Bippity-Boppity-Boo!; Becoming a Princess at Fairytale Land
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Once upon a time becoming a princess occurred only when marrying a prince. Nowadays, the yearning to become a princess satisfies more than obtaining the status. Pretending to be a princess is seen to be just as fulfilling. What is it about being a princess that brings contentment? Specifically, what is it about wearing an oversized dress and a tiara that makes life more fascinating for young girls? Disney fairytales such as *Snow White* and *Cinderella* have helped popularize the motif of princesses. Girls can buy Cinderella costumes or visit their favourite princess at Disneyland. This helps create the notion that becoming a princess is something to be desired. It is important to note, that life as a princess is hardly ever visited in stories such as Grimm's *Little Snow-White*, or even Disney's *Cinderella*. In fact, these tales end right after a girl marries prince charming and obtains the princess status. The sole insight readers gain about life as a princess is that, 'they lived happily ever after'—a sentence stated at the end of many Disney fairytales. The company Fairytale Land, demonstrates how contemporary society recreates the princess motif. The ability to facilitate the transformation of a young girl to become a princess is promoted at Fairytale Land. Fairytale Land, however, distorts Disney's focus on *becoming* a princess into a process whereby young girls are allowed to live that life of luxury. In the focus on being a princess, one then fixates on contemporary female ideals of beauty.

Preparatory to proceeding, it is important to gain an understanding of contemporary children's culture and see how Fairytale Land is indicative of it. There is no firm understanding or definition of children's culture, as it varies across time and place. However, children's culture is increasingly being understood as a product of media consumption. David Buckingham highlights how the age of digital technology has changed children's cultural environment:

Children's 'crazes'-typically entail a high degree of 'interactivity,' not just in the texts themselves but also in the communication that takes place as children move between one cultural form and another, from the television series to the card game to the books and the toys (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003). In the process, the gathering of specialist knowledge - much of it impenetrable to adults - becomes inextricably entailed in the purchase and collecting of commodities (Kehily 129-130).

Within the context of this paper, the prevalent 'craze' within contemporary children's culture is the desire to become a princess. In this following section, I will show how this fixation is expressed through Fairytale Land. Fairytale Land is a venue for young girls to celebrate their birthday (www.fairytaleland.ca). The website serves to represent

the place itself, while enabling viewers to virtually navigate through the fantastical setting. A collection of commodities available to purchase online include: party packages, cakes, loot bags, costume sets or pieces, and jewelry. Everything is princess themed. The website for Fairytale Land was selected for this paper as it depicts and emphasizes the extent to which media consumption has led to this desire of becoming a princess. As Buckingham expresses, fads are a product of children's media consumption (Buckingham and Sefton-Green 2003). Fairytale Land not only enables this fad but promotes it.

The girls are entertained by their Fairy Godmothers in Fairytale Land. They dress up as their favourite princess at the Fairy Godmother Salon. Face painting, makeovers, and tea parties are popular activities once could participate in, as the photos on the website illustrate. As transformed princesses, the girls learn about royal ball etiquette, take part in a royal fashion show, and show off their dresses, wands, tiaras, miniature heels, and glamourous makeup in front of an audience. Prior to the show, girls paint their nails and choose fancy jewelry pieces to wear including. One of the 'enchanted birthday party' options, "Glitz&Glam", includes hair extensions for girls to wear. There are about twenty cakes to choose from when planning a birthday party at Fairytale Land. All but two or three cakes are princess themed. This highlights the stringent craze with princesses. All the rooms at Fairytale Land are painted in colours society has normalized with being a girl. The website does not display any rooms painted a colour other than pink and purple. The venue looks like a palace itself: large rooms with elaborate, detailed furniture. The Fairy Godmother Salon appears to be a large closet filled with costumes, heels, and tables covered in the jewelry.

Fairytale Land is an artifact of children's culture. However, it pertains solely to young girls. There is only a single photo of a boy posted on the website. The boy is seen playing a guitar and it appears as if the photo is retrieved from the internet and pasted onto the website, rather than a photo taken of an actual boy present at Fairytale Land. This indicates that very few boys visit this venue. It is fascinating to consider how children's culture has fixated on the motif of princesses, but not princes. The website does not advertise an option for boys to host birthdays at Fairytale Land, to become princes.

