



## Comparison of Beauty Standards and Body Images on Disney Princesses and Female Villains

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### Abstract

*As the role of mass media has increased, people have become more obsessed with the ideal portrayal of “ideal beauty and body”. With Disney Princess, the media’s perception of “ideal beauty and body” even spread to younger audiences. This study aims to analyze the comparison of beauty standards and body image between Disney Princesses and Female Villains. A quantitative content analysis method consists of two categories; videlicet Beauty Standards and Body Image are used to analyze the visualization of the characters. Six indicators for Beauty Standards and three for the Body Images category. This research found no differences in Beauty Standards and Body Images between Disney Princesses and Female Villains. Still, two indicators in Beauty Standards are declared significant, namely Hair Color and Physical Appearance. Eventually, this study declared no significant indicators difference between subjects; still, there are two indicators declared significant, which can lead to audiences’ misperception.*

**Keywords:** *beauty standards, body images, female villains, Disney princess, mass media*

**Paper type:** *Research paper*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Media has major power to shape or guide people's beliefs and perspectives everywhere, especially in America. Since years ago, the media has always presented a powerful ideal of what is considered attractive or good-looking for a woman. The ideal visualization includes a small frame, small waist, big bust, a curvature shape, and looking youthful (Dohnt & Tiggemann, 2006) like the iconic Marilyn Monroe. Not just skin tone is also a significant factor in how attractive an individual is perceived (Frisby, 2006). Western societal beauty standards were often based on white skin, the European ideal of attractiveness (Bryant, n.d.). This societal beauty standard is often perpetuated by T.V. shows, fashion trends by media, commercial influences, and other forms of mass media (Sekayi, 2003). Returning to 1937, we can find Disney's beauty standards and body image constructed with Snow White's Character. Not only that, but Disney also keeps constructing beauty standards and body image through other princess characters in the next films.

Disney is one of the leading media industries worldwide. Although Disney's series and film are produced in the United States, it affects strongly around the world (England et al., 2011). With this powerful effect, it will be easy for Disney to construct and shape the audience's beliefs. One of its biggest products of Disney is the Disney Princesses. The Disney Princesses' influence was getting enormous because of the powerful marketing franchise supporting them. Over 26.000 products rose from 300 million in annual sales in 2001 to 4 billion in 2008 (England et al., 2011).

There are many types of research based on Disney Princesses. Still, there aren't plenty of them that analyze the content details of beauty standards and body image visualization on the Disney Princess Characters and the Female Villain Characters. Therefore, this study aims to analyze and compare the beauty standards and body image of Disney Princess Characters and Female Villain Characters.

This research used the content analysis method and focused on how Disney Princesses and the Female Villain Characters represent beauty standards and body image. Since Disney Princess Movies are created in America and are

targeted at young girls, this research focuses on how Disney Princesses and their Female Villains present American female “beauty standards” and “body image”.

RQ1: How do Disney Princesses and Female Villains visualize female “beauty standards”?

RQ2: How do Disney Princesses and Female Villains visualize female “body image”?

RQ3: Are there differences in beauty standards indicators between Disney Princesses and Female Villains?

RQ4: Are there differences in body image between Disney Princesses and Female Villains?

H1: There are differences in beauty standards indicators between Disney Princesses and Female Villains.

H2: There is a difference in body image between Disney Princesses and Female Villains.

### **Beauty Standard and Media History in America**

American society has always valued the concept of beauty, especially for women (Zhu, n.d.). When the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment was released in America, women gained legal equality. However, it didn’t do much change for women. Instead, the media interfered with the progress by giving Americans skewed visualization of women’s “beauty standards” (Zhu, n.d.) . This proves that the media has been shaping society for years. As the role of mass media has increased, Americans have become more obsessed with the ideal portrayal of “beauty standards”.

With Disney Princess Characters and Barbie Dolls, the media’s perception of “beauty” even spread to younger audiences. The first model of Barbie created society’s “perfect” woman: white skin, shiny blonde hair, long thin legs, a narrow waist, full heart-shaped lips, large breasts, and blue eyes. These portrayals became American beauty standards for women in a blink of an eye.

### **Body Image and Media History in America**

Between 1890 and 1910, middle-class America started against body fat, and even some societies pointed out direct hate to obese people(Stearns, 2002). In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, women’s “ideal” bodies were tiny waists and large bustles. Many women were willing to use an extremely tight corset to achieve the “ideal” look. This “body image” keep being constructed, especially when media becomes a thing. Many researchers claim that media affects young women’s body image

(Holmstrom, 2004). The writer thinks that the media's messages did not just affect the young woman but also anyone from any background of race, age, etc.

