

The Princess Scale

By Courtney Inbody

There is a changing narrative to the story of the Disney Princesses. No longer are they dependent on a male hero; they are becoming the heroines. Three young women give us an insight to how they feel on a scale of one to a Princess.



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rowing up in a world where beauty ideals are represented by fictional characters can be scary. Comparing one's self to an animated character can have consequences, but it can also become a very dynamic relationship between a young girl and the character she would like to become. Everyone wants to be a princess, and with the melting pot of cultures emerging in the United States, Disney is moving towards the diversification of the knowledge that everyone can be a princess.

There are currently eleven Disney Princesses who have been crowned. The coronation ceremony is normally held at Walt Disney World in Florida, and the previously crowned princesses surround the newest Princess. Merida, from Disney/Pixar's *Brave*, was just named the eleventh princess. The princesses, in order of coronation, are: Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Jasmine, Belle, Mulan, Pocahontas, Tiana, Rapunzel and Merida.

Through the eyes of three Syracuse University sophomores, their attitudes and opinions about the current Princesses are expressed. Between how they feel about the diversity of the Princesses and their impact of having grown up with the first ten, their answers are similar and different in certain respects, but all feel as though they have grown up with the Princess Scale: how they fit in comparison to some of their favorite characters they have grown up with.

Deanna Acosta, 18, is a sophomore art history major, education minor at Syracuse University. She is of Puerto Rican and Dominican descent. Melissa Ruh, 20, is a sophomore political science major at the university as well. She is of German and Irish descent. Tashiana Nelson, 20, is a sophomore social work major, political science minor at Syracuse as well. She is of African American descent.



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When asked if the Princesses have affected their self-esteem in any way, both Deanna and Tashiana did not think that they were affected as children, because they did not have a Princess to grow up with, a role model to look up to. Because of the Eurocentric ideals that most of the early Princesses fit into, these two ethnically diverse women feel as though they were not represented, so they never felt the need to watch Disney Princess movies as much as Melissa.

“They all looked the same, apart from some of the different races, ethnicities or nationalities of today’s Princesses,” said Tashiana. “All of the early Princesses are thin, with long, beautiful hair and perfect lighter skin and big eyes.”

Melissa, on the other hand, felt as though she was affected greatly by the Disney Princesses growing up. The early Princesses offered her with a set of ideals: for appearance, self-presentation, actions, personal characteristics; that she could look up to, because they were almost a direct representation of herself when she was younger – pale skin, blonde hair, blue eyed. She has green eyes, and grew into a more strawberry blonde as she got older, but the correlation was still prevalent.

“The Princesses had a lot of the characteristics that I wanted to duplicate when I was younger,” said Melissa. “Ariel was brave; Cinderella was kind, and taught that being mean wouldn’t get you anywhere; Jasmine said, ‘I am not a prize to be won,’ and she was the first Princess to break the mold.”

The mold Melissa speaks of is the domesticated Princess that Disney had used as their model for many years. The most prevalent ideal for these princesses was that they needed a husband, or a man, to complete them, or to get them out of the situation they were in. Snow White needed to get married to the prince; Ariel became a human because she wanted to be with the man she loved, though never met; Aurora needed true love’s kiss to break the curse; Cinderella wanted to go to a ball to meet the prince and live happily ever after.



This happily ever after mold was broken with Princesses Jasmine and Mulan, with movies in 1992 and 1998, respectively. Their attitudes towards men, and the ideals placed upon them as needing to have a man to live, gave rise to a new type of Princess, one that young girls could look up to in the changing society where women were starting to become the breadwinners for their families.

“I never had anyone to look up to, but with the new Princesses, there is finally someone that I can somewhat look up to, and someone I know my niece can look up to,” said Deanna, speaking of Princess Tiana, because her niece is half African American. “These new Princesses, like Tiana and Rapunzel, Mulan, even Merida, have a sense of fulfillment, that they don’t need men to prosper. They are more tuned in to society.”

Tashiana felt the same way, when asked how the Princesses shape the minds of young girls. She focused on how Disney put a strong emphasis on the concept of the Princesses needing men to save or rescue them in order for them to survive. Even though Elsa, from *Frozen*, is not crowned a Disney Princess, or even the newest Disney Queen, Tashiana felt that she could most relate to her.

“Elsa was one of the first Princesses that I felt really realized that she did not need a guy for her to prosper. The movie was not about finding a husband to help her rule the country, but to find true love, and that love was between her and her sister, not a man,” said Tashiana.

