LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND BEAUTY: GENDER ROLE CONSTRUCTION OF DISNEY HEROINES

By

CAROLINE ANNE DUFF

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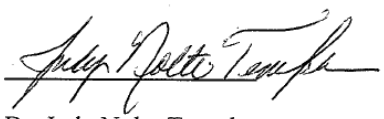

Dr. Judy Nolte Temple

Department of Gender and Women's Studies

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I have been working with children since I was in middle school. Childcare was always more than a job to me. It is not often that I work for a family as a one-time event; rather, I have been lucky enough to become integrated into families. With this comes the privilege of being allowed to play a large role in child development. The games, activities, art projects, field trips, meals, stories, and songs that I use to engage the children with are not just things done to pass the time until their parents get home. These are opportunities to foster growth of the mind, body, and spirit in the children.

One activity in particular that I enjoy experiencing with the children is watching children's programming. Media, as a teaching tool, can be so beneficial to children, the consummate example being *Sesame Street*. Today's children are growing up in a world of media saturation, where everything is connected, specialized and technological demands are met instantaneously (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts). When I was growing up there was cable television and home video cassette players; nowadays, children have access to digital recorders, DVD players, and the internet. The accessibility of specialized content is beyond easy, and the options seem to be vast and unlimited. Yet, one man's (or mouse's) work stands above all the rest for more than seventy years when it comes to children's programming: Walt Disney.

Many of my own childhood memories are intertwined with the classic animated tales. I grew up in the Golden Age of Disney films: where the oldest films were being given new life through their first release onto home video and the animation studio had finally found their way out of the slump that plagued the creative process for more than a decade. One of my earliest memories is of my sister receiving *Cinderella* and *Peter Pan* on VHS tape for Christmas. I remember my father explaining to me that the movies were

my sister's, but she would let me watch them if I asked nicely. While not entirely thrilled with this arrangement at the time, I would like to point out that twenty years later the VHS tapes sit on *my* movie shelf. Receiving a Disney movie as gift for any reason (Christmas, my father returning from a National Guard trip, just because it was finally available to own) was an exciting moment in my house. I grew up a member of the Disney generation: there were movies to watch whenever, there were Saturday morning cartoons, hopeful wishes of Disneyland trips, and there was stuff to play with. I owned everything from action figures/dolls to pillows, clothing to Halloween costumes, and back-packs to themed birthday parties with Disney Characters on them. Not much has changed between then and now, as most of the children I work with own Disney paraphernalia in some form or another.

What stands out most in my childhood memories are the hours of imaginative play I spent pretending to be a Disney princess. In the summertime, swimming in the lake meant pretending to be Ariel from *The Little Mermaid*. Cleaning the house turned into a game of *Cinderella* (my older sister's attempt at getting me to participate in the actual cleaning). Adventuring outside usually entailed a theatrical reenactment of *Pocohantas*, and playing dress-up inside meant there had been an invitation to a private ball, like in *Beauty and the Beast*. The beautiful princesses wore pretty dresses, they danced with handsome princes, and they gave me unrealistic expectations about hair. I wanted nothing more than to grow up and be a Disney Princess.

The effect that these animated stories have on young children, specifically young girls, is profound. Unknowingly, or rather ignorantly we have accepted films into our homes, believing the tales they tell to be rather benign. Now as a grown woman and

feminist, reflecting back on my own experience, and seeing it develop in the children I work with, I know this is not the case. Recently, I began working for a family with five-year-old twin girls. They knew all the Disney Princess stories (and even had favorites), but had yet to watch any of the movies when I started. So, each time I come over I bring a new movie for us to watch together. Having cringed profusely while relating the story of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* ("She does all of their cooking and cleaning, so the dwarfs will let her stay!"), I decided to interject a less dated ideal for women during the actual film, by commenting on what a good idea it would be to wait to find a Prince Charming until *after* they had gone to college and started careers. One of the girls looked back at me and asked incredulously if I meant in real life or in the movie. When I answered both, she looked towards the screen, back at me, and let out a rather unenthusiastic "eh" sound before focusing back on the movie. That moment, and others like it, made me begin to really question what the Walt Disney Company is teaching, and has been teaching, young girls about what it means to be a woman.

In the beginning, there was a girl and an apple. The girl had been told by the seven little men that she cared for not to partake of the fruits offered to her by unknown characters. The old beggar woman who was selling the apples, , was just showing her gratitude for the girl's kindness. The apple was so red, so shiny, and so fragrant. To refuse a gift of thanks would be rude. One little bite could not hurt her, could it? Choosing not to heed the warning given to her, the girl bit into the apple and promptly fell to the floor, seemingly dead. Not quite the same Eden story that we are taught in church school, but the similarities are quite distinct.

At the center of the story is the consummate battle between good and evil, exemplified here through the characterization of the kind and innocent Snow White and the evil and manipulative step-mother/queen/old hag. Disney would capitalize on this by "relentlessly polariz[ing] the notion of the feminine to produce a murderously jealous and forbiddingly cold woman on the one hand and an innocently sweet girl accomplished in the art of good housekeeping on the other" (Tartar 78). Upon examination of the original tale from the Brothers Grimm, scholar Maria Tartar focuses her analysis on this dichotomy, and ties in the passive and active roles that the female characters take in the story. Looking first at Snow White, it becomes painfully obvious that when it comes to passivity, she is the poster child. There is no recount of a struggle when her step-mother forces her to become a domestic servant in the castle, and she flees from home when told to by the Huntsman who is commissioned by the Queen to kill her. She gladly tends house and cares for the seven dwarves with no compensation except the roof over her head, where she lies in wait for a prince to come rescue her. The character of the Queen, on the other hand, is driven by her desire to stay in power and be the most beautiful

person in the kingdom. She decides to rid herself of Snow White, commissions the Huntsman, and then decides to the do the job herself when he fails. In the Grimms' world of fairy tales and children's stories her aspirations are too high – for a woman. Her hunger for power has driven her mad: "the Queen takes her individualism and independence to an extreme, and because of her vanity she moves beyond the rules of civil society to narcissistic self-destruction" (Inge 141). For all of this she must be punished: dancing in iron shoes that have been heated over open flame at Snow White's wedding reception ought to do the trick.

The choice to have the story *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* be the first full-length animated feature film that Walt Disney released in 1937 was an indication not only of the time and the attitudes it exemplified, but it set the tone for Disney heroines, and created a mold that the company is still struggling to break out of today. Changes were made that were both minor and major to the Grimms' storyline where mothers "identity and their work are simultaneously erased, naturalized, and devalued" (Haas 196). First, Disney did away with any mention of Snow White's dead biological mother, leaving the only example of a grown woman in the film to be her evil step-mother, the Queen who actively participates in witchcraft to bring about Snow White's demise. The queen only makes one (successful) attempt on Snow White's life, and her demise occurs immediately thereafter, brought about by her own foolishness of running to higher ground during a lighting storm and being knocked from the cliff's edge. One of the most prominent themes retained in the film is Snow White's affinity for domestic housework, and how she is "represented as serving an apprenticeship in home economics" (Tartar 248).

The most lauded scene in the film is the musical number "Whistle While You Work," where Snow White and her new animal friends set to work cleaning the home of the seven dwarves, characters she has yet to meet, and assumes to be small children based on the size of their belongings. She seems to find motherly joy and happiness in cleaning up the revolting mess of others, so much so, that after meeting the small statured miners, Snow White offers to keep house and cook for them in exchange for a roof over head. Her enthusiasm for the task is "natural," considering how dirty the men have already proven themselves to be. With this sequence, it is quite obvious where Disney believes a woman's place is in society: in the home. It exemplifies the idea that women should have "allegiance to the home and family," where deep satisfaction can be found in belonging to the Cult of True Womanhood (Inge 140). The Queen, in contrast, has outright rejected this lifestyle in the film. She shows no signs of having maternal feelings for Snow White (whom she "would destroy… for her looks"), she is not responsible for the domestic duties in her own home, and she only deems to get her hands dirty if it is to her own benefit (Cashdan 41). This is yet another reason why she must be punished, and why the audience detests her. Her lack of "natural" maternal inclination, to the point of wanting the innocent child dead, does not sit well with the audience. Her obsession with consulting the mirror to confirm her beauty, exemplifies the idea that women fixated on themselves, the vain and self-centered, are irredeemable. This is why we celebrate her demise at the end of the story. We, the audience are meant to see this as the moral of the story "about looks, looking, and being looked at": Vanity and Jealousy will make you no friends, and inner beauty is far more important than what is visible on the outside (Gould 7). What is really happening, is that Disney has highlighted the so-called qualities that

make women attractive (passive, docile creatures who enjoy housework), declared agency to be an evil worthy of punishment, and rewarded the passive with the love of the prince.

