

PORTRAITS OF FILIPINO WOMEN IN THE SELECT DISNEY MOVIE PRINCESSES**Mrs. Kathleen H. Gana-an**Doctor of Arts in Literature and Communication Candidate
Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines**Dr. Niña Jen R. Canayong**College Professor, Department of Languages and Literature,
Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Philippines**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to analyze the portraits of Filipino women in terms of its plot struggle and dominant human dimension and Filipino value of the three selected Disney movie princesses. This study is a qualitative discourse analysis utilizing the theories of formalistic approach and sociological approach. The study reveals that the characterization of Disney movie princesses is reflective of the Filipino women. The images manifested in the plot struggles are sacrificial, strong and persistent. The dominant human dimensions that emerge are moral, intellectual, social and political and the themes further disclose the values of Filipino which are tolerance, love and resilience. Thus, portrait of Filipino women is very evident in the selected Disney movies princesses in plot struggle, characterization, and dominant human dimension and Filipino value.

Keywords: portrait, characterization, plot struggle, human dimension, Filipino value, Disney movie princesses

Introduction

One of the longest, existing, and surviving genres of children's literature is fairy tale. It has permeated society over ages. It has a timeless appeal in different cultures across the world that literature and media retell it again and again passing this down from generations to generations. Over the years, children have learned about femininity, masculinity and women's role from it may it be verbal or visual (Hecht, 12). According to Baker-Sperry and Grauerholz, fairy tales written during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are intended to teach girls and young women how to become domesticated, respectable, and attractive to a marriage partner and to teach boys and girls appropriate gendered values and attitude (qtd. in Bispo, 2). Consequently, fairy tales help children to shape their view of the world.

When motion picture cameras are invented and film production companies start to be established, the visual presentations of these fairy tales have been mostly dominated by Walt Disney. Its emergence is very influential, pervasive and powerful that children as well as adults tend to believe that the story depicted by Disney is the real story rather than the classic version of the story they may or may not have heard before (Hurley, 3). It has become a well-integrated part of modern society because of its success in turning fairy tales into child friendly adventures (McIntyre, 1).

While Disney may receive a lot of criticisms for racial stereotyping and sex roles such as women are depicted as exceedingly weak and submissive individuals who are to show emotion and care while exhibiting very nurturing characteristics; men are stereotyped as dominant gender role possessing a position of leadership and tremendous strength, socially accepted females are described as physically attractive and possessing numerous feminine qualities, including domestic responsibility skill (Towbin et al., qtd. in Bispo, 3-4), there is no doubt that there are many positive effects these movies have on children even up to these days.

Disney movies are much more than entertainment for they always send a positive message at the end of the movie. They show children lessons about honesty, good, helping others, the importance of being themselves, living up to their responsibilities, and raising awareness that people like them for who they are and not who they pretend to be. It also encourages children to believe and hope in happy ending amidst struggles and uncertainties. In addition, inter-actions between the female protagonists and animals in the stories display positive characteristics which can be seen as reputable women who set a worthy example for young girls. Not to mention that these women characters are ideal citizens of their respective times who are in pursuit of happiness aiming to promote equality yet establishing healthy and functional relationships (Lueke, 1).

One of the factors behind the popularity of these Disney films is the female characters who definitely grasped the attention of young girls and truly captured the hearts of many. Setting aside their small waist, large breasts, big eyes and batting eyelashes, are their resilient characters and progressive images who are women of their own.

Generally, the role of women is based on the context of its society's culture, standards and mindset. Historically, to be a woman means expectation about behaviors and characteristics such as learning domestic tasks. Her main role is to procreate to preserve human race. In the Latino culture, women are taught to cook, clean and manage a household. It is the role of the Latina daughter to play caretaker to her parents. There is a high expectation for obedience placed upon them as well. As far as modesty is concerned, they are expected to be chaste and virginal (Benitez, 1).

In Shakespeare's time, the father is in charge of his daughters, making all her decisions for her such as choosing their future husbands. They are expected to obey their fathers (Ballard, 2). Once married, women are obliged to accustom themselves primarily with domestic concerns. In the same vein, in ancient China, women have to be obedient in three situations and should possess the four virtues. The three aspects of obedience are: to obey their father and elder brothers before marriage, their husband during married life and their sons in widowhood. The four virtues are: integrity, pleasant appearance, propriety in speech and be a skilled needlewoman.

