

Globally Constructed, Locally Mediated: Indonesian Millennial Mothers' Experiences in Shaping the Global Narrative of Disney Princesses

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Rivga Agusta^{1*}, Annisa Gissena²

¹Department of Communication, Universitas Amikom Yogyakarta
Jln. Ring Road Utara, Condongcatur, Sleman, Yogyakarta 55283 – Indonesia

²Department of Communication, Universitas Gadjah Mada
Jln. Sosio Yustisia, Bulaksumur, Yogyakarta 55281 - Indonesia

*Corresponding author: rivgagusta@amikom.ac.id

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Abstract - This study explores the experiences of Indonesian millennial mothers in mediating Disney princess narratives as information hegemony from media giants. Aiming to understand how parental mediation shapes children's interpretations of global princess constructions, the study highlights how mothers address the intersection between global media influences and local cultural values. Using a phenomenological approach, in-depth interviews with four purposively selected mothers were conducted to uncover how they actively mediate Disney princess content through various media forms, such as films, books, and merchandise. The study reveals that media giants like Disney construct dominant cultural narratives that mothers, as cultural mediators, can reinforce or challenge, reflecting societal ideologies and shaping children's understanding of global narratives. By examining the role of parents in managing media consumption, the study highlights the impact of information hegemony on children's media exposure and identity formation. Ultimately, this study contributes to understanding the negotiation between corporate media influences and local cultural contexts, emphasizing the power of parental agency in shaping children's media literacy and critical engagement with global narratives.

Keywords: Disney Princess Narratives; Millennial Mothers; Parental Mediation; Phenomenology

Introduction

The Disney Princess franchise is a powerful example of how media giants shape global culture. Through animated films, a merchandise empire, and ubiquitous digital content, Disney has developed a princess universe that is recognized and admired by children. Even classic characters like Snow White, Cinderella, and Belle remain familiar to children despite the emergence of new princesses like Elsa and Moana (Play Like Mum, 2020; Price, 2023). This visibility not only highlights the franchise's cross-generational appeal but also the hegemonic reach of Western media narratives that continue to circulate globally with their cultural and economic power.

This influence is also evident among Indonesian children. They are familiar with Disney Princesses not only through the films but also through the ecosystem of content and everyday products. On YouTube Kids, there is Indonesian children's content influenced by Disney Princesses. For example, edutainment content uploaded by the channel SAM si JELI LINCAH (2023) and children's vlog content uploaded by Dista Mikhayla (2023).

On popular e-commerce platforms like Shopee, numerous Disney Princess merchandise items are sold in the thousands, with thousands of reviews attesting to their popularity. These products are specifically designed for young children, incorporating Disney Princess imagery into birthday party supplies, school materials, and even home decor. Additionally, there is a growing trend of Disney Princess-themed birthday parties, further solidifying Disney's dominance (Agustina, 2024; Aprilianto, 2024; Fundrika, 2022; Lin, 2021).

As a media giant, Disney has a significant influence on children's culture globally. With its extensive global reach, Disney perpetuates specific values about femininity, beauty, nobility, and moral standards that are primarily rooted in Western cultural codes (Fathanah et al., 2022; Hicks, 2023; Hine, England, et al., 2018; Hine, Ivanovic, et al., 2018; Masykuroh & Fatimah, 2019; Shehatta, 2020). These values are encoded in Disney Princess products distributed worldwide through various forms of media, including films, television shows, books, and merchandise (Coyne et al., 2016; Forman-Brunell & Hains, 2013; Shen et al., 2021).

Interestingly, Disney's influence on children begins with their parents' exposure to Disney during their childhood. A study by Ononiwu and Uzuegbunam (2025) found that parents' engagement with Disney films stems from their affection for Disney, particularly through nostalgic connections and the revival of childhood memories. This engagement encourages them to consume Disney products, especially Princess films, with their children, who then develop an interest in imitating the Disney Princesses.

However, Disney princess characters carry cultural values that may not align with local traditions or norms, particularly in non-Western contexts such as Indonesia (Adriany, 2019; Hine, Ivanovic, et al., 2018; Sulistyani, 2016). Therefore, the consumption of Disney princesses can be said to involve a complex interaction between global media hegemony and local cultural values. Disney's global dominance raises critical questions about how Western values are integrated, resisted, or adapted within the framework of local culture, particularly concerning aristocratic cultural identity.

Nevertheless, what happens in everyday life is more than just alignment or resistance. In the Indonesian context, the increasing normalization of Western values, particularly those related to femininity, beauty, and nobility, signals a deeper process of cultural transfer and ideological naturalization. These values are not only imported but also instilled through media, products, and daily routines. In this process, parents become active participants in the transmission of global culture.

On the other hand, although Indonesian princesses assert their existence through cross-cultural communication strategies (Nilasari, 2024), their visibility tends to be limited to historical or political contexts (Safitri, 2019) making it difficult for them to resonate with younger generations. In contrast, Disney princesses dominate global media and shape children's ideas about royal families (Adriany, 2019). With Western values at risk of overshadowing local constructions of princesses, mothers play an intermediary role in these hegemonic narratives.

Additionally, Disney's global reach obscures the Western culture it cultivates. Despite being marketed as diverse, princesses of color remain underrepresented and framed through Western-centric narratives. This reinforces global hierarchies of beauty and standards of white skin (Jin, 2023; Silalahi et al., 2023; Uppal, 2019). Thus, Disney princess culture functions not only as entertainment but also as a form of covert and sustained information hegemony, where media not only dictate who is seen as noble but also how to be a woman.

In response to hegemony, families (including parents), along with schools, function as hegemonic institutions that reproduce dominant ideologies through everyday practices (Çoban, 2018). In this practice, parents act as cultural gatekeepers who mediate children's exposure to media as part of the ideology reproduction process. Parental mediation, ranging from restrictive control to active discussion, shapes children's interpretive frameworks and critical thinking (Eichen et al., 2021; Haywood & Sembante, 2023; Lemish, 2019; Wandu, 2022). However, these practices are not neutral, as they are inherently rooted in parents' ideological beliefs and social positions (Matsumoto et al., 2021). This relation highlights how family dynamics align with hegemonic structures.

