

Visual Discourse Analysis of "Cinderella 2021": Exploring Gender Roles, Cultural Elements, and Societal Perspectives

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Abstract

This research employs visual discourse analysis to dissect the visual elements within the film "Cinderella 2021." The primary objective is to comprehend how the film portrays notions of work, gender roles, and the significance of male and female characters, alongside embedded cultural elements. Through this analysis, the study seeks to unveil the impact of these cinematic depictions on societal perceptions, aiming to contribute to a broader discourse on enhancing perspectives within the community. The recurrent adaptations of Cinderella across various cinematic renditions offer a unique opportunity to scrutinize the evolving perspectives on gender issues throughout time. The narrative serves as a critical lens for dissecting society's attitudes towards female protagonists, their agency, and the nuanced definition of a "happy ending." Consequently, the enduring popularity of Cinderella not only attests to her timeless allure but also positions her as a cultural artifact that prompts contemplation on the intricate dynamics of gender representation within the realm of storytelling. This research sheds light on the film's potential to influence or challenge prevailing societal views, thereby fostering a more informed and progressive dialogue on gender roles and cultural representations.

Keywords: Visual Discourse Analysis, Cinderella, social perception, gender roles, cultural representation

INTRODUCTION

Research on gender representations in media has become a growing focus as awareness of the role of media in shaping gender perceptions and identities. As highlighted by Santoniccolo et al (2023), examining various factors influencing gender representations, media emerges as a significant contributor, exerting influence across diverse aspects. In this case, films are one of the things that can have an impact on gender representation. According to

Holtzman & Sharpe (2014) Entertainment media, including TV, films, and music, significantly influence our perceptions of identity and shape our understanding of what is considered normal. Films, as a subset of entertainment media, hold a unique power to contribute to the broader discourse on gender representation, given the potent combination of cinematic storytelling, visuals, and narratives. This underscores the need to delve into the specific ways in which films contribute to the intricate landscape of gender representations in media.

As per the insights provided by Santoniccolo et al. (2023), the term "gender stereotypes" encompasses simplified notions that define attitudes and behaviors deemed conventional and appropriate for men and women within a given cultural setting. These stereotypes manifest across diverse facets of individuals' characteristics, including their physical appearance, personality traits, behaviors, social roles, and chosen occupations. The beliefs associated with gender stereotypes can be further dissected into descriptive elements, which encapsulate how individuals perceive a person of a specific gender; prescriptive components, outlining societal expectations regarding the behavior a person of a certain gender should exhibit; and proscriptive aspects, detailing the behaviors that individuals believe a person of a certain gender should abstain from. In essence, gender stereotypes create a framework that simplifies and categorizes individuals based on their gender, influencing perceptions and expectations across various dimensions of life (Santoniccolo et al, 2023). Recognizing these different facets of gender stereotypes, including descriptive, prescriptive, and proscriptive aspects, is essential for comprehensively understanding the impact of these societal constructs on individuals' lives and behaviors. Such recognition lays the groundwork for critical analysis and potential challenges to these stereotypes, fostering a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of gender roles in different cultures and societies.

The story of Cinderella stands as a widely recognized and frequently adapted narrative that has appeared in film on several occasions, sparking discussion around gender-related themes. In the classic "Cinderella" storyline, we witness the image of a young girl being abused by her stepmother and stepsisters. However, the narrative takes a transformative turn towards the end, culminating in Cinderella achieving her long-awaited happy ending through marriage to the prince (Rachmijati & Cahyati, 2021). This seemingly straightforward tale, if examined more closely, will reveal the nuances of gender dynamics. The initial depiction of Cinderella as a victim of abuse underscores common gender issues, reflecting the challenges faced by female characters in traditional narratives. The transformative resolution, in which Cinderella's

fate changes drastically with the wedding, also prompts critical reflection on societal expectations and traditional gender roles embedded in the narrative (Grzelka, 2019).

The repeated adaptations of Cinderella in various cinematic versions allow for the exploration of evolving perspectives on gender issues over time. The story provides a lens through which to analyze society's attitudes toward female protagonists, their agency, and the definition of a "happy ending." Therefore, Cinderella's enduring popularity not only speaks to its timeless appeal but also to its role as a cultural artifact that invites contemplation regarding the complexities of gender representation in storytelling.

