



# In Defense of the Princess: How Plastic Tiaras and Fairytale Dreams Can Inspire Smart, Strong Women

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It's no secret that most girls, at some point, love all things princess: the poofy dresses, the plastic tiaras, the color pink. Even grown-up women can't get enough of royal weddings and royal gossip. Yet critics claim the princess dream sets little girls up to be weak and submissive, and allows grown women to indulge in fantasies of rescue rather than hard work and self-reliance.

Enter Jerramy Fine – an unabashed feminist who is proud of her life-long princess obsession and more than happy to defend it. Through her amusing life story and in-depth research, Fine makes it clear that feminine doesn't mean weak, pink doesn't mean inferior, and girliness is not incompatible with ambition. From 9th century Cinderella to modern-day *Frozen*, from Princess Diana to Kate Middleton, from Wonder Woman to Princess Leia, Fine valiantly assures us that princesses have always been about power, not passivity. And those who love them can still be confident, intelligent women.

Provocative, insightful, but also witty and personal, *In Defense of the Princess* empowers girls, women, and parents to dream of happily ever after without any guilt or shame.

## In Defense of the Princess: How Plastic Tiaras and Fairytale Dreams Can Inspire Smart, Strong Women Details

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## **From Reader Review In Defense of the Princess: How Plastic Tiaras and Fairytale Dreams Can Inspire Smart, Strong Women for online ebook**

### **Kathleen says**

This title caught my eye at the library. As a mother of three daughters, I've heard many variations of either loving or hating princesses. Ms Fine does a wonderful job of pointing out many flaws in the idea that loving princesses creates girls who grow up into weak women who need a man to rescue them. She reminds us that princess stories were around way before Disney and many princesses have wonderful qualities that we want to see in our girls--perseverance, strength, grace, and kindness among them. I love that Ms Fine encourages us (as a society) to allow girls to be girls, letting them play princess if they choose. Personally, this book went right along with many things I've felt as a mom. I recommend it to anyone who has a princess loving girl in their life.

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### **Shannon Rose Lee says**

A wonderful and easy read for those who are tired of how the world wants to crap on princesses and femininity.

(Honestly, this book should be renamed "In Defense of Sansa Stark" for obvious reasons. If you dislike characters because they embody female gender roles, YOU ARE PART OF THE PROBLEM. But I digress...)

Jerramy Fine explains how femininity and the archetypal princess actually teach young girls/women to be compassionate and bold and to demand better for themselves. She also says that "in a world heaving with male-driven narratives, fairytale princesses [...] demonstrate to young girls that their stories deserve to be told."

Fine addresses the fact that society constantly puts down and demeans everything that is the slightest bit feminine in favor of venerating masculinity, and how this inherently tells young girls that they aren't good enough as they are and that what they like/love/enjoy is less meaningful and important than what boys/men enjoy.

One of my favorite little paragraphs is from page 202 - I even drew a heart with a crown beside it and circled the page number about 5 times... "Most of us would agree that dismissing someone purely because she is female is unacceptable. Yet dismissing feminine qualities and feminine expression (including princess culture) is still widely condoned." Just let that soak in.

She even suggests that feminists have sabotaged their own movement by rejecting and demeaning femininity, because by rejecting femininity in favor of masculinity, you are setting aside important attributes and values that the world needs, like compassion and vulnerability.

In amongst all this, Fine gave readers examples of real life princesses and women who are educated and strong and worthy of being role models, because they are using their education and power to make life better

for others and improve the world around them. That is the true purpose of a princess - to show girls that they are powerful and strong and that they can make a real change in this world by simply being themselves and standing up for what they believe in. (Examples included Princess Diana and Kate Middleton, of course, but also included Jackie Kennedy, Grace Kelly, Crown Princess Mary of Denmark, Princess Eugenie of the United Kingdom [who is one of the brightest members of the English royal family, if A-level exams are anything to go on], Princess Bajrakitiyabha of Thailand, and many more!)