Together, this framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved in parental mediation of Disney Princess narratives. Media hegemony offers a perspective on the global power structures that shape content. At the same time, parental mediation explains how global messages are negotiated within the family context, and princess culture highlights the material and symbolic dimensions of cultural transmission. This integrative approach is employed to understand the cultural tensions that arise when global values intersect with child-rearing practices in the Indonesian context.

Although there have been numerous studies on representation (Fathanah et al., 2022; Hicks, 2023; Hine, England, et al., 2018; Khairunnisa, 2018; Masykuroh & Fatimah, 2019; Putri et al., 2022; Shehatta, 2020), commercialization (Forman-Brunell & Hains, 2013; Kérchy, 2018; Kunze, 2023; Muir, 2023b), and children's acceptance of Disney princesses (Adriany, 2019; Azmi et al., 2018; Coyne et al., 2016; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024), there is a research gap focusing on how parents, especially mothers, experience their role as mediators of global cultural narratives. Studies by Hubbard (2017), Tóth and Lassú (2023), Overend (2020), and Newman (2018) demonstrate that parents are not passive consumers, but rather actively interpret, negotiate, and sometimes restrict Disney content to align with their values. However, most of these studies are based on Western contexts and focus more on parenting styles than on the cultural negotiation process itself.

In non-Western contexts, such as Indonesia, where global media representations often intersect and at times clash with local traditions, there remains a significant gap in understanding how mothers reinterpret Disney princesses' culture within a local cultural framework. This gap is particularly important given that Indonesian local traditions, especially those associated with royal families and princesses, are historically and culturally distinct from their Western counterparts. These traditions emphasize different values, social roles, and expectations surrounding femininity, hierarchy, and moral conduct, which may influence how global princess narratives are received, negotiated, and redefined within Indonesian families.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how Indonesian millennial mothers engage with and adapt Disney princess narratives within the context of global culture. Using a phenomenological approach, this study highlights how global media is reinterpreted through the lens of parenting, revealing the role of mothers in shaping cultural identity amid global hegemony and local values in non-Western contexts.

Theoretical Framework

Disney's Media Hegemony

The emergence of giant media conglomerates marks a significant shift in the global power structure, in which corporate control over information has become a profound cultural influence. Over the past few decades, the expansion of the media industry has intensified ownership concentration, giving transnational corporations reach over what is known, seen, and believed by society (Birkinbine et al., 2017; Mirrlees, 2013). These conglomerates wield power in the economic, political, and symbolic sectors, reinforcing dominant ideologies while narrowing the space for difference (Birkinbine et al., 2017; Çoban, 2018). More than just disseminating content, media giants also act as ideological institutions, shaping public perceptions, marginalizing alternative voices, and reproducing capitalist norms through consent rather than coercion (Artz, 2003; Çoban, 2018). This information hegemony commodifies culture, obscures inequality, and transforms democracy into a form of consumption (Artz, 2003).

Despite the emergence of regional media powers, US-based companies (e.g., Disney) continue to dominate, exporting dominant narratives and values globally (Mirrlees, 2013). The structural dynamics behind this global media power form an essential basis for examining how the media industry perpetuates systemic injustice under the guise of entertainment and "universal" culture.

Disney, as one of the media giants, exercises cultural hegemony through strategies that blend entertainment, commerce, and ideology. Drawing on Gramscian hegemony, Disney does not dominate through coercion but through consent, embedding its narratives into everyday life and making its worldview appear natural, acceptable, even desirable and universal (Forman-Brunell & Hains, 2013; Robinson II et al., 2020).

Disney's hegemonic reach is achieved through vertical and horizontal integration (Nur, 2019; Puspitaningrum et al., 2024), enabling control over content production and distribution. Through a

transmedia storytelling mode (Kérchy, 2018), Disney disseminates the princess narrative across various media, including films, commercial products, theme parks, and digital platforms, thereby creating a seamless “brandscape” (Shen et al., 2021).

Strategically, Disney also adapts content by modifying characters, values, and cultural aesthetics to align with local norms (Anjirbag, 2019; Bouquillion et al., 2021). In Indonesia, for example, this is evident in the localized promotion of Disney+ and princess films with local cultural representations, which tactically reinforce Western values within a local framework (Fathanah et al., 2022; Sutanto, 2022; Zahara et al., 2022). The combination of fantasy, market power, and cultural legitimacy makes Disney's hegemony so powerful and enduring.

It is undeniable that the Disney franchise has given rise to a culture known as “Princess Culture” (Forman-Brunell & Hains, 2013). This culture operates as a hegemonic force shaping societal narratives about femininity, identity, and consumerism. As a global media conglomerate, Disney creates and distributes highly curated values for children, rooted in the aesthetics of femininity, romantic idealization, and consumerism (Coyne et al., 2016; Shuler, 2015). The constructions driven by this media giant, often packaged as empowerment, are closely tied to neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies, where empowerment is equated with freedom of choice, as long as those choices align with notions of beauty, grace, and emotional strength (Heatwole, 2016; Wellman, 2020).

Disney directly targeted millennial mothers through its *Beauty and the Beast* (2017) campaign, which appeared on the television program *The Bachelor*, targeting an audience of women aged 18–49. It demonstrates a marketing strategy that positions them as key consumers (Koushik & Reed, 2018). Meanwhile, Muir (2023a) reveals that the “princesshood” culture continues to be perpetuated through various channels, including films, merchandise, costumes, apps, and events, ensuring Disney Princess products are widely available at numerous consumer touchpoints. This data confirms that millennial mothers' childhood experiences with Disney Princesses are systematically passed on to their children through consistent access and exposure to products, reinforcing the role of mothers as the primary mediators of Disney Princess cultural hegemony.

