Plato once said, “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.” With all of the newspaper, magazines, movies, and television shows on the global media circuit today, children do not have the opportunity to truly see what beauty is and understand the negative implications media can have on a child’s growth and development. The Disney princesses are beautiful and skinny but do the unrealistic waist size of Belle and the perfect porcelain skin of Snow White really show what beauty is and are the young girls striving to be these idealistic fictional cartoon princesses metaphorically scaring themselves for the years to come?

Beauty, the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit, the definition of beauty says nothing of skin tone, body type, or hair color just that beauty is something that gives pleasure to the senses. A study by Hargreaves in 2002 discovered, “that young girls who watched commercials featuring thin and traditionally beautiful women ended up feeling less confident, more dissatisfied, and angrier about their own appearance.” (Thompson) Watching a twenty second commercial in the comfort of their own homes makes young girls self-conscience! Multibillion-dollar beauty and fashion industries both shape and depend on the cult-like worship of what physical attributes the public sees as beautiful. And most women feel the effects of those decisions (Dawson) many women and some men spend a one-third of their income on looking good, but why? An article by Dan Eden talks about benefits of being more beautiful. “Good-looking people tend to make more money than their plain-Jane counterparts, according to a study by the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, researchers found that “beautiful people tend to earn five percent more an hour than their less that comely colleagues. If that weren’t enough, the St. Louis bank also discovered a “plainness penalty,” punishing below-average-looks with earnings of nine percent less an hour.” Another study, in 2005, determined that the discrimination was consistent across occupations, so that even a computer programmer buried behind a desk could suffer from the plainness penalty. Being ugly as perceived by the media is becoming “a punishable offence” not being paid as much and discriminated against by their own bosses. Being beautiful has a lot of benefits which makes the “plainness penalty” more smart that discriminative. “People who are physically attractive might develop better communication skills because the tendency is that from an early age they get more attention from all their caregivers, including their own mothers onward,” having better communication skills helps at work and being more sociable is a positive attribute to have in the office and elsewhere. In 2006, a hit television show called Ugly Betty came on with it spawned a wide conversation about whether the show portends a greater tolerance in society for the unattractive. ABC, the network who aired the show, started the “Be Ugly” campaign which urged women and girls to “Be real, be smart, be passionate, be true to yourself, and be ugly.” Some people perceive this campaign to be a marketing ploy and they argue that the show has done little to increase acceptance of the homely. On the contrary, American society continues to move aggressively in the opposite direction, critics say, placing an every-higher importance on beauty.” (Kershaw)

Where does beauty come from? Who started all this who is beautiful and not? The evolution of beauty is one that has spread through the centuries really starting during the renaissance. During the fifteenth century, women plucked their hairline to make their foreheads seem higher, and scraped their hair back under an elaborate headdress. This is opposite of what happen now where “five heads” or foreheads where you can fit all five fingers on it, is considered not beautiful. A similarity between then and now is that blond hair was considered to be a sign of beauty and high class. Men and women would attempt to turn their hair blond by using bleach, saffron or onion skin dye, or in the case of Italian women, by sitting for hours in crownless hat in the sun. During the Elizabethan era people would copy the royals like nowadays people copy celebrities or “movie royalty” for the latest trends. Back to Elizabethan era, society women copied her naturally pale complexion and red hair, using white power in great abundance, along with red wigs. The most successful means for recreating her skin color was ceruse or white lead, which was later found to be poisonous. The Victorian era advocated a modest, natural beauty, restrained and without makeup, which was completely opposite of the Elizabethan era a few generations earlier. The 1920’s through the 40’s were filled with the beginning of Hollywood and the starlets setting the trends in women’s fashion. Beauty has always been a huge part of the way people live. Always looking the best is something people hold to be one of the most important things in life. (Jefferson)

