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Princesses & Superheroes

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PRINCESSES AND SUPERHEROES

A Look At Gender Socialization by Tiara Fore

CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA

Children are very impressionable and the things that they see in the media really affects the way they think and act with those around them and how they carry themselves.
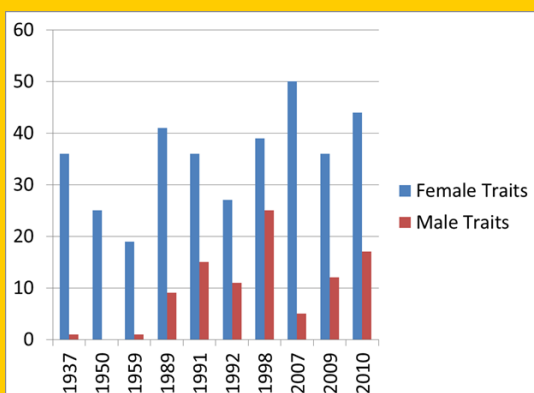
Chart showing male and female traits in princess films by Jolene Ewert

- Female Traits
- Male Traits

CHARACTER TRAITS

MALE CHARACTERS ARE ALWAYS ALWAYS HAD TRAITS PERTAINING TO THEIR PHYSICAL STRENGTH AND SELF- CONFIDENT.THEY DON'T USUALLY SHOW "FEMININE" CHARACTERISTICS LIKE CRYING OR SHOWING ANY KIND OF VULNERABILITY.FEMALE CHARACTERS USUALLY "WEAK" AND NEED SOMEONE TO SAVE THEM.

PRINCES AND PRINCESSES

1930s-50s

"The movies portrayed more gendered attributes for both the princesses and the princes, as the characters employed more traditional gender roles when compared to the five films produced in and after the 1980s" (Wolfe)

"It's about time you got your head out of those books and paid attention to more important things. Like me. The whole town's talking about it. It's not right for a woman to read. Soon, she starts getting 'ideas' and 'thinking'"- Gaston to Belle in *Beauty and the Beast*.

"You'll have your looks, your pretty face and don't underestimate the power of body language!" Ursula to Ariel in *The Little Mermaid*
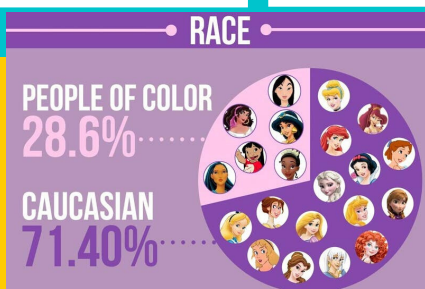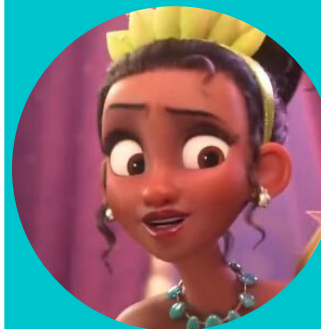
RACISM & COLORISM

So often, people of color are depicted as angry, dangerous, and all around bad people.

So, it was a joy to learn that there would be a black princess getting her own movie and joining the lineup of Disney princesses and The Frog. However, it was a disappointment to learn that she was a frog for majority of the movie. Black girls are already not valued enough in our society and so often compared to animals with attachments to racist connotations. So, for them to dwindle a whole person down into just an animal is upsetting. It makes young black girls believe that they are not seen as worthy of being seen as a person, weather that was the intention or not.

This situation was not helped at all when the controversy surrounding Tiana's whole look being changed in *Wreck It Ralph 2*. Animated completely changed Tiana to fit more Euro-centric beauty ideals with lighter skin, smaller nose, and loose brown curls. It was a disrespect to the original character and children with darker skin. Colorism is something that is not often talked about, but it effects run deep, especially when it comes to young black girls.

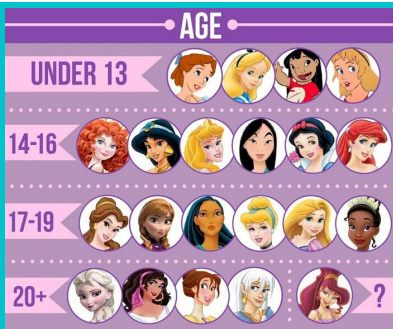However, the situation was rectified when the higher-ups listened to the outrage on social media and took the time to return Tiana to look more like she did back in the original movie. It's not a complete fix for the issues we see with colorism in media, but it was definitely a step in the right direction.