According to *History of Body Image in America: How The 'Ideal' Female And Male Body Has Changed Over Time* (2015), the "ideal" body constructed by media is changing over time from the curvy body (the 1890s) to Thinspiration vs. Plus size models (2010s-now). According to *Beauty Standards Over Time for Women - Deep Science* (2022), plus-size women these days have been featured on magazine covers and fashion campaigns. Also, the Kardashians' and Rihanna's bodies with large busts and bum became a heavy trend. Regardless of these fortunate movements, Disney could not care less and still invented unrealistic body sizes through its Disney Princesses' movies.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Cultivation theory by Gerbner states that television significantly contributes to building viewers' conceptions of social reality (Emilio Hernandez & Hughes Peggy Gordon Miller, 2012). Turner & Richard (2007) said that the amount of viewing time viewers spend on television has a linear impact on the amount of exposure viewers get. Most time, television is likely to send and cultivate inaccurate depictions of reality to the viewers.

This theory can also be applied to other platforms or message mediums like movies. In this case, all Disney Princesses movies and characters have shared the same messages regarding beauty standards and body image for decades. The same shared meanings are planted in the audiences' thoughts, especially children, which causes some negative effects, such as a lack of confidence, bullying, and even suicide.

### **Conceptual and Operational Definition**

Based on the Oxford Dictionary, body image is an individual's mental picture of how good or bad their physical appearance looks, especially when compared with how they think they should look. Meanwhile, beauty standards are the illusion of standards constructed to determine whether an individual looks attractive, including themselves.

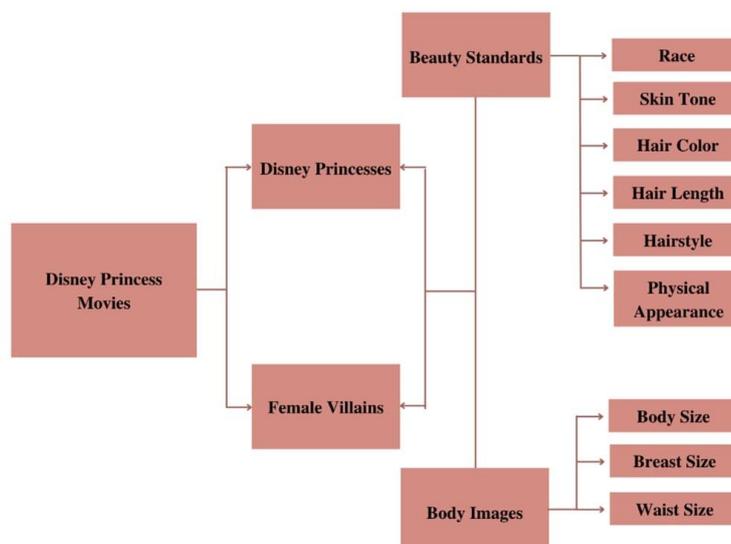
Operational Definition that applied to this study:

1. Beauty Standards

- a. Race
  - b. Skin Tone
  - c. Hair Color
  - d. Hair Length
  - e. Hairstyle
  - f. Physical Appearance
2. Body Image
    - a. Body Size
    - b. Breast Size
    - c. Waist Size

**Picture 1.**  
**Category and Indicators Framework**

## METHODS



To analyze the visualization of beauty standards and body images of Disney Princesses and the villain characters, this research was analyzed using quantitative content and descriptive research. “The purpose of descriptive research is to describe events, individuals, or conditions by studying them as they are in nature” (Siedlecki, 2020).

Due to differences in the level of measurement on several indicators and small samples, several indicators need to be analyzed with different tests. Nominal data were tested using Fischer’s Exact Test, and ordinal data used Mann

Whitney. For the body size category, the data from each indicator was summed and tested using the T-test.

This research analyzes the characters' visuals and investigates their physical features. The visual analysis offers space to analyze meanings the author needs to be coded in images (Van Leeuwen, 2001). Therefore, this research needs human coding to identify each sample's visuals.

This study used Census Sampling, which means every unit in a population is included in the content analysis (Riffe et al., 2019). Therefore, all 14 Disney Princesses and 10 Female Villains were analyzed in this study. According to Shodiq et al. (2018), Roscoe recommends that a suitable sample estimate for the examination be 30 and 500. Hence, the author includes Ariel's daughter, Melodi, that appeared in *Little Mermaid II: Return to the Sea* (2000), and Ariel's sisters, Attina, Alana, Adella, Aquata, Arista, and Andrina, that appeared in *Little Mermaid III: Ariel's Beginning* (2008). Ariel's daughter and sisters are not considered Official Disney Princesses by Disney, but they are princesses based on the story. In total, there are 31 samples and populations to analyze.

