

The Impact of Disney Princess Animation on Contemporary Girls

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Abstract. The image of Disney princesses has changed in people's minds over the years, with more female characters becoming confident and courageous rather than relying on the sidekicks as they once did. Therefore, this article will conduct interviews to examine whether Disney Princess movies have subtly changed the thoughts and behaviours of contemporary Chinese girls. Interviews will be conducted with five girls between the ages of 16 and 24 via both online and offline platforms and concluded that young girls were influenced by recent Disney movies the most rather than previous ones with respect to romantic relationships, values, and thoughts on patriarchy. The author also discusses the impact on them, suggesting that there are innate as well as acquired social factors involved. With education and exposure to cultural diversity, women reflecting on the Disney movies they have watched in the past have gained a new understanding of the above topics.

1 Introduction

In light of the emergence of more and more examples of women's awakening, such as increasing female literacy in China, heightened share of women's wages in men's wages, and increasing employment rate of women in Japan, which all indicated that women are using their own abilities to show their charms and power to the society [1-3]. Those societal examples inspired the author to examine what factors may propel the awakening of female consciousness, and why it happens so late. Disney Princesses have evolved over time into three different phases of Disney Princesses, represented by Snow White, Ariel, and Elsa, a process of gradual independence [4]. The author decided to begin the investigation with the Disney Princess movie, as this medium which is characterized by high popularity and exposure has had significant impacts on women of all ages in China and abroad. Many little girls started watching Disney Princess movies at a young age, so it was even possible that they may be subliminally influenced without realizing it. Many of the Disney Princess movies do not just tell a story that revolves around a girl but also reflect the time period in which each movie was created and the way that women are treated in today's society. Disney Princess movies from different eras are bound to have a different culture shock on girls who are still in their formative age. The author aims to explore the changes that Disney films have had on contemporary women as social class and the status of women have evolved, and in what ways they have created strong emotions for women regarding their views on love and patriarchy.

2 Methods

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2.1. Interview

This paper adopts the method of interview and invites five women aged 16-24 at different stages and analyzes the influence of the image of Disney princesses on their growth through questionnaires (see Table 1). It analyzes the obedience and resistance of Disney princess stories to patriarchy in different times. Based on the interview results, this paper analyzes the templates behind Disney princess stories in different eras, their differences from classic male stories, and their different results on male and female thinking, and summarizes their influence on female growth by referring to the role of contemporary media.

Table 1. Brief information about five interviewees

	Age	Stages	
1	16	High schooler	
2	17	High schooler	
3	18	Undergraduate	
4	24	Graduate student	On work
5	18	High schooler	Study abroad

2.2 Interview questions

Since most women watched Disney Princess movies as children, they may have a renewed understanding of the Disney Princess kernel. So the author needs to guide the interviewee from Disney Princesses to talk about patriarchy and related topics by designing skillful questions on it. The authors decided to take a step-by-step approach, starting with the most familiar topic of Disney Princess movies, and then slowly seeping into

values and deeper thinking questions to allow the interviewee to have a process of self-thinking and self-reflection.

- (1) What was it like to watch Disney's princesses when you were a kid? What's it like to watch them now?
- (2) Do you now recall the Disney movies you used to see and feel like you have a different perspective on them?
- (3) What do you think is the difference between Snow White, Ariel, and Elsa?
- (4) How do adults educate you based on Disney princess movies that you watched together?
- (5) Did the Disney Princess movies have an effect on you? Such as romantic relationships or values.
- (6) Have you seen the epitome of patriarchy in Disney movies (Cinderella and Elsa)?

2.3 Interview process

The author used qualitative analysis and conducted very detailed and targeted interviews with each interviewee, in order to get precise and personalized information about each individual so that we could be more comprehensive and efficient with our interview data and results. At the same time, in the course of the interviews, the author consciously guided the interviewees to talk about their discussions on patriarchy and related topics and continued to design relevant questions based on their answers to ensure the quality and integrity of the follow-up interviews. Interviews are conducted in various forms, including face-to-face, online via Zoom, and texting.