The history of Philippine society by some means shares the same ideology. A traditional Filipino woman is tasked to take care of the domestic responsibilities. The first born daughter (called Ate) is to look after her younger siblings and be a second parent especially if the parents are gone. Women are also expected to marry, produce children and rear them and support her man in his endeavors in the future. In simple words, their roles are mostly limited to nurturing the family and managing the household.

However, over the years, the role of women has transgressed the boundaries of ascribed habitus. They are now more willing to sacrifice for the improvement of the family such as to help in paying for the education of her siblings leading her to work hard and sometimes delay marriage. They are also driven to achieve the same (if not higher) heights as their male

counterparts such as Gabriela Silang, Melchora Aquino, Corazon Aquino, Josefa Llanes-Escoda, Cecile Licad, Lea Salonga and Miriam Defensor-Santiago who show mettle and excellence in various fields. By and large, more and more Filipino women of today defy traditional expectations of them branding them as a beautiful equilibrium of a gentle homemaker and at the same time a feisty nation builder (Soriano, 1).

The pride that the Philippines takes in as one of the homes of some of the world's most prolific and iconic women and the immense influence of each Disney movies has on children across the globe has awakened the desire of the researcher to analyze the characterization of Disney movie princesses vis-à-vis the image of Filipino women. Young girls worldwide aspire to become like their idolized Disney counterparts and interiorize their messages to heart. Not to mention society is influenced by the media's way of portraying how people should look and act; for that reason, further research in the scholarly world relative to Disney movies is a must due to the extent of their impact. Given the profound effect that viewing these movies has in the society especially a child's psychological aspect, the researchers find the necessity to explore how the plot struggles, characters, and underlying dominant human dimensions and values are presented in these movies in the context of the Filipino women. This study also finds the importance to bring awareness to the readers on how Filipino women play their roles in Philippine literature and promote full appreciation to attain greater pride and value as members of the society since they get less attention in the literary field.

Objectives

This study determines the portrait of Filipino women in Disney movie princesses.

Specifically, it investigates on the following:

1. plot struggle; and
2. dominant human dimension and Filipino value.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method Used

The method of research used in this study is discourse analysis. This method uses analysis and interpretation of the literary works investigating particularly its animated film focusing on the female protagonists vis-à-vis the image of Filipino women using formalism and sociological theory. Each Disney movie is viewed and studied focusing on its movie plot struggles, characterization, as well as its human dimension and Filipino value to derive the image of Filipino women. Extensive reading and thorough analyzing of different Philippine fictions with female characters, major or minor, is done as well.

Sources of Data

The main sources of data are the animation films in which these Disney princesses appeared namely *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Frozen* (2013), and *Moana* (2016) respectively. Purchasing and downloading of these movies are done as well. Aside from its main source of data, Philippine fictions taken from internet sources and theses and dissertations are used. The following stories are: *Absent Ma'am* by Ferdinand Balino, *Maternity Leave* by Ligaya Victorio-Reyes, and *Wedding Dance* by Amador Dagui.

Data-gathering Procedure

The procedure of the investigation follows two phases:

Phase One. Plot Struggle. In this phase, each animated film is analyzed in terms of its plot focusing its main struggle. Each is examined closely, carefully and systematically to reveal a concrete image of Filipino women. The same procedure is done with the Filipino fictions.

Phase Two. Dominant Human Dimension and Filipino Value. In phase 2, the researchers delve into the theme by comprehensively scanning each Disney movie and examining it thoroughly. Each theme then is to be located with its dominant human dimension and relate it along with the Filipino values. These phases are used in order to derive a concrete image of Filipino women in each Disney movie and its princess.

Results and Discussions

This presents the data in order to answer the sub-problems raised in the study generated through literary discourse analysis. Each table is followed by analysis and interpretation of the data presented.

Plot Struggle

The following are the prevailing struggles that emerge in the Disney movies and the revealed images of Filipino women.