Exploring gender stereotypes and cultural content in the film "Cinderella 2021" is an interesting study. The goal is to understand how the movie portrays work, gender roles, and the importance of male and female characters, along with cultural elements. The analysis aims to reveal how these aspects influence or challenge societal views, contributing to a broader discussion on improving perspectives within communities.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In recent years, the investigation of gender issues and the promotion of gender equality in the realm of cinematic narrative have become central themes in contemporary media studies (Edström, 2018). Academics and researchers are increasingly turning their attention to analyzing how gender is portrayed, the challenges faced by individuals, and advocating for equal representation and treatment in film. This literature review explores scientific discourse around gender representation, general issues, and active advocacy for gender equality in cinematic narratives. Specific and nuanced focus is directed at examining these themes in the context of the film "Cinderella 2021." By examining key perspectives put forward by academics in the field, this review seeks to uncover the complex layers of gender-related discussions in the cinematic landscape, offering insight into the evolving dynamics of gender representation and the broader social implications in this context. certain cinematic works.

Some research covering gender is listed in the following. The first research by El Shaban (2017), "Gender stereotypes in fantasy fairy tales: Cinderella". The main finding of this research is that the emphasis in the three analyzed versions of Cinderella is on the importance of beauty and physical appearance, and that beauty and attractiveness are usually rewarded. The heroines are expected to be white, blond, sexy, and fair with colored eyes. The research also found that the gender stereotype of being evil associated with ugliness is emphasized. The study suggests that educators should practice critical analysis and be cautious

with the hidden messages such as ideologies, race, class, and gender. The second research by Rachmijati & Cahyati (2021), “Cinderella Vs “Timun Mas: Exploring Gender Stereotypes and Culture as Learning Material Purposes” engages in a qualitative investigation using content analysis to delve into the representation of gender roles in the literature of "Cinderella" and "Timun Mas." The primary objective is to scrutinize these narratives with a focus on Occupations and Gender Stereotypes, the Centrality of Female and Male Characters, Cultural Content, and their Suitability as learning materials. In summary, both narratives are deemed authentic learning materials for gender references, but "Cinderella" distinguishes itself with a more diverse representation of gender and richer cultural content compared to "Timun Mas." The research sheds light on the potential educational value of these narratives in understanding gender stereotypes and cultural nuances. The third research by Shamna (2017), “The Making of Masculinity: Readings on the Male Stereotypes in Cinderella and The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood”. The central focus of the research is on analyzing how gender-stereotypical concepts are woven into these tales, implicitly establishing standards of behavior and attributes for young boys who aspire to emulate the royal figures portrayed in these stories. The overarching inquiry aims to shed light on the potential impact of fairy tales on the development of gender norms and perceptions in vulnerable young minds. The last is Berlianti (2021) “The stereotypical representation of women in the classic fairy tales Snow White, Cinderella, and Sleeping Beauty”. The research unveils details regarding the seven functional characters in these fairy tales. The findings underscore the prevalence of various stereotypical representations targeting women in these stories. These include an emphasis on the importance of natural beauty, misconceptions about the meaning of ambition, and the overarching theme that marriage serves as the solution to all the problems faced by women in these tales. In essence, the research sheds light on how classic fairy tales contribute to and reinforce stereotypical expectations placed on women. By delving into the narratives and characterizations, the study unveils the underlying messages, questioning the implications of these tales on societal perceptions of women and their roles. In essence, these research studies collectively highlight the pervasive nature of gender stereotypes in classic fairy tales and cinematic narratives, emphasizing the importance of critical analysis, awareness, and a nuanced understanding of the potential impacts on societal perceptions of gender roles and relationships. The academic exploration in this domain contributes significantly to ongoing conversations about gender representation in media and its broader societal implications.

METHODOLOGY

In this research, the chosen research method is visual discourse analysis. This method is implemented through a series of systematic procedures involving the collection, analysis, and presentation of data. Visual discourse analysis is a research approach employed to scrutinize and comprehend the messages or meanings conveyed through visual elements, such as images, illustrations, graphics, or any visual components present in diverse contexts like mass media, art, literary works, or visual documentation (Albers, 2013).