I went into this book thinking that it would be just about why princesses are important, but I discovered that it is so much more than that - it is a defense of all things feminine and of all little girls who believe that they are worthy of having the best in life, but it is also a critique on the older forms of feminism and how it is necessary for us all to embrace femininity and female-ness in order to truly move forward as a society. It was a quick read and Jerramy Fine's writing made it an entertaining one.

My only complaint is that sometimes I wish Fine had really gone for the kill while critiquing, but it is still a 5-star read for me because it kept me thinking and analyzing.

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### **Virginia says**

I was able to read this through NetGalley in exchange for a review. I'm the kind of feminist that has problems every Christmas when I have to buy something for one of the nieces that love the whole pink princess thing, as I want to get them something that they like, but doesn't violate my own personal ethics about what should be encouraged. Because I've never really seen much value in the phenomenon. Pink by itself doesn't bother me, it's just a color, but the way it's used to target and isolate women, helluva problem. (Though, lately it seems to be less about merchandising things to women in general than awful corporate pink-washing, see, we care about breast cancer! We made our oil drillbits pink!) So, I went in to this book thinking, ok, convince me that this whole frilly princess obsession isn't just a way to keep girls silly and decorative. Make your argument that there is value in it.

And, for the most part, she does. The arguments she makes (and backs up) are that the Disney Princesses themselves haven't been doormats since well before I was born, most of the ones in recent decades have shown more strength than anyone else in the movie. And that most of them are actually very old archetypes, and there's a reason why their stories have survived hundreds of years. Some specifics will always make me cringe, but I'm ok with most of them, and the ones I'm not, I'm definitely ok with the redos that Disney has started doing with the worst of them (specifically Maleficent letting me pretend to forget that Sleeping Beauty exists). There are plenty of problems that remain in the movies (Fine tries to argue that the criticism of the waist size of the Disney Princesses isn't a problem, since no one complains about Charlie Brown's head being twice the size of his body. Well, no one ever tries to become hydrocephalic on purpose so that they could meet the Peanuts beauty standards. Disney isn't completely responsible for eating disorders, but they sure don't help.), but it's a lot of the side merchandising and marketing that's where the real horrors lay.

I found myself highlighting more passages than I ever imagined I would, because there are some very good arguments. The one that spoke to me the most, and pretty much convinced me to just chill out with hating on the whole princess obsession is one she makes early on, that those of us who would have no problems encouraging a boy who wants to play with frilly dolls or a girl who wants to play with construction toys shouldn't be discourage a child that truly wants to play with gender conforming toys. Ok. If a girl wants to be girlie, shaming her for it is just as bad as shaming kids for not being gender conforming.

But, by the end, it kind of falls apart into borderline gender essentialism, women are into sharing and consensus building, men are too competitive. Girls play one way, boys play another. Speak for yourself. There were a whole lot of modifiers missing from the last couple chapters. Some, many, and even most can be your arguments' best friends.

The examples of real life royalty, and all-but (Jackie Kennedy and Eva Peron) are interesting, and support her argument that there's a reason why these women are more culturally adored than the men. I only wish that Crown Princess Masako had more than a short paragraph, as she is the most interesting to me of the modern, accomplished women marrying into royalty. I guess part of it is that the book is mainly focused on the current western princess phenomenon, and part is how tragic it is that a woman that I would argue is almost as modern and accomplished as all the others listed in that section had her mental health so completely beaten down by becoming a princess.

Overall, glad I read it. Mostly well argued and supported, some parts were weak and could be cut or reworked, but I was enlightened, and changed some of my opinions. One thing I did notice by the end was that I can see the word Princess capitalized and think of it as a concept when it's not followed by a specific name, but can't see the word Prince (capitalized and not followed by a name) without thinking of the Purple One. And that got a wee bit confusing for brief moments until I reminded myself that she's not referring to the artist.

