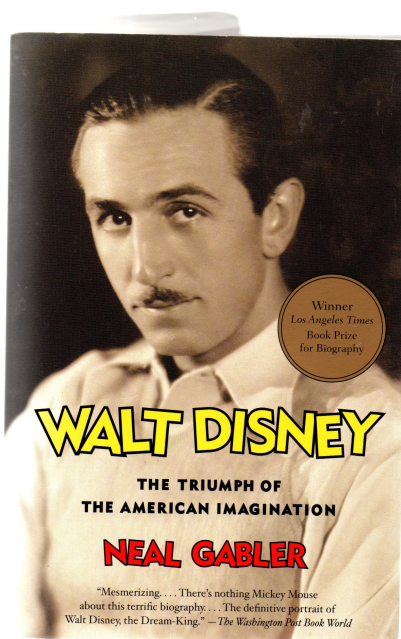


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Introduction

Im going to be exploring the issue around gender representation within Disney. Ive always had an interest in Disney growing up, I've been to Disney World 9 times and have loved it every time. As I've gotten older I've been more interested in the not so magical side of Disney and whether or not Disney is as magical as it seems. Just from my observation I know there is a lack of diversity within Disney movies therefore I want to research more in to the darker side of Disney and see how they can improve as one of the most influential businesses of all time.

Disney



(Kakutani, 2006)

I'm going to be exploring the history of Disney and how much the corporation has changed over the years. Disney was founded by Walt Disney back in October of 1923. Walt Disney himself seems to have had a bit of a disguise after doing some research. Walt Disney has always been seen as a person that is admired by every person however since a new arising biography known as 'Walt Disney: The Triumph of the American Imagination' by Neal Gabler has been released, a dark side of him has been revealed. Neal Gabler was one of the first people in history that have been allowed access in to all of Walt Disneys old records to gain more of an understanding on him before writing and releasing his new book. "During a peripatetic childhood of material and emotional deprivation, at least as he remembered it, he began drawing and retreating into these imaginative worlds". (Harris, 2006) This reveals that he had a troubling childhood, therefore from

this trauma he turned it in to something positive and created his ideal world that is now famously known as Disney World. However, although he portrays a magical world, this facade hides a world that is not so magical for people that worked around Walt Disney. This one source states that he used to 'terrorise' (Harris, 2006) his employees by demeaning them with 'humiliating' (Harris, 2006) reprimands. He also used to talk down to his brother and 'ridiculed' (Harris, 2006) him multiple times in public settings which seemed to have resurfaced later in life regarding his wife as he has been described as an 'uncaring husband' (Harris, 2006). Gabler also stated that Walt Disney seemed to be a racist as he associated with an anti-Semitic group and didn't want any black people to work at Disney world. This follows on to my next point that the representation of race with in Disney films is that of white supremacy.

From looking back at all Disney movies all of them have a common running theme that they all have a story line that if it was a story that actually happened in real life then people would be more than shocked, this is how Walt was so successful as it allowed people to live in a different world whilst watching all of his movies. He almost fantasised dark realities of the real world that people have experienced, for example in *Tangled* (2010) the mother had kidnapped Rapunzel however how it is portrayed in a softened way which wouldn't take place in the real world to allow children to enjoy these movies. (Wood, 2020) This puts people in to a false sense of reality as we become fooled that this how these events take place in the real world. Although these themes were intertwined in to these movies they were still a massive success in everyones childhood which proves the point of how subtle they were featured in the movies as children didn't pay much attention to these dark realities. The use of more adult undertones enabled Disney to create films that were inter-generational.

It is only in recent years that females have started being portrayed as equals in Disney movies next to the male gender, for example, The main character from the film *Moana* (2016) as they were always portrayed as the weaker sex and they always needed to be 'saved' by their prince in order for them to be truly happy. All the princesses for example all had the stereotypical sweet 'vulnerable kind-hearted' personalities which is how women have always been portrayed in society until recent years, because of this there is no surprise that society did go along with these ideologies as Disney was part of the problem of brainwashing people in to believing so. Princesses have always been shown that their best asset is there beauty, for example, in *Cinderella* (1950) she was saved from awful living conditions by a prince, and its not because of how much of a hard worker she is, it's because of her beauty.

Gender



(Strange, 2021)

Following on from my point that the representation of gender in Disney movies is very unbalanced, it is definitely becoming less of an issue in today's society because as a result of movements and female voices speaking out, there is definitely more of a representation of women in Disney movies that states they are an equal next to the male gender. In the Movie 'Frozen' (2013) the princess actually states "you don't need a prince to save you" (Frozen, 2013). This sends out the message that women can be independent and not have to rely on a man to make their life happy.

In Disney princess movies it is stated in a Washington Post article that men almost always speak a lot more than women in the films "especially the films from the 90's". (Guo, 2016) They are very male dominated, in the film Sleeping Beauty (1959) there is "71% male dialogue" (Guo, 2016) and even more shockingly in the film Aladdin (1994) it is "91% dominated" (Guo, 2016) with male dialogue, this just amplifies societal standard stereotypes that the men does all the talking while the woman stands back and looks pretty while being protected by their prince. It is also noted that there are very few female side kicks in Disney movies, it seems to be the default to assign a male as the funny sidekick. "There's Flounder, Sebastian, Lumiere, Cogsworth, Iago, Genie and Mushu. Why can't any of them be women?" (Guo, 2016) It seems to be moulded in to people's heads that women can't be seen as a funny, entertaining character.