Alice in Wonderland (1951) was based on the literary work of Lewis Carroll. The tales he weaved were based off the adventures he told to a young friend of his: Alice Pleasance Liddell, for whom the main character was named. The stories displaced the child from her native Victorian England, into the crazy, confusing world of Wonderland, accessible only by falling down rabbit holes or climbing through a looking glass (Van Doren 607).

Alice epitomizes a child of the Victorian era, with her polite, quiet, and unassuming demeanor, which has been exemplified in western culture through depictions of her dress. In the older book illustrations of Alice adventuring, she is most often portrayed as a brunette, wearing pink, yellow, or white. After the popularization of the Disney film, it is a standard assumption that Alice is a blonde, with blue eyes that match her dress, with a pristine, white pinafore to finish off the look. The change in color palette is not meant to be a progressive step away from the stereotyped assumptions that little girls must wear pink because it is feminine, but rather a historical representation of gender role expectations: “pink was considered more of a boy’s color… [and] blue was considered more for girls… blue was associated with the Virgin Mary” (Frassanito and Pettorini 881). Dressed in the colors of the Holy Virgin, it would not be a far stretch to enhance the image of her purity with blonde hair standing in for her golden halo. Alice is an innocent child; her story is not based on romantic endeavors, but on her own

imaginative ponderings of what the world would be like if "nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't" (Geronimi, Jackson, and Luske 1951).

Knowledge is a major theme found within the story: the search for it, the recitation of it, the philosophical ponderings of existence, etc. Alice questions everyone and everything, including herself, about her surroundings, the thought process, and the rationale of the answers she is receiving. She even goes so far as to question the authority of certain figures, on occasion, but the problem lies within the responses she receives. She is dismissed, repeatedly, by all of the characters she encounters. They regard her as stupid, annoying, incompetent, and a general pest. The best example of this comes from her encounter with the talking flowers (who seem to be stereotypes of overly critical women), which go so far as to call her "A WEED" in the Disney film. Her presence is found to be so annoying, and her quest to understand so unacceptable, that they view her as something that needs to be eradicated rather than nurtured. Her status as a child means she is inconsequential to the world of adults she finds herself inhabiting (both in Wonderland and at home). The responses reflect "societal attitudes in limiting choices" (Frassanito and Pettorini 881), because intelligence fosters agency, and agency in women is unacceptable in a patriarchal society.

Also related to knowledge, is the confidence that Alice has in her own intelligence and identity. In the original story, she questions who she is and what she really knows from the very start of the story. She asks herself: "I wonder if I have changed in the night? Let me think: *was* I the same when I got up this morning?" (Carroll 24) She claims to be knowledgeable, but the pearls of wisdom she expels, and the lessons she attempts to recite seem to be all muddled and mixed up: "I ca'n't remember things as I used" (Carroll

60). This emphasizes the uncertainty of her characterization. Like many female characters, in general she is seen as being "dependent, emotional, silly, clumsy, and lacking intelligence… limited… less competent in [her] ability to accomplish things" (Tsao 110). Disney's reinforcement of these images can be found in the scenes where Alice is brought to tears. At the beginning of the film, after the first of her growth spurts, she is overcome by emotion. She knows she is overreacting, but she "can't help it." Later, she laments in song about giving herself good advice, but never following it, concluding the number by breaking down into tears, again (Geronimi, Jackson, and Luske 1951). This second bout of crying does not occur in Carroll's original tale, but is a creative addition made by Disney to remind us that she is a Girl Child who, like other heroines, is incapable of getting herself out of a pickle. In both instances, she is rescued by male characters: the Door Knob and the Chesire Cat.

The other women who are present within the story do little to build up the little girl, nor are they exemplary role models for her either. While all of the inhabitants of Wonderland are supposed to be mad, the prominent female figures seem to be even more irrational than the rest. The character traits of the Queen of Hearts particularly seem to exemplify her flaws, or what are seen as flaws in a patriarchal society. She is power hungry, and she demonstrates this with her incessant cry that someone's head is in need of being separated from the rest of them. What is interestingis that eventually her cries are ignored. This is due, in part, to the excessive number of persons that have already been sent to the executioner, but also because no one is taking her seriously. Disney, yet again, strengthens "the patriarchal symbolical order based on rigid notions of sexuality and gender" (Zipes 74). The Queen calls the shots, but whether or not her orders are

carried out depends entirely on the male figures (the King, Card Soldiers, and the White Rabbit) in her life. She wants to lead, and is under the impression that she is in charge, but this subversion of power and her continuous temper tantrums lead other characters to treat her more like a spoiled child than a grown woman.

In a story written by a man about a young boy who refuses to grow up, one would be led to believe the major focus of the story is to be the boy. However, because the story is about the business of growing up, J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* focuses a lot on the characters who play at, and plan on, being grown up. This is something the titular character refuses to do, so the spotlight belongs to the little girl Wendy as she ends her adventures in childhood and begins her journey to young adult, after spending her last night in the nursery.

In reality, this last night in the nursery is merely symbolic of Wendy's growing up. It is obvious from her characterization that she has been groomed from a young age (intentionally and unintentionally) to exhibit the characteristics of a grown woman. In a sense she is more of a woman child, than a girl child, with her mothering tendencies and eagerness to experience the rather adult act of kissing a boy, for whom she harbors romantic feelings. These moments in the story illustrate the rather strong effects that Social Learning has on children and "her role as 'Little Mother'… reflects a Victorian point of view… commitment to the woman's place in the home" (Routh 59-60). Wendy has been taught and has observed certain mannerisms and habits by her own mother that she then puts into practice within her own life: storytelling before bed and sewing by the hearth as the children (Lost Boys) sleep (Routh). Her mother is such a role model in her life that she decides to go with Peter to Neverland, so that she can play house with him

and the other Lost Boys. This to her seems like the grandest adventure: taking care of scruffy, ungrateful boys who do nothing for her in return, except love her like she was their real mother. Her desire to leave home, is seen as selfish and improper, because it shows agency on her part (for she does not consult her parents) and these ambitions will lead to her demise or to someone else's hurt (Fisher and Silber). In Barrie's narrative not only does Wendy almost die after being attacked by the Lost Boys, but her mother also experiences the pain of losing her children. Disney's 1953 animated version omits the suffering mother, but Wendy suffers persecution beyond the Barrie original when she is forced to walk the plank by Captain Hook. Disney tries to balance the mothering with Wendy's desire to have adventures just like the boys, but her idea of adventure is somewhat different. Her choice in activities is gendered and she is rather indifferent to the boys' adventures. She has no interest in the real experiences of "hunting Indians" or fighting pirates; instead she wants to see the mermaids and be introduced to fairies, mythical creatures that do not exist in the world of adults.

Disney's portrayal of Wendy's experience with the Native Americans also brings about an interesting conflict between race identity and gender identity. As a guest at the most politically incorrect Native American "pow-wow," Wendy is portrayed as a somewhat rude, unwilling participant. Like a true Victorian lady, she refuses to smoke, but her reaction to participating in the "peace pipe" ceremony is not one of polite refusal. Instead she makes a face, plugs her nose, and turns her head away as she passes on the offending pipe. When she decides to participate in the ensuing dance, Wendy is informed by a female tribe member that "Squaw no dance. Squaw go get 'em firewood," and with an offended look she obeys. Yet, when she sees her younger brothers "going native," she

drops what she is doing to reprimand their actions. The tribal woman informs her of her duty, again, and this time Wendy indignantly replies that "Squaw no get 'em firewood. Squaw go home," and storms off. Her denial to perform the gendered chore would be deemed positive had she refused from the outset; however, her refusal does not stem from a want for gender equality. Her behavior is racially motivated, and her demeaning attitude and negative response simply perpetuate the dominance of white culture in Disney (Towbin, Haddow, Zimmerman, Lund and Tanner).