Very few aspects of the original fairytales are retained or reciprocated within venues such as Fairytale Land. Take for instance Grimm's *Little Snow-White.* The story was written in the beginning of the eighteenth century and was initially not intended for children. Grimm's tale of Snow White is a much more horrifying and less fantastical version of Disney's *Snow White,* of which most are familiar with. Although Grimm's *Little Snow-White* endorses gender distinctions - implying that women are vulnerable and in need of a man to save them - the motif of princesses is not depicted the way it is at Fairytale Land. In *Little Snow-White,* Grimm implies that a woman needs a man. At Fairytale Land, the transformation from girl to princess implies that a woman needs to be "prettified", and it promotes this fixation on ideals of beauty. The motif of princesses within Grimm's version pertains solely to the princess status itself. Meanwhile, the idea of princesses is redefined at Fairytale Land into one that constitutes an obsession with the process of beautification. Grimm's short story concludes with, "Snow-White and the prince lived and reigned happily over that land, many, many years later" (Grimm, 1922). It is crucial to note that we do not get any insight of what life as a princess is in Grimm's version. Similarly, in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the story concludes with the prince and princess living happily ever after when Snow White marries her prince. Therefore, living the life as a

princess by indulging in dress-up and makeovers is not based on Grimm or Disney's stories, but rather has emerged into a story of its own.

However, a few features are retained from Grimm's, *Little Snow White*. In Grimm's version, Snow White is happiest when she marries her prince at the end. In Disney's *Cinderella*, Cinderella becomes free from her evil stepmother and is happiest at the end when she becomes a princess. Prior to becoming a princess, Cinderella spends her life upset over being unable to do anything other than cleaning the house and follow the orders of her evil stepmother. Likewise, Snow White spends her life cleaning a house for seven dwarfs until she marries her prince and becomes a princess. This promotes the idea that becoming a princess is a yearning fulfillment. However, in contemporary children's culture, becoming a princess is exaggerated. Exaggerated at Fairytale Land is what comes with being a princess and how much greater it is perceived as a princess rather than just as a girl, even if it is for an hour or two. When girls become a princess at the venue, a sense of uttermost happiness is gratified. It is almost as if the transformation from girl to princess is a metamorphosis from mediocre to fabulous. This can be very damaging to the girls' self-esteems and sense of identities. Tiffany Pelton further analyzes the motif of princesses in her work titled, "Thematic Analysis of the Disney Princess Franchise." She states:

> The feminine beauty ideal and the representation of the ideal in fairy tales has been a continued theme of many Disney movies especially among the Disney Princess Franchise. Its portrayal and maintenance in children's literature has spanned a 150-year period. This ideal was a "socially constructed notion that physical attractiveness is one of women's most important assets, and something all women should strive to achieve and maintain. (Pelton 23)

This socially constructed concept around physical attractiveness that Pelton refers to is a notion that exists in contemporary children's culture, which Fairytale Land promotes and facilitates.

Fairytale Land depends more on the Disney versions of fairytales, rather than the original Grimm stories. Fairytale Land holds onto the fairy godmother character, present in most Disney stories. Outfits princesses wear in the Disney films, such as the recognized blue dress worn by Cinderella or the yellow dress worn by Belle, are retained. In terms of the themes of gender distinction taken from the original story, Fairytale Land enforces these while hauling feminism centuries back. At Fairytale Land, the girls are represented as objects of beauty. Girls step out of their reality into a fantastical world to become someone else. The girls enjoy this transformation and indulge in fixating on female ideals of beauty.

The next section of this paper explores the larger ideological causes behind Fairytale Land. As highlighted so far, the venue enforces contemporary ideals of beauty. The temporary satisfaction of being a princess at Fairytale Land is a nonpermanent state of lust. The stepping out of reality into a couple hours of pleasure becomes a state to which girls always crave to be in. This may be because they feel 'free' to indulge and enjoy themselves. However, this kind of freedom is mediated. Everything is done through and by the fairy godmothers. The events and activities offered to the girls are organized, structured, and surveilled. Also, the fairy godmothers are all adults. Therefore, this freedom is mediated by adults. To become a princess, the girls go to the Fairy Godmother Salon. The tea parties, fashion shows, and royal ball etiquette learning experiences are all hosted by the fairy

godmothers. They own the venue, as noted on the website. They are the ones who are giving makeovers to the girls, and providing their costumes. This mediated freedom highlights children's agency present at Fairytale Land: the girls at the venue are always under adult supervision. This mediated freedom is not present in Grimm's *Little Snow-White,* or in Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. In both stories, Snow White becomes 'free' when she marries her prince. As a princess- she is not under adult supervision, even though her age, in both versions, indicates that she is a child.

