
THE TRANSFORMATION OF WOMAN STEREOTYPE PRESENTED TO CHILDREN THROUGH DISNEY'S ANIMATED FAIRY TALES

Vera Virijević Mitrović

The Academy of Applied Technical and Preschool Studies, Niš, Department Pirot, Serbia,
vera.virijevic.mitrovic@akademijanis.edu.rs

Abstract: Proceeding from the need to use one concrete example to show the power with which media and modern visual content can have an impact on children of an early age, we point to the inexhaustible field of psychological influence and sociological response to Walt Disney's animated fairy tales. In this paper, our goal is to determine the appearance and change of gender stereotypes, first of all, the change of stereotypes of women and their social role through the characters of princesses – the main heroines of animated fairy tales by The Walt Disney Studios; with particular reference to the importance of the influence that popular cartoons have on the age of preschool children. We use the method of analysis and comparison of a sample of fairy tales, according to the chronology of creation, taking into account both the meaning of the story and the scenario, as well as the wealth of visual and musical content with which these popular animated films captivate children. The analysis shows that the changes in social stereotypes of women in the range from the middle of the 20th century to today are clearly evident in the representation of women in the animated Disney fairy tale, as well as changes in the importance and role of male characters. Taking into account the enormous viewership and popularity of these cartoons, we conclude that through an animated film as one of the powerful media content that influences preschool children, it is possible to project the ideal of a woman-heroine to the youngest age of girls, simultaneously portraying changes in the stereotype of their partners. Forming the image of a woman as girls who identify with Disney princesses would like to become can have a far-reaching sociological impact in the formation of attitudes, both about the role of women in the modern social moment, and about gender identity in general. Gender roles and their psychological characteristics have completely changed in the twenty-first century compared to the twentieth century. The revolution in terms of 3d animation and graphic solutions, i.e. the artistic embodiment of that virtual world, is followed by a revolution in terms of the role and characteristics of male and female characters in an animated fairy tale. In the current social moment, an important task for educators is the question of recognizing in video content for children the redefinition of the concepts of gender and sex. The recommendation of this research is that educators become aware of the influence of visual arts on the creation of gender stereotypes, select and present them in a way that does not violate the democratic standards of modern society, but also does not offend the tradition and importance of the natural family environment from which most children come. Considering the conclusions about the powerful and effective influence of the mass media on the formation and choice of ideals that are recommended to children of an early age through animated content, the question arises of the need for parents and educators to become aware of these influences and, with such knowledge, offer children positive views and interpretations, as well as selection of alternative visual contents.

Keywords: animated fairy tale, gender stereotype, influence of visual content on preschool children

1. INTRODUCTION

This research aims to analyze from several sides the change of stereotypes of women in Disney animated fairy tales, comparing their gradational change from the stereotype of the damsel in distress waiting to be rescued and the housewife, i.e. women who dream of a perfect marriage, to more recent fairy tales in which the stereotype of a woman superior in action, struggle, and business plan is highlighted, through her independence, creativity, initiative and self-sufficiency. We find the impetus for this type of research in the immediate environment where the great popularity of Disney franchises is observed among children of an early age – preschool children. The hypothesis of this research is that Disney's animated fairy tales at a child's early age can influence the formation of children's gender stereotypes and have a more far-reaching influence on the personal choice and formation of the child's personality and lifestyle at a later age based on unconsciously accepted role models in the characters of Disney princesses. "Disney as a global corporation has imposed on the psychological development of children in regards to identity management, gender performance, and racial stereotypes, forming an overall structure society has been reduced to confine in." (Sohani, 2021, p. 112)

A surprisingly large number of scientific works, popular articles and academic studies have been written about these phenomena, which are recognized as significant and influential in the formation of children's stereotypes and, in general, social changes in gender stereotypes. They cover a wide range of interests and various angles of observation, such as those concerning literary changes in the story of a fairy tale transferred to a cartoon script, then

those describing artistic and technical changes in animation, to this type of sociological and psychological research concerning the notions of sex and gender the social role of women and the changes that are evident in the decade-long development of Disney franchises with princesses(England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011); the latest are feminist, eco-feminist, LGBT angles of observation (Yip, 2021), analyzes that talk about the influence of the media on the younger age of children, school age and teenagers (Hine, Ivanovic & England, 2018; Sohani, 2021).