Peter's constant companion, Tinker Bell, the pixie, raises a completely different slew of issues in regards to the portrayal of women within J.M. Barrie's world of fantasy. In the theatrical versions staged in 1901, Tinker Bell is represented on stage, not by a grown woman, or even a young girl, but by a light. And (until very recently) in any version of the story her voice was represented by chiming bells, that were translated by another (physically present, audible, and usually male character) actor in the scene. When Disney decided to give her a physical body (but still without an audible speaking voice) in their 1953 animated adaptation, they decided that she was going to be ahead of her times, the epitome of the "modern woman." They now describe her as having "larger than life personality and fierce independence… mighty pretty… ruled by emotions… [and] hot-tempered… liberated" (Disney 2007). In actuality, Disney's Tinker Bell embodies none of the characteristics of a modern woman (expect, arguably, in the beauty department). She embodies the "gendered sexuality that alternate[s] between loyalty and spitefulness, indulgence, and insouciance" with her atypical physical traits: blonde hair, blue eyes, pin-up curves, and understatedly petite body (Bell 120). Like her source material, she lacks a comprehensible voice and the audience relies on her pantomimes

and translations through other characters. As mentioned earlier, a woman's articulation is often how she finds agency (Fisher and Silber). If Tinker Bell cannot be understood verbally by the media consumer, then her perceived authority and ability as an individual character is greatly diminished. This same minimization of the female character will be seen again, with Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* (1989). Because Ariel is not able to speak for herself and ask questions, the audience is more likely to believe that she is incompetent and unintelligent. With Tinker Bell, the audience relies on other characters to translate her chimes, which emphasizes her codependency issues.

A connection can be made here with her need for attention, and jealous streak. Tinker Bell, like so many other female characters, is very prone to vanity and seeks the approval of others. If she does not have people's support, if they stop believing in her, she will cease to exist. Comparatively speaking, we see this same need for approval with the Evil Queen in Snow White. She seeks the approval of the magic mirror's "masculine gaze for affirmation of her self-worth, based on superficial appearances" (Inge 141). It is most prominent in Tinker Bell's *obsession* with Peter, and seeking his approval of her actions, which leads to self-harm and destruction.

This concept of all decisions leading back to the hero in the heroine's story figure quite prominently into the last Princess movie that Walt Disney oversaw before his death in 1966. *Sleeping Beauty* (1959) is an interesting recreation of what is usually considered a rather sexually explicit tale. Perrault's original story was often seen as an allegory for the main character's transformation from a young girl to a woman. The pricking of her finger on the spindle of the spinning wheel was representative of either menstruation or her first sexual encounter. The animated film version bypasses all of this and instead

"what Sleeping Beauty experiences in the Disney version is rescue not transformation" (Gould 132).

The title of the film is deceptive, in that audiences are led to believe Sleeping Beauty will be the main character of the film. All of the action of the film will surround her accordingly -- except, Sleeping Beauty/Aurora/Briar Rose is absent for nearly two-thirds of the film. She is a baby, hidden in her bassinet or shielded by her mother, for the first portion of her film. Then she pricks her finger, resulting in a death by domestic object, and is concealed in the highest tower (away from all of the action) until Prince Phillip goes to wake her. The real action of the story takes place between the Evil Fairy Maleficent, who cursed Sleeping Beauty as a baby, and her embodiment of the evil femininity (corrupted by power, unnatural rejection of love, kindness, and helping others) and Prince Phillip and his masculine triumph. The problem with this turn of events is that the audience is "deprived of the heroine's story…obscured by the glare of the hero's victory" (Gould 132). There is no story arch for Sleeping Beauty; she lacks any kind of growth in character, because she is a one-dimensional representation of a beautiful trophy: an object that is treasured, fought over, and ultimately won by the battle champion. Instead, we see Prince Phillip grow from a boy who thinks that the baby Princess is yucky, to the man who falls in love with her, to the hero who battles the Dragon to save the Princess.

Another important point to make is that "for Disney, sleep is death… Only a hero can bring the Princess back to life, and life back to her world, but when he does she will be on no higher level than when she fell asleep" (Gould 132). The tale of *Sleeping Beauty* will never really be about Sleeping Beauty, because where the story leaves off is not at

her birthday party/return celebration, but her engagement party. When they marry, Prince Phillip will inherit her throne, and ultimately he will rule. This is demonstrated through the negligible role that Sleeping Beauty's mother plays in the story. She has exactly one speaking line, and when it comes to decision making about her daughter's future, it is all predetermined by her husband and Prince Phillip's father. The other female characters in the story fair no better than Sleeping Beauty and her mother.

In the same vein of *Peter Pan* and Tinker Bell, *Sleeping Beauty* features a trio of Good Fairies, Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather, and the Evil Fairy Maleficent who are characterized as Non-Women. They are female characters, but they fail in performing as women. Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather are characterized as Good, because they make the decision to give up their magic, and live as mortal women, caring for the cursed baby Aurora/Briar Rose. They find their "allegiance to the home and family" that Disney felt all female characters should inhabit, but they fail miserably at the tasks this entails (Inge 141). While attempting to put together a birthday celebration for the Princess-in-disguise, the Good Fairies are completely incapable of baking cakes, making clothes, or cleaning the house in the mortal fashion, or without squabbling over who does what. In order to do things right they have to resort to magic, meaning they cannot be "real" women. Maleficent, like all the other Evil Queens, Stepmothers, and Villainesses, rejects any notion of being a real woman from the start. Her goal for the entire movie is to destroy an innocent child, and not as a necessary means to accomplish her real goal. Maleficent's motivations for wanting the child dead are never revealed, and we are left to assume that it is her unnatural rejection of all things "good" (read: womanly) that give way to such ambitions.

The rejection of "good" is somewhat reflective of the time that *Sleeping Beauty* was released into theaters. The real world was on the verge of rebellion: the Sexual Revolution, the Vietnam War, and the Women's Liberation Movement were all imminent. In contrast to all of this, Walt Disney had created a wholesome visualization of what a perfect world would be like and in it the "vision of the feminine ideal… [with] Sleeping Beauty…lying motionless, blanched, incapable of feeling sexual desire or even curiosity until a man comes along to rouse [her]" (Gould 131). After Disney's death, and with the dramatic changes taking place in the real world, the company veered away from (human) female characters to headline their films and so "the heroine is dead until the hero chooses to say, 'Live and be mine.'"(Gould 131).

It took Disney Studios thirty years to resurrect the (human) female lead in the form of *The Little Mermaid* (1989). For thirty years, they had no idea what to do with (human) women, because now it was okay for women (in the real world) to have (some) agency, and seek professional goals of having a career and waiting to get married. Times change, and so do the heroines of the Disney film, sort of. The nameless main character from Hans Christian Andersen's original tale was modified by Disney to be a headstrong mermaid, with an independent streak, named Ariel.

Unlike Andersen's Little Mermaid, Ariel is very driven in her pursuit of knowledge of the human world. Her father forbids any interaction between the two worlds, but she stubbornly ignores him (Andersen's mermaids are allowed to visit and observe the surface world on their fifteenth birthdays). Ariel has agency, she wants to learn and nothing is going to stop her. Then she meets, falls in love with, and rescues Prince Eric, thus turning into a "lovesick girl" (Disney 1989). She takes the initiative at

the beginning of the film, through the inversion of roles. Ariel is the one who makes the first move, by growing a pair of legs and setting off to meet him. But, as human she is entirely dependent on Prince Eric, and he is the one that has to rescue her at the end of the film; thus, Ariel is recuperated from fearless and independent heroine to dependent damsel in distress. Her motivation to wanting to live as a human is no longer about satiating her curiosity, and learning about all the artifacts of human life (snorfblats and dinglehoppers) that fascinate her; instead, she is in pursuit of her one true love, Prince Eric. Ariel goes to the Sea Witch, Ursula, for help and has her fins turned legs for the "small" price of her voice, which Ursula describes as a mere trifle. Ariel is able to pursue her dreams, but she cannot speak for herself. Through this we see that "Ariel wrestles with the double-binding cultural expectations of choosing between either voice or access, but never both" (Sells 179). By making these traits mutually exclusive, they lose their viability, because it is only when they are used together that women really have any power.