Through massive marketing, from films, merchandise, to experiences in theme parks, Disney Princess culture reinforces what Gramsci calls cultural hegemony, in which domination is not through coercion, but through consent (Artz, 2003; Çoban, 2018). Children, especially girls, internalize these messages from an early age. One such message is the engagement with princess media, which has been shown to influence behavior and gender identity formation (Coyne et al., 2021; Muir, 2023b). Although Disney has recently introduced more modern characters, such as Moana and Merida, the commercial packaging often reverts to traditional princess values. This update highlights the tension between narrative progress and capitalist interests (Giannelli, 2020; Heatwole, 2016; Wellman, 2020).

Parental Mediation

Parents play a crucial role in shaping children's media consumption, acting as regulators and interpreters of global cultural content. Several studies emphasize that mothers have a significant influence as primary caregivers in the household (Musick et al., 2016; Nagy et al., 2023). They make decisions about what their children watch, buy, and imitate on a daily basis, particularly regarding gender-based media, such as the Disney Princess franchise (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2016; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024).

This dynamic presents a unique challenge, especially for millennial mothers in Indonesia, given the parenting characteristics of their generation, which places greater emphasis on balancing traditional values with global consumer culture (IDN Research Institute, 2025; Palintan et al., 2024). Furthermore, millennial mothers were Disney's target audience during their childhood. With their exposure to Disney throughout their childhood and into adulthood, Disney indirectly shaped their understanding and values (Koushik & Reed, 2018; Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025; Overend, 2020; Tóth & Lassú, 2023). As cultural gatekeepers (Gaunt & Pinho, 2018), they not only filter global messages but also adapt them to local norms, blending global narratives about princesses with local cultural interests. In this way, they shape how their children engage with and embody the idea of princesses in their daily lives.

In other forms of mediation, such as co-viewing and setting rules as guidelines for consumption, parents also transmit sociocultural values (both intentionally and unintentionally) that reinforce or challenge existing power structures (Coyne et al., 2016; Hubbard, 2017). This underscores the role of parents in confronting information hegemony, not only through content exposure but also through discursive, affective, and daily routines that shape how children understand, accept, or resist dominant global culture.

When examining the Disney ecosystem, alongside their role as gatekeepers, parents are also active economic agents who can reproduce culture. Khanna et al. (2024) reveal how parents' purchasing decisions are significantly shaped by their children's emotional bonds with the characters they consume. However, parents also negotiate these patterns of consumerism through practical considerations such as price and quality. This negotiation takes the form of mediation through discussions about integrated values, highlighting the latent role of parental media literacy in shaping their approach.

Previous studies (Ahn, 2022; Kowalczyk & Royne, 2016) have borrowed these parental mediation strategies (restrictive, active, and co-viewing) in the practice of hegemony through the commercial market. This demonstrates the relevance of parental mediation in the context of media giant hegemony, which extends beyond informational hegemony. Historically, parents have acted as an extension of hegemony, positioning Disney as a "safe" cultural product for children, illustrating how parental authority has long aligned with Disney's marketing strategies (deCordova, 1994). From this, it can be seen that critical media literacy needs to be viewed as a parenting strategy to encourage children and parents to reject passive consumption and deconstruct the company's storytelling codes (Fritz, 2020).

Mothers are often positioned as the primary educators for children due to their role as primary caregivers and socialisation agents, who monitor and interpret all media content consumed by children (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2016; Taj et al., 2021). In the context of Disney Princess exposure, mothers employ restrictive mediation (limiting time and content types), active mediation (discussing narrative meanings), and co-viewing (watching together without directly prohibiting) to guide children in understanding the gender values and self-image portrayed (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2016; Shuler, 2015).

Awareness of accountability, which was shown that 89% of mothers agree that it is necessary to check cartoons before children watch them and 63% of mothers feel responsible for the psychological and linguistic impacts, reinforces the argument that future research should focus on the experiences of millennial mothers in mediating exposure to Disney Princesses (Taj et al., 2021). The above perspective reveals the complex role of parents, especially mothers, in the hegemonic culture of Disney princesses.

Material and Methodology

This study employs a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of millennial mothers in Indonesia as cultural mediators, specifically in their engagement with global children's narratives and their translation into local practices. Phenomenology seeks to uncover the essence of lived experiences by examining what individuals experience and how they experience it, ultimately reducing personal stories into a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Adams & Van Manen, 2017; Arnett, 2017; Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2018; Larsen, 2023; Van Manen, 2017). In this study, the phenomenon in question is the experience of millennial mothers in shaping the global Disney princess narrative for their children. One limitation of this study is that it does not include direct interview with children, and thus focuses solely on the perspective and interpretations of the mothers.

This research uses hermeneutic phenomenology approach where it views life experience as an interpretive process that takes place within the context of an individual's "lifeworld," which is the world of life as experienced by a person. This means that an individual's consciousness is shaped by their historical life experiences, including their personal and cultural history. This approach argues that the observer is an integral part of that world and cannot be completely free from bias. Understanding of phenomena is achieved through a mode of interpretation that involves the influence of personal background, such as individual experiences and culture (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Crowther et al., 2017; Neubauer et al., 2019; Suddick et al., 2020). In hermeneutic phenomenology, analysis is not limited to a set of structured analytical techniques, but involves an interpretive process that involves various interactive analytical activities (Neubauer et al., 2019).

Following the framework suggested by Alsaigh and Coyne (2021), the research process begins with identifying the relevance of research questions to hermeneutic phenomenological methodology. This stage begins by developing the research background above and determining the main question, "How are millennial mothers' experiences in mediating the narrative of Disney princess as the hegemony of the media giant?". From this question, we developed a set of questions as an interview guide, ranging from (but not limited to) the participants' and their kids' profiles and experiences with the Disney Princess narrative, to their kids' experiences with the Disney Princess narrative, and finally, their experiences in mediating those.

On the second step, researchers must be aware of preliminary knowledge prior to data collection (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). This step includes identifying and reflecting on any prejudices or

biases researchers may have regarding the phenomenon being studied. Based on previous literature reviews, we have identified that mothers play a significant role in mediating children's content, that millennials are one of Disney's target audiences, and that prior engagement with Disney princesses can influence how they mediate their children's exposure. These biases are not limiting; instead, they are open to what might be discovered during the data collection process.