On to another problem that is featured in Disney movies is the body type that is presented in Disney movies especially all the princess movies. All the princesses have been given the typical 'perfect' hour glass figure, that if it was a real person the person would actually be extremely unhealthy, as you can see from the image above. (Strange, 2021) Also on the other hand the beauty standards for men was very unrealistic too with the Princes always having a masculine, broad shoulder physique, for example 'Flynn Ryder' in Tangled (2011).

Since the rise of Feminism in America in the 1980s there has been a noticeable change within Disney princess movies, when 'The Little Mermaid' (1989) was released this is when the positive change started happening, Ariel was a unique princess compared to previous ones, firstly with her being a mermaid but along with that "she was bold, rebellious and ambitious, unlike the previous princesses who played the typical 'Damsel in Distress'". (Bowers, 2018) For example 'Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs' (1938) is all about a young 14 year old who ended up being poisoned because someone was jealous of her Beauty and the only way she could get saved is if a prince saved her. This has definitely taken an even bigger step towards feminism when Frozen (2013) was released as 'Elsa' the princess doesn't even have a love interest as she states she's too busy for one, she is represented as a strong independent woman. This positive change in Disney began because Disney received a lot of backlash in the 90s because of the representation of women in their movies and so they promised everyone they would make a change in the next movie which turned out to be 'Beauty and the Beast' (1991) and even hired a female to screen write the film however people still weren't happy as it put the message across that females are "responsible for controlling male anger and violence instead". (Bowers, 2018) Following on from this Disney finally released a film called 'Brave' (2012) which was based around a princess that was completely independent and it doesn't even mention a prince charming in the storyline, Merida the princess figures out all her problems by herself, she even is presented with a more natural figure and different quirks with her hair being crazy and not so 'perfect' like all the previous princesses. This is definitely going to have a positive impact on children who watch these films when they realise they don't have to rely on anyone to make them happy, they can find happiness within themselves whether they're a boy or a girl.

Race



(Disney, 2016)

There has always been a lack of diversity with in Disney films up until recent years when they created a film with a black Princess in the film 'The Princess and the Frog' (2009).

Although they finally created a black princess, people still weren't completely happy as the first black princess spend more than half of the movie as a frog, however she was still presented as a woman who "works hard, she is focused, she sets goals, and nothing is going to hold her back. She was going to make things happen for herself" (Narratives, 2017) The majority of princesses have been of lighter skin which dis-abled many children to grow up watching Disney movies without having someone they can look up to that looked similar to themselves.

One of the most diverse Disney film to be made to this day is 'Big Hero 6' (2015) with four out the five main characters are not white. The co-directors biggest aim was to create a film that knocked down racial barriers with in Disney and he succeeded to do so. "One of the things that I am proud of is the fact that we do have this very diverse cast. In one sense, we don't make a big deal out of it. The characters are certainly not defined in any way by their race and I'm very proud of that" (Carter, 2014) The director said this in an interview they did with buzzfeed. In 'Big Hero 6' (2015) they also go against stereotypes in society when they had a big guy with muscles that was actually the boy that was in to books rather than placing in as the big tough guy with his strength being his only personality trait. Also linking to the representation of gender in Disney movies 'Big Hero 6' (2015) also challenges gender stereotypes when they feature "bold and brainy" that end up being centre of attention up on stage with both of them also being women of colour. This film is a huge step in the right direction with Disney movies being more Diverse. Going from Walt Disney the creator of Disney not even wanting black people to work at Disneyland to now where there are black protagonists being featured in the movies.

The problem is with Disney having lack of Diversity is that children that watch these movies always look for someone within a movie to look up to, even subconsciously sometimes, you are always drawn to someone that resembles you the most however if you were a person of colour even 20 years ago your choices are limited to which characters you are able to resemble as "We all relate better to people and things that look like us" (Narratives, 2017) Alongside this argument about lack of Diversity in Disney movies there is always the side that Disney creators don't just want to create Diverse films "just to check it off a list". (Narratives, 2017) Disney likes to create movies with exciting story lines without having to think about whether they are being diverse enough, they think it will take it away from their primary goal which is to create an entertaining movie. "Diversity for diversity's sake is a bad thing if they feel like they have to. If they don't have a good story to go along with it, it is just diversity for diversity's sake." (Narratives, 2017) Disney movies are a great way to introduce children to Diversity to show them that everyone isn't like yourself and it is proven children are more open to the idea of accepting everyone as they haven't built their ideology yet. A mother from Oregon states children "don't necessarily see the difference between people's skin colour or socioeconomic status like we do. So having that in kids' movies makes it so much more ingrained in them for when they become adults." (Narratives, 2017)

Conclusion

After researching my keywords I have come to the conclusion that I want to research more in to the darker side of Disney and how they are changing in a positive way as a world wide business to be more inclusive and Diverse within their movies. I have also found it interesting looking at the life of Walt Disney and what led him to the actions he took out in his life both bad and good. The question for my Dissertation that I'm going to do is 'What is the reality behind Disney?'. I could even look in to what its like to work at a Disney Theme-park whether its a positive or negative experience and whether the lack of diversity in Disney films has lead to more of a white fanbase of Disney even in todays day and age, and whether more there is a more diverse fanbase now because of the more diverse films that are being released by Disney. I could also look in to the films that have been announced that are being made and see if there is more of a diverse cast to see what the diversity will be like in the next couple of years. The spoiler releases of films also grabs the attention of people from different cultures if they feature people that resemble them therefore they can get excited for these new films which grows the popularity of Disney even more.

My Dissertation question for next year is going to be "What is the Reality behind Disney?"

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