The Little Mermaid's transformation, in both versions of the story, is very telling about how women's bodies are objectified, and how agency is punished. Depictions of mermaids are highly sexualized, especially by Disney's standards, yet restrictive in other ways. Ariel is more sexualized than any of the heroines that came before her, with her infamous purple shell bikini top and exposed belly button, but as a mermaid she lacks female genitalia. When she trades her flippers for legs (and thus a vagina) she is doing it as a "compliance with the beauty culture, rather than her desire for access, mobility and independence" (Sells 180). She cannot attract a man if she does not have the right parts: body language can be substituted for her voice, but fins (and a lack of female genitalia)

will not cut it. Andersen's version is even more restrictive of the Little Mermaid's agency by torturing her: "every step you take will cause you pain all but unbearable; it will seem to you as though you were walking on the edges of swords, and your blood will flow" (Andersen 34). Yet, she still dances for the prince because he loves to watch her. She concedes her own satisfaction (a life free of pain) to his power over her (her love for him) without question; both literally and figuratively because she has given up her power of speech.

With Disney, the story of *The Little Mermaid* "depicts women as either self-effacing or evil, incapable of creating their own responsible power without either depending on men or stealing power from them," (Trites 152) as seen in their characterization of Ursula. Unlike Andersen's Sea Witch who is not seeking revenge on the Little Mermaid's father, Ursula wants to usurp King Triton's throne and be all powerful. Again, Disney is blatantly stating that "evil comes in the form of a woman who covets the power of the male phallus" (Trites 150). Visually, Ursula is represented through physical exaggerations, embodying "the monstrosity of feminine power": her body is large, her make-up is clown like, and her voice is loud and rather guttural (Sells 184). Comparable to the real life persona of the transgressive Divine, Ursula "exaggerates feminine traits to the point of becoming grotesque" (Hallam). She is beyond feminine with her over the top make-up, and amplified curves, but this figure is "intended to arouse fear and disgust rather than desire" (Hallam). The most significant of her features is found on the lower half of her body. Ursula, unlike the other mermaids in the story, is half octopus, meaning she has always possessed genitalia. When depicted in frame, her "nether regions evoke the dreaded vagina dentate," or vaginal teeth, which myth has

perpetuated as a threat of castration to any man who enters (Douglas 296). It is standard in Disney movies that "any woman with power has to be represented as a castrating bitch" (Sells 181).

Disney's attempt to create a strong heroine for a new generation of viewers is undermined by a story that "perpetuates sexist values by teaching those values to a new generation" (Trites 152). *The Little Mermaid* tells young girls that it is okay to give up on all of your dreams when you meet a man, that you have to change yourself in order for him to love you, and ultimately: "it is the prince who kills the witch… because nice girls are not supposed to have that much power" (Trites 150).

Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) follows in the footsteps of *The Little Mermaid*, with a heroine that embodies stronger characteristics than the Princesses that Walt Disney had direct influence over. But her independent streak is still only a "flourish" in her characterization (Douglas 297). She spends a better part of the film resisting the control of one man, but than proceeds to bend over backwards to accommodate the needs of two others. This is similar to the source story as told by Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, except in the original the heroine Belle does not have an unwanted suitor, but simply complies with the wants and needs of her father and the Beast. Leprince de Beaumont's version was printed in 1786 and was "aimed at girls who would soon face the prospect of themselves being married off to unknown 'beasts,' possibly twenty years older than they were… in matches arranged by their parents" (Gould 135).

In the film version of *Beauty and the Beast*, the heroine Belle lives with her father outside of a small village where the other residents view them as odd. Belle loves to read

and seeks to find adventures away from the impolite comments of her neighbors. Her father, an inventor, is looked down upon and considered to be slightly mad. While traveling to a fair, he loses his way and ends up at the Beast's castle. Offended by his unwanted presence, the Beast locks him up. Belle comes looking for her father, and bargains to take his place as the Beast's prisoner. After a few loud verbal arguments, an attempted escape by Belle, and the Beast rescuing her from a pack of wolves, the two form a tentative friendship that quickly blossoms into love. At her request, the Beast allows Belle to leave the lavish lifestyle in the castle to care for her sick father back home. While she is at a home, her former suitor, the overly macho Gaston, makes another attempt at getting Belle to marry him. When she refuses, and shows him (and the other villagers), via an enchanted hand mirror that she and her father were not lying about the Beast, Gaston decides to lead an angry mob to destroy the Beast. At the castle, the mob meets resistance in the form of the servants who were turned into household objects by the same curse that made the Prince into the Beast. Gaston is killed in his attempt to kill the Beast, who is badly injured. Belle professes her love to the Beast as he lay dying, breaking the curse that had transformed him. Having been restored to his human form, the Prince/Beast and Belle are married and live happily ever after. The double heterosexual love plot reinforces the stringency of Disney's position on sexuality and love (this rigid attitude resurfaces again with *Mulan*). Leprince de Beaumont's version does not include an evil suitor, but instead jealous sisters, who convince her to extend her visit home. They are comparable to Cinderella's stepsisters, and embody the stereotype of the overly critical female peers (also seen again in *Mulan*). She has what they want (looks, fortune, and a man), therefore, they cannot allow her to live in peace. When she

does not return as promised, the Beast nearly dies from heartbreak, but is saved upon her return with declarations of love.

The hostile and heated relationship that Belle and the Beast first share in Disney's revision represents an imbalanced, unequal, abusive relationship. As it plays out on screen, it even follows the pattern of such a relationship with Belle's attempted escape and return to the castle, where she tends to the wounds of the Beast. This is the turning point in the story, and Belle suddenly begins to act like a "woman being concerned for an abusive man, wanting to understand and help him" (Béres 192). Her change of heart and attitude towards the Beast indicate that she has developed Stockholm Syndrome, the psychological condition where hostages begin to sympathize and bond with their captors (Merriam – Webster). The Beast may be lavishing her with gifts, clothes, an entire library full of books, and they may be enjoying one another's company at meals, playing, and dancing together, all of which appear to make Bell happy, but ultimately she does not possess the power to wake one morning and leave if she so chose because she is the Beast's prisoner.

The change in the dynamic of their relationship is also due, in part, to a change in the Beast's demeanor. Belle refuses to engage with him, until he starts to behave in a more polite manner and stops yelling at her. This indicates that the power of "a woman's love socializes a male, turning a Beast into a 'Charming Prince,' an outcast into a husband" (Gould 185). Both the Beast and Gaston represent the ideal in society that men are supposed to be wild, rough, tough, brutish, and bestial. The Beast is literally a man transformed into an animal, and Gaston is portrayed as physically huge, with a loud temperament, and an affinity for hunting as sport. They are essentially men's men. The

reason why the Beast is good and lives at the end of the film, and Gaston is considered evil when he plummets to his death, is the influence of Belle. She "brings culture and refinement to the Beast" and leaves Gaston to his man cave at the local pub where the other local girls attempt but fail to catch his attention (Lacroix 223).

The images of the other local girls as contrasted with Belle also bring up an important point about women and appearances. Belle's costuming is demure: she wears long skirts with modest necklines, leaving plenty to the imagination. The choice to animate her this way "offer[s] a more traditional iconography of the Disney heroine… and bespeak[s] more conservative and romantic images of the feminine heroine" (Lacroix 221). The majority of the women seen in the village scenes are older and frumpy, and then there are the triplets. Gaston's gaggle of groupies is a trio of blonde sisters in style matched outfits: off the shoulder short sleeves, with low cut necklines that show off their ample cleavage. Their actions of flouncing, flopping, and falling all over themselves when Gaston is around emphasizes the cut of the dresses and in contrast to Belle, leave little to the imagination. Yet, Gaston considers Belle to be the most beautiful woman in the village and actively pursues her, even though she continually shoots him down. These other girls openly swoon over him, and would gladly participate in a relationship, but he does not even notice them. This commentary blatantly discourages women from being obvious with their affections or dressing in a supposedly immodest fashion, because it says that men are only want to marry the "good" girls. This is, at least, true for the Disney's Caucasian heroines.

