

Arguably, at some point in every young girl's life she dreams of being a princess. A princesses perfection is so appealing to young girls who are placed in front of certain media that displays these princesses. Media plays a huge part in forming gender roles and beauty standards in the United States. Disney has created an abundance of princess movies that continue to shape the minds of young girls as they try to figure out their role in this society. The Disney princesses in the movies *Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs*(1937), *Aladdin*(1992), *The Princess and The Frog*(2009), *Brave*(2012) and *Moana*(2016) showcase how beauty standards and gender roles have evolved yet still have room for improvement.

In the United States there has been standards for beauty since the beginning of time. Seeing the changes along with these impossible standards have been hard to watch considering the weight it puts on young girls and grown women. I have experienced too many girls in my life lose confidence solely because they do not look a certain way. A lot of girls strive for perfection when perfection is unattainable. This yearn to meet beauty standards gets reiterated to young women repeatedly through all types of media. Disney princess movies use their popularity in the media world to promote the unspoken standard for women. Subsequently, a lot of girls are taught to want to be beautiful, skinny and end up with a handsome man. Not only are these the qualities that are desired but ethnicity is also included in beauty standards today. I know I personally fed into the idea of beauty standards. All around me, when I was younger and even still, each year on Halloween I see many young girls who want to be a princess for that one special night. Dressing up in a pretty dress with a crown on and maybe some make up, all of a sudden makes them feel beautiful and fulfills their dreams. Saying this from experience, there is a negative effect on young girls who are in the midst of physical and mental growth that experience these standards.

society. Slowly time has shown to positively impact the evolving roles of gender; nevertheless, I still too often see or hear of a woman feeling less than or being treated differently than a man. Women as a whole have fought for their ability to create their own lives and prove to the world that they do not need a man for them to find success. To give an example, women did not start working until the 1900s and now women are becoming CEOs of major companies. Women are more able than ever to be whoever they want to be, but there is still much that is in need of adjustment. Arguably media has worked to convince women that the best thing they are made for is men. Media consistently creates female characters with the only purpose being to be a man's possession. The gender roles in our society have made positive progress over time but there is still work that needs to be done before standards are abolished.

Both Naomi Wolf and Simone Beauvoir shed light on the unreasonable standards set in the United States. Naomi Wolf focuses on the beauty myth, which is defined as placing a woman's value on their level of beauty. This concept is a dangerous and daily struggle for way too many women. Women are supposed to be beautiful, small and feminine. This beauty myth leaves some women with eating disorders, the tendency to wear makeup or the usage of plastic surgery. Young and older women struggle with this unattainable perfection that most men desire in a woman. As this myth is portrayed in media, men believe that they deserve to have someone that has that kind of beauty. This has a domino effect in that women never feel good enough. Wolf says that women are subjected to the beauty myth. They have no choice but to succumb to its persistent request. Equally important, Simone Beauvoir goes in depth on the gender roles and the idea that women have always been seen as "the other." Being "the other" is considered to be invisible, which to Beauvoir encompasses all women. Women are expected as "the other" to find

need for a women to have an actually role or work to be something. She points out that it is normal to look at a woman who does not belong to a man and see her as unimportant. To bring this into perspective, in the 1900s women were expected to get married and have children at a very young age. This was a gender standard at the time and if a women did not partake in this normalcy, they were looked down upon and seen as “the other.” Wolf and Beauvoir capture the struggle that comes with the beauty myth and gender roles in our society.

By looking through the lenses of Wolf and Beauvoir it is evident that Disney princess movies incorporate the beauty standard and gender roles. Disney started to create the princess movies back in 1937 with the first movie being *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and are still continuing to be made today with *Moana* being one of the most recent movies. The older Disney princess movies all coincide with the theme of women being weak and in need of a man. The plot of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs includes a young stepdaughter who is put to sleep by her step mother, the queen, by a poison apple. The resolution is a prince saving the princess from a deep sleep by kissing her. As simple as it seems the male character being the one to save the day and complete the life of Snow White was the first of many princess movies that display the gender roles and the beauty myth. Snow White displays the gender roles of being a woman who takes care of those around her, is super sensitive, lives as a cooker and cleaner for the dwarfs and eventually marries a man. These gender roles that are set in front kids, are engrained in their heads and influence the way gender is understood. The beauty standards that Snow White encompasses are that she is beautiful, white and skinny, to name a few.

As the years went by the plot of Disney princess movies stayed very similar. One of the very first times we see a change within these movies is in *Aladdin*. The movie had a very similar

character in Aladdin, was the very first princess of color, which was unexpected. She was beautiful, feminine and skinny therefore was an unrealistic standard for how young girls should look; however, it was a step in the right direction to make way for future change.

More recently, there was a slight shift in the way Disney princesses are portrayed. *The Princess and The Frog* had a very apparent plot change and had the female character as a person of color. Tiana was the first African American princess and the first to be working to build a strong future for herself by working as hard as she could to reach her dreams. This change in mindset of women not staying at home to cook and clean and instead having big dreams to work towards is impactful to women's standards and the beauty myth. Seeing a young woman paving her own path with no desire for male validation in the process creates a supportive feeling in young girls that they too can chase their big dreams. Although Tiana was an African American who shifted the usual themes, she still ended up with a handsome prince. This movie did not sell as well as past movies had and in one of the following princess movies they created princess Merida in *Brave* to be a white woman. In the movie *Brave*, the gender roles were similar yet more non traditional compared to *The princess and the Frog*. Merida was strong, independent and outspoken and she ended up with no man in the end. Merida was the first Disney princess to have absolutely no desire to be with a man. This movie brought so much change to Disney because the plot was completely new. This change is inspiring to young girls. It shows them that having really feminine qualities is not required. The beauty standard of being sensitive and succumbing to the request of others is completely shut down in this movie. The plot brings comfort to girls who are overwhelmed by the beauty standard and the gender roles that are repeatedly playing in the minds of women.

needing a man and also being very strong and outspoken. She also defies the original beauty standard by being a person of color as well. This is the first time we see a Disney princess not fully embodying the normal beauty standard and not following normal gender roles as well. Moana did not end up in marriage and she used her own strengths to save her home. It is very encouraging to see the evolution of the beauty standard and gender roles in the Disney Princess movies.

Disney princess movies that are generally produced for children, leads young girls to obtain a skewed view of what they need to look like and the standards of how they should act. The feminine qualities of the gender stereotypes in the princess movies are unrealistic and exaggerated; nevertheless, at a young age it is difficult to understand this concept, so it is what is desired. They build ideas that girls need the help of men to be able to be complete and happy. Not only does the female character lead the audience to thoughts of needing male validation, it can also lead to insecurities within their bodies and personalities. Seeing the perfect princesses constantly shown in the movies reiterates the way women are supposed to act and look and when women do not meet the gender or beauty standards, then they may feel like they are not enough.

A young girls desire to look and be just like a princess stems from the constant media that portrays princesses as perfect and desirable to men. Media is especially present in the United States and has a big impact on society. The Disney princess movies of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Aladdin*, *The Princess and The Frog*, *Brave* and *Moana* show the evolution that has been made to create and abolish beauty standards and gender roles that are discussed by Naomi Wolf and Simone Beauvoir.