In any case, in the sea of papers, observations and conclusions, the question of permanent psychological influence on the formation of attitudes and tastes of the target group for which these fairy tales are intended – children of preschool age – arises. In this sense, the work aims to include, from every point of view, the basic knowledge about gender stereotypes produced by Disney's animated fairy tales, but also to ask the question: Are and to what extent these influences are decisive for the formation of gender stereotypes in preschool children, and how much is the final outcome influence of educators and family?

2. SAMPLE OF ANIMATED FAIRY TALES AND CHARACTERS REPRESENTING THE STEREOTYPE OF WOMEN; ANALYSIS AND COMPARISON

From the mid-thirties of the 20th century until today, a whole series of animated fairy tales was created in the Walt Disney studio, which captured and won the hearts of children with their script, or rather fable, artistic and musical creations, making them an inseparable and impressive part of cultural content during their growing up. Starting with "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" from 1937, there have been a total of fifteen Disney princesses, creating a whole world of animated content, sequels, i.e. franchise, as well as an enormously large production of accompanying popular products, costumes and toys in the children's industry. The following table lists all Disney animated fairy tales with princesses:

Table 1. chronology of Disney animated princesses and popularity according to IMBD

animated fairy-tale:	released:	IMBD rating:	princess:
<i>Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs</i>	1937	7.6	Snow White
<i>Cinderella</i>	1950	7.3	Cinderella
<i>Sleeping Beauty</i>	1959	7.2	Aurora
<i>The Little Mermaid</i>	1989	7.6	Ariel
<i>Beauty and the Beast</i>	1991	8	Belle
<i>Aladdin</i>	1992	8	Jasmin
<i>Pocahontas</i>	1995	6.7	Pocanhontas
<i>Mulan</i>	1998	7.6	Mulan
<i>The Princess and the Frog</i>	2008	7.1	Tiana
<i>Tangled</i>	2010	7.7	Rapunzel
<i>Brave</i>	2012	7.1	Merida
<i>Frozen</i>	2013	7.4	Elsa (and Anna)
<i>Moana</i>	2016	7.6	Moana
<i>Raya and the Last Dragon</i>	2021	7.3	Raya

The popularity of Disney's fairy tales is usually measured by the amount of money brought in by cinema distribution, "the colossal amount of financial success, with approximately \$55.1 billion global revenue in 2016 and \$5 billion box office sales for animated feature films released since 2008, followed by a significant amount of popularity with young children worldwide"(Shahid, 2021,p. 114). However, there is also a cumulative popularity, which cannot be precisely expressed numerically, and it is shown through the later showing of older cartoon fairy tales in a private environment, through accompanying image and sound carriers or through sites for exchanging films with fans, in table 1. shown numerically based on the IBMD list (<https://www.imdb.com/list/ls063178653/>).

Through this text, we try to show from several aspects the change in the stereotype of women in Disney's animated fairy tales, comparing the degree of her passivity in the role of a lady who is waiting for her hero and being occupied with domestic affairs, in some fairy tales from an earlier period, to later fairy tales in which the superiority of the princess is highlighted – women in the rescue action plan, through her independence, creativity, initiative and self-sufficiency. In the evolution of Disney's princesses, we can see a clear division into three stages based on their role in the drama and the change in stereotypes of women: The Age of the Classic Disney Princess: 1937-1967, Princesses of the Disney Renaissance: 1989-1999, and Princesses of the Revival Era: 2009-present (Hu, 2020). In his research on the influence of Disney's animated fairy tales on the understanding of gender roles and gender stereotypes, Shahid notes: "The original portrayal of Disney from the time of inception with Show White, followed

by Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty have seen Disney princesses portrayed as stereotypical damsels-in-distress, domestic avatars. The second wave of characters can be seen played by Ariel, Mulan, and Rapunzel where the characters are seen to be more rebellious and ambitious. The third shift in roles has been played through characters like Merida, Anna, and Elsa where the princesses have been seen to be more independent and free-spirited" (2021, 113).