Table 1: Plot Struggle

Disney Movie	Plot Struggles	Filipino Fiction	Plot Struggles	Image of Filipino Women
Beauty and the Beast	A spell is cast to Beast and his castle and it needs to be broken before the last petal falls	Maternity Leave	Fear of taking another maternity leave	Sacrificial
Frozen	Elsa's immense power that she does not know how to control	Wedding Dance	Unable to produce a child	Strong
Moana	The need to restore the heart of Te Fi Ti to end the darkness consuming the island of Polynesia	Absent Ma'am	Fail to attend class because of the lack of shoes	Persistent

Beauty and the Beast. The conflict in the story arises as the unnamed prince's hostility is punished by an old beggar who is a beautiful enchantress, by transforming him into a hideous beast and placing a powerful spell on his castle. The spell will be only broken if the prince can learn to love another, and earn her love in return in spite of his appearance by the time the last petal falls. As the years pass by, the prince, later on called beast, falls into despair, loses all hope and become even more short-tempered.

As Maurice, Belle's father, inadvertently reaches Beast's territory as he gets lost into the woods and later seeks refuge in his castle, his intrusion prompts the Beast to imprison him. Due to her love for her father, Belle offers to take her father's place in exchange of her freedom. With the possibility that Belle can be the girl who can break the spell, Beast takes her despite Maurice's objection. Belle has to confront the fear of losing her father, and her dreams and live with the Beast regardless of his awful appearance and being occasionally bad-tempered. This act of Belle is tantamount to being **sacrificial**.

The story of *Lucia* in *Maternity Leave* by Ligaya Victorio Reyes replicates Belle's. In the entire story, Lucia worries about her pregnancy for this would mean earning little amount for her family and spending much after a little time of breastfeeding for the baby's food and milk.

During her time, public teacher's health care especially of woman is treated unfairly which is the struggle. There are "punishments" for teachers like her who dare to have children in the middle of semesters. Lucia, on her third child, fears the effects of taking another maternity leave. As she wants to ease the financial burden of the family and her desires to provide her family with a more comfortable life, she decides to abort her baby to get rid of additional mouth to feed. She sacrifices the life of her baby, an easy way out of her predicament. Lucia opts to carry the burden alone for her husband and her children.

Frozen. Elsa, one of the protagonists in the story, owns a power that she does not know how to control. With the fear of hurting others, she isolates herself from people especially to her younger sister Anna, whom she unintentionally hurts when they are still young.

As Elsa grows old, her power becomes so tremendous that it accidentally plunges an eternal winter to her entire kingdom which is unraveled later on as the story develops. This is seen during the coronation night as Elsa is enraged by Anna's impulsivity to get married and tactlessness; thus, exposing Elsa's power to the public. This leads Anna to find Elsa, as she later flees into the countryside to live a hermitic life, to save her and the kingdom.

This conflict has led the two protagonists to be **strong**. Anna, knowing the foreseen danger of Elsa's power, ventures out just to save Elsa and her kingdom. Elsa, on the other hand, has to overcome her extreme power to reverse the curse she caused to her realm to bring back summer and reunite with her sister Anna.

The story of *Lumnay* in *Wedding Dance* by Amador Daguio is reflective of Elsa's and Anna's. Lumnay is destined to be left by her husband Awiyao for her tribe's tradition in spite of her being a great wife. She cannot give her husband a child so Awiyao has to remarry another. It pains Lumnay to let go of her husband for she sincerely loves him. This is evident when the two starts to part ways but Lumnay keeps on coming back to Awiyao pleading him to stay. She even thinks of protesting and denouncing the unwritten law that a man may take another woman. At the end, Lumnay decides to walk away, sacrifice her love for her husband and, accept her fate.

Moana. The central conflict is seen right at the beginning where a narration of Gramma Tala (Moana's grandmother) takes place of how Maui, a demigod of the wind and the sea, steals the heart of Te Fiti, a goddess of Polynesia who has the power to create life. This deed has led to Te Fiti's downfall, giving birth to a terrible darkness, draining the life from island after island which will eventually lead to an inescapable demise. In order to prevent this, the heart of Te Fiti must be restored to bring back balance to the world and salvage the islands around Polynesia. In the story, the ocean chooses Moana, the daughter of Motunui's chief, to do the saving.

