

# Do We Really Want To Be a Disney Princess?

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## INVESTIGATIVE ARTICLE

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**D**o you remember being a child and consistently reading Disney princess novels, wishing that you were a princess and living this flawless, exquisite lifestyle? I remember dressing up in my Belle or Ariel dress, buying plastic high heels and wigs to ‘live’ the way my idols did. Now, being in my (almost) 20s and reading these novels back through the ‘amazing’ lens of social media, I realise that there are so many things the nostalgia of our childhood overlooks, such as the damaging ways that these stories diminishes women’s rights. Or do they?

Firstly, we must remember that as kids we don’t recognise the true meaning behind these magical stories. This could be argued to potentially ruin the whole ideology we hold of our childhood.



p.s yes this is a picture of the younger me in a princess dress...

Kids don’t understand the concept of feminism, but should they? I remember receiving a Princess and the Frog hardback novel when I was a little girl, showcasing it like a trophy and reading it over and over for years until it was falling apart at the spine, not even thinking about the controversy that Princesses encompass regarding feminism.

Princesses, such as Sleeping Beauty and Snow White, created within Disney’s so called Golden/Silver Ages, mirror the ideological woman shaped by the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s culture of domesticity. They suggest the notion that women should stay within the home and rely solely on the protection of their ‘breadwinner’ husband, and where the ultimate happy ending revolves around marriage. Like, come on! That’s not very feminist of us!

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I recently read an amazing article about a mother from Lehigh University who started to write powerful feminist statements in her child's Disney Princess novels, such as *The Little Mermaid*, to show the endless possibilities women can achieve. Do we think this is too far? As a child, I just remember seeing beautiful women with entertaining lifestyles that I could look up to, not how women are unfavourable!

With just a quick Google Search, I found the Cinderella fairy tale in a Bedtime Story for Kids subsection. And as we know already, Cinderella spends most of her life in servitude, being confined to the house, her only solution being her fairy godmother showing up and giving Cinderella a complete makeover, gifting her an expensive dress to wear to go to meet the man of her dreams.

WOW, how realistic! That's the whole point of kid's books though, they aren't meant to be realistic. However, showing to a kid that they need to be socially beautiful to feel valued could lead to ruined self-esteem at such an early age.

Understandably, Disney has come a long way then. We now have *Mulan*, *Princess Jasmine*, *Elsa*, *Moana*, and many more who are more inclusive of female empowerment; like *Queen Elsa*, she doesn't need no man!

Not to mention, my favourite has to be the iconic 1998's *Mulan*. Instead of becoming a bride to uphold her family's honour, *Mulan* impersonates a man and successfully fights in the military service to uphold their duty and to save her father instead of acting like the typical 'damsel in distress.'

What a good way to educate the new and upcoming generation, am I right? But seriously though, breaking these stereotypical ideologies unleashes so much inspiration and aids kids to understand the morality of life; it is okay to be independent!

Lastly, growing up on these less feministic novels, I see now that there is clearly a powerful timeline there that represents society's issues.

For example, Disney's *Moana: Book of the Film* published in October 2016 is a story that I wish I could have experienced when I was a kid. Yes, it is nice to have the nostalgia of the fairy-tale high life. But seeing Moana, a female, in a leader position as a chief of her tribe, having a supportive grandmother that is telling her to follow her heart and embark on a dangerous journey, really touches my inner child's heart. There is something we can teach in future generations to come, by being inclusive of all kinds of unrealistic stories that can teach children to escape from the damaging societal norms of the real world.



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