These prejudices also act as the basis for sampling. Sampling in phenomenological research focuses more on the depth of experience than the number of participants. Purposive sampling is used to select participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon being studied, thereby producing in-depth and relevant data (Arnett, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Neubauer et al., 2019). We selected participants from our social networks based on the relevance of their experiences and our prejudices, rather than attempting to generalize to a broader population (Adams & Van Manen, 2017; Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021; Errasti-Ibarrondo et al., 2018).

To ensure alignment with the research objectives, participants were selected based on specific criteria. These criteria include: (1) Millennial mothers (born between 1981 and 1996) who are actively involved in mediating their children's exposure (IDN Research Institute, 2025; Kowalczyk & Royne, 2016; Musick et al., 2016; Nagy et al., 2023; Palintan et al., 2024); (2) Have children aged 3–10 years who have been exposed to Disney princess narratives during key stages of child development (Geist, 2022); (3) Have experience introducing or facilitating such narratives, and (4) are willing to participate in in-depth interviews and share relevant documents. The number of participants was limited to four mothers, in line with Creswell and Creswell (2023) recommendations for phenomenological studies. Based on these limitations, the following participants were selected. Note that these names are pseudonyms; furthermore, all forms of identification will be replaced with aliases to protect the participants' and their children's privacy and safety.

Table 1. Research Participants

Name	Age	Occupation	Daughter's Name	Daughter's Age
Sarah	34	Stay-at-home mom	Aurel	4
Linda	30	Business owner	Rania	6
Utari	35	Lecturer	Fayza	5
Wanda	33	Freelancer	Malia	7

Source: Authors, 2025

The third step is gaining understanding through dialogue or interview with participants (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). In this case, understanding develops through conversations that focus on direct interaction between the researcher and participants. The researcher plays an active role in capturing the temporalization of statements in the conversation to co-create the text with the participants. This process is known as horizon merging, where understanding emerges when the researcher's horizon merges with the participant's horizon, and expands understanding by asking questions that raise new horizons. This process is conducted through an online interview via Zoom until the saturation point was reached. All interviews were audio-recorded (with consent).

After gaining an understanding from the participants, the fourth step involves dialogue with text, namely the transcription of interviews and their analysis (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). We read the transcripts in depth and repeatedly to gain a thorough understanding, and examine each section of the text to discover the meaning contained within. Through this process, we conduct abstraction and synthesis, grouping sub-themes into main themes that relate to the overall meaning of the participants experience in mediating Disney Princess hegemony.

After grouping, as recommended by Creswell & Creswell (2023) and Alsaigh and Coyne (2021), we interpret the data. First, we create a narrative flow that guides the presentation of findings, ensuring alignment with the research questions and overall objectives. Second, a structured and chronological analysis is conducted using an analytical framework that integrates relevant theoretical concepts, namely media hegemony, parental mediation, and princess culture. Ultimately, the interpretation weaves together the common threads into a cohesive explanation of how mothers shape, negotiate, and localize global narratives for their children.

On the fifth step, we ensure the reliability of the research by connecting lived experiences, interactions between researchers and participants, and reflexivity (Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021). We employed triangulation and member checking to verify the findings and ensure that the analysis remained grounded in the participants' experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). Throughout the study, continuous editing and deep reflection were conducted, ensuring that the findings accurately represented authentic life experiences (Adams & Van Manen, 2017; Alsaigh & Coyne, 2021).

Result and Discussion

The experiences of millennial mothers in mediating their children's understanding of the hegemony of Disney Princesses are mapped into three themes: the construction of mothers' understanding of princesses, the construction of their children's understanding of princesses, and the experiences of millennial mothers in mediating their children's exposure to Disney Princesses.

The Construction of Millennial Mothers' Understanding of Princesses

Consistent with previous research on nostalgia (Heatwole, 2016; Luisi, 2022; Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025), the construction of the princess image began when these millennial mothers first encountered Disney Princesses. They learned about Disney Princesses through various channels, such as DVD films, TV shows, and magazines. As a media giant, Disney truly dominates various media channels to create its princess universe (Kunze, 2023; Tyner-Mullings, 2023). This media channel is used to reach a diverse audience, although during the millennial generation's childhood, Disney's hegemony was not quite as widespread. Linda felt this imbalance, as she was more exposed to Disney Princesses while living in Japan than in Indonesia.

I attended elementary school in Japan. When I was in Indonesia, I was rarely familiar with Disney characters. While in Japan, Disney was more famous. The first time I saw a princess book was in Japan. In Indonesia, as far as I remember, I've never gotten a princess book (Linda, personal communication, 6 May 2025).

In defining princesses, the four millennial mothers associated the figure of a "princess" with Disney characters such as Cinderella, Belle, Ariel, Rapunzel, and Jasmine. They described princesses in a visually appealing manner, using keywords such as "beautiful", "fair-skinned", and "luxuriously dressed", and associated them with royal settings. Interestingly, Wanda's experience with Disney Princess shows that she does not always associate princesses with luxurious clothing. She recounted:

I prefer Moana ... because she's unpretentious. She changed my mindset from thinking that princesses were what I mentioned about: rich, glamorous, and having everything. When I saw Moana, I thought, 'Oh, it turns out there is a simple princess'. Her clothes aren't impressive, but she's more modest than these princesses (Wanda, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

For some participants, the visual aspect of Disney Princesses was the primary attraction, particularly Sarah and Utari. These visual attractions and associations are closely tied to Indonesia's physical culture. Utari explained that the depiction of Disney Princess hair was appealing because it differed markedly from the hair of Indonesians. Utari explained, "I'm from a rural area, right? So it's like that (princess) has yellow hair, red hair, so it's like I've just witnessed that there are hair colors other than black," (Utari, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

Nevertheless, millennial mothers' construction of princesses does not stop at visuals. Some also associate personality keywords with princesses, such as "kind", "patient", "gentle", and "courageous". Although Sarah is more drawn to Disney Princesses for their visuals, she notes, "There's a moral behind the story, like Cinderella's patience. So, it's not just about her beauty, but also her struggles," (Sarah, personal communication, 6 May 2025).