The primary focus of this particular research is to investigate the representation of gender stereotypes within the realm of films. Representation, in this context, refers to how individuals, groups, ideas, opinions, realities, or objects are portrayed in a film. The chosen research approach draws upon the work of Berlianti (2021), indicating a foundation in contemporary scholarship.

The concept under scrutiny in this study is the representation of gender stereotypes, a multifaceted topic that involves examining how certain characteristics, roles, or attributes associated with gender are depicted in cinematic works. Stereotypes, as explored in this research, can encompass both positive and negative attributes, and they may be accurate or erroneous. Furthermore, these stereotypes can pertain to individuals or extend to entire groups within the societal context.

Through visual discourse analysis, the researcher aims to unveil and interpret the underlying visual narratives within films, contributing to a deeper understanding of how gender stereotypes are perpetuated or challenged in the cinematic medium. This method allows for a nuanced exploration of the visual elements, shedding light on the ways in which films play a role in shaping and reflecting societal perceptions of gender (Albers, 2013). The emphasis on representation and the examination of stereotypes contribute to the broader discourse on gender studies and media analysis, offering valuable insights into the intricate relationship between visual media and societal constructs of gender.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION



Picture 2.1



Picture 2.2



Picture 2.3

In the film, specifically in picture 2.1 at the 1.03-minute mark, the residents engage in a collective song about the kingdom's way of life, turning the film into a musical drama where spontaneous singing occurs. In this scene, male residents are depicted performing manual labor, each holding a shovel. The accompanying subtitle emphasizes the monotony of their lives, stating *"doing the same job every day,"* indicating a routine existence that adheres to established regulations and doesn't venture beyond their comfort zones. This visual representation underscores the societal perception that men are assigned physically demanding tasks due to their perceived strength, aligning with the observations made by Towbin et al. (2008) & Rahma (2019), which identified five themes characterizing men's behaviors, including strength and heroism.

Contrastingly, in image 2.2 at the 1.07-minute mark and image 2.3 at 1.38 minutes, women are portrayed engaging in household chores such as washing and drying. Santoniccolo et al. (2023) suggest that recent analyses affirm the persistence of certain stereotypes, with women often depicted in traditional roles, including the portrayal of a woman as the queen of the home. Furthermore, Yang et al. (2020) argue that women are frequently presented in constrained and subordinate roles, conforming to traditional feminine stereotypes as nonprofessionals, homemakers, wives or parents, and sexual gatekeepers.



Picture 2.4



Picture. 2.5



Picture 2.6

In image 2.4 at the 17.38-minute mark in the film, a significant visual detail emerges: the King's chair is positioned higher than the Queen's chair. This discrepancy is explicitly acknowledged by the Queen in image 2.5 at the 17.55-minute mark, where the subtitle reads, "*... or your throne is a little higher than yesterday...*" This indicates that previously, the King and Queen's chairs were at the same height, but the King altered this by raising his chair slightly. In image 2.6 at 18.02 minutes, the King justifies this adjustment, asserting his right to elevate her, given the hierarchical nature of their positions. However, the Queen's need to question and protest this decision raises a peculiar point: why does she need to ask for clarification?

This scenario highlights an inherent inequality in the dynamic between men and women, where men wield more power. This dynamic aligns with gender roles, as noted by Rahma (2019). Gender roles play a defining role in attributing specific tasks to each gender based on perceived traits. Traits such as tentativeness, submissiveness, weakness, victimization, emotionality, fearfulness, seeking advice, asking for help, dealing with troubles, and collapsing while crying are traditionally associated with femininity. Conversely, attributes like strength, assertiveness, impassiveness, intellectuality, athleticism, freedom, fearlessness, inspiration of fear, handsomeness, leadership, offering advice, and the will to explore are considered purely masculine traits. Schuh et al. (2014) further discuss the ongoing disproportionality of women in leadership positions, despite an increase in their representation over the last few decades. This underrepresentation remains a persistent challenge, emphasizing the need for continued examination and action to address gender imbalances in leadership roles.