The revolution of feminism, shown through the chronology of these fairy tales, begins in the second stage with the rebellion against tradition in the princesses Pocahontas and Ariel who, despite the prohibition by their authoritative fathers, find love in a hero from the opposite camp (Hineet all, 2018). In Princess Ariel (1989) it is still a prince, only of the hostile human race; Indian princess Pocanhontas (1995), unwilling to marry a warrior from her tribe, instead of the peaceful course of a river, chooses the course of a swift mountain stream, seeking novelty, exhilaration and adventure with Captain Smith, a sailor and a wanderer from an opposing nation who attacks her tribe. A feminist twist occurs when Mulan takes on the garb of a man and becomes victorious in war, thus proving the equality of women in the traditionally male vocation of warrior (like Serbian World War I heroine Milunka Savić). Rebellion and resistance to authority, escape from home and from the glass bell is represented in the character of Princess Rapunzel, in the film with the ambiguous name "Tangled". It portrays a girl hampered by obstacles who bravely chooses to escape from the safety of her daily routine with a stranger and petty criminal Flynn Ryder in order to realize her dream of lanterns. An even greater dose of rebellion, feminism and not only equality, but the superiority of women as warriors is shown by the character of Princess Merida from the cartoon "Brave". She defies tradition and almost mocks the three prince suitors with her above-average warrior skills, riding and archery. None are worthy of her because she is absolutely superior in archery. While the princess character is portrayed as an elegant, agile and capable young woman, the princes are portrayed as clumsy and physically unattractive, complete caricatures. The message of this cartoon is clear: a girl should not get married if she does not find her equal, i.e. if she is superior in relation to her male environment – another completely rational modern typically feminist attitude. Through the cartoon's chronology, we come to the increasing female independence from the male-prince, more precisely from the rigorous aversion to men that Princess Elsa from the movie "Frozen" feels. If Merida was brave enough to resist traditional marriage, then Elsa is frigid and disinterested, or rather hostile to men. In the character of her sister Anna, the roots of the old stereotype of a girl who believes in love at first sight are evident, but in this contemporary cartoon, such love for the prince is completely ridiculed and refuted. Her choice in the course of the film turns out to be absolutely wrong; instead of a handsome prince, she finds her partner in a guy from the common people, simple and unpolished habits, of uncertain origin, but selfless in his intentions. The continuation of female independence and heroism are the following two animated fairy tales, published one after the other: the island princess Moana who saves the world with the help of her somewhat clumsy, but witty and capable companion, with whom no romantic relationship develops during the fairy tale, but competition, teasing and friendly jokes. In the latest animated film, Princess Raya not only has no help from fearless male heroes, but the heroine of the opposite camp against which she has to fight is a manly-looking woman warrior; and the last dragon that is the target of her portage turns into a female human being near the end of the film. "Raya and the Last Dragon" is truly a fairy tale full of feminist remarks, rough and fighting women with swords, ambition and practically not giving up on goals that adorns every modern feminist in the fight for a successful career and power in society.

In the hierarchy of the most unusual princesses, as a model of the most individual, isolated from society and not integrated, Princess Elsa from the animated fairy tale "Frozen" is at the top. Some authors compare her with the character of a child who did not fit in, who was born with some disorder that the parents hide from the environment, and for that reason, as well as her untouchability and coldness towards male characters, they consider her a gay princess. Be that as it may, this information is not explicitly shown in the animated film "Frozen", although a significant and surprising novelty of this film is an act of true love that saves the world, a kiss that is not a kiss between a prince and a princess, but an embrace between two sisters. This hug in the animated fairy tale "Frozen" saves the world of eternal ice and cold, and in a social sense, destroys all previous notions about the act of true love that brings resolution of the type "they lived happily ever after". The doors of Arendelle are forever open to all foreigners, which some critics interpret as the opening of rigid and rigorous societies for diversity in the new structure of partnership relations of the LGBTQ+ population. Anyway, this movie was one of the most watched according to all viewing statistics in the year it was released. The most popular is the visually and musically superb scene – "Let It Go"; the part in which Princess Elsa, leaving the throne and the way of life intended for her by her parents, goes to the mountains where she enthusiastically develops her ice powers in solitude, creating a huge and magnificent ice castle and transforming herself from a conservative girl to an independent sparkling young woman, radiant and content herself in her cold and self-sufficient sexiness. This determination of Elsa as a princess without a prince, who creates a supreme creation without a partner and is satisfied with herself being alone, is an idealized image of a feminist, as an independent woman perfectionist, who creates perfect works on the business front,