In line with the personality framework, Linda has a unique way of viewing princesses. She does so from a more personal perspective, where she associates them with people who exhibit certain behaviors, as she explains, "Even around us, ordinary people can be likened to princesses, as in, 'Oh, she's such a princess!' So, like someone who is truly revered, not someone who can get hot like that," (Linda, personal communication, 6 May 2025).

How these millennial mothers define the princess figure aligns with Gissena dan Agusta's (2025) findings about how Disney constructs the concept of princesses through its Disney Princess content, specifically through visuals and personality. The study also noted that the concept of princesses is constructed through narrative. Participants emphasized how the moral messages in each film or story shaped their perceptions of princesses. For Linda, the princess figure she remembers most is Cinderella, due to her message of perseverance and struggle. Meanwhile, Wanda associated the concept of princesses with Mirabel, even though she is not a Disney princess. Wanda underscored:

Mirabel's older sisters have their powers. Well, she's the only one who doesn't have them, right? (The moral is,) How can I have those powers too? Well, that's what the princesses are showing now. Like, each of us has our special qualities (Wanda, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

The definition of "princess" put forward by participants is not neutral; it contains implicit gender norms that dictate what is considered appropriate, desirable, and worthy of emulation, which in turn shape behavioral expectations and gender identity from an early age. This shaping emerged in Wanda's experience, where Disney Princesses shaped her notion of female identity. Wanda compared the narrative approach of the Japanese cartoons she used to watch to the exposure of Disney Princesses, which conveyed a girlish image:

It (Disney Princess) was so dreamy, like living in a palace and wearing all those nice clothes. Moreover, the princess stories were also limited. I mean, back then, we were watching Japanese cartoons, and after finding Disney Princess, it felt different from the other cartoons. Because I was usually exposed to Japanese anime. So, on Sundays, the TV shows were Japanese, silly ones. ... Well, Disney was like, really girly (Wanda, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

Disney is hegemonically positioned in childhood culture visually, through its depiction of personality and fantasy narratives (Gissena & Agusta, 2025). Therefore, the familiarity of the idea of a princess easily becomes common sense that is perpetuated through films, merchandise, and everyday consumer experiences so that mothers' subjective definition is seen as the result of negotiations between personal nostalgia and industry messages (Luisi, 2022; Muir, 2023a; Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025).

Children's Understanding of Princesses

The development of media, which has become a diverse distribution channel for Disney Princess products, has made exposure to princesses accessible through various channels. According to millennial mothers, children aged 4 to 7 form ideas about princesses from books, music, and streaming media, such as YouTube and Disney+. Furthermore, Disney products such as merchandise, clothing, and stickers also introduce them to the concept of princesses.

For children, exposure to Disney can come from both outside and within the family. For example, Aurel (Sarah's daughter) first learned about princesses from her cousin. Meanwhile, Rania (Linda's daughter) learned about them from her school friends. Parental decision to facilitate access to Disney Princess products is partly due to the prior knowledge children gain outside of parental input.

Since we did not interview the participants' children directly due to parental consent, we asked them to describe how they thought their kids would interpret the princess figure based on their own experiences. The idea of a princess for children is strongly associated with Disney depictions. According to Sarah and Linda, their daughters associate the idea of a princess with Disney characters like Elsa and Snow White. According to Sarah, Aurel can visually describe a princess, associating it with certain hairstyles and accessories:

"She knows that princesses wear long skirts, and their hair is also long ... And she is aware that a princess wears a crown," (Sarah, personal communication, 6 May 2025).

The robust construction of princesses, built on their appearance, is deeply ingrained in children, extending to internalization in behavior and consumption. Children are adept imitators, so at some point they imitate the princess figures they see (Coyne et al., 2016; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024;

Shawcroft, Gale, et al., 2024; Valade, 2024). As experienced by Fayza (Utari's daughter) and Malia (Wanda's daughter), both imitated the idea of princesses they saw. Utari explained her daughter's experience of asking to wear princess clothes. "*It was her friend's birthday, (Fayza says), 'I want to wear a pink princess dress..., the one with the long tail!'*" (Utari, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

These findings align with previous studies that explain how the remediatization process makes princess figures present in various everyday objects and practices, so that princess signs are continuously replicated in children's play spaces; this availability increases the opportunity for imitation and habituation. Here, there is an imitation mechanism that transforms observations into behavior and identity, so that observations of princess visual attributes (e.g., "beautiful, wears a dress, lives in a castle") that are then manifested in children's play are consistent with this model (Coyne et al., 2016; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024; Shawcroft, Gale, et al., 2024; Valade, 2024). Furthermore, Disney is positioned as a hegemonic phenomenon that makes princess representations easily become common sense in children's culture (Adriany, 2019; Osuna-Acedo et al., 2018; Uppal, 2019).

Disney, through its commodification strategy, permeates children's social spaces not only as a storyteller but also as a shaper of norms and consumption markets, making princess images easily become everyday references for families (Çoban, 2018; Hine, Ivanovic, et al., 2018; Kérchy, 2018; Koushik & Reed, 2018; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024; Tóth & Lassú, 2023). This exposure occurs both vertically and horizontally: parents transmit values from their childhood experiences to children, while peer groups and the marketplace reinforce these values through merchandise and digital platforms.

Although several studies report that high engagement with princess culture in preschool can correlate with more progressive attitudes toward gender in early adolescence, these findings do not automatically negate the risk of stereotypical reproduction in the early stages of children's identity formation; the results depend on the context of parental mediation and family consumption practices (Adriany, 2019; Coyne et al., 2016, 2021; Luisi, 2022; Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025; Overend, 2020; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024; Tóth & Lassú, 2023).

Furthermore, Disney's practice of cultural repackaging, reselling traditional stories within a Western fantasy framework, complicates local reception by producing foreign meanings that must be negotiated at the household level (Gissena & Agusta, 2025; Heatwole, 2016; Luisi, 2022; Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024; Tóth & Lassú, 2023; Uppal, 2019). The implications are two-way: Disney products provide readily accessible identity materials, but their meaning and impact are primarily determined by how mothers and family networks interpret, facilitate, or limit access to them within the context of local values and the global marketplace.