Although discriminating against the “ugly” is hurtful and detrimental to a person’s wellbeing what people recognize as beautiful is actually programmed into the brain, “In fact, the human brain has a special part called the fusiform, located in the back of the head near the spine. It's the same neural pathway needed to recognize faces of family, friends and acquaintances. When it's damaged, the patients cannot recognize anyone, even people they has just met. Also, in experiments, they cannot discriminate between photographs of plain and beautiful faces. Studies show that when recognizing a face as "beautiful" the brain is actually making a judgment about the health and vitality of that individual. “We interpret facial symmetry (the similarity of left and right halves of a face) and the smoothness of the skin to mean that a person has good genes and has been free from diseases.” (Eden)

Barbie is a huge part of media and young girl’s perception of what beauty truly is. Girls ages three to ten have on average eight Barbie dolls and only one percent of adolescent girls in the United States have never owned one. For the more than fifty years Barbie has been around girls strive to look and be just like her but, little do they know there is a one in one hundred thousand chance of attaining Barbie’s proportions and she is estimated to be 6’2 to 7’5 in height a whopping six inches taller than the average women. Studies show that forty percent of girl’s age eight to nine report that they would like to be thinner; the majority of those girls have played with a Barbie at some point in their life. A study done by York university took a total of one hundred and sixty two girls ages five to eight and exposed them to either a Barbie doll or no doll at all. The results showed that Barbie was detrimental to girls’ self-esteem and body size satisfaction as significant drops in reported self-esteem and body dissatisfaction was reported after being exposed to images of Barbie while having no Barbie only slightly affected self-esteem and body satisfaction. (Ditmar) Even though Barbie is the cause of many body image issues in young girls it is one of the most popular twentieth century dolls representing female beauty and the American dream; every second a Mattel Inc. produced Barbie doll is purchased. Barbie dolls are among girls’ ages eight to twelve first or second favorite toy as young girls view her as the image of perfection. Although the majority of girls found that they generally perceived Barbie as being “fake” but agreed that she was the image of beauty and perfection. (negative)

In 1937 Walt Disney came out with the first Disney princess, Snow White, a beautiful skinny girl with porcelain skin and black hair. Since then the princesses came every couple of years, steadily getting skinner. If someone were to line the princesses up chronologically, in the order their movies were released, some things become strangely apparent. Look at their waistlines – although Snow White starts off incredibly thin, as time goes by the princesses only get thinner and thinner. [The 1960s are when the real thin ideal came into its full force in the American culture](http://www.jonrobison.net/FDNH/unit1a.htm) – is it a coincidence that Disney princesses had started shrinking in the decade before? It’s true that culture informs media, but it goes the other way too, little girls who grow up idolizing impossibly thin princesses become young women who perpetuate and buy into the idea that thin is the only acceptable form of beauty and one should strive to be thin, regardless of the price. Obviously Disney is not the only perpetrator of this ideal (but considering its constantly growing power, revenue, and influence it plays a large role) and all little girls do not grow up and internalize this message, but enough of them do to make a difference – as shown by the shifting ideals between 1950 and 1960. In 1992, when Jasmine joined the list of princesses, she marked both the first non-white princess, and relatively “fuller” than any of the other princesses. Jasmine opened the proverbial floodgates for Disney, allowing a multiracial wave of princesses to break into the mass media, for example Pocahontas, Mulan, and Tiana. On one hand it is wonderful that Disney is making an effort to be culturally inclusive and put their racist beginnings in the past, on the other hand Disney’s non-white princesses (just like their white princesses) leave something to be desired. Disney is certainly taking steps in the right direction its princesses are becoming less homogeneous, more independent, and just generally more awesome…but there are still issues. First of all – each and every one of these princesses still embodies a beauty ideal that is unachievable for real women and girls. While it is understand that they are cartoons and a certain suspension of reality is expected and accepted – do their waists really have to be nearly as thin as their arms? Why can there not be an average sized princess, or even an overweight princess? Disney has made a great step in attempting to break down racial beauty stereotypes, now, why not continue that momentum to encompass weight (among many things) as well?