RACE

PEOPLE OF COLOR
28.6%

CAUCASIAN
71.40%

Princess Demographics Pie Chart by Buzzfeed
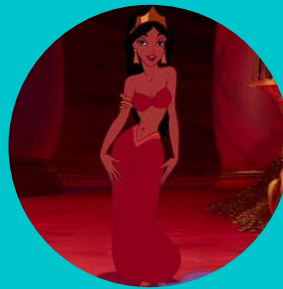
AFFECT ON CHILDREN

Most of these princesses have ridiculously inhuman body shapes. Showing this to young girls could make them think that is the ideal body type especially since princesses that have this type of body are the ones the princes always fall for. It doesn't help that most of these princesses are so young so it makes it even more relatable to children.

Princess Age Chart by Buzzfeed

Girls and women need to be able to realize that they have the potential to be strong and independent in their own right. The media showing children these types of movies reinforces that they need to worry more about how they look rather than what they can contribute to society. This in turn makes boys think that girls are inferior to them and they grow up thinking that women should act a certain way.

SUPERHEROES

Male superheroes usually show more of the manly character traits as stated before. They don't often show their true emotions due to having to portray the image of being a hero to everyone. There is no room to be vulnerable. Since, children so often aspire to be like superheroes because of how they carry themselves, it makes them mirror those traits onto themselves.

"Boys who watched more superhero media had higher rates of playing with pretend weapons, as well as higher rates of playing in stereotypically male ways (play wrestling, for example, versus playing dress-up)."

(PAPPAS)

LACK OF FEMALE SUPERHEROES

In the past few years, the only two solo female movies that were major blockbuster films have been Captain Marvel and Wonder Woman. Both were very good films, however, there is this idea that only one of them can be the best. There is not enough room for multiple female superheroes.

Before these movies the only "major" female superhero was Natasha Romanoff as Black Widow in the Avengers movies. In these movies, she has been dwindled down into a love interest with a few good fight sequences. Once again, this plays on that idea that girls can't be strong and independent without the story of a man to prop them up. What it is telling young children is that their stories aren't worth telling because there is not enough room, and they should only be there to look pretty.

THE CHANGE

While there is still a lot of work to be done when it comes to how characters are portrayed in media for children, there has been some improvements.
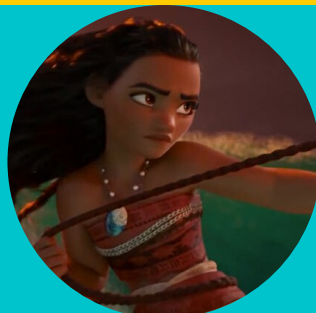
In Black Panther, there is an elite military force of women called the Dora Milaje who protect their king in the fictional country of Wakanda. There is also a young black girl named Shuri who is the head of all of their technological advances.

"A Black women and girls can see in a major studio movie that their contributions matter, both in the work that the characters do and in the fact that these actors made it to this level of the Hollywood stratosphere." (Reed)

In Iron Man 3, we see a well known superhero, Tony Stark as Iron Man, showing more vulnerability than ever previously shown before in superhero movies. We see him feel a whole range of emotions from scared to panicked (it doesn't sound like a lot, but it is for these movies). We also see him learn from his mistakes and grow from experiencing and processing these emotions.

There are also princesses like Elsa and Moana in Frozen and Moana, whose stories have no attachment to that of a man. They are on their own journeys of self-discovery and for once, being their own hero.

THERE IS STILL A LONG WAY TO GO WHEN IT COMES TO CHILDREN'S MEDIA, BUT THIS IS THE STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION. CHILDREN CAN LEARN THAT THERE IS NOT JUST ONE WAY OF BEING WHETHER THEY ARE A BOY, GIRL, OR GENDER NON-COMFORMING.

Annotated Bibliography

Abbadessa, Ellie, and Derek Jenkins. "Female Stereotypes." Disney Gender Analysis, disneyanalysis.weebly.com/female-stereotypes.html.
This article is a breakdown of a few of the animated Disney princesses over the years. They talk about those who all into the damsel in distress trope, strong female role model characters, and the newer princesses who, while they still have stereotypes woven into them, seem to be headed in the right direction.