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### **Abby says**

There aren't enough words to adequately express how much I absolutely adore this book. It is, in fact, perfection. I feel like I have been waiting for this book my entire life. I feel validated, and supported, and empowered. I wish this was required reading, especially for parents. And spoiler alert- the author sites studies which were done to back up claims. So to those dissenters out there- we have evidence. Aside from how I think this book says so many things that needed to be said, and they were said well, the book is super entertaining. I found myself laughing throughout. Also, this book is very up to date- I loved her comments about Emma Watson and how she obviously doesn't see her upcoming role as Belle in Beauty and the Beast to be in conflict in anyway with her recent He for She work. (Because it isn't.) Princesses, even Disney-fied princesses, do not detract from feminism, and this book lays out how true this is in rather profound ways.

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### **Dalestair says**

I really enjoyed this book, but I was disappointed in how Trans-Exclusionary it was. I enjoyed the first half very much, but as I got into the second half a lot of the author's views/language about gender made me uncomfortable because it was so Cis-minded. I still think it was a worthwhile read, but could have been better.

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### **Sara Holland says**

I was so excited about this book. I wanted to love this book. I even posted about it on Instagram before I read it.

Unfortunately, it really fell short for me. I absolutely love that there's literature backing the idea that Princess play isn't as harmful as it's made out to be, but the author really struggled to provide me with much evidence to support that stance.

On the technical side, most of her conjectures weren't backed by fact at all. At one point she states that "ultra-ambitious college girls will publicly cite Hillary Clinton, Sonya Sotomayor" etc. as their role models but "when pressed further, they unanimously confide that the woman they truly want to be is Kate Middleton". Who? Who says this? How can you use unanimously without showing us who you polled? And then still present it as fact?

I also found the chapters on beauty to be particularly damning. Her argument that girls shouldn't be shamed if they're beautiful reminds me of the argument that we shouldn't "skinny shame women" either. Of COURSE we shouldn't do that. It's never right to shame women for anything body centric or otherwise harmful. But there's no denying that we live in a society that caters to thin, beautiful women. Rather than belittling the opposing side, a better defense might be that beautiful or otherwise, girls should be encouraged to feel comfortable in their own skin regardless of physical appearance. Whether glamour makes them happy or not, that's ok! Denouncing a few 21st century princess' physical features by writing that they're an attack on femininity entirely misses the point. She argues that we need to allow femininity back in feminism - and I agree - but why not let women choose? "Liberation lies in the choice".

To be clear - I still agree that Princesses promote independence, leadership, and positivity for girls. I gave it 2 stars because she does have some good ideas and I liked a few of the quotes she pulled from other authors a lot. All in all, I felt like this book mostly missed the mark.

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### **Courtney (A Little Bookish Life) says**

I am what anyone would consider a very feminine girly girl. I am at heart, also a feminist. I joined the US Navy and took advantage of the opportunities that feminism throughout the ages has afforded me. However, I did unfortunately face some negativity for choosing to wear the black skirt instead of the pants with my dress uniforms. Surprisingly, it was only from women that I faced this discrimination, no matter how marginal it was. My skirt was the perfect length, neither longer nor shorter than two inches above or below the knee as the uniform regulations allowed. Of course, not all women cared, or went out of their way to make comments about my more feminine demeanor and appearance, but there were a few that tried to convince me that I need to dress and act more like the men in the military to hold my own. Umm, no.

Feminism has afforded me to exist as the female that I want to be amongst men. Let me reiterate that not a day in my life was I out of regulations with hair, minimal makeup, or uniform choices, but it was frowned upon by some that I chose to not indulge in wearing pants or embracing a more masculine appearance.

In my personal opinion and choice of comfortability, skirts are so much better than pants. I love the floppy knee and tea length tulle skirts and wear them all the time! Of course, it doesn't help that I'm more on the petite side and can never really find a pair of pants that doesn't need hemming, and "ain't nobody got time for that."

