



Stereotype Construction in Disney's Retellings of Grimms' Fairy Tales: An Intertextual and Discursive Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how gendered and moral stereotypes are constructed and transmitted through Disney's animated adaptations of three canonical Grimm fairy tales, namely Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (1937), Cinderella (1950), and Sleeping Beauty (1959). Employing intertextual analysis, critical discourse analysis, and reader-response inquiry, the study pursues a twofold aim: to identify the narrative and discursive strategies through which Disney transforms its Grimm source texts, and to investigate how these adapted representations are received and retained by non-Western audiences. Textual analysis reveals that Disney's hypertextual adaptations systematically excise moral complexity, punitive justice, and female agency from the Grimm originals, replacing them with romantic resolution, passive femininity, and Eurocentric beauty ideals that equate physical appearance with moral worth. Semi-structured interviews with 164 undergraduate students at an Islamic university in Indonesia demonstrate that Disney's versions have effectively displaced the Grimm originals from participants' cultural memory, with nearly all respondents referencing the Disney adaptations as their sole point of narrative familiarity. Participants consistently described Disney through affective rather than critical frameworks, reflecting the studio's capacity to embed normative gender and moral ideologies within emotional and mnemonic structures that persist into adulthood. These findings extend prior Western-centered reception studies into a non-Western context and contribute to ongoing scholarly discourse on media imperialism, critical media literacy, and the pedagogical implications of globalised children's entertainment.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Cultural Memory, Fairy Tale Adaptation, Gender Stereotypes, Intertextuality*

INTRODUCTION

Fairy tales have long functioned as a primary medium of cultural meaning-making, transmitting values, norms, and social expectations across successive generations (Mullyar et al., 2021). Far from constituting innocent or neutral narratives, they carry deeply embedded ideologies shaped by the historical, political, and economic conditions in which they are produced and reproduced (Ruban, 2020). As cultural texts, fairy tales serve a dual function: they provide entertainment while simultaneously socialising audiences into dominant worldviews (Zipes, 2012). The Grimms' fairy tales, originally collected and published in the early nineteenth century by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, occupy a foundational position in the Western literary canon. Rooted in European oral traditions, their written form served both as a vehicle for preserving regional folklore and as an instrument of moral instruction. These narratives reflect pre-modern societal structures, moral binaries, and cultural anxieties, expressed through graphic violence, punitive justice, and conservative gender roles that reinforce the patriarchal frameworks of the period (Zipes, 2012).

Walt Disney's animated adaptations of these tales mark a decisive moment in the commodification and globalisation of fairy-tale narratives. Through the systematic repurposing of source texts for mass consumption, Disney has reframed these stories through the lens of American ideology and market-driven aesthetics (Matusitz & Palermo, 2014). The studio's animation simplified and sanitised the original tales, foregrounding romantic love, virtuous femininity, and idealised beauty, elements that have since become dominant fixtures in children's imaginaries worldwide (Menise, 2020). This transformation represents not merely a stylistic reworking but a deliberate cultural project: reshaping foundational narratives to align with hegemonic ideologies and commercial imperatives. The process of what scholars term "Disneyfication" refers precisely to this transformation of multi-layered cultural narratives into ideologically streamlined, commercially consumable products that reinforce dominant societal norms (Matusitz & Palermo, 2014). Canonical Disney productions, including *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), have become global cultural reference points, surpassing the original Grimm tales in reach and popular recognition, while simultaneously displacing their more morally complex and ambiguous content.

Scholarly inquiry into the gender politics of Disney narratives has produced a substantial body of critical literature. England et al. (2011) conducted a foundational content analysis of Disney princess films, demonstrating that female protagonists consistently exhibited passive, domestic, and appearance-centred attributes, while male characters were assigned roles of heroism and agency. More recent investigations have extended this critique. Coyne et al. (2021), in a longitudinal study tracking child from preschool into early adolescence,

demonstrated that Disney princess engagement produces measurable and persistent effects on gender schema formation, with girls displaying stronger associations between feminine identity and appearance-focused self-evaluation and boys exhibiting heightened adherence to hegemonic masculinity norms. Manaworapong and Bowen (2022), employing corpus-linguistic analysis of Disney film scripts, further confirmed that the linguistic encoding of gender in Disney animated productions has evolved only partially, with core ideological framings of femininity remaining consistent across decades. These findings collectively affirm that while the studio has made incremental efforts toward more progressive representations in later productions, its most globally circulated classical films remain deeply implicated in the reproduction of normative gender ideologies.