beautiful and seductive, but emotionally frightened and untouchable. The former stereotype of the bridegroom that every previous Disney princess aspired to and her "happily ever after" depicted in the act of marrying a prince charming, sometimes followed by a sequel in which the offspring appear (eg "Return to Sea", sequel to "The Little Mermaid"), was replaced by an interesting but somewhat harsh representation of a woman-warrior, ambitious perfectionist in a society where there is no place for an equal man. In modern fairy tales about princesses there is not even a prince, the male stereotype has changed from a noble and fearless savior to a funny and clumsy assistant and companion who is in the complete shadow of female actions and deeds. The actions taken by the main heroines are energetic actions that in these fairy tales break the rules, cross the boundaries, but win and solve the enigma. In this way, the Disney animation studio fully depicted the modern western feminist society where power and victory in the business sense is above emotional connection, the search for eternal love and the traditional wedding act that marks a new beginning, the founding of a family.

Most of the earlier animated fairy tales have a basic plot in ancient fairy tales, the classics of the Brothers Grimm or Hans Christian Andersen, somewhat modified and modernized. These changes, i.e. modernization concerns not only the change of the plot, which is adapted to children of an early age, but also the visual effects and the selection of the character and aesthetics of each princess, which is adapted to the times. By comparing looks, costumes, hairstyles, facial features (makeup), one can accurately guess which fashion decade belongs to which princess. In some cases, one could guess that acting and fashion icons influenced the appearance of Disney heroines (eg Nicole Kidman – Ariel, Monica Bellucci – Pocahontas). Until 2008, Disney used 2d animation to create its animated fairy tales, with the last Princess Tiana ("The Princess and the Frog") created in 2d technique. From the next animated fairy tale Tangled from 2010, the princesses were created in 3d rendering, which proved to be cheaper and faster to produce, and very receptive and enticing to the audience; Disney's Animation Studio kept up with the times and applied the most modern technology, which at the same time brought increasing viewership, i.e. financial profit (Brayer, 2022). Apart from the modernization of the external character and appearance and the modernization of the production technique by switching from 2d to 3d animation, the new princesses undergo a transformation of their role, their share in the plot itself. Their role goes from passive to active, from one waiting to be rescued by the prince, to one who takes steps to reverse and change the outcome of events, lead to the resolution of the situation, resolve the spell and play the decisive move. The obvious influence of the growing feminist attitude about the role of the modern business woman in social and political events is reflected in the character of the Disney princesses. Accompanied by all the magic present in fairy tales, they take a decisive step by which they break tradition (Pocahontas, Merida, Rapunzel, Elsa, Moana) and repair the disaster, save the world, sometimes only accompanied or assisted by a male hero who in most of the new fairy tales is not a prince, but some seemingly marginal character, anti-hero, caricature. The researchers point out the particularly strong influence of the stereotype of a woman that the Disney industry has on girls of an early age, directing them towards a feminist representation of the modern heroine. "Such advancement is supported by many audiences since Disney targets young girls in creating the princess movies, by which it is believed that how Disney depicts their princesses will affect the way these young girls behave" and "Many researchers agree to declare that Tangled, Frozen, and Moana can be considered as the movies with strong feminism message in them. The princesses in these movies are the leading role, and they do not rely on men to be saved. However, although they are not rescued by the heroes – they instead try to save other people, they still require the heroes' assistance in accomplishing the quest they desire to resolve" (Palupi, 2019, 10-11). The latest Disney animated fairy tale has lost all connection with tradition, because it neither relies on traditional fairy tales for its plot, nor in its culmination does any male character appear to help Princess Raya. Contrary to all expectations, there is also a female leader on the opposite side, which conveys the atmosphere of ruthless female competitiveness and careerism created by modern Western society into the world of animated fiction.