Picture 2.7



Picture 2.8



Picture 2.9



Picture 2.10

Continuing from the previous discussion, Figures 2.7, 2.8, 2.9, and 2.10 persistently highlight a recurring issue related to power dynamics. In Figure 2.7, the positioning of the next successor is unequivocally right beside the King, a detail corroborated by Pennington (2023). Moving forward to Picture 2.8 at the 19.54-minute mark in the film, Princess Gwen takes the initiative, proposing herself as the successor and articulating her aspirations in Picture 2.9. However, the King dismisses her proposal, instructing her to leave, citing an ongoing conversation with the Prince at that moment. This scenario vividly exemplifies the presence of gender stereotypes, an observation aligned with the findings of Ellemers (2018). Despite the demonstration of similar characteristics, preferences, and ambitions between men and women, societal perceptions and stereotypical expectations often relegate them to separate realms. Delving into the origins and implications of these gender stereotypes becomes essential to comprehend their connection to broader gender disparities in society. Furthermore, examining parental attitudes, even those professing no gender-based differences in child-rearing, reveals the influence of implicit beliefs. Parents making implicit gender-stereotypical associations are more likely to treat their sons differently than their daughters, particularly in disciplinary situations (Endendijk et al. 2014). This suggests a perpetuation of the idea that women might

face barriers to leadership roles due to deep-rooted royal regulations passed down through generations.

Expanding the scope of this discussion to encompass broader research perspectives, Ferreira & Gyourko (2014) conducted a study shedding light on the impact of electing a female leader in U.S. cities, yielding intriguing results. Despite the increasing participation of women in mayoral elections, the study discerns no substantial effect of the mayor's gender on policies related to the size of local government, the composition of municipal spending and workforce, or crime rates. While female mayors are acknowledged for possessing elevated political skills, enjoying an incumbency advantage at least 5 percentage points higher than their male counterparts, this advantage does not extend to the overall political success of other female candidates in the same city or in local congressional elections. Hence, despite differences in political skills between female and male mayors, this research affirms that these gender disparities do not exert a significant influence on political policies and outcomes within the realm of U.S. mayoral elections.



Picture 2.11



Picture 2.12



Picture 2.13



Picture 2.14



Picture 2.15

Continuing the discussion on gender stereotypes, the previous images focused on depicting women deemed unsuitable for leadership roles. This time, the images center around women in the workforce. In pictures 2.11 and 2.12, around the 32.31-minute mark in the film, Cinderella is seen observing a market stall with only male sellers. However, this doesn't deter her determination to one day establish her own shop, as she expresses in picture 2.15. Cinderella further offers a dress she has sewn to another woman, as depicted in picture 2.14 at 32.54 minutes in the film. Unfortunately, the woman responds with mockery, saying "*you should be embarrassed.*" Similarly, when Cinderella loudly offers her dress in the middle of the market, as shown in picture 2.13, the residents find it strange and look down on her. This incident aligns with the concept of gender bias, as discussed by Cismas (2017), which explores the impact of gender inequality and discrimination in causing and perpetuating poverty and vulnerability in contemporary society.

Barreto et al. (2004) and Ellemers (2018), note that reflecting on past gender discrimination can motivate men to showcase their best abilities. However, it has been observed that such reflections diminish the current chances of success for individual women, weaken their ability to perform well, and hinder them from seizing available opportunities. Undoubtedly, gender bias in the workplace poses significant challenges to a woman's career.



Picture 2.16

Cinderella can be regarded as the archetype of fairy tales, narrating a story deeply embedded with the gender roles society has enforced upon men and women for centuries. As noted by Lieberman (1986) and Kumlu & Çomoglu (2021), "the child who dreams of being a Cinderella Dreams is not only chosen and exalted by a prince but also becomes a glamorous sufferer or victim." The dangling girl, immersed in adversity and ultimate surrender in the ashes, carries such potent symbolism that she later inspires the concept known as "The Cinderella Complex," as proposed by Dowling (1981) and Kumlu & Çomoglu (2021) in the field of psychology. Dowling's work highlights the figure of the dependent woman, characterized by a fear of independence, manifestations of neurotic dependence, learned helplessness, and a lack of self-esteem and self-confidence (Kumlu & Çomoglu 2021).