Within this discursive context, the question of representation assumes theoretical significance. As Hall (1997) argued, representation is not a neutral reflection of the world but an active construction of meaning achieved through the repetition of signs, symbols, and narrative codes. Disney's animated films thus function not merely as entertainment but as ideological apparatuses that construct gender, morality, and identity within a consumerist framework. Through sustained exposure from childhood, these representations are internalised as naturalised "common sense," a process that Hall links to the workings of ideology in sustaining relations of power. This process of naturalisation is particularly consequential when narratives originating in one cultural context are consumed globally, as audiences in diverse national and cultural settings encounter ideological content that may conflict with, or imperceptibly reshape, their locally embedded worldviews.

Theoretically, this study is grounded in the framework of intertextuality. Kristeva (1980) argues that no text exists in isolation; rather, every text is constituted by a mosaic of references to other texts, absorbing and transforming prior meanings in ways that are both explicit and latent. In the case of Disney adaptations of the Grimm corpus, this intertextual relationship is doubly productive: Disney relies on audiences' presumed familiarity with the source material while strategically revising its ideological content. Through selective omission, narrative embellishment, and tonal transformation, Disney's retellings overwrite the moral complexity of the Grimm originals, substituting punitive ambiguity with emotional catharsis, heteronormative romance, and binary moral resolution (Genette et al., 1997). Fairclough's (1992) operationalisation of intertextuality within critical discourse analysis further provides a methodological lens through which such transformations can be traced at the level of text structure, narrative voice, and discursive positioning. The convergence of these frameworks enables a rigorous comparative examination of how meaning is transferred, transformed, and reinscribed across cultural and temporal boundaries.

Despite the breadth of existing scholarship on Disney's textual and ideological operations, a notable gap persists in research addressing how audiences outside Western contexts receive and internalise these adapted narratives. The

majority of critical studies remain anchored in textual or filmic analysis, with limited attention to the reception process as an active, culturally situated practice. Muir (2022), employing a facet methodology to examine the Disney Princess phenomenon, acknowledged that audience interaction with princess imagery is shaped by intersecting cultural, historical, and commercial forces, yet such audience-oriented frameworks have rarely been applied to non-Western settings. This study addresses that gap by investigating how Indonesian university students engage with, recall, and interpret fairy-tale narratives, focusing particularly on the dimensions of character recognition, moral framing, and emotional memory.

This inquiry is situated within the broader framework of cultural studies, which emphasises the dynamic and often contested interaction among text, audience, and context. Indonesia presents a particularly instructive case: as the world's largest Muslim-majority nation, it possesses a rich and distinctive cultural and literary heritage, yet its younger populations have been extensively exposed to Western media, including Disney productions, through decades of global media circulation. Examining how students at an Islamic university in Indonesia negotiate their Disney-mediated memories against their local cultural frameworks allows this study to explore the mechanisms by which globally produced narratives operate within and interact with diverse reception environments. Ward and Grower (2020) have demonstrated that media exposure during formative developmental periods has measurable consequences for the internalisation of gender role stereotypes, a finding with direct relevance to the Indonesian context examined here.

The present study therefore pursues a twofold aim: first, to analyse the intertextual and discursive strategies employed by Disney in adapting selected Grimms' tales; and second, to investigate how these adapted narratives are received and recalled by Indonesian young adult audiences. By integrating comparative textual analysis with student reflections collected from 164 participants, this research illuminates the power of Disney not merely as a storyteller but as a shaper of cultural memory and identity. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing scholarly conversations concerning media imperialism, the globalisation of narrative, and the pedagogical implications of childhood cultural consumption, conversations that are increasingly urgent in an era of unprecedented media saturation and global content distribution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Intertextuality and Cultural Reproduction