These realizations of power and influence, self-control and respect, led to ideals of the Princesses being culturally and ethnically representative. All three women felt as though Disney has slacked in the diversity category when it comes to their Princesses. With the years to come after Princesses Jasmine, Pocahontas and Mulan, Disney only brought along one new ethnically diverse Princess, Tiana.





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“We have to remember where these Princesses come from, though,” said Melissa. “The folktales that Disney finds to make their movies come from Germany and France, which is why the Princesses are very Eurocentric. Grimm’s fairy tales were German; not a very diverse set of ideals.”

With the announcement that Disney is bringing another Princess into the lineup, ideas started sparking about the movement to make more ethnically diverse princesses, moving away from the Anglo looks of the older Princesses. Though the newer Princesses, such as Merida, Elsa, Anna – even though the two princesses from *Frozen*, have not been crowned yet – are from countries such as Scotland and Norway, they are very light skinned and light eyed. The newest Princess breaks that tradition; Princess Moana Waialiki will be the first Polynesian princess in the Disney lineup.

“I think it’s great they’re making a Polynesian Princess, at least a Princess from the islands,” said Melissa. “But I would love to see a real life African Princess. I was very disappointed when Tiana came out, and she wasn’t African, but from New Orleans. I wanted to see a real tribal Princess, the daughter of a chief, but a Samoan princess is a great start.”

With talk of Moana as the next Princess, all three women commented on what they believed would be beneficial to have in the characteristics of Disney Princesses to come. Tashiana reflects on how all of the Princesses look very similar in physical characteristics: Mulan having the same big eyes as Cinderella, Pocahontas having the same hair type. Although some of the skin tones are darker, she noticed that they were lightened in the remodeled images that came out from Disney in late 2013.

“If changes are made, I would like to see different body types, and make sure more cultures are represented,” said Tashiana. “I want them to be more realistic, because they don’t necessarily portray real life. They don’t have acne, or struggle with fluctuating weight problems. If they were represented that way, I could relate to them a lot more.”



Deanna was the most adamant about what she would like to see in an upcoming Princess. Her first response to the question was that she wanted a Hispanic princess, but not one from Mexico. Because of the growing population of Hispanics in the United States, and her heritage, she feels as though a Hispanic princess would be a giant leap in the right direction for Disney.

“When thinking of different Hispanic cultures, the one thing that always comes up for me is the tradition of a quinceañera. It is more about the idea of a girl turning into a woman – what she should wear, how she should act – and I would love to see that tradition incorporated,” said Deanna. “A princess from Cuba, Puerto Rico, Brazil or the Caribbean would be amazing.”

From the old to the new, the Disney Princesses are changing for the better. Whether those changes come in the form of personality characteristics, or body characteristics, the newer Disney Princesses are evolving and changing the scale in which young women can relate to them. On a scale of one to a Princess, many young girls are finally able to measure themselves, based on more than just looks and needing a husband.

Now, girls and young women can live up to the perfect ten of being a Tiana or a Merida by their ability to work hard towards their dreams, and fight for their own beliefs and ideals of what is right. Through the eyes of these three Syracuse University sophomores, the standards of what it means to be a Princess are changing, and are now seen in real life.





Meet
the
Princesses





Rapunzel

Rapunzel is the main female protagonist in the film *Tangled* and the short *Tangled Ever After*. Like Aurora, she is blonde, born into the title and was removed from her parent's custody as a baby, only to be reunited in her late teens. Her hair has magical properties. She is voiced by Mandy Moore. She is strong-willed and her preferred weapon is a frying pan.

Rapunzel is born a Princess; the only child of the King of Corona, she eventually marries Eugene "Flynn Rider" Fitzherbert, giving him the title of Prince Consort.



Aurora

Aurora is the titular protagonist of the film *Sleeping Beauty*, although she is the princess to have the least amount of screen time. She is voiced by Mary Costa. She has golden hair and violet eyes. She is the first Disney Princess to be physically injured by the villain, as she pricked her finger on Maleficent's enchanted spinning wheel.

Aurora has the purest pedigree of any Disney Princess; she is the first-born daughter (and only child) of a King and marries Prince Phillip; the firstborn son and heir of a King. She is also well educated by her three godmothers.





Ariel

Ariel is the main female protagonist of *The Little Mermaid*. She is the first Disney Princess to have not been born human, and is also the first Disney princess to have children. She and Eric had a daughter, Melody, in the sequel. She is voiced by Jodi Benson in all films and modern media and has red hair and blue eyes. She is the second Disney Princess to be 16 years old (after Aurora) in her first film.

