How to deal with princesses

I want my two girls to grow up knowing that “female” is their gender and not a definition of their abilities. I thought I had lots of time to figure out how to raise Melise and Alina believing that.

But then Melise, at just 3 years old, said to me, “Mommy, when I grow up I’m going to be a princess.” My eyebrows went up, but the alarms didn’t go off quite yet.

“Okay, what are you going to do as a princess?”

“I’m going to marry a prince.”

Whoa! I wasn’t ready for that, although I should have been, considering that’s how the plot of every princess movie works (not to mention that the princesses are often 16 at the time of marriage). Now, it’s not that I have anything against marriage or princesses, but when they are the life goal of my child I get a little anxious.

So I had a nice chat with Melise about how marriage is just one of many options in life. I also suggested she might choose to marry someone other than a prince—like a plumber or artist or engineer ... you get the picture.

Melise just gave me a funny look and said, “I’ll be a princess and marry a prince!”

Thus, the guilt began. Who let her watch all those princess movies? Oh, that would be me. In fact, who saw Cinderella at the library and said, “Melise, don’t you want to watch this one?” Yep, me. And who ran out and bought Tangled as soon as it was on DVD? Me again. I am

responsible for all unrealistic princess fantasies that my child has!

After a lengthy inner struggle over whether I should let her watch any more princess movies, I decided to do some research. I went to the internet to learn what other moms thought.

I tripped upon one very funny blog post called “The Feminist Mom and the Princess Party” by Dana Hernandez about her dilemma with her 5-year-old wanting a princess themed birthday party. Her story ends with her daughter expressing the belief that she could be the kind of princess that her mom would like (e.g. the kind that plays sports and has many talents).

Reading that story not only put a smile on my face but also reminded me of Melise picking out the theme of her own birthday party a few weeks before. I gave her a selection of Dora the Explorer themes, which included a Princess Dora option, but she chose Dora’s Pirate Adventure. Pirates and princesses? Maybe it’s all the same thing to Melise.

I finally decided that I didn’t need to discriminate against princesses. After all, I’d probably miss them as much (if not more) than Melise. Instead, I’ll pick carefully among them and talk to her about the good and bad lessons she can learn from them. She’ll love those talks, right? And I’ll make sure she has lots of other female role models to balance it all out.

Hopefully all that explains why, just a few days later, I could be found in a state of serenity as I cut out a Sleeping Beauty paper doll for Melise and explained the evils of getting married at 16 to a man she knew for only one day while picking berries. Such is the role of a mom!

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