Thirty years after the Civil Rights Movement and the passing of legislation that ended racial segregation, Disney began to introduce their Princesses of Color. *Aladdin*

(1992) is the first Disney film that did not have Western European origins. The original story comes from the collection of Medieval Arabian stories known as *One Thousand and One Arabian Nights*, but the story setting takes place in China, not the Middle East. Even with the new setting, the animated film version actually has little to do with authentic Arabic culture. Rather the film "gives an interpretation of the Arab world through the lens of American Disney," as is demonstrated in the presence, appearance, and characterization of Princess Jasmine (Borthaiser).

The princess of the original story is barely mentioned, and her presence seems to act more as a necessary plot device, a reason for Aladdin to call upon the Genie of the Lamp. Her physical description is given in one line as looking "so beautiful Aladdin fell in love with her at first sight," and any description of her personality is completely absent (Lang and Bock). This gave Disney the opportunity to be very creative with their interpretation of the character, an opportunity they seemed to squander by stereotypically placing the "emphasis on sexuality and the exotic" simply because she is a female character of color (Lacroix 215). The role was expanded considerably from the original, given a name, and her character is nowhere near as docile or quiet. Similar to Wendy and Tinker Bell, and arguably Sleeping Beauty, the focus of the film is not on her character. Jasmine fills the role of love interest, and her dilemma in the film (being forced to marry a prince, rather than someone she loves) is just one of many dilemmas that the protagonist Aladdin has to overcome. In fact, her perspective on the unjust law only comes into play when her character is introduced at the beginning of the film, and again at the end of the film right before the (happy) resolution. The rest of the time, the focus

on her character revolves around her physical appearance, costuming, and characterization.

For the first Disney Princess of color, how Jasmine is depicted sets the tone for future representations of women of color. Her template begets a cycle whose "pattern is evident with regard to the settings and heroine characters that increasingly emphasize the exotic, the foreign, and the sexual" (Lacroix 218). This is most evident in her costuming, which brings to mind the Virgin/Whore dichotomy. Unlike the more modest outfits worn by the Virgin White Princesses who came before her (even Ariel covers up in human form), Jasmine's costume reveals a lot of skin all of the time which "accentuates the physical far more," (Lacroix 221) evoking the Whore. Her arms, shoulders, and stomach are bared to the viewer "referencing…the imagery of [the] harem" (Lacroix 221). In fact, most of the women whom we see in the windows of the residences lining the market place of the fictional Agrabah, or in the parade that introduces Aladdin as Prince Ali, are wearing similar bedlah (belly dancing costume) outfits. Besides the fact that we rarely see a woman in the actual market place, the outfits we do see them are not an accurate reflection of garments typically worn by Middle Eastern women. The animated characters are highly sexualized with come-hither looks; this combined with their costuming and tendency to be grouped together in residences, rather than out on the streets, could stretch the imagination to assume these places are actually brothels, thus making the women sex workers.

It is only older looking women seen in the marketplace who are depicted wearing burkas and hijabs, and Jasmine is the only young woman depicted who dons one when she escapes to the marketplace. It acts as her disguise, something she is hiding behind

rather than an everyday look. In order to prove herself to be the Princess, she has to remove it and expose herself. No one takes her seriously when she is covered up, so she is forced to prove herself by revealing more skin. Bearing this in mind, it is obvious that viewers are "encouraged, through this privileging of the body and the physical in the rendering of the physique and costume to *look* at Jasmine… in [a] voyeuristic manner" (Lacroix 222). Again, we see this idea of what Eastern culture is from the Western perspective, and it isn't necessarily good because the "moral quality of the society is reflected in the appearance of scantily-clad dancing women" (225 Hurley).

The push for Western dominance over the East is also prevalent in the depiction of the Western image as good, and the Eastern image as bad. Physically, Jasmine has an "appropriately darker" skin tone that represents her Middle Eastern heritage, but her facial features (and voice) are Aryan, and even "her figure was drawn on the basis of a careful study on professional American models," whereas the evil sorcerer Jafar who is bent on destroying Aladdin had distinctly Middle Eastern characteristics in both body and voice (Borthaiser). "The length of noses, color of skin, and shape of eyes… were all hotly debated in the Disney shop," but ultimately Jasmine ended up being nothing more than a Barbie doll image of a woman of color (the darkened skin tone, but unchanging features) (Bell 122).

Jasmine's command of her own body, her awareness of her sexuality, and the way she uses it are important as well. The Princesses that came before Jasmine were specifically unaware of their beauty, because it was their humility and innocence that their Princes found attractive. Jasmine, though, is fully aware that men find her attractive, and want to "possess" her, so she uses it to her advantage. She manipulates both Aladdin

and Jafar on screen, and in all likelihood she used the same tactics to get rid of potential suitors before she is seen at the start of the film. She uses seduction tactics to lure her targets into a false sense of mutual attraction, and then proceeds to tear them down. It is a distracting technique that she uses to get what she wants, and it is frowned upon by greater society. The construction of her character to be "sexually enticing" feeds into the "ethnic stereotype of the harem" (Lacroix 225). This use of sexuality to get what she wants diminishes her intelligence, and is strikingly one-dimensional for a supposedly strong character. In the end, she does not end up living independently anyway. She may use her sexuality as an "attempt to escape the confines of her predestiny… [but she still] finds the culmination of her adventure in the relationship with a man" (Lacroix 224). A truly independent character would have demanded her father eliminate any law that said she must be married by her eighteenth birthday, and instead of handing the kingdom off to her fiancé, she would be the new successor. Instead, the Sultan merely changes the stipulation from she must marry a prince, to she "shall marry whoever she deems worthy" (Musker and Clements 1992). She still has to marry somebody, thus denying her, and her young viewers, agency and independence.

In 1995, Disney broke from tradition with its fairy tale origins, and decided to draw upon history for the inspiration of their next story. *Pocahontas* is based off the true story of Matoaka (nicknamed Pocahontas by her tribe) the daughter of Chief Powhatan, leader of the Powhatan tribe; and her interaction with colonist John Smith at the Jamestown settlement in Virginia. That is where the similarities end, really, because Disney took great creative license when retelling the story for entertainment purposes. In the original writings of John Smith, he recalls first meeting Pocahontas when she was

only a ten year old child, and the infamous story of her saving him from being killed by the Powhatan's is only accounted by Smith himself, so many historians doubt the authenticity of the recalled event. The idea of Smith and Pocahontas being lovers is not historically supported, either, but has been perpetuated. This legendary love is what Disney based their entire narrative on. The film tells the story of a nearly twenty-year-old Pocahontas, and her interactions with the new settlers. She meets John Smith, they fall in love, and work to together to (successfully) promote peace between the Natives and the Colonists. The decision to age-progress Pocahontas from a more accurate age of ten to the age of twenty facilitates the romantic story line that is the focus of the film.

Her physical appearance also makes an important statement, because for the first time Disney animators had a created a strong-looking woman. They "wanted to emphasize Pocahontas' athleticism" and reflected this in her physical actions of "running… diving from a cliff in perfect form," as well as her physical appearance: "appears to be almost an Amazon. She is tall, has long, strong legs, and a developed bust" (Lacroix 220). Pocahontas "retains, however the slender waist like the other [Princesses]," because heroines and/or heroes are never "fat" in the animated world of Disney. Pocahontas' physical resemblance to a supermodel is no mistake either, because one of the many life models used was a supermodel herself. Disney was quite proud of their Native American Princess, and had high expectations for box-office revenues and award nominations, but the interesting thing is that while the story is based on the life of Pocahontas the Powhatan tribe member, the animated character's "features [are] modeled from [an] Asian American actress" (Lacroix 220). Yet again, Disney forces their ideal of what beauty is, and manipulates the public into believing the same concepts. Her dress is

also constructed in a manner that is quite "strategic" in exemplifying her physical attributes: her "shoulders are almost bare… slit of the skirt shows much of the thigh, particularly in the active scenes" (Lacroix 221). This was not done as a reflection of historical accuracy in the costume (which is doubtful at best), but rather as a chance to exploit the physical attractiveness of the body. And, just like with Jasmine, it exemplifies her Otherness as a woman of color because her clothing also acts as a uniform for her ethnicity. She is the mainstream representation of Native American women, so her appearance affects how people understand Native American culture and stereotypes.