Another view point on the whole Disney Princess issue comes from an article called *10 Disney characters who stirred up controversy*. “Because the tales of various (and very lucrative) Disney princesses drew their inspiration from various ancient folk stories from a broad variety of cultures, it probably come as little surprise that the underlying misogynistic elements remained intact. Ardent feminists from every decade and every medium have relentlessly lambasted the studio for their insulting portrayal of women, whose characters almost always seem more defined by how they related to the masculine heroes of the story rather than their own inherent virtues and vices. Even so-called “action girls” such as Princess Jasmine, in the end find themselves judged more on their level of attractiveness and must be rescued by their respective princes in some fashion or another. As the info graphic accurately outlines, satisfying singlehood is never an option for any lead female in a lead Disney movie- she always has to rely on her beauty to snag her man. Particularly egregious examples from the past two and a half decades (eras ostensibly more “progressive” and “enlightened” when it comes to woman’s role in society) include Belle’s submission to an abusive relationship with the beast in *Beauty and the Beast* and the fact that her pretty face and undying love saved the day far more than her brains ever could. *The Little Mermaid*’s Ariel completely alters her appearance and gives up her voice, family, friends, and home for the sake of a man she loves only because of his looks and he has to fall in love with her for no reason other than what he sees. To add insult to injury, the story PRAISES their submission and acquiescence to the concept of women as decorations. Never does the possibility of equality in a relationship crop up as a possibility. All of their respective romances default to the dominant male/submissive female dynamic, sadly influencing their target audience of young women to accept that as normal and idyllic. Even when the accusations of racism and sexism become clouded by the inclusions of more positive character traits, it is hard to deny that to some extent Disney relies heavily on ethnic and sexual stereotypes to tell a story rather than putting forth the effort to create depth and dimension.”(10) Some parents and teachers may want to use their offensive, controversial decisions as valuable educational tools to teach children about respecting other cultures and genders but using Disney Princesses as educational tools they might have underlying psychological consequences. (10)

Now with the constant backlash Disney has with the Disney Princesses, they have now come out with the new generation of princesses, a young girl. The New York Times, reporter Brook Barnes investigated, “The Disney princesses exert a powerful hold on the imaginations of many girls, influencing everything from how they play to what they wear. Some parents think they can also send the wrong message to girls — that life isn’t complete without Prince Charming, for instance So how will a new Disney princess aimed squarely at preschoolers go over? This week the company plans to announce “Sofia the First,” a television movie and series centered on a girl princess. It’s a first: Disney’s princesses until now have all been adults (Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and so on). “Sofia the First” will play on both Disney Channel and Disney Junior, a channel aimed at children ages 2 to 7 that is set to make its debut in the coming months. The company’s hope, of course, is for the character to spawn all kinds of consumer products. It’s a solid business bet; the Disney Princess toy line generates about $4 billion in annual retail sales. (Barnes) Disney is also keenly aware of the potential for criticism and emphasizes that “Sofia the First” will focus on learning and what it says are age-appropriate themes. Lessons will include the importance of getting along with siblings and how to be a kind and generous person. Sofia will have “plenty of pretty dresses and sparkly shoes,” said Nancy Kanter, general manager for Disney Junior Worldwide, but episodes will teach viewers that “what makes a real princess is what’s inside, not what’s outside.” Ms. Kanter said Disney had high hopes for the series, partly because focus groups reacted with “uniform positivity.” “We saw girls have an instant reliability to this character,” Ms. Kanter said. “If kids relate to what they watch — if they can put themselves in that world — that’s where real learning can start.’” So is Disney really trying to change its moral fiber for the good or are they just starting young girls off at an even younger age for more disappointment when they grow into teens and even young adults? (Barnes)

A more positive article took the negativity of Disney like the others but also talked about some of the benefits the Disney Princesses have on young girls. “I think there is an aspect of royal play that is about transformation and aspiration,” an expert on the subject said, but explained that the products such as a magical talking vanity and a Rapunzel-styling head — both listed as 10 selling toys on the Disney Store website — might prompt concern. “It starts (young girls) on a path of getting that sense of self and value from how they look,” she said. “It’s a constant narrowing of what it means to be feminine.” Mrs. Cone, a mother talking on the issue, is happy to see a role play that isn’t directly princess-themed. “Some of these things can encourage creativity and independence,” Cone said. “I think it's just fine for little girls to want to grow up and own their own salon or be a make-up artist. Wanting to grow up and be a princess is a whole other story.” But Orenstein, an author on this subject, points to research done by the American Psychological Association that links early emphasis on beauty and play “sexiness” to the pitfalls we link with older girls such as risky sexual behavior, eating disorders and low self-esteem. Finucane, another mother, calls this princess phenomenon something worth studying. (O’Connor)