### **Unit of Data Collection**

Visual or image of Snow White, Cinderella, Aurora, Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, Pocahontas, Mulan, Tiana, Rapunzel, Merida, Elsa, Anna, Moana, Evil Queen, Cinderella's Stepmother (Lady Tremaine) and Stepsisters (Anastasia and Drizella), Maleficent, Ursula, Morgana, Marina del Ray, Mother Gothel, Nasira, Melodi, Attina, Alana, Adella, Aquata, Arista, and Adrina.

### **Unit of Analysis and Coding**

This study has two units of analysis: (1) beauty standards and (2) body images. Each sample was coded based on several indicators of beauty standards and body images based on (Beasley & Collins Standley, 2002; Conrad et al., 2009; Downs & Smith, 2010; Neuendorf & Janstova Sharon Snyder-Suhy Vito Flitt, 2006; Thompson, 1995). Coders were asked to code based only on the visual or image of each sample.

To analyze the beauty standards unit, each sample was coded for (a) race (Caucasian, African American/African, Asian, Native American, Arab-Middle Eastern); (b) Skin Tone (Conrad et al., 2009) (Light, Medium, Dark); (c) Hair

Color (Blonde, Red, Brown, Black, Gray/White); (d) Hair Length (Short, Medium, Long, Very Long); (e) Hair Style (Straight, Wavy/Curly, Afro); (e) Physical Appearance (Extremely Attractive, Attractive, Average, Below Average, Extremely Unattractive).

For the body images unit, each sample was coded for (a) body size (nine-point body size from Thompson (1995) ); (b) breast size (Beasley & Collins Standley, 2002) (Flat, Average, Voluptuous); (c) Waist Size (Downs & Smith, 2010) (Disproportionately Small, Average, Disproportionately Large).

### *Validity*

The coders' team consists of three communication science undergraduate students. The coders were seriously trained for the codebook. Every variable was discussed and accepted by the coders. Although, there are some adjustments were added to the final coding book.

### *Reliability*

A total of 35 reliability samples were coded. Using the Riffe et al. (2019) recommendation, use ReCal (<http://dfreelon.org/utis/recalfront/recal-oir/>) to calculate the codebook reliability. ReCal is a web-based software that can calculate four reliability coefficients. The author found some variables did not achieve the minimum acceptable level of Krippendorff's Alpha and the Percent Agreement on the first reliability test. According to Hayes & Krippendorff (2007), the minimum acceptable level of Krippendorff's Alpha is 0.7. The minimum acceptable level of percent agreement is 0.8 (Feng, 2014). Therefore, additional coder training was needed and conducted. The hair color and hairstyle variables were recoded into a smaller coding number. After the second reliability test, nine variables were finally found reliable.

**Table 1.**

#### **Intercoder Reliabilities**

<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Levels of Measurement</b>	<b>Holsti (Percent Agreement)</b>	<b>Krippendorff's Alpha</b>
<b>Race</b>	6	Nominal	96.19%	0.948
<b>Skin Tone</b>	3	Ordinal	-	0.89
<b>Hair Color</b>	6	Nominal	94.286%	0.916
<b>Hair Length</b>	5	Ordinal	-	0.989
<b>Hair Style</b>	4	Nominal	-	0.939

<b>Physical Appearance</b>	5	Ordinal	-	0.897
<b>Body Size</b>	9	Ordinal	-	0.867
<b>Breast Size</b>	4	Ordinal	-	0.964
<b>Waist Size</b>	4	Ordinal	-	0.811

As shown in Table 1, all nine indicators exceed the minimum value of acceptance and are considered reliable.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Beauty (Sarwer, 2003) and body goals are abstract constructs. Everyone has their visualization of beauty and body goals. But undeniably, mass media has, over time, constructed several visualizations to achieve the idea of ideal beauty and body. In turn, it affects the public’s behavior and perspective regarding beauty standards and body images. Somehow, beauty is constantly associated with women (Boggs, 2011) . The media see many aspects of appearance as beauty ideals, such as hair, skin, and facial features (Levine, 2017). Other than that, body weight, body shape, and race is also part of the ideals of beauty constructed by media. We could rarely find African Americans and Asians in Hollywood Industry back then. From here, we can see that race also plays an important role in the media’s beauty standards. Beauty standards created by mass media mean several benchmarks constructed or visualized by media to describe an attractive individual.

Meanwhile, “body image is a multidimensional construct that refers to one’s perception of and attitudes about the size and shape of one’s body” (Levine, 2017) that is considered ideal or not. Over the years, women have been told they are not beautiful enough and forced, directly and indirectly. Throughout history, the female “perfect body” standard has been unrealistic. Just like constructing beauty standards, body image is built through advertisements, films, magazines, and any other media.

Thus, this research aims to enlighten the audiences, especially parents with kids, by finding the beauty standards and ideal body image captured by Disney Princesses’ movies. On top of that, this research is also trying to discover the

different portrayals between Disney Princesses and Female Villains that would probably have been creating some misconceptions.