The connection that Native Americans have with nature is a stereotype that Disney heavily accentuates in the film. So not only is Pocahontas irrevocably connected to nature through her gender, but she also inhabits a cultural connection. She is depicted as being particularly responsive to nature, as is evident through her "relationship with animals, the trees, the water, and the wind" (Lacroix 221). Like her predecessors, Pocahontas has animal companions she interacts with, and like her fellow Princesses Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Belle, and Mulan she has a grandmother figure looking over her, only hers takes the form of a 200 year old willow tree. The wind plays a big role, too, in dispensing advice and guiding her decisions. Listening to the wind, and allowing it to dictate her path in life is a passive act for an active person, because she does not make the decision on her own; something (or someone in a spiritual sense) is doing it for her.

When it comes to her relationship with John Smith, Disney emphasizes the gap between the characters through race, language, and gender. From the time that they first meet face-to-face it is apparent that "Pocahontas' personality and behavior in the plot are directly and clearly related to her ethnicity/Otherness and enacted in contrast to John

Smith's Whiteness" (Lacroix 225). This is demonstrated in the actions of John Smith, as he is literally hunting Pocahontas, approaching her as one would a wild animal. He crouches behind a waterfall, gun poised, and upon realizing his mistake attempts to make contact with her as she runs away. He approaches her slowly, cautiously, without making sudden movements, and talking softly even though she cannot understand him. Depicting Pocahontas as "always moving nimbly through the forest" and creeping up on him with slow, deliberate, animal like movements does nothing to refute this idea (Lacroix 220). Her inability to understand John Smith due to the language barrier is portrayed as a trivial obstacle that they, or rather she, overcomes. Previously both Grandmother Willow and the Wind tell her to "listen with your heart, you will understand," and when she heeds the advice in that moment, she is suddenly able to understand spoken English. Interestingly enough, John Smith does not obtain a sudden understanding of the Algonquian language. Disney proves yet again that it is the woman's responsibility to be malleable to the needs of the man.

Pocahontas rather openly defies her father when it comes to pursuing her feelings for John Smith. She shirks her responsibilities to him and her people to spend time with him and in this sense "presents herself as strong willed and independent" (Lacroix 224). By the end of the film, though, she alters her way of thinking. She makes two major sacrifices: the first is her physical self, and the second are her dreams of adventure. She physically places herself between John Smith and her father who is acting as his executioner, because she loves Smith. Then she begs her father to recognize where hating the English colonists has gotten them: on the brink of war. This is representative of the idea that a woman's "heroic actions [are] based on emotion, rather than rational thought

[and] pejoratively characterized as revealing typical female volatility" (Dundes 365). When John Smith is forced to return to England due to injury, he asks Pocahontas to come with him. She is presented with the opportunity to have the adventures she longs for, but instead "she chooses her loyalty to and the needs of her own people over her own desires" instead (Lacroix 224). This change of heart (whispered to her by the wind) "models the submersion of a young woman's desires to allow a commitment to selfless altruism" (Dundes 353). Pocahontas "achieve[s] her fulfillment through dedication to her people," not through marriage (Lacroix 226). She has a career, and she has a love life, but she cannot have both. Instead she "fulfills societal expectations of today wherein young women are supposed to progress from selfish absorption in relationships to selfless dedication nurturing others," and in Pocahontas' case it means choosing career over love (Dundes 353). There is little progress for building up strong autonomous women, if they are still meant to make sacrifices of their wants for others.

Mulan (1998) is often considered to be the best example of a Disney animated film with a strong female character because it is " a story about breaking conventional gender boundaries and roles, about the ability of the female to be as strong, as aggressive, as cunning as the male" (Yang 312). Disney does manage to bring this over from the original text, which tells the story of a young Chinese woman who goes to war in her father's place, disguised as man, unbeknownst to her comrades. She returns home a hero, and reveals herself, where she is lauded for her strength and courage. The legend has been repeated and reinvented slightly for centuries. One particular version, written by Maxine Hong Kingston in her book *The Woman Warrior*, is actually a retelling of "the Mulan story to empower female identity" (Dong 221). The heroine not only successfully

lives her life as a man, but marries her childhood friend in secret, hides a pregnancy and newborn son under her armor, and leads her men to victory in battle. While Disney's version is more a "commercial fantasy of the 'other'," it still "transgresses the boundaries of socially and culturally defined gender roles in both traditional Chinese and American culture" (Dong 229; Dong 220).

In Disney's musical version there is an emphasis placed on the performance of gender roles. At the beginning of the film, the audience is introduced to Mulan as she is preparing to meet the Matchmaker and fulfill her duty as a woman to marry and give birth to sons, as detailed in the song "You'll Bring Honor to Us All." This song outlines the fact that "female characters are involved in few of the activities and assigned few of the characteristics or goals that are accorded prestige and esteem" (Tsao 110). Motherhood is lauded as a woman's highest calling - the most important thing she will ever do. However, this declaration limits women, and is used to prevent them from excelling at other activities. After her disastrous interview, the Matchmaker declares that even though Mulan "may look like a bride, [she] will never bring [her] family honor" (Bancroft and Cook 1998). This indicates that gender is not just indicative of appearance, but a person's ability to act in a masculine or feminine sense as well, and that by feeding into "gender stereotypes…[it] prevent[s] female human potential from being realized by depriving girls of a range of strong, alternative role models" (Tsao 107). When Mulan fails to live up the feminine expectations she has to "fill a 'male role (soldier); thus suggesting that there are no 'female alternatives' in relationships" (Tanner 365). If a woman cannot perform feminine tasks, she is left with no options to prove herself a woman. Men, on the other hand, have all of these outlets for displaying their masculine

capabilities. If they fail at being a soldier, perhaps they can become a doctor or a politician. They have options outside of the domestic realm, but Mulan is confined to her work in the home, until she decides to impersonate a man. This episode is also an indication of the stereotypical denigration and gossip that occurs between women. Women can be each other's worst critics, and by "making the matchmaker the ultimate judge" of Mulan's feminine capability it reinforces this idea (Tang 157).

Mulan joins the army disguised as a man, where she and the other men are subjected to a rigorous training regimen to prepare them for battle. The entire sequence is set to the song "I'll Make a Man Out of You," which acts as a blueprint for what it means to be a man (swift, forceful, strong, and mysterious), is the perfect example for the expectations of gender performance that men are pressured into. Shang questions whether the families of China sent their daughters to serve in the army instead of their sons, because he finds the men to be incompetent. This exemplifies the "engrained societal attitudes and biases in the available choices and expectations assigned to different genders" (Tsao 106). If men are incapable of certain physical tasks, one way of taunting is to call them a "girl". This feeds into the concept of physical weakness being a feminine trait, and that being a girl is bad thing. At the end of the film, Mulan disguises her three male friends as women to sneak them into the palace to save the Emperor of China. The men look absolutely ridiculous, though, and they break character after one of them drops a piece of fruit that was standing in for a breast. This moment makes audiences laugh, but it is significant in understanding the differences in gender role reversal performances. Men are "locked into sexual identity" because of their male status, and "male [role] reversal… seems capable of representation only in terms of farce" (Doane, Hallows,

Hutchings, and Jancovich 253). Audiences would never believe that Mulan's friends could ever pull off being women because the concept is so silly. Yet, the idea of Mulan passing as a man is believable because women lack masculine power that is notably found in the phallus. A man impersonating a woman is a degrading experience, therefore no man would enter into such an arrangement as part of a *serious* life change, it would only be done in jest. Women on the other hand gain power when they disguise themselves as men. They have everything to gain (social, political, and economical power) through the experience of living the liberated life of a man. So while it is "positive to see female success celebrated" it is important to remember that Mulan's success in the story "is achieved as a temporary imposter in the male world" and all of the film's "action is strictly delineated in male-centered terms" (Yang 312).