In picture 2.16, at the 1.23.07-minute mark, Cinderella's stepmother utters the phrase, "the only way out is to get married." She conveys this to Cinderella, understanding her as the woman sought after by the Prince. However, Cinderella refuses to comply and persists in her desire to become a businesswoman. This situation aligns with the concept previously explained as the Cinderella complex. The character of Cinderella differs in this film due to deliberate changes. As Tatar (1999) and Kumlu & Çomoglu (2021) point out, the story of Cinderella has undergone numerous reinventions by diverse cultures, resulting in different characteristics for Cinderella in each version. The Cinderella fairy tale portrayed in this film transforms the traditionally passive and incompetent Cinderellas into competent and powerful figures.



Pict. 2.17.



Pict. 2.18.



Pict. 2.19.



Pict. 2.20.

Towards the conclusion of the film, Cinderella confronts the challenges in her life, symbolized by her departure from home and her transition into married life with the prince, all while engaging in business ventures. Concurrently, the king, depicted in image 2.17, carefully deliberates and passes on the throne to his youngest son. This narrative underscores the message that women can pursue diverse roles, whether as leaders or entrepreneurs, if they are willing to take on the challenge. Both Cinderella and Princess Gwen actively strive to eliminate gender disparities, challenging patriarchal norms and negative stereotypes.

This theme resonates with Waylen's (2014) research, where it is argued that insights from gender research enhance comprehension of informal institutions and institutional change. Examining informal institutions aids scholars in understanding the disparity between changes in formal institutions and their actual outcomes. Building on institutional analysis and feminist institutionalist studies, this discussion delves into the intricate relationship between informal institutions, institutional change, and gender equality. It utilizes gender equality as a lens to scrutinize fundamental issues associated with institutional change, emphasizing that institutional analysis becomes more nuanced when incorporating gender dynamics. Unveiling the genderization of power relations sheds light on power dynamics in institutional change, offering a deeper understanding of why institutional transformations often deviate from designers' intentions.

In a related study, Bayeh (2016) emphasizes that achieving successful sustainable development in Ethiopia necessitates the empowerment of women and the attainment of gender equality. The research contends that relying solely on male participation makes it challenging for countries to achieve sustainable development. The significant representation of women, constituting half of the country's population, underscores the urgency of activating their roles across all facets of development. Consequently, this research advocates for a strong

governmental commitment to empowering women and harnessing the full potential of the country to realize sustainable development.

CONCLUSION

Gender stereotypes hinder the equitable sharing of caregiving responsibilities and the mutual benefits derived from interpersonal connections in the context of family and childcare. These stereotypes also impede women with successful careers from forming romantic partnerships and leave unemployed men feeling undervalued. They lead to an underestimation of the emotional toll on women performing caregiving duties and the physical strain experienced by men engaged in strenuous labor. The consequences of these stereotypes extend beyond individual costs, affecting societal well-being by impacting the psychological and physical health of individuals, family resilience, and the sustained participation and contributions of workers in the labor market. Acknowledging our inherent susceptibility to stereotypical thinking and gendered expectations is crucial. Embracing this fallibility, rather than denying the role of gender stereotypes while inadvertently perpetuating them, facilitates corrective measures to address any adverse outcomes that may arise.

In the exploration of gender issues within the Cinderella film, it becomes evident that gender stereotypes exert a pervasive influence on various aspects of individuals' lives. Specifically, these stereotypes act as barriers to achieving a balance in the distribution of caregiving responsibilities and the associated rewards stemming from interpersonal connections within familial and childcare settings. The consequences of such stereotypes extend into the realms of romantic relationships, as women with successful careers may encounter difficulties in forming partnerships, while unemployed men may grapple with feelings of undervaluation.

Furthermore, the impact of gender stereotypes manifests in the realm of caregiving, where the emotional burden placed on women is often underestimated, and the physical strain on men engaged in strenuous labor is overlooked. This not only imposes significant costs on the individuals directly involved but also carries broader societal implications. The psychological and physical well-being of individuals is compromised, family resilience is undermined, and the long-term availability and contributions of workers within the labor market are affected.

Acknowledging our human fallibility in succumbing to stereotypical thinking and adhering to gendered expectations is essential in addressing these issues. Rather than denying

the role of gender stereotypes, it is imperative to accept our susceptibility to them. This acknowledgment creates a foundation for corrective measures, allowing for a more conscientious approach to mitigate any undesired outcomes that may arise from perpetuating these stereotypes implicitly.

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