It is important to consider what the girls would change about Fairytale Land if they had the opportunity to do so. This is because Fairytale Land is created by adults for children. It is without a doubt that the girls are enjoying themselves at Fairytale Land. However, if children were to create their own 'fairytale land,' would it be any different? In "Cinderella Ate My Daughter: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Girly-Girl Culture," Shuler states:

> Even when parents try to limit their children's exposure to the Disney marketing enterprise, the princesses seem to creep in; Disney Princesses are often a girl's first foray into popular culture without the guidance of her parents. Orenstein's daughter, and mine, learned from friends at preschool the names, hair, dress styles, and basic story of all the princesses. (Shuler 97)

The marketing of princesses is difficult to escape from, as Shuler emphasizes. However, when thinking about exposure and the marketing enterprise it must become clear that what children are being marketed, and what children are being exposed to, is adult generated. Fairytale Land itself is a business being run by adults. From a larger perspective, this demonstrates that while children's culture is a product of media consumption, it is highly controlled and manipulated by adults. Although Shuler argues that this popular culture is without guidance of her parents, the details the child becomes occupied with about princesses are in some way or form a result of adult inventions such as books and films of princesses. This section of the paper can conclude with the significance that female ideals of beauty are promoted at Fairytale Land, but more importantly through and by adults. Children are absorbing these notions, but at its root adults have created the fixation of becoming a princess.

This paper will proceed to analyze the character's present at Fairytale Land, as displayed on their website. As shown, the fairy godmothers are white, and the all the ones displayed on the website have blonde hair. All the fairy godmothers wear long identical white gowns and do not look a day over the age of twenty-five years. Their makeup is done, their faces are clear from any blemishes, and their hair is beautifully styled. In comparison to how a fairy godmother appears in Disney adaptations, the ones present at Fairytale Land are quite different. In Disney's *Cinderella*, the 'fairy godmother' is not young but rather is an old lady who wears an oversized blue cloak and holds a magic wand. Her face appears larger, rather than slim, demonstrating she is a woman on the heavier side. In Grimm's *Little Snow-White*, a fairy godmother is nonexistent. In the most recent *Cinderella* adaptation released in 2015, the fairy godmother's costume is an enormous white dazzling sparkly dress. She holds a wand in the film and her makeup is extravagant. She is a much younger fairy godmother than Cinderella's fairy godmother in the film adaptation made in 1950. Fairytale Land mimics their fairy godmothers to look like the one in the recent

Cinderella version, appearing more glamorous. However, their Cinderella costume for the girls to wear is not altered in any way. It looks exactly like the one Cinderella wears in the 1950 adaptation. Fairytale Land has taken the 'best of hits' of all Disney fairytales. In this case, they grasped the concept of having a magical fairy godmother character to make all dreams come true. Consequently, the young girls undergoing the process of becoming a princess at Fairytale Land enter a world by which beauty is glorified and worshipped. Fairytale Land displays what beauty is, from whom it can come, and the steps to becoming beautiful. Beauty, then, is defined by makeovers and oversized dresses, which comes from young women bedazzled in white gowns with long luscious blonde hair.

The final step of becoming a princess involves showing off their looks at the royal fashion show. The little girls become a product of these fairy godmothers and look similar to them at the end of the transformation. Fairytale Land homogenizes young girls in the process of becoming a princess. David Buckingham discusses what contemporary children's culture has become and how we have drifted from the original stories into an outcome much more complex in his work "Dissin' Disney: Critical Perspectives on Children's Media Culture." He states: "The 'Disneyfication' of this original is seen to result in oversimplification, sanitization, repression and ideological mystification. Yet in the process, there seems to be little recognition of what the text might be attempting to achieve in its own right, and its relation to its actual target audience" (290). The main idea to grasp from Buckingham here is that there is little recognition of what the original text aimed to express. An altered or misunderstood version of what these stories are trying to say has developed. As mentioned earlier, not much has been retained from the motif of princesses in Grimm's *Little Snow-White* and from various Disney stories. Fairytale Land has taken concepts from these original stories but has molded them into a story of its own. Grimm's *Little Snow-White* concludes with the queen becoming overly consumed with her obsession to be pretty to the point where she eventually dies from it. Fairytale Land has decided not to focus on the basic lessons conveyed within the original story. Instead, it promotes the opposite of what Grimm attempts to warn readers: that fixating on ideals of vanity is grueling and is in fact not the path to obtaining happiness.

To conclude, this paper has expressed how becoming a princess at Fairytale Land depicts how children's culture has distorted Disney's focus on becoming a princess into a process whereby young girls can live that life of luxury and in the process, fixate on contemporary female ideals of beauty. Buckingham argues that crazes exist within contemporary children's culture. However, a craze is understood to come and go, but the obsession with princesses has yet to go. The untangling of such a craze appears to be impossible as this fixation seems to only be rapidly growing and expanding. Places like Fairytale Land will always make money, if this craze survives. Adults will continue to keep this craze alive, as it has made corporations like Disney billions of dollars in revenue. Society must recognize how damaging the fad of becoming a princess is for young girls. If there is one thing from the original Grimm's *Little Snow-White* that should be retained, it is the basic lesson that fixating on ideals of beauty is consequentially harmful. Places like Fairytale Land must reassess what they decide to promote for young girls because the long-term consequence to this fairytale does not comprise of a happy ending.

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