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<p style="text-align:center">Not Always Happily Ever After</p>

After its conception during the early to mid-1900's, Walt Disney Studios quickly became a household name across the United States, and shortly thereafter, across the globe. Disney created ground-breaking animations and was known during this time for its princess movies. Due to their immense popularity throughout the 20th century, Disney princess movies were idolized and therefore granted a large amount of power over determining what was seen as normal and/or acceptable in society. Young children especially, the target demographic of Disney films, form an attachment with the characters they view in movies. Therefore, the concept of representation is important because children feel validated when they are able to connect with the characters. Children who grow up frequently viewing Disney movies are solely exposed to this corporation's view of "normal," often leaving them feeling invalidated and unimportant to society if they do not fit this rigid mold. Disney princess movies negatively impact its young viewers' minds by perpetuating gender roles and underrepresenting individuals such as minorities and those who are disabled; thus, exemplifying how capitalism allows powerful corporations to have control over what is shown in the media, despite the adverse effects on society.

The princesses frequently portrayed in Disney movies negatively impact the way young boys and girls view their roles in society and the possibilities for their futures. Especially because of their young age, children who view repeated portrayals of males and females often feel as though

they must mimic these observed behaviors in their own lives. The princesses, characterized by their beautiful physical appearance, are consistently portrayed as "damsels in distress" who are waiting for their prince to come save them. On the other hand, the prince must "rescue" her, which creates the idea in the minds of women that they are incapable of helping themselves. "Disney Princess films feature male characters speaking more often that women, which raises additional questions about the example these princesses set for girls' independence and confidence," (Salyer, 2016). While the princesses are beautiful to look at, the men are given more active roles in which they go after her and are later given the power to dictate her fate. Rather than teach girls how to be independent and follow their dreams, consistent portrayals of dependency on a male figure have shaped the idea that falling in love should be all girls' main goal. Furthermore, such portrayals adversely affect men as well, causing them to believe that they must be "strong" and capable of rescuing and taking care of a woman. Moreover, these movies instill the belief that men's greatest priority should be to win over a woman's love. Disney princess films perpetuate gender roles which negatively impact the way young males and females view themselves by making them feel as if they must act a certain way because of their gender.

Throughout the 20th century, Disney neglected to represent individuals of varying ethnicities and racial backgrounds by solely using white characters in its movies. The children who view these movies are young children; by seldom viewing individuals who look similar to themselves in in the media, these children are prompted to feel as if they are not important to society. If there are not movies being made about individuals in minority groups, a wedge is created between different racial and ethnic groups. According to medium.com, "in racial categorization, white is the norm, so other groups of people who are heterosexual, race does not come into account as a

prominent way, neither does culture," (2017). By not equally representing diverse individuals, Disney is contributing to the idea that the color of one's skin separates people and makes them different from one another. Furthermore, Disney is furthering the belief that people of different backgrounds and cultures have different goals and ideas. Underrepresentation in the media contributes to racial biases, which are prevalent in our society, by perpetuating the idea that minorities are inferior to those who are white.

The Disney princesses fail to represent not only racially and ethnically diverse individuals, but also those with disabilities. Able-bodied describes individuals who do not have mental or physical conditions which limit their ability to perform necessary tasks. Each of the Disney princess movies throughout the 20th century features an able-bodied protagonist. Discrimination of people with disabilities becomes normalized as they seldom represent the desirable characters throughout the films. Instead, the disabled individuals in Disney movies are the ones who are set back or disadvantaged. "Disney, I realized, has the capability and opportunity to open the hearts of millions of children all over the world and provide them examples that could prevent their discrimination against the disabled before it even begins" (Ott-Dahl, 2014). With its expansive audience, Disney has the opportunity to create a more accepting society and reduce the stigmas which surround disabilities. By neglecting to represent individuals with disabilities, both physical and mental, these people feel they are undesirable since they are not portrayed in the media. Furthermore, a lack of representation may make them feel as if they do not exist at all. Since the majority of Disney movies are centered around themes of love and happiness, disabled individuals subsequently feel that they are incapable of achieving the goals they desire in their own lives.

Due to the system of capitalism in our society, Disney has become a dominating force in the media industry and subsequently gained the power to dictate societal norms. Since Disney has produced so many popular princess films, the corporation has become a common household name across the globe. For example, when young girls were asked to draw their idea of a princess, "nearly every drawing—61 out of 63—depicted a light-skinned princess, many of those resembling Disney characters" (Neilson, 2019). The children's drawings were depictions of the commonly known Disney princesses such as Cinderella and Belle. While they were not specifically instructed to draw Disney princesses specifically, the corporation has enough power that it has been able to define what it means to be a princess. However, Disney's dominance does not end with its movies; Disney is able to use its power further into other industries such as consumerism. Since Disney has complete control over the characters, the corporation is able to dictate trends by creating consumer products desirable to viewers. Disney has total creative control over the princesses and therefore can dictate consumers' buying trends. Disney's lack of equal representation combined with its large amount of power adversely impacts society.

Inevitably, individuals compare themselves to characters portrayed on-screen. By consistently showing characters who look and act the same, Disney is creating a false sense of reality for its viewers. Thus, what is shown in the media often forces viewers, especially children who have minimal exposure to the world, to categorize themselves as "different" or "not ideal." However, in recent years, Disney has made large strides towards inclusivity and representation. Disney has featured characters of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, expanding its plot lines away from solely a princess who needs a prince to save her. While there is a substantial amount of progress still necessary, Disney has taken the first steps towards reaching more equal representation in the media.

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