It is important to note here that all of Disney's romantically involved characters have made up heterosexual couples. As a man, Mulan befriended Shang, but after "he discovered she was a woman, they fell in love" (Tanner 364). Initially, he is angry with her, and ignores her attempts to apologize. In a sense, he has been cuckolded, and shuns her in his ensuing shame. Ultimately, it is Mulan who goes on to defeat Shan-Yu (the leader of the invading Huns), but it is important to remember that Mulan is rescued first by Shang. According to law she should be murdered for her transgressions, but Shang lets her go, because he already knows he is in love with her. In the end, they reunite and it is implied that marriage will follow. It can be concluded that Mulan's "efforts in the battlefield have brought her the prize of a partner" (Yang 312). So even though she has proven herself to be a strong and capable woman, and brought honor to her family by

saving China, her character still ends up having the same domestic goals of love, marriage, and a family, like all the other Disney Princesses.

The Princess and the Frog (2009) tells the story of a Disney's first African American Princess Tiana, a woman who vocalizes her lack of interest in any kind of domestic relationship, and is solely focused on her dream of owning her own restaurant. This is quite different from the Brothers Grimm tale of a spoiled princess who promises to do anything for a talking frog if he will fetch her expensive toy that she lost down the well. Instead we have a spoiled Frog Prince, who promises Tiana her restaurant if she will kiss him and break the voodoo curse he has been placed under. Unfortunately, Tiana is turned into a frog instead. Disney's first African American Princess, a historical moment in company history, spends fifty-eight minutes of a ninety minute movie as a frog. In a way this resembles the situation of Princess Jasmine who is supposed to be a Middle Eastern character but has the facial features of a White woman, it is the "reality deprived of substance" (Borthaiser). Finally, there is a Black Princess, but we do not see her on screen for most of the movie. Like Sleeping Beauty, Tiana is removed from the action, and the audience is expected to accept the slimy, green frog body she inhabits as a substitute.

Tiana's focus on her career and overall disinterest in romantic love and socializing with friends and family is quite a departure from the usual Disney heroine, but ambition (outside of the familial sphere) has never been a friend to a Disney female. The kind of career that Tiana is chasing after is not what gets her into trouble. Being a restaurateur still falls within domestic realms, because she wants to nurture and nourish people with her food. That fact that she wants to make it a profitable career, instead of

merely having and feeding her family is the factor that needs to be dealt with. It is her career "ambitions that will lead to her demise," and she wants her restaurant so badly that she will even do the unthinkable (because just the idea makes her skin crawl) and kiss a frog to get it (Fisher and Silber). Instead of Prince Naveen becoming human again, Tiana turns into a frog, and their adventure to get turned back begins. Her punishment of being turned into a frog is because of her greed and willingness to take a short-cut (for the first time in her life), both of which are unacceptable, and unattractive, qualities in a woman.

Prior to this turn of events, Tiana is shown in her day to day life working as a waitress saving up the money she needs for her restaurant. Her plan is to work hard, save her money, work hard, never socialize, work hard, barely sleep, and work hard some more. She proclaims over and over again that she knows if she works just a little bit harder she will earn enough to get her restaurant, even if no one else believes she can. She abhors Prince Naveen for his complete lack of work ethic and sets about trying to convert him from a life of squandered privilege. She is an embodiment of neoliberalism and sees "'private' *competition, self esteem*, and *independence* as the roots of *personal responsibility*, and excoriate[s] 'public' *entitlement, dependency*, and *irresponsibility* as the sources of social ills" (Duggan 14). Tiana is intent on making this restaurant happen on her own, she does not ask for handouts (even from her incredibly rich, White best friend Charlotte), and motivates herself even when others, including her own mother, tell her to just give up now. Prince Naveen embodies everything she hates, and everything she stands against. She is categorized as being the anti-Welfare Queen, the model example, and it is unrealistic.

Class, race, and gender are not autonomous, but intersectional concepts of a person's identity that cannot be separated. Even if Tiana becomes financially successful, her race and gender will always keep her at the bottom of the food chain, so the idea that she could pull herself up by the bootstraps is far-fetched at best. Disney also incorporates the Liberal idea of "hiding stark inequalities of wealth and power and of class, race, gender, and sexuality" (Duggan 5). Disney barely acknowledges racial differences, the sole instance occurs when the real estate agents working with Tiana insinuate that a "little woman of [her] background" would be unsuccessful in the restaurant business (Clements and Musker 2009). Nor does the enormous class and racial difference between Tiana and Charlotte seem to be an issue when it comes to maintaining their friendship. This friendship seems to be built on Tiana and mother rendering domestic services for Charlotte and her father, who are friendly and polite in return. Charlotte's opportunity to repay Tiana for all her hard work, is by kissing the Frog Prince Naveen which will make them human again, but she fails to do so in a timely manner. In theory, their friendship is a great example of diverse people coming together, but the portrayal glosses over all of the differences and how it affects their relationship, instead of using the disparities to define the relationship.

There is so much potential for character enrichment and growth through this kind of friendship, especially for Charlotte. There is an imbalance of power between the two, based solely on the color of their skin, and it is manifested in the locations where they interact. Charlotte may be Tiana's best friend, but she has no idea what kind of life Tiana really leads because she has never spent any time in Tiana's home. Their friendship is based on Tiana fitting in to Charlotte's world. Plus, Disney is reinforcing the idea that it

is okay for Caucasian girls to be frivolous, flighty and believe in magical romance, while African American girls need to devote their time to working hard, and being realistic instead of fantasizing about being rescued by a Prince.

By the end of the film, Tiana is shown the error of her ways, and decides that if she cannot be with Prince Naveen, than being human is not worth it, even if she has to give up her restaurant. Two important pieces of information come from this. First, Tiana has to be rehabilitated from independent workaholic to a woman who is head-over-heels in love with the Prince, in order for there to be a happy ending like the other Princess movies. Second, after the frog versions of Tiana and Prince Naveen are married in the swamp, their first kiss as man and wife transforms them back into humans. Like Belle and the Beast, we are shown that a "woman's love socializes a male" (Gould 185). Prince Naveen was lazy and indolent prior to his trip with Tiana through the bayou. Along the way she teaches him how to mince, and her passion for the restaurant becomes inspirational to him. In order for Prince Naveen to grow as a person he cannot "marry a girl who has been brought up as a Princess. She will not make a satisfactory wife unless she has endured hardship" and can make him understand the necessity of hard work (Gould 130).

It is obvious that while Tiana was drawn in a new century, her story is still constructed from the same formula as all the other princesses that came before her. Her transformation into a frog, and her relationships with Louis the Crocodile and Ray the Firefly, display her affinity for the natural realm. These animal characters also exemplify another common occurrence in Disney films which is to have the "animal and other nonhuman characters undergo a kind of racialized anthropomorphism" (Lugo-Lugo and

Bloodsworth-Lugo 168). Louis is a trumpet playing crocodile that wants to be human so he can "play with the big boys," and is distinctly voiced by an African America man (Clements and Musker 2009). It is pretty safe bet, too, that should Louis ever be granted his wish to be human, he would take the form of an African American man. Tiana also has a fairy-godmother character in Mama Odie, the old Voodoo Priestess. Mama Odie can best be characterized as the anti-Ursula. Where Ursula "blatantly equates love with sexuality," Mama Odie sees love not as a want, but as a necessity (Trites 147). She takes nothing from Tiana, and only gives her the advice to "dig a little deeper" to find what it is she really needs in life -- love with Prince Naveen -- rather than just her wants -- a lucrative career. The voodoo curse can be broken only if, and when, Prince Naveen kisses a Princess. As frogs, Tiana and Prince Naveen marry and seal it with a kiss that transforms them back into humans. Their dilemma is solved, because Tiana has become a Princess through marriage.

Even after seventy-three years, Disney's animated Princesses are being made from the same cookie dough and cut with the same design. The only part that has changed is the color of the frosting. Repeatedly the same premises are seen of a Princess needing to be rescued (either from an evil force or the consequences of her own decisions), love and marriage being the ultimate goal of woman's life, choosing love over personal interests, having a profound connection with nature and animals, and having physical appearance and dress play a major role in defining the character.