I think it's so wonderful that children are encouraged to be whomever they want to be, and enjoy any character that they love, but in the past few years, I feel like there's been an unnecessary extent of some princess bashing and unfair comparisons that this author so wonderfully and passionately defends! She

defends so many princesses, both fictional and real, and explores how they serve as wonderful role models that children should not be discouraged to look up to!

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### **Allie says**

*This rating/review is based on an advanced reading copy.*

Definitely not for me. I think if you remove all the nonsense from this book it would make a really excellent article for like Slate. That's approximately how much actual content is in here. There are also some major flaws with how the information is presented. The author uses an incredible amount of unsupported generalizations and anecdotal evidence that I personally find baffling. Most Wikipedia pages are better supported.

I have a lot more to say, but I'm hiding it using the spoilers tag. Read if you want, don't if you don't.

(view spoiler)

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### **Kelly says**

I thoroughly enjoyed this quick nonfiction book that took a distinct look at princess culture with a feminist perspective. I think Fine's viewpoint is really important as she encourages people to look at a lot of the more "feminine" aspects people associate with princesses (dresses, tiaras, Disney movies, pink, etc.) and instead of putting down the girls who enjoy those things, she really looks into what these associations mean and shows that although many people may see these "princess things" as weak and passive interests for girls, they can actually serve as really powerful and positive messages. I feel like there are so few books discussing this sort of encouragement (many popular arguments are the complete opposite of Fine's) and so I think it would be very enlightening for more people to read this well-researched, super relevant book, and even if they still disagree with it, I don't think anyone will walk away without learning something.

(Also posted on Amazon)

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### **Liz says**

This was a great (and fast) read - a defense of the idea that women can be strong, smart, and accomplished without giving up the desire to be feminine and to wear a tiara. It's about how we can embrace the qualities that make a true princess - strength, kindness, diplomacy, serenity, rationality, and a giving spirit. I loved it.

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## Alyssa Marie says

### **Thank you to NetGalley for my copy of In Defense of the Princess: How Plastic Tiaras and Fairytale Dreams can Inspire Smart, Strong Women.**

I'm not generally not a non-fiction reader, but since I have always loved princesses, I wanted to read this one. I'm really glad that I did decide to! I found it is filled with a belief of inspiring values - like intelligence, strength, and helping others. The book discusses what is truly means to be a "princess" and the positive qualities that can bring to your life. Not only that, but I did enjoy the history in this book too. There were some stories and information about real life royals that I didn't know about before. There were a lot of examples of real life "princesses", royal or not, that are positive role models. The book was well-written, easy to read, and flowed very well from chapter to chapter. I personally thought that this book promoted a lot of positivity and good values.

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## A Reader's Heaven says

(I received a free copy of this book from Net Galley in exchange for an honest review.)

*It's no secret that most girls, at some point, love all things princess: the poofy dresses, the plastic tiaras, the color pink. Even grown-up women can't get enough of royal weddings and royal gossip. Yet critics claim the princess dream sets little girls up to be weak and submissive, and allows grown women to indulge in fantasies of rescue rather than hard work and self-reliance.*

*Enter Jerramy Fine – an unabashed feminist who is proud of her life-long princess obsession and more than happy to defend it. Through her amusing life story and in-depth research, Fine makes it clear that feminine doesn't mean weak, pink doesn't mean inferior, and girliness is not incompatible with ambition. From 9th century Cinderella to modern-day Frozen, from Princess Diana to Kate Middleton, from Wonder Woman to Princess Leia, Fine valiantly assures us that princesses have always been about power, not passivity. And those who love them can still be confident, intelligent women.*

This was quite an interesting book. As the father of a little girl, I was fascinated to read what is essentially a book that goes against the current tide of how girls should be raised and the "sexualising" of play time.

I have always been of the belief that having role models in princesses was a good thing...until the last few years when the over-riding thought in society was that girls don't need to subscribe to that dated theory anymore - they can be whoever they want to be and that's that. They should look to artists and politicians and scientists for inspiration, not princesses. I could see the logic in that - there aren't too many jobs available for Barbie.