3. RESULTS

We came to the conclusion that most princess characters rely on the already existing stereotype of the perfect woman, as a mirror of social relations and hierarchy at the time they were created. Let's take into account that in the middle of the twentieth century, most women were housewives, and as such, women who take care of the house, look beautiful, take care of children and do not make important decisions, but their field of action is considered successful and recognized in society related to the family environment. Sometimes, they were presented as victims of "neighborhood scheming", that is, the envy of other women (evil stepmothers, forgotten fairies, witches, etc.) in the form of female villains. In contrast to these, at the end of the twentieth century, we discover, through Princess Ariel from "The Little Mermaid", the character of a mischievous, disobedient teenager who resists the authority of a cruel father, being in love with her prince, whom she needs to charm and win within three days. This kind of disobedient princess running away from home was further perfected through the character of Rapunzel from the cartoon fairy tale "Tangled"; she is in love with a wanderer, a vagabond, a charming criminal with whom she teams

up to make her dream come true. With these examples, we illustrated some stereotypes of young women that society at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century ("The Little Mermaid", 1989, "Tangled", 2004) presented as women full of courage and initiative who split up with the traditional attitude towards parental prohibitions, break them and they make their own decisions related to the choice of partner and the course of their lives. In the following, the Disney princesses that were created in the first decades of the twenty-first century not only represent the typical phenomena of modern society, but anticipate them, give them momentum, shaping those behaviors that were previously considered unusual, strange or peculiar, in a word, socially undesirable, and that in the current moment, with all the visual, scenic, musical effects and the carefully designed scenario and characters, they have received their ultimate embodiment. "Media forms would operate to both help construct and mirror such developments." (Hine et al, 2018, p. 3)

4. DISCUSSIONS

The influence of the media on children of an early age, as confirmed by many previous studies, is evident in the field of building gender stereotypes through highly popular animated cartoons. Aware of this influence, the researchers emphasize the particularly strong influence of the Disney industry's stereotypes of women on girls of an early age, directing them towards a feminist representation of the modern heroine. Therefore, in the modern world of shaken authorities, where children and young people receive an increasing source of information from mass media, and less and less from parents and educators, the question arises of the balance of these two influences in the formation of social stereotypes related to sex and gender. The influence of Disney's animated fairy tales can be both positive and negative at the same time: positive in the sense of freeing individuality and strengthening courage, stimulating young women to action in societies too suppressed by traditional restraints. On the other hand, Disney's fairy tales can be a negative factor in the formation of gender stereotypes, as an extended arm of certain social lobbies, by which children from democratic and freedom-loving environments, freed from gender prejudices and restrictions, are unnecessarily attracted to the overly rugged and combative representation of the modern woman, reshaping peacefulness and tenderness into a warlike attitude towards the world, or even an ambivalent, misanthropic and xenophobic attitude towards the opposite sex.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Many works that talk about gender stereotypes in Disney's animated fairy tales were written in response to the need of academic society to explain the phenomenon of the popularity of these films, to show the origin of Disney fairy tale stereotypes but also to show them through the prism of modern society. Whether we want to admit it or not, this company has had primacy for decades, especially in the Western cultural sphere, but one could also say globally, in the production of animated films with enormous viewership. The visual, musical, scenographic design make them attractive to children of an early age, but also to adults. That is why it is important to analyze all the layers of meaning that the fable and characters carry and in what way the actions and character of the characters of Disney cartoons influence children of the earliest age. Through conversations and surveys with children, the motives and actions of the Disney heroes should be analyzed and it should be observed in what the children look up to them, what they identify with. It is very necessary for parents and educators to participate in the selection of visual content that they present to children, with a critical view of their aesthetic, social and ethical side. Through shaped aesthetics, social role models and ethical values are presented to children in cartoons. This paper indicates the evolution of the stereotype of a woman from a housewife to a business feminist, with the idea that the influence of the media and the influence of the family model in a child of an early age are refracted in such a way that in the formation of the child's personality, the immediate family environment and the personal example of the teacher in everyday situations prevail, but that in the formation of a child's taste, the appearance, character and temperament of the cartoon characters that he accepts through constant viewing can have a certain influence. In a way that is accessible to children, the cartoon hints at, or even invokes, certain changes in gender stereotypes that will only be reflected in the society whose carriers will be those grown-up children in two to three decades after those video-contents that we marketed to children. The values that were provided to them through a certain, even if hidden, ideology in childhood, through cartoons as the visual content of great impact, can appear as dominant in later society through certain life trends.

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