“Because Disney Princesses are cartoon images, and from a well-trusted company, one that seems part of the American story, (their effect) is not really looked at as seriously,” Finucane elaborates. “Many articles on girls acting too old, dressing too sexy, are good at pointing out when it’s happening but not at examining what went on years before that.” But when the other options marketed to young girls range from lip-liner-sporting Bratz dolls to Disney-Channel-starlets-turned-rehab-patients, the Disney Princesses don’t seem like the worst thing for a kid to get into.” (O’Connor)

Different cultures have different standards and norms for appropriate body size and shape, which can affect how children perceive their body image. Some cultures celebrate a fuller body shape more than others, but researchers at the Center for Obesity Research and Education (CORE) at Temple University have found that an overweight or obese child can still be unhappy with his or her body, despite acceptance from within their ethnic group. In many cultures and historical periods women have been proud to be large--being fat was a sign of fertility, of prosperity, of the ability to survive. Even in the U.S. today, where fear of fat reigns in most sectors of the culture, some racial and ethnic groups love and enjoy large women. For example, Hawaiians often consider very large women quite beautiful, and studies show that some African American women experience more body satisfaction and are less concerned with dieting, fatness, and weight fluctuations than are white women. However, the weight loss, medical, and advertising industries have an enormous impact on women across racial and ethnic boundaries. These industries all insist that white and thin is beautiful and that fatness is always a dangerous problem in need of correction. In the country of Mauritania, “plump is sexy!” for generation’s young girls were subjected to the practice of force feeding in order to fatten up and make them more desirable. In Mauritania the more a girl weighs the better chance they have at finding a husband. Although force feeding is now frowned upon by the government, old habits die hard in remote areas of the country. Some young girls spend hours each day in the stifling heat, forced to stuff themselves with couscous and high-fat camel’s milk, vomiting only leads to another helping of food. Houda, a woman who grew up in Mauritania, says her father is a doctor who sees the negative effects of the country’s big idea of beauty. “My father deals every day with women with serious health issues such as high blood pressure. She says. Even though the problems associated with obesity like high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes are prevalent, it doesn’t deter women from wanting a big body. “When your skinny, you’re even considered as sick or there’s something wrong with you, women that are fat, they’re really happy. (Schiavocampo)

The different viewpoints of what beauty is, all around the world is very interesting and diverse from what Americans feel is beautiful. Asia, the leading continent in beauty product sales is kind of “out there” with their beauty rituals. Skin whitening has a long history in Asia, stemming back to ancient China and Japan, where the saying "one white covers up three ugliness" was passed through the generations. A white complexion was seen as noble and aristocratic, especially in Southeast Asia, where the sun was always out. Only those rich enough could afford to stay indoors, while peasants baked in the rice fields. “In their early bid to lighten up, Chinese ground pearl from seashells into powder and swallowed it to whiten their skin”, says Chinese University chemical pathology professor Christopher Lam Wai-kei, while across the Yellow Sea, Geisha girls powdered their faces chalk white. This obsession with whiteness has not faded over time. A survey by Asia Market Intelligence this year revealed that three quarters of Malaysian men thought their partners would be more attractive with lighter complexions. In Hong Kong two thirds of men prefer fairer skin, while half the local women wanted their men paler. Almost half of Asians aged 25 to 34 years used skin whiteners in a business that some analysts have said could be worth billions of dollars. On the border of Thailand and Burma, members of the Kayan tribe begin their begin beautifying at a young age. At just five years old girls start wearing brass rings around their necks, a ritual that is centuries old. As they grow older, more rings are added and eventually their necks start to look elongated, giving them a giraffe-like appearance. For these women, the shiny brass rings are the ultimate sign of female elegance and status. Some neck pieces can weigh up to twenty-two pounds. Both these examples are traditions used by these native people for centuries. (Schiavocampo) Media has had hardly any effect on them, but the way the outside world views them is skewed by the media, instead of seeing the elegance and beauty the women of the Kayan tribe want to exude, the people watching or reading only see a “fat person” or someone who looks like a giraffe. Media is causing the breakdown of custom and tradition and putting instead unrealistic ideas for young girls like being extremely skinny or like China having perfect porcelain skin and calling that beautiful. (Schiavocampo)