However, some informants also expressed concerns about the negative internalization of beauty norms or an emphasis on appearance. For example, Utari explained that her daughter internalized the general concept of beauty as that portrayed by Disney Princesses. She elaborates:

At that time, she (Fayza) probably felt, 'Why are my other friends fair-skinned, but why am I darker?' So she felt ugly, she lacked self-confidence. ... Maybe it's like when I was little, the view of beauty was white (fair-skinned). The princess (who) she probably saw was Snow White, whose skin was white (Utari, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

This experience illustrates how Disney cultivates certain expectations and fantasies, and how its popular media continually reinforces hegemonic power through its content (Artz, 2003). Children, as audiences, process these narratives, but their understanding is also shaped by family communication (Alehpour & Abdollahyan, 2022; Çoban, 2018; Lemish, 2019). Children often lack their critical thinking frameworks, instead simply translating Disney stories into a world of imagination.

From this, it can be inferred that Disney has succeeded in creating a princess hegemony through visual domination and the distribution of derivative products, so that the meaning is internalized in children's understanding concretely from what they can most easily observe, i.e., white skin, long hair, beautiful clothes, and beautiful accessories. This representation is so strong that when children identify princess, they tend to describe the physical and visual image of Disney Princess characters, not the moral qualities or political and historical contexts that are usually attached to royalty (Gissena

& Agusta, 2025; Kawai, 2021; Lal, 2024; Nash, 2015; Pike, 2015; Safitri, 2019; Uppal, 2019; Zrzavy & Zrzavy, 2015)

On the other hand, this meaning does not stand alone, but rather is the result of a relational process between mother and child, which also indicates the vertical reproduction of values within the family. Although the child's initial exposure to content can come from the social environment, the mother plays a central role as the mediator who filters, reconstructs, and renegotiates the meaning under local values and norms. This demonstrates the tension between Disney's dominant global narrative and local efforts to contextualize its meaning, where Western cultural values are internalized not passively, but through subjective experience, active mediation, and reflective interpretation in everyday family practices.

The Parental Mediation Experience Associated with Disney Princess Exposure

Interviews revealed that these millennial mothers employed mediation strategies that ranged from restrictive to active, including co-viewing or co-use. First, they engaged in selection and access control. This restrictive mediation strategy focuses on limiting or controlling the media access of children. Mothers limited the duration and type of viewing and chose "family-friendly" versions (Chen et al., 2023; Helsper et al., 2024; Iqbal et al., 2021).

Wanda is one participant who applies this restrictive strategy. Although she feels Disney Princess is a child-friendly narrative, she still chooses not to introduce classic Disney princesses due to the perceived value differences. Wanda explained:

I don't favor too many romance genres. The old Disney Princesses were very focused on everything with the prince. Nowadays, there are rarely any princes. So, in terms of family values, it seems suitable because there isn't much romance. I prefer to introduce relatable stories, meaning that the conflict is more social, not just about her and the princes (Wanda, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

Wanda's explanation demonstrates that the alignment of exposure values and family values is a key driver in the decision to mediate Disney princess content. Furthermore, Wanda also suggests that age is also a key factor in line with what Sarah explained:

I don't think Aurel's age is appropriate (for watching Disney Princess). So I didn't give it to her. ... So maybe she only knows about things like Cinderella and all that from books. ... Aurel can't digest those shows yet (Sarah, personal communication, 6 May 2025).

In line with previous studies, restrictive mediation strategies are closely related to children's age and parents' negative perceptions of media or media content (Wang et al., 2023). The study found that paying attention to a child's age and being skeptical about media and content led to parents being more protective, resulting in more restrictive mediation. This suggests a child's understanding of a princess is determined by the appropriateness of family values and the child's age.

Although Sarah tends to limit screen time, she, like Linda and Wanda, also employs a co-viewing or co-use strategy, where she accompanies her child in reading princess books. Sarah, Linda, and Wanda employ a co-viewing strategy where they consume media alongside their children (Chen et al., 2023; Connell et al., 2015; Iqbal et al., 2021; Jiow et al., 2017; Nagy et al., 2023). Through this strategy, they not only consume media together but also facilitate discussions about what they watch. These discussions are conducted through recontextualization, where participants, like Linda and Wanda, recount Disney Princess stories in their own words, highlight role models, and incorporate moral values.

For instance, Wanda, who frequently spends movie time with her family, mentioned watching Disney Princess movies together with Malia, followed by a discussion about what they had seen. Their discussions were driven by how Wanda recontextualized the content's narrative to fit her family's circumstances. Wanda told:

We often talk like that, too. For instance, Moana doesn't obey her father in that manner; she can't play in the waves like that. ... I told this by using words that Malia would understand: if she didn't obey her father, there would be a consequence (Wanda, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

The co-viewing strategy employed by millennial mothers also plays a role in constructing their children's princess idea. Practically, co-viewing facilitates a shift in children's focus from superficial imitation (such as costume selection) to understanding the characters' roles, motivations, and the consequences of their actions. This approach also has the potential to reduce negative impacts on body image and social comparison, as the emphasis shifts to the quality of the characters' actions and relationships, rather than solely their appearance. This negative impact arose from Fayza's experience comparing her skin color to that of her friends (Utari, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

However, through co-viewing strategies accompanied by discussion, princess latent constructions, such as personality and narrative, can be grounded in children as a series of meanings that can be explained, questioned, and tested in everyday contexts. With co-viewing and discussion, parents are not merely passive witnesses to their children's visual imitations. Mothers actively label the characters, highlight the consequences of the characters' actions, and provide alternative interpretations, for example, emphasizing that courage or effort are more valuable than mere appearance. This process reinforces that co-viewing strategies provide an opportunity to articulate meaning and consciously instill values (Connell et al., 2015; Jiow et al., 2017; Luisi, 2022; Nagy et al., 2023; Shuler, 2015; Taj et al., 2021; Tóth & Lassú, 2023).