The theoretical foundation of this study rests on the concept of intertextuality, initially developed by Kristeva (1980), who argued that every text is constituted as a mosaic of quotations absorbed from prior texts. Genette et al. (1997) subsequently refined this framework through his taxonomy of transtextual relationships, with particular emphasis on hypertextuality, wherein a new text (the hypertext) transforms an antecedent text (the hypotext) through adaptation, parody, or

pastiche. Within this framework, Disney's animated adaptations of the Grimms' fairy tales operate as hypertexts that systematically reshape the cultural, narrative, and moral architecture of their source material. The five-part taxonomy of transtextuality proposed by Genette, encompassing intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality, remains an indispensable instrument for mapping the layered relationships that obtain between canonical source texts and their popular cultural retellings (de Castro, 2021). The hypertextual relationship between the Grimm corpus and Disney's adaptations is particularly productive in that it involves not a simple reproduction but a strategic and ideologically motivated transformation of narrative content, character architecture, and moral resolution.

In cultural studies, intertextuality encompasses not merely the formal layering of texts but also the ideological function of retellings as sites of discursive power. Fairclough (1992) demonstrates that intertextuality is a domain in which discursive power is actively exercised, particularly when texts are repurposed for new social audiences. Disney's adaptation of fairy tales transforms narratives rooted in European oral traditions into globally distributed media products, embedding distinctly Western values such as romantic individualism, consumer aspiration, and the moral reward of social conformity (Matusitz & Palermo, 2014). These adaptations are not merely derivative reformulations but constitute new cultural products that frequently overwrite their source texts in public and popular memory. This process of narrative displacement establishes what Sanders (2015) terms "authoritative intertexts," wherein a single adaptation becomes the socially dominant representation of a narrative, effectively displacing alternative versions from cultural circulation. The act of retelling is therefore a consequential ideological act, involving not only narrative simplification but also the selective encoding of cultural values that serve the interests of the producing institution.

Stereotype Formation in Fairy Tales

Fairy tales have historically functioned as carriers of normative social values, including gender roles, moral hierarchies, and standards of beauty (Berlianti, 2021). The tales collected by the Brothers Grimm reflect patriarchal, Eurocentric, and binary moral frameworks that served the ideological purposes of nineteenth-century German nationalism and bourgeois domesticity (Zipes, 2012). Although the original tales contain violence, ambiguity, and punitive imagery, they nonetheless model didactic expectations of behavior, particularly for female characters, who are routinely positioned as passive, beautiful, and subordinate.

In Disney's adaptations, these gendered norms are not merely preserved but further consolidated into archetypes that now dominate the global landscape of children's media. England et al. (2011) conducted a foundational content analysis of twenty-one Disney animated films and demonstrated that female protagonist characters consistently exhibited passive, domestic, and appearance-focused

behavioral profiles, while male characters were assigned roles of heroism, agency, and physical dominance. Coyne et al. (2021), in a longitudinal study tracking child from preschool through early adolescence, established that engagement with Disney princess content during early childhood is associated with persistent effects on gender schema formation among both girls and boys, with girls demonstrating stronger associations between feminine identity and appearance-focused self-evaluation, and boys exhibiting increased adherence to hegemonic masculinity norms.

The persistence of such stereotyping is further illuminated through Hall's (1997) theory of representation, which holds that repeated symbolic forms do not merely reflect social realities but actively construct and normalise them. Stereotypes in media function as ideological mechanisms that embed normative frameworks into cultural memory through the accumulation of repetition and emotional resonance. Manaworapong and Bowen (2022), in a corpus-linguistic analysis of Disney animated film scripts across two decades, confirm that the linguistic encoding of gender norms in Disney productions has evolved only partially at the surface level, with core ideological framings of femininity as passive, relational, and appearance-focused remaining structurally consistent. Ward and Grower (2020) further document that sustained exposure to gender-stereotypical media during formative developmental periods is associated with the internalisation of rigid gender role expectations, underscoring the real-world significance of representational choices in commercial children's media.