3 Results

3.1. Feelings as a child

The vast majority of people think the process was hard but the ending was happy and enviable. For example, A shared that her experience with ADHD as a child and her parents' upbringing had triggered thoughts about the background of Disney princesses but had not been influenced. B thinks that although the princesses were poor, they eventually got out of their difficult situation by marrying the prince. C says that when she was a child she had fantasies of being a princess and being surrounded by people, so she started to imitate some particular gestures of a princess. E says I didn't sub in Disney princess characters too much when I was a kid because I thought they were too cut off from reality.

3.2. Reflection

As they grow up, the girls change and reflect on their past views of Disney Princess movies as they are exposed to more diverse cultures and education. C says Elsa's appearance shows us that Disney princesses are different from the traditional Disney princesses and do not need a strong man to solve their problems, and have their own abilities and thoughts. E thinks that Disney's

recent animated movies have seen the character of princesses become more independent and courageous as new ideas awakened women's rights to the zeitgeist. D shares that Early Disney animated movies had hints that women needed to forgive and heal the damage and mistakes done by men, even if it had nothing to do with her.

3.3. Impact on the Present

Many people said that after receiving the interview, they had a lot of new thoughts and feelings when they looked back at the Disney animations they had watched before. E comments that female characters are refined and abstracted during the creative process, and the image becomes unified. Hans (The prince in Frozen 1) is not an official prince but a villain. Disney animation becomes more realistic because not every prince is of high moral character and upbringing, and not every kingdom can be rich and powerful. B says that there is the epitome of seeing patriarchy, like Cinderella, there is something of a Mary Sue text about women being the weaker and men being the stronger. This was a very common idea at the time, and if a princess gained such a position and it didn't turn out well, it wasn't a good thing.

3.4. Impact on values

Disney Princess movie at the same time came to a change in values, after combining the girls' own self-examination. E says the Disney Princess movie made me feel negatively about romantic relationships because the so-called prince approached the heroine without her consent. B says the Disney Princesses of the past are very different compared to today; the Disney Princesses of today rely on their own abilities to get happy endings instead of relying on others, which guides the young girls who watch the movie to rely on their own abilities to get the life they want.

4 Discussions

The author speculates that Interviewee C's imitation of Disney Princesses may not only be due to longing and yearning for Disney Princesses but also due to observational learning, which is a psychological phenomenon that refers to the tendency of young children to imitate the behavior of their parents or the things they are frequently exposed to [5]. Thus, Disney princess movies, as frequent elements in little girls, are bound to have an impact on their upbringing. In addition to this, many of the interviewees stated that the recent Disney Princess movies had a greater impact on them than the previous ones, which the authors attribute to the fact that the characters of the recent Disney Princesses are more relevant to the modern context. The authors speculate that it may be the emergence of more and more female entrepreneurs that has made more women realize that this is not a society completely ruled by the