Moana's concern for her people and the village she is born and raised with provokes her to embark on a sea journey to save them even without the proper training to sail. She has to find the banished Maui to help her in restoring the heart. Along her journey, it is evident that Moana

is tested in different circumstances. First, Maui is reluctant to assist her in restoring the heart, second, she encounters the Kakamora who wants to steal Te Fiti's heart, third, they have to retrieve Maui's hook from Tamatoa which is hidden in the realm of monsters, fourth, they have to get past to Te Ka to return the heart to Te Fiti, and finally, she has to face Te Ka alone as Maui leaves her stranded when his hook is partially destroyed. However, Moana's **persistence** never allows these challenges to shake her faith that she can restore the natural state of things and save her village.

Moana's persistence mirrors the life of *Buhay sisters* in Ferdinand Balino's *Absent Maam*. *Rose Buhay* and *Daisy Buhay* demonstrate the importance of education. They do not lose hope to finish their studies. Their status in life do not hinder them to continue going to school even if they only have a pair of shoes, and they have to walk to reach their school. Instead of giving up, the two find ways such that they work as part time helper and purchase another pair of school so they do not have to miss class.

From the findings, it is evident that different struggles in life are experienced by the protagonists in the five Walt Disney movies and are able to surpass those. These conflicts that have emerged have projected varied images of Filipino women such as being tolerant, sacrificial, brave, determined and strong in facing the adversities in life.

Dominant Human Dimension and Filipino Value

The table below contains the prevailing themes of each Walt Disney movie which are derived from the plot and are located with its dominant human dimension and Filipino value.

Table 2: Dominant Human Dimension and Filipino Value

Disney Movie	Human Dimension	Filipino Value
Beauty and the Beast	Moral	Tolerance
Frozen	Social and Political	Love
Moana	Intellectual and Political	Resilience

Beauty and the Beast. As moral being, a person must go out to other and in fact to all humanity in love (DECS Values Education Program, 6). This dimension is greatly seen in Belle's action towards Beast despite his horrible appearance and very bad temper especially when he gets angry. Though at first, Belle fears him but as the story evolves, she begins to see Beast as a human being. Regardless of the townspeople's misjudgment towards Beast, Belle has learned to love Beast which later on becomes the instrument for Beast to become soft-hearted.

The story of *Beauty and the Beast* accentuates the message that real beauty is not to be conformed to conventional beauty standards, but it is to one's inner self (Siddiqui, 1). Hence, true beauty comes from within. It is all about being kind to others, not only thinking about her. Outer appearance may matter but it is second only to a beautiful soul. Outer appearance does fade as people age but the inner persona never goes away.

When Belle and Beast come together under the circumstance of Belle having to stay in exchange for her father, Belle begins to see the gentle nature and goodness inside Beast. Although at first, Belle is stunned by Beast's physical appearance, this never hinders Belle to establish a connection with Beast and find in her heart to love him by looking Beast underneath. This has broken the spell that is cast over Beast and his castle.

Physically and socially, Filipinos have a great capacity to adjust and adapt to any circumstances easily. This value is truly manifested by the overseas Filipino workers. They can work with a diverse group with different physical appearance, background, culture and belief.

They can adjust to unplanned or unanticipated change of rigid schedule and the nature of work. They even excel in various fields despite the language barrier because of their tolerance.

Frozen. Elsa's acceptance as being the queen of Arendelle despite her fear towards her power only shows her love and loyalty to her kingdom. When she notices the disaster she brings to her kingdom, she immediately runs away and hides herself thinking she could cause more harm to her people. Similarly, the same attitude is shown by Ana. After Elsa accidentally plunges Arendelle into a winter, she immediately ventures out to find Elsa and convince her to reverse the curse. The responsibility is on her shoulder since she is the cause for Elsa's action and Elsa's action has great impact to their people. As specified in the DECS Values Education Program (7), as social being, a sense of responsibility must be fostered in the human heart. Consequently, he or she must be in pursuit for the welfare of others. When Elsa and Anna see their loved ones and people in danger, they react towards it and they react with love.