The co-use mediation strategy manifests itself not only in the consumption of Disney princess products in the form of media content but also in the consumption of other products. Like Fayza, Malia also has a desire to purchase princess-themed knick-knacks and clothing. In fact, Malia once had an Elsa-themed birthday for her third birthday and a Moana-themed birthday for her fourth. Wanda recounted, "*She made her request to dress up as if she wanted an Elsa theme,*" (Wanda, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

To facilitate this desire, Wanda mediated through co-use, where she was also involved in how Malia selected, purchased, and consumed the princess products. Wanda also shared how she facilitated Malia's interest in Disney Princesses. Malia does enjoy wearing dresses and desires to dress like Moana. However, Wanda negotiated values here, where she still bought Moana-style clothes but chose more modest ones to suit local norms.

(Malia) wanted a dress that was similar to Moana's. There was one, but it was a two-piece dress... you could see her belly button. Then I said, 'Where are you going to wear that? If it's like that, it can't be worn (to go outside), and it can only be worn at home. We have to find something that can be worn everywhere'. Finally, I looked for references. There was a shop on Shopee that sold all princess clothes, but I thought it was more wearable (Wanda, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

Utari experienced a similar situation, where Fayza wanted to wear a princess dress for her modeling activities. To that end, Utari facilitated her daughter's interest by offering two easily found outfits: the Jasmine dress and the Moana dress. However, again, because the princess dress designs were considered quite revealing, Utari negotiated the value by modifying her outfit to make it more covered by adding a cuff (Utari, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

This negotiation of values was also facilitated by Fayza's grandmother, who sewed her more modest and covered princess clothes. Wanda recounted:

"When she was around 3 years old, every day she wanted to wear a princess dress... because her grandmother was good at sewing, so her grandmother sewed her a modest princess dress," (Wanda, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

From this, millennial mothers' co-use mediation goes beyond simply accompanying and discussing; it involves active and situational negotiation of practical values, where parents mediate their children's desires while simultaneously upholding family norms. Wanda and Utari's actions in choosing more covered versions of princess dresses or modifying them demonstrate mediation as an interpretive and adaptive practice: mothers facilitate consumption but alter its form to suit the family's

social appropriateness and pedagogical goals (Koushik & Reed, 2018; Kowalczyk & Royne, 2016; Luisi, 2022; Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025; Shuler, 2015; Taj et al., 2021).

Here, we can see a negotiation between global and local messages. Participants accepted some Disney values (e.g., family, kindness, and independence) as being consistent with Eastern values. However, they also recognized incompatibilities in certain elements. For example, themes of fantasy, romance, or behavior princess, which are considered inconsistent with local norms. In response, the mothers applied local interpretations.

For instance, when Utari and Wanda emphasize modesty in clothing when discussing Disney characters. They add religious/cultural values from the archipelago to ensure the story aligns with family customs. In this way, they glocalize the narrative (Gutierrez, 2017; Musa, 2022; Zahrad & Ridwan, 2024) by maintaining elements of the global narrative (about who Moana and Jasmine are) while still inserting local context in the form of norms of modesty in clothing. This aligns with Mouzakis's (2019) findings, which highlight how non-Western children internalize Disney stories in distinct ways. The children do not passively absorb them; instead, they construct their meaning within their cultural context.

The practice of co-viewing or co-use, which extends to product selection and purchase, demonstrates the close relationship between the interpretation of meaning and consumption decisions. Co-use allows parents to evaluate the function of clothing or character traits, then make corrective or compromising consumer decisions, such as choosing a "wearable" model over a more explicit version. This phenomenon positions mothers as key actors in the commodification chain: they are both nostalgia-influenced consumers and value gatekeepers who negotiate the final form of goods entering their children's worlds (Ahn, 2022; Koushik & Reed, 2018; Kowalczyk & Royne, 2016; Muir, 2023a; Shuler, 2015).

Meanwhile, Utari and Linda also employ the active mediation strategy, which enables parents to engage in discussions about media content with their children, thereby encouraging critical thinking and reflective discussion (Chen et al., 2023; Iqbal et al., 2021; Jiow et al., 2017; Nagy et al., 2023). Active mediation is an enabling strategy. In this regard, Utari had a unique experience in which her child was exposed to content in the school environment. Fayza's school provided facilities for watching films, one of which was a Disney Princess film. Since the screening took place on school grounds, Utari naturally had no authority to intervene. Therefore, she applied active mediation by inviting Fayza to discuss everything she watched at school every night. Utari explained that their discussion habits had developed since Fayza was a baby.

I make sure there is a bedtime ritual every night. I ask Fayza, 'What were you doing at school? What did you watch before you shower?'. Usually, she watches it right before she takes a shower. Then she tells me (what she watched). If I don't know what the film is like, I look for references first. The next day, I discuss it again, 'Oh, this character is like this,' (Utari, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

The findings regarding this active mediation strategy align with previous research on its predictors. Utari's entrustment of schools to select viewing material, fostering discussion habits in children from infancy, and then simply facilitating children's questions demonstrates a pattern of active mediation predicted by several key factors. Trust in teachers and school institutions, along with the presence of a social support network (friends, teachers, and family), increases the likelihood of parents adopting an active approach, namely receiving exposure from the school and then complementing it with dialogue at home. This social support builds resilience and a sense of security, allowing children to confront the material while receiving explanations (Iqbal et al., 2021).

The habit of open communication from an early age is a crucial foundation: regular dialogue between parents and children facilitates participatory learning, so that when children often tell stories about what they watch, parents are more likely to respond with explanations and clarifications rather than strict prohibitions (Iqbal et al., 2021). As Utari recounts:

Fayza loves to tell stories, "Mom, Mom, look at this. It's like this, like this, like this," ... She says what she feels. But if she sees something she doesn't know yet. She asks, "Mom, what does this mean?" (Utari, personal communication, 7 May 2025).