But, having read this book I can understand that aspiring to be a princess isn't all that bad. Lots of great examples are given - from Cinderella to Wonder Woman, from Princess Diana to Princess Leia - the author gives good, solid reasoning for young girls to always aim for who they want to be...and if that includes being a princess, then, as parents, we shouldn't deny them!

Paul  
ARH

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### **Aisha says**

I love the message of this book. Fine shows how at its root, the princess archetype is all about girl power—girls going after their dreams, being courageous, seeking adventure, developing and displaying a noble character, pursuing justice, etc. She also shows the danger in limiting girls' choices and of putting down their interests, particularly if those preferences happen to be more "feminine" in nature. As she points out, we still take men seriously if they talk about sports, so why do we take women less seriously if they talk about fashion? We correctly tell little boys it's okay for them to play with dolls and like "girly" things; why do some adults discourage little girls from liking princesses and other "girly" play? Women, as humans, are complex and can have many interests and be many things. The princess ideal encourages girls to be whatever they want and to believe themselves worthy of their desires. Overall, Fine highlights the value and power of the feminine and how this can and should go hand in hand with being a strong, smart, accomplished, and happy woman. An important, feminist message, but sadly, many haters are still going to hate.

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### **Peter Jowers says**

I found this book on the "Smart Thinking" shelves at a branch of Waterstones in the UK. As a father of two English daughters, and grandfather of two adult American girls; clearly a reason to read it! The last book I read was Nadeem Aslam's Maps for Lost Lovers. Amazing contrast. The latter descriptive of the plight of many young Pakistani women, who happen to fall in love with, in the opinion of her father and brothers may find herself at the wrong end of a so called "Honour Killing". So the message in Fine's book isn't by any means fluffy Princess stuff. It is about empowering women and in doing so still keeping their femininity.

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### **Sarah - All The Book Blog Names Are Taken says**

I received this as an ARC via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

The last third or so was such a disappointment. Full review to come. Apparently all princesses are compassionate and empathetic and blah blah blah.

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My book blog: <http://allthebookblognamesaretaken.bl...>

<https://www.facebook.com/AllTheBookBl...>

[www.twitter.com/SarahsBookNook](http://www.twitter.com/SarahsBookNook)

I received this book as an ARC via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

I absolutely loved this one for about the first half or two thirds or so. The rest was such a disappointment.

This may come as a surprise, since I seem to be the target audience. After all, I myself am a princess. My name means 'princess' in Hebrew, I have the word 'princess' tattooed in Hebrew on my body, and I was pretty much raised like a princess, being an only child - and only grandchild for ten years. But the problem with this one is that the author applies modern thinking while making general statements about all princesses - that princesses are caring, protective of their kingdoms, etc. Disney Princesses, yes (more on these lovely ladies in a second), but REAL princesses, in the middle ages? They had no power themselves and lived to be pawns for their fathers to gain power through marriages. Princesses then were decidedly NOT powerful, so I think it is important that the author makes the distinction of being a modern princess who has autonomy and control over her own life.

I like how the book started out, specifically focusing on Disney Princesses. We love Disney in this house and I will never apologize for that. My daughter is two and a half and loves to watch Frozen, Tangled, and Brave especially. She dresses up in the Elsa and Anna costumes, then plays with her dump trucks and garbage trucks. I have zero worry that she is being damaged by unrealistic expectations that Disney supposedly promotes. So, I appreciate this aspect of the book and the author suggestions that these princesses display self-reliance, compassion, critical thinking, ingenuity, etc. However, lets be honest, that was not the message being sent when Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Snow White came out decades ago. I do agree that these princesses were more on the weak side when compared today to the likes of Rapunzel and Merida. And before you tell me that Rapunzel waited for a man (Flynn Rider) to help her leave her tower, I must remind you that she had never left the tower and had also asked Mother Gothel to take her. It was not that she needed a man to protect her - she did that just fine on her own. She just needed someone to show her the way to the lanterns.