Ariel's title comes primarily from her father, King Triton; as one of his daughters, she holds the title of Princess; however, she does acquire the title of Princess Consort through her marriage to Prince Eric.



Snow White

Snow White, the main protagonist of the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, is the first Disney Princess. She has short black hair and brown eyes and is currently the youngest Disney Princess at age 14 (in her film appearance). She is voiced by Adriana Caselotti in her film, and Katherine Von Till in modern media (official website, sing-a-longs, etc.).

Snow White is a true princess; the daughter of a King, she also marries an unnamed Prince, though it is unclear whether he is the son of a King or of a Regnant Prince or if he is a Regnant Prince himself.





Pocahontas

Pocahontas is the main protagonist in the film *Pocahontas* and is the first Disney Princess to have been based (loosely) a real person, and not on a fairytale. She has black hair, brown eyes, and is voiced by Irene Bedard. She is the first Disney Princess to have two “princes” (John Smith and John Rolfe, though only the former is an official Disney Prince).

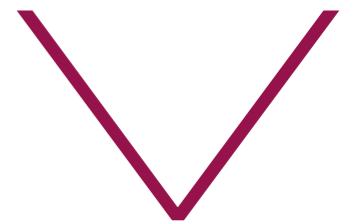
Pocahontas was born the eldest child of Chief Powhatan, thus she is technically a Princess, the Chieftain’s Daughter.



Jasmine

Jasmine is the main female protagonist of the *Aladdin* film, its two sequels, and the *Aladdin* television series. Jasmine is voiced by Linda Larkin and has black hair and brown eyes.

Jasmine is noble-born; the firstborn daughter (and only child) of the Sultan of Agrabah, thus she is born with the title “Shahzadi Sultan” (Princess). When she marries Aladdin, a commoner (the son of the self-styled “king of thieves” notwithstanding), he gains the title Prince Consort.





Belle

Belle is the fifth Disney princess and the main female protagonist of the film *Beauty and the Beast*. Belle is the first Disney Princess to have been the antagonist of her love interest. She is 18-19 and has brown hair and both brown and sometimes hazel eyes. She is voiced by Paige O'Hara in all movies but one, in which she is voiced by Jodi Benson. She is also the first person to have a confirmed country in the movie (France), since the countries of other princesses are inferred, though not confirmed. Belle is of common birth. When she marries Prince Adam (a Prince Regnant of his principality), she becomes a Princess Consort.



Mulan

Fa Mulan is the main protagonist in Disney's film *Mulan*. She has black hair and brown eyes. She is the first Disney princess to be based on a legend instead of a fairytale. Mulan is voiced by Ming-Na.

Mulan is (to date) the only Disney Princess to not hold the title of Princess in one form or another; not noble born, she bears no titles of her own, although she earns the non-noble title of Imperial Consul. Her eventual marriage to General Li Shang (also non-noble) does not grant her any titles either.

Mulan and Shang are the only non-royal Disney couple in the Disney Princess franchise.





Cinderella

Cinderella is the main protagonist of her eponymous film and the second Disney princess. She is somewhere between the ages 16 and 20. She is voiced by Ilene Woods in her original film and Jennifer Hale in the sequels and other modern media. She has blonde hair and blue eyes. She is the first Disney Princess to have siblings, although they are her step siblings and not actual siblings.

Cinderella is not noble-born; she becomes a Princess by marriage to Prince Charming, the son of a King.



Tiana

Tiana is the main female protagonist in the film *The Princess and the Frog*. Tiana made history as the first African-American princess. She is the third to be married into the Princess life. She is probably the princess closest to our time period as her story is set in New Orleans in the 1920's. Tiana is voiced by Anika Noni Rose and the fourth princess since Belle to have her voice actress both talk and sing.

Commoner-born, Tiana becomes Princess Consort upon her marriage to Prince Naveen, the eldest son and Heir Apparent of the King of Maldonia.





Merida

Merida is the main protagonist of the Disney/Pixar film *Brave*, making her the first Pixar Princess. She is the first princess since Ariel to have red hair: she has curly, red hair and blue eyes. She is voiced by Kelly MacDonald. She lives in medieval Scotland and is the first Disney Princess without a love interest until the sequel to the film.

Merida is a true Princess; firstborn of King Fergus of DunBroch. Her lack of a romantic interest (and lack of any sequels) make it unlikely that she will rise to rule the kingdom as a Regnant Queen, considering the views of gender equality in the era.

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