

# Teaching Your Princess to Make Responsible Choices

As father to a daughter and husband to a woman who has long believed in female empowerment, I am very cognizant of the “princess culture” believed to be perpetuated by corporations like Disney.

The idea is that from an early age, little girls are inundated with the notion that being a woman means having an unattainable figure, while waiting for a man to rescue you so that you can live happily ever after bearing children.

Of late, it seems as though parents have tried to redeem some princesses. Belle is smart, so she can be admired. Rapunzel (whom my daughter adores) saves the man in the end, bucking a trend. Merida is athletic, smart and doesn't want to get married.

What has brought this all to the forefront of my consciousness is a recent [piece](#) in *The Atlantic* about a father who fought hard against the princess culture - to no avail.

While I understand the author's philosophical stance and reasoning, ultimately, I believe that if our battle is with princesses alone, we're ignoring a larger war we need to be fighting for and with our children.

For me, the battle isn't about eschewing princesses, it's about presenting options for play and enjoyment that are varied - particularly ones that create memories without creating debt and allow for creativity without circumventing childhood.

For example, our daughter has always been presented with a wide array of clothing options. She can choose equally between a dress or pants, a pink shirt or a blue one, a skirt or shorts, a pair of purple pants or blue jeans.

In other words, in her mind (right now) there are no “boys' clothes” and “girls'

clothes.” There are just clothes, and whatever strikes her fancy she is allowed to wear.

Toy-wise, she has accumulated princess dolls alongside Mickey stuffed animals, princess dress-up clothes and Legos, Hello Kitty toys and train sets, hair bows and books, puzzles and a toy stroller. In other words, there are no “boy toys” or “girl toys.”

Interestingly, *USA Today* [recently](#) looked at why toys are better when they can appeal to both genders.

Our quest, then, has primarily been one of equality. We’ve wanted to present a range of options.

The decisions shall be hers, we tell ourselves. If she loves pink and lace, we will cherish it. If she prefers earth tones and basketballs, we will encourage it.

And this is the chief task of parenting: to offer our children choices and then to accept their nondestructive choices as they turn from babies to children, children to kids, kids to teens, teens to adults, and adults to peers.

As I’m very quickly learning each day, many times my daughter will not choose for herself as I would pick for her.

But the sooner we learn decisions have both benefits and consequences, the sooner we learn a process of deciding what works best for us and those we love.

Therefore, I don’t think the battle we need to be fighting as parents is one with princesses, but with consumption, where personal choice reigns more supreme than any monarch.

Part of what irks me about this “princess culture” is that much of it is tied to consumerism. Princesses are [pushed](#) because they’re profitable, not because some company is trying to codify a feminine standard.

This is what we get for living in a free market, not what we get for living in patriarchy.

Of course, we're still dealing with the vestiges of a bygone era that was far more dominated by men than women. That history creeps into this free market today and still affects, to a large degree, what is made and advertised.

But, in the end, the market wins and determines what gets made again. Case in point? The Easy Bake Oven that's now [available](#) for both boys and girls.

The bigger lesson to teach, then, is that we can like what we want and we can spend our money in that pursuit.

Just because the princesses scream the loudest from the toy aisle at Target doesn't mean we have to listen - not because they're princesses, but because we can do things we enjoy that don't cost money.

I'd rather have my daughter learn about her own dreams and abilities than those I want her to have. I want her to discover what she likes and why she likes it, no matter what it is she likes.

Ultimately, if she wants to be a princess, I'll play a king as best I can. And when I do, we'll talk about how she can be a princess that doesn't exploit others, that balances her other needs and wants as a person and a member of a family and community, and that helps people in need.

Ultimately, being a princess or a prince, a muppet or a mouse, a belle or a builder is about choice.

And I'll chase any context, no matter how "Disney-fied" or "Disney-free" it is, that helps her understand choice is about privilege and privilege is about responsibility.

And my warning to her will be that if she decides to princess, she must princess responsibly.

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