney princess media, it does “not [consider] the consequences of these princess’s gendered characteristics and behaviors” (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2021). So, as they continued their research, they found that “princess engagement was associated with higher body esteem across development” (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2021), especially those who are coming from a low socioeconomic status. This result was very unexpected and surprising since the hypothesis and prediction regarding the princess culture was always negative on body images. It ultimately does not lower body esteem, but strengthens it long term, also “during a developmental period when the pubertal process makes body esteem concerns

particularly intense for some individuals” (Coyne & Linder & Rasmussen & Nelson & Birkbeck, 2021). This was important research that changed the perspective on how Disney’s princesses are not entirely negative, and they can have a positive impact in child development throughout their lives.

Overview

Throughout the evolution, it is evident that gender roles have changed throughout each era since the 1930s. However, one important feature that has not evolved as much during this line was the body images of these princesses. In the third era, many researchers did studies and noticed how Tiana’s body, from *The Princess and the Frog*, did not change compared to the typical image creators used for the first two eras. “She does not break the stereotype or try to represent a different ideal of beauty by fitting the typical Disney princess physique” (Johnson, 2015). These body images still portray the ideal beauty standards with very slim bodies and long, flowy hair. However, they do slightly alter them “with Media, but blurred the final message due to the alteration of her appearance in ads afterward”, proving that they still have a lot of progress to be made (Johnson, 2015).

Conclusion

The change in representation of women in Disney princess films is due to the change in society in terms of women’s rights and their societal expectations throughout history. The creation of eras and the characters’ differences are all

influenced by real world society, reflecting one another. First, in the 1930s, women were typically in their homes working, cooking, cleaning for their homes and husbands. During World War II, even advertisements were impacting women to stay domestic. These actions are all reflected in the films, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *The Sleeping Beauty*, and *Cinderella*, completing the first era of Disney Princess films. The next era starting with the film, *The Little Mermaid*, represents the women who are willing to fight for their goals and dreams. This is evident during the 1970s-1980s, when many movements occurred to fight and rules were assigned, allowing women to gain some rights, but not completely. This 'Rebellious Era' also includes the *Beauty and the Beast* and *Mulan*, both containing characters who show ambitious traits. The 'Independent and Girl Power Era' has the recent films, *Frozen*, *Brave*, and *Moana* among many others representing women and young girls today. Through the second era, women were able to gain full rights as men enjoy freedom to make their own choices and goals in life. The characters in the third era all solve their own problems with no male figure while making their own decisions along the way. These changes throughout the films also impact the viewer's perspective on gender identities. While the viewers of Disney Princess films are mostly young girls, many studies also researched grown women and young girls who watched Disney. The Cultivation Theory also explains how media can have a long impact on viewers' societal beliefs and actions. In terms of children,

they idolize the princesses, wanting to become one of them when they are older. The young girls who watch the first generation also hold the idea of house labor or working qualities. They get impacted in terms of body shapes, since most princesses hold unrealistic body images. However, while Disney gets criticized for the amount of negative stereotypes they engrave in early children's minds, they do also serve some positive effect such as having higher body esteem through development which was a very surprising result at the end. The Disney princesses overall helps people understand the evolution of women in terms of societal norms and expectations as well as the both negative and positive effect it has on young audiences' stereotypical views and change in behaviors.

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