With all of these negative effects media has on the general public regarding beauty and self-image take a look at the other side of the spectrum, many positive organization on the internet and in media today switch the negativity around to look at a more positive side of beauty in the media today. “ The pressure on women to look and behave in certain ways is so deeply ingrained in our psyches that it’s easy to overlook the impact mass culture has on how we feel about ourselves and our bodies. Watching TV, reading magazines and newspapers, surfing the Net, we are bombarded with airbrushed images of perfect beauty and thinness. Inevitably we absorb the relentless message that such beauty is the norm, and is achievable, if only we would use this makeup, remove that hair, buy the right clothes, reshape that body part. Many of us know that the unspoken promise -- use our product and you will get the love, the happiness, or the success you want -- is a lie. Many of us have had long, ongoing struggles to accept our bodies as they are and to make our peace with, and possibly even celebrate, food. Still, there are times our insecurities and self-loathing outweigh our feminist sensibilities, and we need reinforcements to remind us that looks don’t make the woman.” (martin)

“A new breed of websites is striving to challenge culturally imposed standards of beauty and to provide an oasis for women sick of being told that somehow -- whether your eyelashes are too thin or your hair is the wrong texture or your thighs are too fat -- you are not okay the way you are. These sites counter the messages of mainstream media with information about the advertising industry, the risks of seeking physical perfection, and the profits made off women’s (man-made) insecurities. Using humor, sarcasm, anger, and insight, these sites challenge the tyranny of body obsession.” (martin) One of the example of a site mentioned above is [*The Body Positive*](http://www.bodypositive.com/) is a great site committed to helping women feel good about the bodies we have. Their motto, Change Your Mind, Change Your Culture, and Let Your Body Be, informs their website, which suggests, among other things, “Taking up occupancy inside your own skin, rather than living above the chin until you're thin.” One page asks the question, what will the reader miss out on if they fail to love their body and treat it as it truly deserves to be treated? The reader responses are powerful and often wrenching. (Our bodies ourselves)

Huge companies that are always in the media have started campaigns for “real beauty” such as Dove with their Movement for self-esteem which says the Dove Company “is committed to building positive self-esteem and inspiring all women and girls to reach their full potential.” The Dove brand is rooted in listening to women. The findings of a major global study, The Real Truth about Beauty: a Global Report, Dovelaunched the Campaign for Real Beauty in 2004. The campaign started a global conversation about the need for a wider definition of beauty after the study proved the hypothesis that the definition of beauty had become limiting and unattainable. Among the study’s findings was the statistic that only 4% of women around the world would describe themselves as beautiful.  More than half (54%) of women globally agree that when it comes to how they look, they are their own worst beauty critic. Since 2004, Dove has employed various communications vehicles to challenge beauty stereotypes and invite women to join a discussion about beauty.  In 2010, Dove evolved the campaign and launched an unprecedented effort to make beauty a source of confidence, not anxiety, with the Dove Movement for Self-Esteem. (Dove)

Beauty, the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit (Webster), is a remarkable obsession almost everyone in the world has whether being on the large side or being a “stick”, wearing brass rings around the neck or bleaching skin, no matter the place beauty is the supreme ruler. Not all of the aspects of the Disney Princess franchise are horrible and should be destroyed or banned from children, they bring joy and happiness to young girls, but the unrealistic waist line and the story of Prince Charming always being there is a fiction that girls could think to be true. With organizations such as Dove and the “Be Ugly” campaign, women and young girls are regaining right to have flaws while still being beautiful. Media and the universal perception of beauty go hand in hand but when eating disorders and bleaching skin products are everyday objects being used by young girls and teenagers all around the world, the big media outlets should take a step back and see if selling these products are worth it, if all of their customers end up dead.

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