

## The Terrifying Truth behind Beautiful Fairy Tales

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### Abstract

Children from around the world hear beautiful stories about princesses saved by brave princes. Everyone knows Disney: it is the world's largest film production company which makes movies for children. Many people grew up watching their stories. But did you know that some of these fairy tales are based on real, tragic stories that happened to real people? How are the characters of children around the world shaped when they watch movies about weak princesses who need protection? We think it is really important to talk about this because such stories exist all over the world, and they promote stereotypes which children from every continent and virtually every culture learn.

Children from all around the world hear beautiful stories about princesses saved by brave princes (e.g. Sleeping Beauty) and tough princes ruling their countries (e.g. Cinderella). One of the most famous companies that work in this field is Walt Disney. They ranked No. 53 in the 2019 Fortune 500 – an annual list of 500 largest US corporations published by Fortune Magazine. But did you know that some of these fairy tales are based on tragic histories that happened to real people? How are the characters of children around the world shaped when they watch movies about weak princesses who need protection and princes who do not show any emotions beside bravery? In this article, to make our point clearer, we focused on the story of Pocahontas and Cinderella.

According to Linda Rodriguez Mcrobbie (2013) many little girls are obsessed with princesses. In 2000 Disney decided to make dolls which looked exactly the same as the characters from the movies. They had one primary characteristic: a princess title. Princesses are now the biggest industry for the preteens. In 2012 Disney Princesses were the best-selling products among toys for kids in North America. They generated more than \$4.6 billion worldwide. This is one part of the “Princess Industrial Complex.” It is everything related to princesses that is being sold to kids. Peggy Orenstein, author of “Cinderella Ate my Daughter,” is worried that princesses represent unrealistic expectations of beauty and are turning kids into narcissists (Mcrobbie, 2013). Things like intelligence are not even mentioned in most of those stories.

Pocahontas' real name was Amonute. Matoaka was her other, more private name, which means „white feather.” Pocahontas was only her nickname and it means „spoiled child”. She was born around 1596 and she was her father's favourite child. His name was Powhatan and he was the chief of more than 30 tribes (Mansky, 2017). She first met John Smith when he came to Virginia in 1607. He was 27 years old at that time and she was around 10 years old. This was when Pocahontas and John first met. In December 1506 John was caught by Pocahontas' brother and brought to Powhatan. Indians caught him

when he was trying to talk to them. He was supposed to be killed, but Pocahontas protected him with her own body.

Debate still continues whether he was really supposed to be killed since this fact was mentioned in John's diary. Some studies say that it may have been a ceremony that only the Indians knew. Pocahontas was calling him her brother and Powhatan was calling him his son. In 1608 John's people were starving to death and the Indians were not giving them as much food as they used to. There was a drought, so food was hard to find for everyone. Later that year John and some of his people went to Powhatan to have a talk about their relationship and how they could improve it. In January 1609 Pocahontas, who was still seeing the colonials against her father's wish, warned them about her father who was going to kill them the next time they come to his village. John's life was saved by Pocahontas again (Kupperman, 2019).

One of the most important events of this story is the kidnapping of Pocahontas by Samuel Argall, the successor of John Smith. It happened during the first Anglo-Powhatan War. Samuel tried to exchange Pocahontas for all the prisoners Powhatan was keeping in his village, but the girl's father did not fulfil Samuel's wish. While being kidnapped Pocahontas learned English and was baptised. Her new, Christian name was Rebecca. In April 1614 she married a man named John Rolfe. In 1616 Pocahontas sailed to England with her husband and her newborn son. Because of her ethnicity, she was very popular in London and was soon called „The Indian Princess.“ A lot of people wanted to meet her, including the Royal Family. She died in 1617 in London. To date there has been little agreement on what have killed her. Some scientists think it may have been a European sickness and as she was from North America her immune system was unable to fight it.