Furthermore, parents' motivations, which are oriented toward understanding and developing their children's critical capacities, encourage them to use discursive mediation, namely responding, interpreting, and affirming meaning, as a primary strategy (Jiow et al., 2017; Nagy et al., 2023). Situational contexts, including the nature of the material screened at school and the child's ability to grasp it, also shape responses; media perceived as complex or potentially question-provoking typically trigger more active parental involvement (Jiow et al., 2017; Nagy et al., 2023). Ultimately, this pattern reflects parental responsiveness: responsive parents utilize their children's storytelling moments as pedagogical opportunities, so that mediation takes a facilitative and supportive form, reinforcing that post-viewing discussions at home are rooted in a combination of social resources, intensive communication, parental educational goals, and the media context itself (Iqbal et al., 2021; Jiow et al., 2017).

Disney media, particularly the Disney Princess line, has long been a dominant cultural influence that has significantly shaped the construction of princesses for the millennial generation (Heatwole, 2016; Luisi, 2022; Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025). Classic Disney Princesses (e.g., Snow White, Cinderella) are often depicted as passive and dependent on men, while more recent productions (e.g., *Moana*, *Frozen*) depict princesses with greater agency and independence. The impact of these narratives is felt from the very childhood of millennial mothers, so that from a young age, they internalize the princess image through visuals, personalities, and storylines. Previous studies even show that children's engagement with Disney Princesses is associated with more gender-socialized behavior (Coyne et al., 2016, 2021; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024; Shawcroft, Gale, et al., 2024) and that parental mediation can strengthen this correlation (Luisi, 2022; Overend, 2020; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024; Shuler, 2015; Tóth & Lassú, 2023). In other words, Disney serves as a dominant cultural narrative that is passed down through mothers to their children.

On the other hand, millennial mothers' nostalgic childhood experiences encourage them to view Disney content as a tradition that needs to be passed on to their children. Research suggests that nostalgia can strengthen parent-child bonds and motivate parents to transfer their values and traditions to the next generation (Yin et al., 2025). However, because Disney is a global cultural product, mothers also face tensions between Disney's universal values and local cultural values. As Pham (2024), found, many parents recognize that YouTube and other global media can threaten local traditional values, so they must balance "global benefits" with local values. In other words, millennial mothers are not simply passing on stories; they also negotiate Disney's message with the local norms they adhere to.

Therefore, the process of constructing meaning through media exposure in children occurs through active parental mediation, not a linear process from media directly to children. Prior researches indicate that parents employ a range of mediation strategies to manage or explain their children's media exposure. The literature mentions three main strategies: co-viewing or co-use (consuming with children), active (discussing or explaining the content), and restrictive (limiting time or type of content) (Chen et al., 2023; Helsper et al., 2024; Iqbal et al., 2021; Jiow et al., 2017; Nagy et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2023). Our field findings are consistent with this: mothers do not rely on a single strategy, but instead choose a combination of strategies according to context. As noted in a study of Nigerian parents (Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025) young parents shift from restrictive, active, and co-viewing strategies. For example, they select which Disney films to watch, discuss the film's message with their child, or watch together while providing explanations. Thus, maternal mediation becomes a central and dynamic variable in shaping children's understanding of characters, such as the princess.

In more detail, restrictive strategies are typically applied when Disney content contains values that conflict with family values or local norms, or is deemed age-inappropriate for children. Mothers then limit access or censor certain parts of the story, as supported by the following research findings: "... the pre-screening process reflects restrictive mediation by filtering out content they consider misaligned with cultural or moral values" (Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025, p. 69). On the other hand, co-viewing and active mediation strategies are employed to convey messages that are too subtle or complex for children to understand. When watching together, parents can negotiate and translate the global message of Disney into the context of family values (Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025; Overend, 2020; Shawcroft, Coyne, et al., 2024; Tóth & Lassú, 2023).

These mediation strategies play a crucial role in how children construct what is considered a princess. Millennial mothers, through their chosen mediations, which select and re-clarify Disney exposure based on their cultural heritage, values, and nostalgia. With this selective attitude, mothers simultaneously discipline Disney hegemony (e.g., rejecting passive messages of femininity when inappropriate) while simultaneously extending that hegemony into the domestic sphere. For example, some mothers choose to highlight Disney films with strong, independent female characters, actively selecting alternative, aspirational narratives for their children (Ononiwu & Uzuegbunam, 2025). In this way, they not only limit inconsistent old narratives but also introduce more curated and tailored Disney narratives. A key implication is that the reproduction or transformation of gender representations in children is primarily determined by mothers' contextual mediation practices, not simply by media exposure alone.

Conclusion

Our findings confirm that millennial mothers can combine restrictive, active, and co-viewing mediations, indicating that parental mediation is a holistic approach that is dependent on the cultural context of family values. Therefore, understanding the construction of princesses in children requires recognizing the mother's mediation as a dynamic variable that actively filters and shapes media messages, rather than merely serving as a static control variable.

The results of this study on the experiences of millennial mothers highlight the subjective meanings, which include a mix of enjoyment and anxiety. They are delighted that their children are inspired by the curiosity and creativity sparked by Disney princesses, but worry that gender stereotypes, materialist ideals, and Western norms are internalized. This process demonstrates the local rearticulation of Disney culture, understood as a negotiation of hegemony. Gramsci's model (Artz, 2003; Çoban, 2018) acknowledges the space of "contestation" in the acceptance of dominant culture. Disney offers a dominant narrative, but millennial mothers (and their children) have the agency to reinterpret it. For example, mothers may highlight the independence of Disney characters (Mulan, Merida, and Moana) while questioning their propriety. The specter of hegemony is not absolute, as family interactions are where global media is viewed according to domestic values. Similarly, global cultural coverage can be embedded in the local landscapes where people experience everyday life (Griffith & Marion, 2020). This study contributes theoretically by conceptualizing parental mediation as a dynamic and culturally embedded process, and practically by highlighting mothers' roles as active cultural mediators. However, the study is limited by its small qualitative sample and focus on mothers' perspectives, suggesting that future research should include children's perspectives and adopt comparative approaches.

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