The Disneyfication of Fairy Tales

The concept of "Disneyfication" describes the process by which traditional narratives are transformed into commercially viable, emotionally palatable, and ideologically standardised products for global mass consumption (Liang & Wang, 2020; Pitre, 2023). Matusitz and Palermo (2014) analyse this process within a globalisation framework, positioning Disney as a multinational corporation whose global expansion is premised upon the internationalisation of distinctly American entertainment values, including uniformity, spectacle, and market-driven emotional experience. Through this process, Disney's adaptations eliminate socio-historical complexity, narrative ambiguity, and moral violence, replacing them with simplified binary structures in which goodness is rewarded, beauty signifies virtue, and romantic resolution represents the pinnacle of human aspiration. These narrative choices are ideologically loaded, consistently aligning with neoliberal values of individual transformation through personal virtue and consumer-compatible aspiration.

Muir (2022), examining the Disney Princess phenomenon through facet methodology, demonstrates that Disney's global cultural reach is sustained not only through its film productions but through an integrated system of merchandise, media, and affective branding that positions the studio's characters as objects of

genuine emotional identification rather than commercial products. This affective economy effectively masks the ideological content of the films beneath layers of nostalgia and personal memory, making critical engagement with the studio's representational choices considerably more difficult for audiences. From a broader cultural studies perspective, the global reach of Disney's narrative and aesthetic conventions raises substantial concerns regarding media imperialism: as the studio's products circulate across non-Western societies, they occupy the symbolic space in which children and young adults develop their understandings of identity, gender, and moral order (Matusitz & Palermo, 2014). The spread of Disney's conventions thus constitutes a form of cultural standardisation that operates beneath the seemingly benign surface of children's entertainment.

Reader Response, Cultural Memory, and Identity

While a substantial body of scholarship addresses the content and form of fairy tale adaptations, considerably less attention has been devoted to how audiences, particularly those located outside Western cultural contexts, receive, interpret, and retain these narratives. Reader-response theory, as advanced by (ser (1991) and further developed within the context of interpretive communities by Fish (2003), positions the reader not as a passive recipient of textual meaning but as an active co-producer of meaning whose sociocultural positioning, prior knowledge, and lived experience fundamentally shape the reading process. In this framework, audiences do not merely absorb the ideological content of Disney adaptations but engage with, negotiate, and sometimes resist that content through the filter of their own cultural and experiential resources.

Empirical scholarship in this dimension offers important indicators of how Disney media shapes audience cognition and identity. Coyne et al. (2021) confirm through longitudinal data that exposure to Disney princess media during early childhood produces enduring effects on gender role attitudes that are measurable in adolescence, including stronger feminine stereotyping among girls and differential associations with masculinity norms among boys. Ward and Grower (2020) further demonstrate that media consumption during formative developmental years shapes young people's internalised gender schemas in ways that persist into adulthood. In the context of non-Western reception, the question of how globally produced narratives interact with locally embedded cultural frameworks becomes particularly significant, as audiences in diverse settings may encounter values and representations that either reinforce or conflict with the normative expectations of their own communities (Muir, 2022).

Cultural memory theory provides the most productive framework for understanding how Disney's narratives become embedded in long-term audience cognition. Assmann (2011) argues that cultural memory is constituted through the accumulation of representations embedded in symbolic cultural objects, which transmit normative frameworks across generations through repetition, emotional

resonance, and social reinforcement. Disney's fairy tale adaptations function precisely as such cultural carriers: through the globally sustained circulation of emotionally resonant narratives introduced during childhood, the studio's productions embed normative frameworks of gender, morality, and beauty into the long-term cultural memory of their audiences. Erll (2011), extending this framework to account for the role of media as active agents of mnemonic production, argues that mediated narratives do not merely record or transmit memory but constitute it, shaping the very terms in which cultural experience is recalled and interpreted.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in cultural studies, integrating three complementary analytical approaches: intertextual analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA), and reader-response inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). This combination was selected to address the study's twofold aim of examining how Disney's adaptations of selected Grimm tales construct and transform stereotypical representations at the textual level, and how these constructions are subsequently received, recalled, and interpreted by young adult audiences in a non-Western context. The interpretive paradigm underpinning this design is consistent with cultural studies' emphasis on meaning-making, ideological power, and audience agency (Fairclough, 1992; Hall, 1997).

