

Peggy Orenstein

Peggy Orenstein (b. 1961) is an American journalist who has written for major American newspapers such as The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times. Her articles often thematize the state of contemporary families and call for diversity. Orenstein writes a blog which can be found at <http://peggyorenstein.com/blog.html>

What's Wrong With Cinderella?

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I finally came unhinged in the dentist's office – one of those ritzy pediatric practices tricked out with comic books, DVDs and arcade games – where I'd taken my 3-year-old daughter for her first exam. Until then, I'd held my tongue. I'd smiled politely every time the supermarket-checkout clerk greeted her with "Hi, Princess"; ignored the waitress at our local breakfast joint who called the funny-face pancakes she ordered her "princess meal"; made no comment when the lady at Longs Drugs said, "I bet I know your favorite color" and handed her a pink balloon rather than letting her choose for herself. Maybe it was the dentist's Betty Boop inflection that got to me, but when she pointed to the exam chair and said, "Would you like to sit in my special princess throne so I can sparkle your teeth?" I lost it.

"Oh, for God's sake," I snapped. "Do you have a princess drill, too?"

She stared at me as if I were an evil stepmother.

"Come on!" I continued, my voice rising. "It's 2006, not 1950. This is Berkeley, Calif. Does every little girl really have to be a princess?"

My daughter, who was reaching for a Cinderella sticker, looked back and forth between us. "Why are you so mad, Mama?" she asked. "What's wrong with princesses?"

Diana may be dead and Masako disgraced, but here in America, we are in the midst of a royal moment. To call princesses a "trend" among girls is like calling Harry Potter a book. Sales at Disney Consumer Products, which started the craze six years ago by packaging nine of its female characters under one royal rubric, have shot up to \$3 billion, globally, this year, from \$300 million in 2001. There are now more than 25,000 Disney Princess items. "Princess," as some Disney execs call it, is not only the fastest-growing brand the company has ever created; they say it is on its way to becoming the largest girls' franchise on the planet.

arcade game sb. computerspil
checkout clerk sb. kasse-eksponent
Longs Drugs apoteker-kæde
inflection sb. tonefald
Masako japansk prinsesse, der har haft svært ved at tilpasse sig livet i det japanske kongehus.
execs sb. executive = chef
franchise sb. bestemt forretningstype

Meanwhile in 2001, Mattel brought out its own "world of girl" line of princess Barbie dolls, DVDs, toys, clothing, home décor and myriad other products. At a time when Barbie sales were declining domestically, they became instant best sellers. Shortly before that, Mary Drolet, a Chicago-area mother and former Claire's and Montgomery Ward executive, opened Club Libby Lu, now a chain of mall stores based largely in the suburbs in which girls ages 4 to 12 can shop for "Princess Phones" covered in faux fur and attend "Princess-Makeover Birthday Parties." Saks bought Club Libby Lu in 2003 for \$12 million and has since expanded it to 87 outlets; by 2005, with only scant local advertising, revenues hovered around the \$46 million mark, a 53 percent jump from the previous year. Pink, it seems, is the new gold.

Even Dora the Explorer, the intrepid, dirty-kneed adventurer, has ascended to the throne: in 2004, after a two-part episode in which she turns into a "true princess," the Nickelodeon and Viacom consumer-products division released a satin-gowned "Magic Hair Fairytale Dora," with hair that grows or shortens when her crown is touched. Among other phrases the bilingual doll utters: "¡Vámonos! Let's go to fairy-tale land!" and "Will you brush my hair?"

As a feminist mother – not to mention a nostalgic product of the Grranimals era – I have been taken by surprise by the princess craze and the girlie-girl culture that has risen around it. What happened to William wanting a doll and not dressing your cat in an apron? Whither Marlo Thomas? I watch my fellow mothers, women who once swore they'd never be dependent on a man, smile indulgently at daughters who warble "So This Is Love" or insist on being called Snow White. I wonder if they'd concede so readily to sons who begged for combat fatigues and mock AK-47s.