A quote I particularly liked in reference to this issue: "I'm not suggesting we negate all critical thinking when it comes to viewing Disney films with our children - but if someone tells me that Disney princesses possess zero redeeming qualities, I must and will protest" (8%). This, I certainly agree with.

Another positive: the author mentions Boudicca and Eleanor of Aquitaine in the same sentence and they are awesome. My daughter is named after Eleanor of Aquitaine and her nickname has evolved over the last two years to Boody, for Boudicca. It makes sense in my head and in hers, trust me.

My biggest issue with this book is that the author assumes that women and girls want to be princesses because of the qualities of kindness and compassion, caring for those around them, caring about the 'global and human implications of decisions and not just financial implications'...that is all well and good and OF COURSE we want to raise all our children, not just girls to be kind and caring people. But this assumes then that girls are not also competitive or things that might be perceived as more 'masculine' qualities, because the author uses the phrase 'scientifically proven' several times at the end when discussing the characteristics of women/princesses. Sorry I'm not sorry, but I am super competitive and I always want to win. If I win, that means someone else has to lose. That does not make me any less of a princess. I'd wear my tiara to work every day if I could, but unfortunately I live in the Midwest where people would look at me like I was crazy and I just don't want to deal with that. If I lived in New York or LA, no one would look twice. But I digress. Back to the topic at hand - the qualities the author says princesses have are not the ONLY qualities we possess and that is okay. It doesn't mean that I want everyone else to fail so I can win, and of course it depends on the situation, but still, she is supposing a lot.

Another issue that bothered me was when the author repeatedly discussed Prince William losing his hair in her section on Kate. The author previously made the point about not emphasizing beauty, yet she takes these little potshots at the fact that he is going bald. The first time, I let it go, but then the second mention came in the form of, "...back in the days when his cheeks had color and his head had hair"...and following up with

this one a swipe later about, "...November 2010 when his eligibility came to an end and so did much of his hair." Why is it okay to do this and repeatedly comment on his looks, when we should not do this to women/princesses? Speaking of Kate - while I was among the many who watched the wedding, enthralled, I am a bit skeptical of the author's prediction that she will one day be known as 'Kate the Great'. Does the author know that only one ruler in the history of the country - from even before England was united as England - is known as 'the Great'? He goes by the name of Alfred and he busted his butt to secure Wessex and the surrounding lands, fight Vikings, promote religion and learning, create burghs. I am guessing she does not, since she also stated that the royal family of England goes back to the 400s AD. Um, no, they definitely do not. Roman occupation slowly dwindled out and the country eventually became divided into small kingdoms. It was not until Aethelstan, Alfred's grandson, that England even became united into England in Anglo-Saxon times. Please know your history when it is relevant to your topic.

As an aside, the author mentions a 12 year old girl in California who has discovered that all US presidents except one are directly descended from King John (That would be Eleanor of Aquitaine's youngest son, Richard I's brother who is possibly one of the worst kings England had, and thus came Magna Carta). I found this fact very interesting and wanted to know more about this, how she came across this information and what materials did she have access to in order to determine this?

In the end, I was highly disappointed in how the book devolved from how princesses could be strong, powerful and capable, to a diatribe about feminism. I do agree that you can be pro princess and a feminist. Feminist is not a dirty word, being a feminist simply means you recognize gender equality as a must in our world, so let's just get that out of the way. Yet the author goes on saying how we hate ourselves for buying Princess Diana biographies, and don't want our daughters to have princess-themed birthday parties...Um, please. My daughter's first birthday was Disney princess themed, complete with a three-tiered replica of the Disneyland Castle. I am entirely not ashamed of my princess-ness and no one else should be either. Being a princess is awesome.

And for the record, my toddler knows she is a princess too. She says it every day while she twirls around in her fancy dresses, surrounded by all her trucks.

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