The intertextual analysis component drew upon Genette et al. (1997) framework of hypertextuality and Kristeva (1980) foundational theory of intertextuality to examine how Disney's films selectively draw from, transform, and overwrite the Grimm originals. Three tale-adaptation pairs were selected as the primary corpus: Grimm's *Schneewittchen* and Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937); Grimm's *Aschenputtel* and Disney's *Cinderella* (1950); and the Grimm tradition's *Sleeping Beauty*, accessed through Zipes (2010) scholarly edited translation, alongside Disney's *Sleeping Beauty* (1959). These pairs were selected on the basis of their canonical prominence, the availability of both source and adapted versions, and their salience in participants' recollections during preliminary interviews. Zipes' edited translations were employed to ensure fidelity to the narrative and ideological content of the Grimm originals, while the Disney films were studied both as full-length audiovisual texts and through transcribed dialogue. Each tale-adaptation pair was subjected to systematic narrative analysis, with attention to character agency, plot progression, moral resolution, use of violence, and symbolic representation. Codes including "agency shift," "moral flattening," and "romantic substitution" were developed inductively through open coding and managed using NVivo software.

The CDA component followed Fairclough's (1992) framework, treating texts as sites of power negotiation in which ideological positions are inscribed through both linguistic and visual choices. The Disney films were analyzed through

repeated viewing and systematic coding of character dialogue, visual composition, and narrative resolution, with particular attention to the discursive construction of gender roles, beauty norms, and moral hierarchies. These textual features were interpreted through Hall's (1997) encoding and decoding framework, which provides the conceptual tools for identifying how normative meanings are embedded in media texts and made available for audience consumption.

The reader-response component employed semi-structured interviews with 164 undergraduate students aged 18 to 22 at an Islamic university in Indonesia. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants with documented prior exposure to Disney fairy tales through television, merchandise, or print materials. The interview protocol invited participants to recall the fairy tales they had encountered during childhood, to articulate their understanding of both the original and Disney versions where applicable, and to reflect on their lasting impressions of characters, moral messages, and cultural values. This approach positions the audience as an active co-producer of meaning rather than a passive recipient of textual ideology, consistent with the advanced reader-response tradition (Fish, 2003; Iser, 1991). All participants provided informed consent prior to their involvement, and ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board. Participant confidentiality was maintained throughout through the consistent use of pseudonyms in all transcripts and analytical records.

Interview data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed inductively using the six-phase thematic analysis procedure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process involved familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, development of candidate themes, review and refinement of themes, definition and naming, and production of the final thematic account. Emergent themes included "childhood memory persistence," "idealized character as norm," "romantic rescue as resolution," and "parental mediation of viewing." These themes were subsequently triangulated with findings from the intertextual and discourse analyses to identify consistent patterns in how participants had internalised and reproduced the values embedded in Disney's adaptations. Triangulation across three distinct data types, namely textual comparison, discourse-level interpretation, and audience reflection, strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Denzin et al., 2023). Member checking was conducted on a selection of transcripts to validate the accuracy of interpretation.

The principal limitation of this study lies in the specificity of its sample. Participants were drawn exclusively from a single Islamic university in Indonesia, and the findings may therefore not be directly generalisable to other national, institutional, or demographic contexts. Additionally, the use of retrospective interview data introduces the possibility of selective recall or post-hoc rationalisation on the part of participants. However, as Assmann (2011) and Erll (2011) both argue, cultural memory is constitutively shaped by narrative structures, emotional investment, and symbolic repetition, rendering retrospective accounts a

legitimate and analytically productive source of insight into how media texts are retained and reinterpreted over time. The depth and contextual specificity of the qualitative findings therefore contribute a form of scholarly value that compensates for the deliberate limitations of the sample's scope.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a three-layered analysis of the study's primary findings. It first examines the intertextual transformations enacted by Disney in adapting the selected Grimm tales. It then applies critical discourse analysis to identify how Disney's narrative and visual codes construct stereotypes of gender, beauty, and morality. Finally, it integrates student interview data to illuminate how these adapted representations are retained and reproduced within the cultural memory of Indonesian university students. Where applicable, findings are brought into dialogue with prior scholarship to clarify the extent to which this study supports, extends, or departs from existing research.