More to the point, when my own girl makes her daily beeline for the dress-up corner of her preschool classroom – something I'm convinced she does largely to torture me – I worry about what playing Little Mermaid is teaching her. I've spent much of my career writing about experiences that undermine girls' well-being, warning parents that a preoccupation with body and beauty (encouraged by films, TV, magazines and, yes, toys) is perilous to their daughters' mental and physical health. Am I now supposed to shrug and forget all that? If trafficking in stereotypes doesn't matter at 3, when does it matter? At 6? Eight? Thirteen?

On the other hand, maybe I'm still surfing a washed-out second wave of feminism in a third-wave world. Maybe princesses are in fact a sign of progress, an indication that girls can embrace their predilection for pink without compromising strength or ambition; that, at long last, they can "have it all." Or maybe it is even less com-

décor sb. indretning
myriad sb. myriade/atal
domestically adv. pd
hjemmemarkedet
revenue sb. indtægt
hover vb. svæve
intrepid adj. frygtløs
ascend vb. bestige
bilingual vb. tosproget
grranimal clothesline
with little animals that
matched your clothes for
you, e.g. a giraffe blouse
with giraffe pants.
girlie-girl adj. pige pige
indulgently adv. over-
bærende
warble vb. kvilde
concede vb. tillade

plex than that: to mangle Freud, maybe a princess is sometimes just a princess. And, as my daughter wants to know, what's wrong with that? [...]

A few days later, I picked my daughter up from preschool. She came tearing over in a full-skirted frock with a gold bodice, a beaded crown perched sideways on her head. "Look, Mommy, I'm Ariel!" she crowed, referring to Disney's Little Mermaid. Then she stopped and furrowed her brow. "Mommy, do you like Ariel?"

I considered her for a moment. Maybe Princess is the first salvo in what will become a lifelong struggle over her body image, a Hundred Years' War of dieting, plucking, painting and perpetual dissatisfaction with the results. Or maybe it isn't. I'll never really know. In the end, it's not the Princesses that really bother me anyway. They're just a trigger for the bigger question of how, over the years, I can help my daughter with the contradictions she will inevitably face as a girl, the dissonance that is as endemic as ever to growing up female. Maybe the best I can hope for is that her generation will get a little further with the solutions than we did.

For now, I kneeled down on the floor and gave my daughter a hug.

She smiled happily. "But, Mommy?" she added. "When I grow up, I'm still going to be a fireman."

beeline sb. *lige linje mod*
 preoccupation sb. *optaget*
 mangle vb. *radbrække*
 perpetual adj. *evig*
 endemic adj. *rod/faestet*

Pre-reading

1. Research

- Who is Betty Boop, and what does her speech sound like?
- Who is Dora the Explorer, and what type of girl is she?
- Who is Sigmund Freud?

2. Vocabulary

Translate the following words into Danish.

1. Girlie-girl (sb.)
2. Unhinged (adj.)
3. Paediatrician (sb.)
4. Ritzy (adj.)
5. Craze (sb.)

6. Faux (adj.)
7. Revenue (sb.)
8. Indulgently (adv.)
9. Preoccupation (sb.)
10. Perilous (adj.)
11. Shrug (vb.)
12. Predilection (sb.)
13. Frock (sb.)
14. Bodice (sb.)
15. Beaded (adj.)
16. Contradictions (sb.)
17. Dissonance (sb.)

3. Based on these words from the text try to answer the following questions.

- What gender is the text about?
- Which age group could it be about?
- Can you tell whether the writer is positive or negative in her discussion of the topic?

Analysis

Comprehension

1. Find at least three examples of products made for girls mentioned in the article.
2. What are the characteristics of these products?
3. How much money does Disney make on princess items?

How does Peggy Orenstein feel about the following?	+	÷	Evidence in the text
Being dependent on a man			
Spending a lot of time on your appearance			
Being sweet and passive			
Having ambitions and strength			