In 2007, Disney released the film *Enchanted* that both parodies and plays homage to the original Disney Princess movies. The film starts off in the animated world of Andalsia, where the audience is introduced to Giselle a perky, plucky Princess – to – be who spends her time dreaming of the day her Prince will come. Coincidently, that day has come. After being chased by a troll, Giselle literally falls in to Prince Edward's waiting arms, they make eye contact, declare their love for one another, and plan to marry in the morning. All of this is done in a completely over the top style, from mannerisms to the lyrics being sung, it is obvious that Disney is poking fun at themselves and the ridiculously short time span that passes between the Prince and Princess meeting, falling in love, and getting married in their "classic" Princess movies. Of course this all gets derailed when they are transported to the real world (New York City) where Giselle meets Robert, the cynical single father, who thinks fairy tales are a waste of time, and that relationships should be approached far more pragmatically.

Time and time again, the film pokes fun at, or calls out, the themes of the classic films. The funniest is Giselle's connection to nature with her animal friends. Waking up in the messy apartment of Robert, Giselle calls up on her animal friends, just as she had

in Andalasia, to assist with the clean up. Only there she had squirrels, chipmunks, blue birds, rabbits and deer to leap into action. In New York City, though, she has the pleasure of making the acquaintance of pigeons, rats, cockroaches, and flies, which use their dirty selves to scrub the apartment "clean". Yet, even with these light hearted moments that poke fun at the old films, *Enchanted* still manages to find itself falling into certain traps that perpetuate the same ideas. Not only does Giselle have an affinity for cleaning, but she makes her own clothing (usually from the curtains or bedsheets) and cooks, as well. After Robert's ex-girlfriend, Nancy, runs off with Prince Edward, Giselle takes over her clothing line and makes it her own (puffy Princess dress style of course). Giselle is a domestic character, just like Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Tiana. At the end of the film, Giselle is seen playing house with Robert and his daughter, but there is no wedding for them, nor is a ring visible on her left hand. This image is quite progressive for Disney, but they cannot have a Princess movie without having a wedding (or at least imply that one will happen). So, just before they show Robert and Giselle living in sin, the audience is privy to the animated nuptials of Nancy and Prince Edward. This is somewhat bothersome, too, because Nancy is the more relatable woman who has grown up in the real world, but because she believes in the idea of fairy-tale love, she willingly gives up her life to blindly follow Prince Edward down a manhole. The life of a successful businesswoman is ultimately unsatisfying and incomplete, because she does not have the perfect romance. And when she is offered this fantasy, the life she has built for herself is inconsequential in comparison.

In 2010, Disney took another trip down the rabbit hole and revisited the world of *Alice and Wonderland*, only this time it was not animated and she was a woman of

twenty instead of seven year old girl child. Alice ends up returning to Wonderland (a place she only vaguely remembers visiting as a child) after she runs a way from her engagement party. She feels nothing (except mild disgust) for the man who was proposing and feels the unwavering need to escape. Once in Wonderland, she discovers that everyone believes her to be their savior, but when she fails to remember them, or live up to their expectations, they dismiss her as the "Wrong Alice". Alice's return visit is much darker than the first, far more dangerous, and includes a slew of characters that Disney did not adapt into the animated version of the film from Lewis Carroll's original stories.

The best part of the new Alice, though, is the strength that she possesses and displays on numerous occasions. Because this is a return trip, certain sequences were cut, but that ends up being a positive thing for the character. As a child, when Alice is unable to get through the tiny locked door, and proceeds to grow very small, very tall, and then very small again, she does so with great emotion and it causes quite the flood of tears. The new version banishes all of Alice's tears from the screen. The screenwriter Linda Woolverton also wrote the script for *Beauty and the Beast* and contributed to *Mulan*, but for the first time I think we can actually call her attempt at creating a strong heroine successful. In regards to the missing Pool of Tears, Woolverton explained that she "couldn't have her break down like that" (Rohter AR13). Alice is no longer a little girl; there is no reason for her to be frightened or upset about not getting her way immediately. Nor does she panic and become upset when her height changes rather suddenly through out the film. Having gone through puberty, she is no longer frightened by physical changes. Alice does a fantastic job at maintaining her identity, as well. People keep

telling her she is the "wrong" Alice, but she maintains that she is neither the "right" nor the "wrong," she just simply is Alice. After being reminded of her past visit, Alice decides to play champion for the White Queen and willingly goes into battle against the Red Queen and her Jabberwocky, wearing shiny silver armor and wielding a rather impressive sword. It is not an overtly masculine look, though. Her long hair hangs loose about her, and the armor has a delicate appearance and is quite form fitting to her body. This is not a sequence of a woman trying to be like a man, this is a sequence of a woman being brave and taking action.

Another important aspect of her character that still separates Alice from the other Disney Heroines is her lack of a romantic story line. In the new version of the film she has a rather odd relationship with the Mad Hatter that wavers between a mother/child relationship and that of a budding romance, but it never fully develops one way or the other. When he asks her to remains in Wonderland, though, she declines but promises to return. Once home, she rejects the waiting marriage proposal and takes a position in her late father's company that has her sailing away to China by herself. She decides to strike out on her own, pursuing a career, no matter what kind of good Victorian female role the rest of her family wants her to play.

These two films also see the return of the Villainess to the Disney screen (Ursula was the last evil female character that Disney produced). In *Enchanted*, Queen Narcissa appears to have been developed by combining the Evil Queen from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and Maleficent from *Sleeping Beauty*. She strives to keep Giselle and Edward apart because she does not want to lose her crown to her new daughter-in-law. Queen Narcissa uses poison apples to place Giselle into an enchanted sleep, which can

only be disturbed by true love's first kiss before the stroke of midnight, otherwise she dies. When Giselle is revived by Robert, Queen Narcissa transforms into a terrible dragon and carries him off. Giselle is the one who heroically defeats the dragon, and rescues her new Prince. She is a true heroine, but she still has to end up with love at the end. The new *Alice in Wonderland* features the Red Queen (an amalgamation of the Queen of Hearts, the Red Queen, and the Duchess from Lewis Carroll's stories), who is characterized by her terrible toddler-like tantrums and oversized head. Her ambitions are less driven by an actual desire to be powerful, than they are a revenge tactic against her younger sister, and a cry for love and attention. I believe her good sister the White Queen would be far more influential to young girls, though, because she is a secondary heroine in the story. Her pacifist attitude is quite off-putting, though, compared to the active and brave Alice that the story centers around. Alice is a woman that does not need a man to feel a sense of accomplishment or purpose in her life.

While these two characters are much better examples of what young girls should striver for in their lives, they are not as influential over young girls as the "classic" animated films for many reasons. First, *Enchanted* and the new *Alice in Wonderland* are only partially animated. It would actually be difficult to argue that *Alice in Wonderland* is even meant for young girls, even though it is rated PG. Given its floating severed heads, drinking blood, and some more adult plot points involving adultery and sexual come-ons, I would be hard pressed to find any well-intentioned parent that would allow their daughter under the age of ten to view the film. Children tend to lose interest when watching live action sequences, as well. Secondly, Giselle and Alice are not marketed as part of the Princess conglomerate. Giselle was omitted simply because the company

would have had to pay royalties to the actress who portrayed Giselle for the use of her image forever. The same reasons could apply for the new Alice, as well, but the old Alice was never considered a Princess, either. Disney has made a fortune on the fantasy of the animated Princesses and Heroines, who ask for nothing in return because they are not real. The flesh and blood women who portray the live action characters cannot be owned and manipulated in the same ways, therefore it would not be worth the exorbitant price to keep them.

It is obvious that with all the consumption of media and media tie-in items alike, the Disney Heroines have much longer lasting effects than could be imagined. Each one of the Heroines was taught a similar moral about sacrifice, love, and what it means to be a woman. These female characters are literally commodities, bought and sold in our society. The lessons they teach young children are about how "to be a desirable commodity" (Douglas 299). If you want to be liked, by men or women, you have to act this way, dress this way, and perform this way. Otherwise you are going to end up like the evil witch: alone and mean. The stories are all captivating and entertaining, and Disney has been moving forward with all the good intentions in the world, trying (and failing) to create these strong female characters who can have it all.

Frankly, though, I think it is about time an animated Princess learned to rule without a Prince, and not because she is choosing career over love, but because her story is told without any kind of romantic plot. Love may socialize a man, but it domesticates a woman. Little girls need to know that wanting more and actually going out and making it happen, rather than defaulting to getting and married and having babies, does not make them less than women who do fulfill these domestic roles. Real women come in all

shapes and sizes, and Disney has a long way to go before they accurately depict any of them.

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