Intertextual Reframing: From Grimm to Disney

Fairy tales are culturally contingent texts whose meanings are inseparable from the historical and ideological conditions of their production and reproduction. As Genette et al. (1997) and Kristeva (1980) both argue, adaptation is never a neutral act of textual transfer but a deliberate rewriting in which ideological choices determine what is retained, amplified, or suppressed. The three Disney adaptations examined in this study, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), demonstrate a systematic and consequential reframing of narrative structure, character agency, and moral resolution relative to their Grimm source texts.

In Grimm's *Schneewittchen*, the queen's violence against Snow White is iterative and explicit: she attempts murder on three separate occasions using a poisoned comb, a laced bodice, and finally a poisoned apple. The tale's resolution enacts a form of punitive justice in which the queen is compelled to dance in heated iron shoes until death, a closing that is as graphically retributive as it is morally unambiguous. Disney's adaptation reduces this sequence to a single threat, the poisoned apple, and dispenses with the queen's punishment through a brief and visually understated fall from a cliff, stripped of moral commentary. The shift illustrates a systematic erasure of punitive complexity in favor of romantic closure, a pattern that Manaworapong and Bowen (2022) confirm operates consistently across Disney's classical fairy tale productions through their linguistic analysis of character speech and narrative resolution.

Grimm's *Aschenputtel* similarly contains grotesque punitive elements absent from the Disney version: the stepsisters mutilate their own feet in attempts to fit the golden slipper, and the tale concludes with birds pecking out their eyes as retribution for their cruelty. Disney's *Cinderella* excises these elements entirely,

replacing them with singing animals, a benevolent fairy godmother, and a resolution premised on romantic rescue. This transformation converts a morally complex figure into a figure of passive femininity whose reward is secured not through agency but through the intervention of magical and masculine forces. Coyne et al. (2021) document through longitudinal data that the narrative positioning of Disney princesses as passive, beautiful, and ultimately dependent on rescue functions as an enduring behavioral template, with girls who engaged heavily with princess media during early childhood displaying stronger appearance-focused self-evaluations in adolescence.

In the case of *Sleeping Beauty*, Grimm's *Dornröschen* structures the narrative around the themes of fate, cyclical time, and the power of the fairy's curse. Disney's adaptation retains the princess's fundamental passivity but substantially enlarges the heroic role of Prince Phillip, who now defeats the villain in a climactic battle sequence that organizes the film's visual and dramatic energy around male action. The intertextual shift thus performs a dual operation: it amplifies heterosexual romance as the narrative's governing logic while simultaneously reassigning dramatic agency from the folkloric supernatural to the figure of the heroic male. Taken collectively, these three case studies confirm that Disney's adaptation practice constitutes what Genette et al. (1997) would characterise as transformative hypertextuality, in which the hypertext does not merely rework surface elements of the hypertext but restructures its fundamental ideological premises.

Discourse and Stereotypes: Beauty, Gender, and Morality

Disney's adaptations are not only narratively simplified relative to their Grimm sources; they are also systematically encoded with ideological content that reinforces normative constructions of gender, beauty, and moral worth. Across all three films, the heroines conform to a narrow and racially specific visual standard: pale skin, delicate features, slim figure, and flowing hair. These visual codes are not neutral aesthetic choices but ideologically consequential representations that align physical beauty with moral virtue and racial normativity. The coding of antagonists as visually marked through age, darkness of appearance, or physical grotesquerie reinforces a deeply embedded visual binary in which goodness is rendered fair and evil is rendered dark.

The passivity of the female protagonists constitutes the second major stereotype cluster identified in the discourse analysis. In each of the three narratives, the heroine's salvation is contingent upon male action or supernatural intervention rather than upon her own volition: Snow White waits in enchanted sleep, Cinderella is dependent upon both a fairy godmother and a prince, and Aurora is awakened by a prince's kiss and has no role in her own rescue. This consistent narrative structure subordinates female agency to romantic resolution in ways that, as England et al. (2011) established in their foundational content analysis, have characterized Disney's treatment of female protagonists from the studio's earliest productions.

The present findings extend this observation by demonstrating that passivity is not merely a behavioral attribute but is structurally embedded in the intertextual transformation itself, produced through the deliberate excision of the more agential and morally complex female figures present in the Grimm originals.

