

The correlation between disney movies and poor body image in young women assignme...

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Disney was named the world's second top media company in the US for the year 2004. They have produced over 44 "classics" and are one of the most recognized names in animated film (Peterson). We expose young girls to these animated films at a very young age, yet doing so does not seem to be good for these children. Disney's movies are littered with a virtually unattainable image of what a woman should look like and feeding such images to girls at a young age is wrong and causes low self esteem and poor body image.

The term body image refers to a person's sense of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the physical appearance of his or her body ("Body Image"). Girls are susceptible to influences telling them what they should look like even at a young age. According to a study published in the journal BMC Public Health, children as young as seven and eight-years-old already have notions about the ideal body. An analysis of more than 4,000 students from Nova Scotia revealed that young girls' happiness with their bodies is directly linked to how thin they are (Sharples).

Backing up these notions is the media that these young girls are faced with. For example, in all of Disney's movies the lead female role is portrayed by a stick thin, yet voluptuous woman. These women are often portrayed wearing very revealing clothes. Whether they are under the sea, in the middle of a forest, or in an Arabian desert, plunging necklines and revealed midriff are common among the Disney Princesses' wardrobes. Ariel, the sixteen year old mermaid in Disney's movie "The Little Mermaid", wears nothing other than two strategically placed clam shells for the first portion of the movie.

In the “ Official Princess Poster”, released in 2000, all of the princesses are depicted in flirtatious positions and their low cut tops are showing cleavage. Two years later, in January 2002 Disney marketed their new “ Princesses” line. They grouped together Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow White, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Mulan and Pocahontas creating a whole new line of merchandise. Strangely, Mulan and Pocahontas are rarely depicted on the “ Princesses” lines products; their rustic look of fur cloth and warrior’s gear is less appealing than that of the fancier princesses dresses like Sleeping Beauty or Cinderella’s.

When Mulan does appear, she is typically in the kimono-like hanfu, which makes her miserable in the movie, rather than her liberated warrior’s gear. Unfortunately the warrior’s gear is not as pleasing to the eye. Instead it is bulky and manly, neither of which a desired trait for a princess (Hurley). More often than not, princesses are portrayed as feminine and dainty, interested only in clothes, jewellery, and seducing the handsome prince.

These are not ideal traits to be teaching children, yet we expose them to media reinforcing these traits with hardly a second thought. The need to fit the dainty feminine role of women portrayed by these princesses is becoming very evident in the adolescents of today. There is evidence that young women who hold the most conventionally feminine beliefs ??? who avoid conflict and think they should be constantly nice and pretty ??? are more likely to be depressed than others. In a survey released last October by Girls Inc. school-age girls overwhelmingly reported a paralyzing pressure to be “ perfect”: not only to get straight A’s and be the student-body president,

editor of the newspaper but also to be “ kind and caring,” “ please everyone, be very thin and dress right. ” Sounds like they need a fairy godmother just as bad as Cinderella did (Sharples). The body type of these Princesses is perhaps the most dangerous message girls receive from Disney movies. The thinness portrayed by the women in these movies is unrealistic, giving young girls false beliefs about how they should look.

In Canada today, almost 90 per cent of women and girls are unhappy with the way they look (Johnston). This leads to serious health problems such as unhealthy dieting. This unhappiness is occurring in younger and younger girls, sometimes even as young as four or five, mainly because of how early on in life they are subjected to these unrealistic images. Researchers generating a computer model of a woman with Disney princess proportions found that her back would be too weak to support the weight of her upper body, and her body would be too narrow to contain more than half a liver and a few centimetres of bowel.

A real woman built that way would suffer from chronic diarrhea and eventually die from malnutrition, not to mention have to walk on all fours (Sperry). Real people do not look anything like a Disney princess, though some have tried; Sarah Burge is a former Playboy Bunny who started her surgical pursuit of perfection at age of seven, when she had ears pinned back. Since then she’s had work done on her chest, buttocks, nose, teeth, eyes — pick a body part, odds are that she’s improved it through a surgical procedure. She has reportedly spent over ? 40, 000 on plastic surgery, and currently holds the world record for highest number of plastic surgeries

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(Burge). Sarah Burge is only one example of an adult woman who let her childhood impressions of “ the right way to look” rule the way she treated her body. Many adult women feel the pressure to look perfect. Surgical procedures are far from cheap and not all women can afford to go this route in changing their bodies to meet the unattainable goal they feel is set out for them. Therefore, many turn to even more dangerous methods.

The American research group Anorexia Nervosa & Related Eating Disorders, Inc. says that one out of every three college-aged women uses unhealthy methods of weight control including fasting, skipping meals, excessive exercise, laxative abuse, and self-induced vomiting. These “ weight control strategies” can have serious long-term health consequences on health, leading, in some cases, to death (“ Mental Illness in Canada”). Even when faced with death some would choose looking good, because that is what we are taught at a young age.

In order to be loved by prince charming we have to be pretty. “ The Paper Bag Princess” is a picture book published in 1980. It was hailed as an antidote to Disney; however, behind the moral of the story seems to lie the same message. The heroine outwits a dragon who has kidnapped her prince, but not before the beast’s fiery breath frazzles her hair and destroys her dress, forcing her to wear a paper bag. The ungrateful prince rejects her, telling her to come back when she is “ dressed like a real princess. She dumps him and skips off into the sunset, happily ever after, alone. So there we have it girls, if you step out of line, you end up going solo, no prince wants an ugly princess. This is the message we are teaching young girls.

They see it in movies when they're young and in peers as they grow older. It is wrong to subject children to this unrealistic image of women. They need to be taught that this dainty little princess image is unattainable; that it is ok to slay your own dragons, and that they should wait for a prince who likes them.

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