As far as the second character relevant to our considerations is concerned, the story of Cinderella was as follows. The father of Françoise d'Aubigné was a poor nobleman, who was sent to prison for debt. Probably his wife, Genevieve Pietre, gave birth a girl in Niort prison on 27 November 1635 because she wanted to stay with her husband. This is why the child had been raised by the relatives on the father's side. She was quite happy there and spent seven years with her aunt. After leaving Constant, her parents decided that they would move to the West Indies. Then things just went from bad to worse for the d'Aubigné family. The marriage broke up, her father died, and Françoise had to come back to France and live with her godmother. Paradoxically, it was in the godmother's family in which she experienced "Cinderella" humiliation – heavy and degrading work, she was wearing old rags. She was constantly reminded that she should be grateful for the protection of Madame de Neuillant. After the death of her mother, Françoise married the disabled artist Paul Scarron on 4 April 1652. He was 25 years older than the girl, but this marriage gave her more than just escape from her aunt's family. Scarron had his own salon where an extremely varied group of people was received. She learnt how to preside over it and how to flirt with the male part of the guests. It is said that they did not consume their wedlock. She said that she had preferred to marry Paul rather than a convent. This marriage did not last very long as the poet Scarron was already a middle-aged man. When he died, Françoise was 25 years old and beautiful. She had a friend: the marquise de Montespan who became the king's mistress. When she got pregnant, she asked Françoise if she wanted to take care of the child of King Louis XIV.

Mrs Scarron agreed, and her power became more significant than it was before. She was taking care of three children of the king and Montespan when their father decided to legalize them in 1673. Françoise and her pupils had to move to the royal residence. The king fell in

love with her. Gradually, he gave her more and more attention and gifts: the title of Madame de Maintenon, lands and power. After the queen's death, she became the most important woman in his life. He secretly married Françoise in 1683. Shortly after that Madame de Maintenon began to teach at the Chateau de Noisy which was located near Versailles. In 1686 she began to teach at a school called Saint Cyr that she and the King had founded. Madame de Maintenon ran this institution which educated two hundred daughters of the poor nobility from the area.

It is worth noting that the slipper played a small role in her life. This part of "Cinderella's story" is surprising because her shoes were not made of glass. Formerly French ladies wore slippers for which squirrel pelts were used. Such a material was called *vair*, which sounds pretty similar to *verre*, which means glass in English (Kerziouk, 2015). Parents often are not aware of the true stories behind each one of fairy tales. It is one of the problems, however, not most important. Certain behaviours are shown in these fairy tales, which might not be dangerous at first glance. Nevertheless, after a closer look at fairy tales' structures, their characters and plots, it can be established that their impact on children is huge. In this work, some of the studies have been collected to understand the development of the children when they were raised in Disney movies.

To determine the effects of tales, the authors of the study entitled "Pretty as a Princess" (2016) examined a group of 198 children. Within this group, only 4% of girls had never watched a Disney film, meanwhile, only 87% of boys had watched a Disney film. Those who had watched it, were asked how often they played with dolls. What is surprising is that 61% of girls and only 4% of boys played with dolls. These results provide further support for the hypothesis that boys are not affected by the femininity as far as girls are (Coyne; Linder; Rasmussen; Nelson; Birkbeck, 2016).

In response to the question: "What kind of patterns of behaviour are given to children through Disney movies?" a range of responses was elicited. Firstly, both genders were shown quite stereotypically. Men tend to be strong and heroic, cannot show any weakness or emotions. One kind of prince's model show is "Handsome Princes," which is unfair, and the second one is "Dashing Heroes" who need to take a journey to become a true man after "the fall from grace." A great example of a former prince is Eric in 'The Little Mermaid,' the latter illustration is Aladdin in 'Aladdin.' On the other hand, princesses have to be girly and elegant. They present a specific image of the appearance (e.g. long and natural hair, skinny figure) and the behaviour (delicate gestures and body language). The most interesting finding was that there are not many studies which have examined the role of men in Disney movies.

It is also worth mentioning that in the majority of stories princesses cannot protect themselves and have to wait for the rescue by a prince. Without this point, the plot is impossible to continue. This has a rather strong impact on children: it sends a message that risk and strength should be left for men to solve. Women are passive in action and cannot decide for themselves. 'Snow White' or 'Sleeping Beauty' constitute good models of this storyline (Hine; England; Lopreore; Horgan; Hartwell, 2018).

Returning to the question posed at the beginning of this study, it is now possible to state that tales mostly show us a false reality. The findings suggest that Disney's Princesses were slim, charming, and rather passive in action. Nevertheless, we need to remember when these cartoons were made ('Cinderella': 1950 or 'Snow-white': 1937). The subject of gender equality was not discussed in the past: the world was feminine or masculine. Courage, strength, and self-confidence were assigned to men. Sensitivity, tenderness, and modesty

were assigned to women. Sarah M. Coyne suggests that parents should talk to kids about behaviours, which were shown in all these stories, and explain to them that those are not some kind of models they have to follow. The kid is more than a 'princess' or a 'prince'. The message which should be sent is “You’re so smart, you worked so hard, your body can do great things!” (Adams, 2016). Taken together, these results suggest that we should take more care of the media that children are consuming.

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