The third stereotype cluster concerns the moral architecture of the adaptations. Disney's retellings replace the moral ambiguity and psychological depth of the Grimm narratives with binary oppositions in which characters are either wholly virtuous or wholly wicked, and in which goodness is visually coded as beautiful and evil as physically repellent. This flattening of moral complexity aligns ideological value with aesthetic appearance in ways that naturalise the equation of beauty with worth and ugliness with threat. Ward and Grower (2020) have demonstrated that such media-embedded value frameworks, encountered repeatedly during formative developmental years, contribute to the internalisation of rigid gender and moral schemas that persist into adulthood, a finding that lends particular urgency to the patterns identified in the present discourse analysis.

Cultural Memory, Identity, and Student Responses

Interviews with 164 Indonesian undergraduate students produced findings that are striking in their consistency and cultural reach. When invited to recall fairy tales encountered during childhood, 97 percent of participants spontaneously referenced Disney's animated versions rather than any version of the Grimm originals, and the majority were unaware that the original tales contained the violent, punitive, and morally ambiguous elements identified in the intertextual analysis. Participants recalled with considerable specificity the Disney films' songs, character designs, and visual imagery, while the ideological content embedded in those elements remained largely unexamined and unreflected upon. This pattern of selective recall and emotional investment is consistent with what Assmann (2011) describes as the cultural carrier function of media: Disney's adaptations have, for this population, become the primary mnemonic referent for the fairy tale genre, effectively displacing the Grimm originals from cultural consciousness.

Students described Disney characteristically through affective and experiential language, referring to the films as "part of childhood," "a dream-maker," and "a memory." None of the 164 participants spontaneously identified Disney as a commercial or media corporation, despite its status as one of the world's largest entertainment conglomerates. This finding is consistent with Muir's (2022) observation that Disney Princess imagery operates within emotional and symbolic economies that effectively obscure the commercial infrastructure underlying its production, encouraging audiences to relate to these products through sentiment and nostalgia rather than critical awareness. The absence of commercial consciousness among participants is particularly significant in the Indonesian Islamic university context, suggesting that the affective power of early childhood

exposure to Disney media can persist even within educational environments that cultivate critical social awareness.

Female participants expressed admiration for the kindness, patience, and beauty of the princess protagonists, while male participants articulated ideals of masculine heroism modelled on the prince figures. Several female students recalled childhood aspirations to embody the qualities of Cinderella or Snow White, associating feminine virtue with docility, beauty, and romantic desirability. Male students correspondingly described "saving the girl" as an idealised expression of masculinity. These responses reflect the internalisation of precisely the gendered behavioral models identified in the discourse analysis and confirm that the ideological content of the films has been absorbed into participants' self-conceptions and aspirational identities. Coyne et al. (2021), in their longitudinal study of children's engagement with Disney princess media, documented comparable patterns of gender-stereotyped identity internalisation, and the present findings suggest that these effects are not confined to childhood but persist into young adulthood, particularly where early exposure has been sustained and emotionally intense.

A further emergent theme in the interview data concerned the role of parental and institutional mediation in participants' access to Disney narratives. Multiple students identified their first encounter with Disney films as occurring through school television screenings or family viewing occasions, indicating that the studio's productions entered participants' lives not only as personal entertainment but as socially endorsed and educationally sanctioned cultural material. This institutional reinforcement represents an additional layer of ideological embedding beyond the films' own representational content: when Disney is screened within educational settings, its stereotypical representations acquire a degree of authoritative legitimacy that may further inhibit critical reflection. Ward and Grower (2020) have called specifically for the integration of critical media literacy into educational practice as a counterweight to the uncritical consumption of gendered media in childhood, and the present findings from an Indonesian university context lend concrete empirical support to that recommendation.

The findings of this study both confirm and extend the existing scholarly literature on Disney's ideological operations and their reception by audiences. At the level of textual analysis, the intertextual and discursive patterns identified here are fully consistent with the foundational work of England et al. (2011) and with more recent contributions by Coyne et al. (2021) and Manaworapong and Bowen (2022): Disney's classical fairy tale adaptations systematically encode passive femininity, Eurocentric beauty ideals, and binary moral structures, and these encodings are structurally produced through the process of hypertextual transformation rather than arising incidentally from aesthetic choices. This study extends that body of work by grounding its textual claims in a systematic intertextual comparison with the Grimm source texts, thereby demonstrating that

the stereotypes characteristic of Disney's productions is produced not only through what is represented but through what is deliberately excised from the source material. The erasure of punitive justice, moral ambiguity, and female agency from the Grimm originals is as ideologically significant as any representational choice within the adaptations themselves, a dimension that content-analytical approaches focused exclusively on the Disney films have not been positioned to address.