patriarchy and that women can also achieve success and status through their own strengths [6]. The Disney movie tampered with the original Little Mermaid by changing Ariel, a free-spirit seeker, into someone who gave up her voice for love, but now the awakening of women's consciousness has allowed women themselves to gain freedom in their own minds [7]. Therefore, they prefer the recent literary works created in a more independent female society, including *Frozen*, and *Brave Legends*. Meanwhile, then early Disney Princess movies the ones with magic are usually the villainous characters, such as the Queen in *Snow White* and the witch who put a curse on Aurora in *Sleeping Beauty* [8]. In the new Disney Princess movie, Elsa also has magic, but she uses it to save her kingdom through self-improvement and the redemption of her loved ones [9]. The author analyzes that the reason Interviewee E felt cut off in Disney movies could possibly be because the Disney Princesses were racially incompatible with Asians, and the aesthetics of the time were dominated by the white skin of the West [10]. This led to many little girls growing up with a deformed aesthetic, preferring white young skinny and high noses, which are western facial features, caused by innate factors and geographic environment. Apart from that, the authors speculate that the reason Interviewee D was uncomfortable when she received Disney's offer to forgive rude behavior from a male character was that women are shaken up about entrenched gender roles. Take the movie *Beauty and the Beast* as an example, after Belle is forcibly imprisoned by the Beast in the castle, she is persuaded by a group of so-called furniture to comfort and keep the Beast company. After the Beast's unexplained outbursts of anger, the Furniture has been urging Belle to accept and forgive the Beast [11]. This situation is similar to how women receive some kind of violence in the home, but are still persuaded by friends or even loved ones around them to forgive and back off. If the girls feel uncomfortable and uncomprehending when they watch such episodes, it is a sign that their self-awareness is awakening and their self-esteem is growing. We don't need to constantly make compromises and concessions for the sake of a relationship; women are not absolutely at a disadvantage in a relationship. It is worth noting, however, that the presentation of such aberrant relationships in the movie is likely to mislead some young, nurturing girls, who may even believe that impulsive or violent behavior on the part of their partners or family members is normal and should be tolerated. So Disney officials should take this into consideration and step up their scrutiny of the movie's content. But it can't be ruled out that Disney Animation intentionally made such movies to make women submissive in those days. This can also be understood as the false consensus effect when individuals tend to believe that their own opinions, beliefs, and behaviors are more widely shared by others than they actually are [12]. With the combination of living in a family and being exposed to movies and television, young girls have a strong tendency to embrace this aberrant emotional approach. At the same time, the author analyzes that the reason Interviewee B feels that some of the Disney

Princess stories are unrealistic is that their love transcends class. When we were young, we naively thought that marriage was between two people and that nothing else mattered as long as love existed. But as time passes, love gradually fades into affection, and this kind of illusory feeling cannot be supported by emotions alone, so the future of both parties must be secured [13]. This is the origin of arranged marriages. Love across class ignores all the difficulties of life and is blind to what will happen to them in the future. Especially in moments when there is a huge disparity of monetary power between one party, the other party may become the weaker party as a result, thus becoming a passive presence in the relationship. Take the most classic Disney Princess movie *Cinderella* for example. The prince successfully finding Cinderella and giving her the crystal shoes must not be the end of the story [14]. They will get married and have children, but there is no denying that Cinderella, as the prince's wife, will have to learn to socialize and do other things that a queen should be able to do that Cinderella has not experienced before. At that point will the prince still feel that Cinderella is the most important woman in his life? Could the fairy godmother jump in and help Cinderella every time? So much of Disney Princess animation is created to be on the idealistic side, ignoring the difficulties of life and class differences to weave one impossible wish after another for young girls.

5 Conclusion

Disney animated movies have undoubtedly had a huge impact on a child's childhood as a constant exposure among children. And Disney Princess movies, with its strong target market, are bound to have a positive or negative impact on its audience. While the patriarchal system has developed to today is a sophisticated and complex operating system, which can not be shaken by a single thought or criticism of an industry or region under its rule. In this paper, the hidden manifestation and possible influence of patriarchy in Disney are briefly described, but the deep theoretical research is still not touched.

At the same time, this paper has the problem of an insufficient quantity of research objects and insufficient detail of research questions. In terms of content, there is not enough detail on how Disney princesses influence women to encourage change. Future authors should select a smaller concentration of interviewees for a more targeted and representative survey, rather than selecting a wide range of a limited number of interviewees, which could lead to biased test results. Because of the specificity of the time when the Disney Princess movie was aired, even if there is a difference of four or five years in age, they may have different views and opinions about the same Disney Princess because of the differences in the time background and cultural education that each individual has experienced. This research article can help the general public to recognize the influence of Disney Princess movies and even media

on the youth of today and in what ways it has affected them how.

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