The story of Frozen positively expresses that one should love oneself despite the differences and embrace the way it is. Instead of feeling the pressure to follow the crowd, one must be true to herself or himself. Empowerment, freedom, and happiness occur when one learns to accept who he or she is. Further, one cannot be "loving" to others without being "loving" to oneself first.

All her life, Elsa lives in fear of revealing her true identity. Because of this, she locks herself in her room, isolates herself from the rest and allows her supernatural abilities to take control of her as she loathes herself. This act of her ends up hurting the people she cares about and herself as well and not embracing her true self for the benefit of everyone. When Elsa finally lets go of herself, learns to accept her gift and loves the way she is, she is able to gain control of her power and reunite with her sister Anna without the fear to hurt her any longer. Love as the driving force, she is able to not only enjoy the splendors of her power for herself but spreads joy to her townspeople too.

Filipinos are known for their inherent love for their parents and immediate family. Their affection is what binds their family to be together all the time despite the misfortunes hurled at them. Because of this uncanny love, Filipinos are willing to make big sacrifices to give their family a good life. It is not unusual to see a family member to go abroad either as OFW or migrant workers so that they can help their family financially. Some may delay marriage for they have a sibling to put through school.

Moana. Moana's character is an epitome of an intelligent and self-sacrificing young heroine; hence, intellectual and political respectively. At the very onset of the story, it can be understood that Moana has immense care for her village and the people in it. When she starts her training as the next chief of her tribe, she is responsive to the needs of the townsfolk. Even after it is revealed that she is chosen by the sea to restore the legendary heart of Te Fiti, Moana actually puts her focus on saving her beloved Motunui and not accomplishing the mission. Using her wit, she is able to conquer different death-defying situations. She is able to convince Maui to help her, she is able to escape from the Kakamora, she is able to deceive Tamatoa and repossess Maui's hook and finally, she is able to realize that Te Ka is Te Fiti herself.

Moana conveys a message that when everything seems to be hopeless, one should never doubt himself or herself. Instead, one must be bold, courageous and remarkable. When one doubts oneself, one is underestimating himself or herself, one is hindered from moving forward, and finally one is sabotaging to be successful.

In the story, Maui constantly doubts Moana to navigate the ocean and help her people because of her age. He always puts her down by saying she does not know how to sail, she will

never be a way finder, the ocean is wrong for choosing her, and she cannot defeat Te Ka and restore the heart without him. Moana's continual capacity to prove Maui wrong gives only emphasis of Moana's inherent independence and strength regardless of her social standing. There are times in the movie when Moana doubts her ability to save her people. There is one point when Moana actually gives up once Maui deserts her after his hook is partly damaged. However, Moana is able to gain self-discovery by the help of her Gramma Tala and with newborn courage and inspiration; she dives back into the sea and successfully restores the heart of Te Fi TI.

Resilience is ingrained in every Filipino's heart. The Philippines' location is strategically exposed to tropical storms and various natural calamities such as earthquake and volcanic eruption. With this, Philippines is subject to disaster vulnerability. Despite this, Filipinos keep their good disposition every day. Amidst adversities, they develop their own ways to cope, accept misfortunes and eventually recover from these events. Instead of wallowing, Filipinos smile, laugh, joke, hope and believe that the next day will get better.

The dominant human dimensions emerge in the different movies are economic, moral, intellectual, social and political. Furthermore, the varied themes derived from the five Walt Disney movies mirror the values of Filipino. These values are gentleness, kindness, tolerance, courage, love and resilience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Summary of Findings

The following are the findings of the study:

1. Each movie conflict leads the main character to become sacrificial, persistent, determined and strong as they face the adversities of life; accordingly, these are reflective of the image of Filipino women as they encounter different challenges thrown at them.
2. The dominant human dimension emerges in the three Disney movies are moral, intellectual, social and political and they manifest different Filipino values like tolerance, love, and resilience.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis, it is evident that Walt Disney's movie princesses are reflective of the image of Filipino women in terms of plot struggle, characterization and dominant human dimension and Filipino value.

Recommendations

Considering the findings and conclusion, basic recommendations are hereby offered:

1. An in-depth analysis of the internal and external conflict of each Disney movie may be done to extract a more concrete image; and
2. Examination of all the official Disney movie princesses may be conducted to establish a more meaningful image of Filipino women.

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