At the level of audience reception, the findings from the Indonesian student sample extend the existing empirical literature in two important respects. First, they confirm and geographically broaden the findings of Coyne et al. (2021) Ward and Grower (2020) concerning the internalisation of gender stereotypes through Disney media, demonstrating that these effects are not confined to Western audiences but are reproduced in culturally distinctive non-Western settings with their own normative frameworks, religious values, and educational contexts. Second, and more significantly, the near-total displacement of Grimm source material from participants' cultural memory by Disney's versions constitutes an empirical demonstration of what the literature has theorised as Disneyfication at the level of collective memory: the studio's adaptations have not merely competed with the Grimm originals in the marketplace of popular culture but have effectively supplanted them as the culturally operative version of these narratives for this generation of Indonesian students. This finding partially complicates the more optimistic strand of reader-response scholarship associated with Fish (2003) and Iser (1991), which emphasises the audience's active role in negotiating textual meaning, insofar as the present data suggest that the active dimension of reception is substantially constrained by the prior displacement of alternative narrative versions from cultural memory. Audiences cannot critically negotiate with source texts to which they have never been exposed, and the present study's findings suggest that for the Indonesian participants examined here, Disney's versions have acquired the status of originals rather than adaptations, rendering the intertextual complexity of the genre effectively invisible to critical scrutiny.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Disney's adaptations of three canonical Grimm fairy tales, namely *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty*, constitute deliberate and ideologically consequential rewritings rather than neutral acts of narrative translation. Through intertextual analysis, the study establishes that the studio's hypertextual practice systematically excises moral complexity, punitive justice, and female agency from the Grimm source texts, replacing them with romantic resolution, heroic masculinity, and a visual grammar that aligns beauty with virtue and physical otherness with evil. Through critical discourse analysis, it further demonstrates that these narrative transformations are reinforced at the level of character design, dialogue, and symbolic representation, producing a cohesive ideological framework that normalises passive femininity,

Eurocentric beauty standards, and binary moral structures for audiences worldwide. These findings are consistent with and extend the existing scholarly literature on Disney's representational politics, while contributing a systematic intertextual dimension that content-focused studies have not previously addressed.

The reader-response data collected from 164 Indonesian university students reveal that the ideological content of these adaptations has been effectively absorbed into the cultural memory of a non-Western young adult population. Nearly all participants recalled the Disney versions as their primary or sole point of reference for the fairy tale genre, remaining largely unaware of the darker moral content of the Grimm originals. Participants described Disney not as a commercial media corporation but as a symbolic framework of childhood, imagination, and moral learning, a finding that confirms the studio's capacity to embed its representational norms within affective and mnemonic structures that persist well into adulthood and operate across culturally distinctive contexts. This outcome both extends the empirical findings of prior Western-centered reception studies and demonstrates that the process of Disneyfication operates at the level of collective memory, effectively rendering the intertextual complexity of the adapted narratives invisible to audiences who have no experiential access to the source texts.

The broader implication of this study is that globally circulated media products function not merely as entertainment but as ideological instruments that construct, disseminate, and naturalise normative frameworks of gender, beauty, and morality across diverse cultural settings. For scholars, educators, and policymakers working in non-Western contexts, these findings underscore the urgency of integrating critical media literacy into formal educational curricula, so that audiences are equipped to engage with cultural products as informed and reflective interpreters rather than as uncritical consumers. Future research would benefit from extending this inquiry to other national and cultural contexts, to more recent Disney productions that claim a progressive representational stance, and to the role of digital streaming platforms in accelerating and deepening the global reach of Disneyfied narratives. As the circulation of transnational media continues to intensify, the question of whose stories are told, how they are retold, and what normative residue they deposit in the cultural memory of their audiences remains among the most consequential questions for cultural studies to address.

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