Ewert, Jolene. "A Tale as Old as Time - An Analysis of Negative Stereotypes in Disney Princess Movies." Undergraduate Research Journal for the Human Sciences, Kappa Omicron Nu, www.kon.org/urc/v13/ewert.html.
This article talks about all the different stereotypes found in Disney princess movies. This article will help to support my statements on how girls are portrayed in these films and how it can affect young girls and how boys view them. I also used one of the charts to show the difference between female and male traits shown in these films.

Harrold, Kate. "Disney's Ongoing Fight To Be Feminist." Flickering Myth, 7 Sept. 2019, www.flickeringmyth.com/2019/09/disneys-ongoing-fight-to-be-feminist/.
This article talks baout how DIsney is trying to become more feminist in the more recent movies. They also bring up how they are remaking live-action versions of the old movies with a better representation of strong women so that they don't make the same mistake as the previous animated movies.

Miller, Monica, et al. "Do Superheroes Model Damaging Gender Roles to Kids?" LiveScience, Purch, 2016, www.livescience.com/46380-superheroes-and-violent-play.html.
This article talks about how superhero movies are important to children because of their traits and that children tend to mirror these traits. It also talks about the difference in which women and men are represented in these films when it comes to appearances, power, emotions, etc.

Network, The Learning. "What Students Are Saying About: Female Superheroes, Being Left Out and Their Dream Homes." The New York Times, The New York Times, 14 Mar. 2019, www.nytimes.com/2019/03/14/learning/what-students-are-saying-about-female-superheroes-being-left-out-and-their-dream-homes.html.
This article gives the input of students how they feel about female superheroes. This gives me more insight as to how people feel about female superheroes on a personal level rather than just a broad societal level. It shows both sides of how these students feel; some saying yes representation matters and some saying superhero movies shouldn't be a political ground.

 Pappas, Stephanie. "Do Superheroes Model Damaging Gender Roles to Kids?" LiveScience, Purch, 18 June 2014, www.livescience.com/46380-superheroes-and-violent-play.html.
This article talks about how children watching superhero movies affect their behavior with other children. In terms of young boys, they tend to be more violent in their play and become hypermasculine. It also talks about how parents should have conversations with their children about the media that they are consuming.

Reed, Anika. "5 Ways That 'Black Panther' Celebrates and Elevates Black Women." USA Today, Gannett Satellite Information Network, 18 Feb. 2018, www.usatoday.com/story/life/2018/02/16/5-ways-black-panther-celebrates-and-elevates-black-women/338779002/.
This article talks about how the movie Black Panther was a celebration of black woman. I will use this as an example to show how the media has improved in terms of superhero movies and how they portray women, and more specifically black women.

Sharf, Zack. "Disney Reanimates Princess Tiana in 'Wreck-It Ralph 2' After Backlash Over Lightening Black Character's Skin Color." IndieWire, 24 Sept. 2018, www.indiewire.com/2018/09/disney-reanimates-princess-princess-tiana-wreck-it-ralph-2-lightening-skin-color-1202006386/.

This article talks about the controversy over the look of Princess Tiana changing completely in Wreck It Ralph 2. This provides as an example to show the issues that we still have with colorism in our society and how some people are trying to listen to what people have to say and do something to change it.

Wincherauk, Matthew. "A Foe He Can't Fight: Tony Stark, Addiction, and PTSD." Panic At The Discourse: An Interdisciplinary Journal, vol. 1, no. 2, July 2019, pp. 41–50.

This article talks about Tony Stark in iron Man 3 and how he deals with his PTSD and panic attacks. This article will provide as an example to show how superheroes can be vulnerable as well when discussing how children view themselves through the superhero lens.

Zwiebel, Justine, et al. "We Did An In-Depth Analysis Of 21 Disney Female Leads." BuzzFeed, BuzzFeed, 30 Dec. 2018, www.buzzfeed.com/justinezwiebel/we-did-a-census-of-all-the-disney-female-animated-characters.

This article mainly consists of charts done by Buzzfeed staff on Disney princesses. They did a study on the different traits shown in these movies like eye color, skin color, skills, etc. I used the charts in this article to help support my claims about how girls and women are portrayed in Disney movies.