### Research Question

**Table 2.**  
**The Distribution of the Existing Indicators**

Category	Indicator	Category	Disney Princesses (N=21)	Female Villains (N=9)
<b>Beauty Standards</b>	<b>Race</b>	Caucasian	66.7%	44.4%
		African American/African	9.5%	-
		Asian	9.5%	-
		Native American	4.8%	-
		Arab-Middle Eastern	9.5%	11.1%
		Other	-	44.4%
	<b>Skin Tone</b>	Light	81%	100%
		Medium	9.5%	-
		Dark	9.5%	-
	<b>Hair Color</b>	Blonde	23.8%	-
		Red	14.3%	11.1%
		Brown	14.3%	11.1%
		Black	42.9%	11.1%
		Gray/White	4.8%	33.3%
		Other	-	11.1%
		Unable to Determine	-	22.2%
		<b>Hair Length</b>	Short	4.8%
	Medium		23.8%	11.1%
	Long		28.6%	11.1%
	Very Long		23.8%	-
	Unable to Determine		19%	33.3%
	<b>Hair Style</b>	Straight	19%	22.2%
		Wavy	76.2%	33.3%
		Afro	4.8%	11.1%
		Unable to Determine	-	33.3%
	<b>Physical Appearance</b>	Extremely Attractive	28.6%	-
		Attractive	61.9%	-
Average		9.5%	33.3%	
Below Average		-	33.3%	
Extremely Unattractive		-	33.3%	
<b>Body Images</b>	<b>Body Size</b>	Number 1	33.3%	33.3%
		Number 2	52.4%	22.2%
		Number 3	9.5%	11.1%
		Number 4	4.8%	22.2%
		Number 5	-	-
		Number 6	-	-
		Number 7	-	-

	Number 8	-	-
	Number 9	-	11.1%
<b>Breast Size</b>	Flat	38.1%	33.3%
	Average	61.9%	55.6%
	Voluptuous	-	11.1%
	Cannot Tell	-	-
<b>Waist Size</b>	Disproportionately Small	85.7%	55.6%
	Average	14.3%	22.2%
	Disproportionately Large	-	11.1%
	Cannot Tell	-	11.1%

From Table 2, there are some gaps in the distribution of the existing indicators. For instance, neither Disney Princesses nor Female Villains represent racial diversity. Most of it is Caucasian; even the Female Villains only represent Caucasian and Arab-Middle Eastern races. Most Disney Princesses are Caucasian, and only one is presented as African American, Princess Tiana. For the skin tone indicator, most of the Disney Princesses have light skin, and no female villains have medium and dark skin tones. Only 4 out of 14 Disney Princesses don't have pale skin. These Western beauty standards also lead to race and skin tone racism in Disney Princesses.

Disney does not depict women and girls' inclusive beauty. Many black girls do not feel beautiful and represented by American mass media content, especially Disney. Even though Americans love to have tanned skin, they do not appreciate black skin similarly. According to Mcilhargey (2021) on Popsugar.Beauty Coco Chanel, in 1923, went on a cruise in Cannes with the Duke of Westminster and returned with sunburn. Since then, tan skin has been in, and people see sun-kissed skin as a woman of leisure, young, and fun. By tan skin, beauty standards mean enough brown, not too pale, and not too black. This was proven by many advertisers who have been in a dilemma in using African American model since 1960 (Frisby, 2006).

However, Disney has shown some improvement by choosing an African-American actress to play Ariel's live movie. This decision reaped much controversy because the original Ariel's character is white. Regardless of the discussion, this is a bright future for beauty inclusivity in the future, especially for young females.

Disney also tends to represent the Disney Princesses as women with long hair, while the female villains tend to be described with short hair. For hairstyles indicator, almost entirely Disney Princesses are classified as wavy hair, which consists of wavy and curly hair, while female villains are more evenly distributed. Ultimately, there is a significant difference between Disney Princesses and Female Villains in the physical appearance indicator. Disney formed the perception that female villains looked uglier and unattractive, while the princesses had to look attractive. This statement is also supported by Tania Sharmin & Sanyat Sattar (2018), that stated that Female Villains on Disney are usually portrayed as old, ugly, and unattractive.

For the body image, Disney does not represent the size of the female body. Disney Princess and Female Villain are described in small body sizes except for one villain character. Disney Princesses generally demonstrate a form of “thin-ideal” media representing unrealistically thin female figures as the most positive and desirable. Disney also created most of the villain characters with disproportionately small waist sizes. Additionally, all the Disney Princesses have disproportionately tiny waists.

Media messages regarding the thin ideal are both prevalent and powerful, negatively affecting the viewers’ body esteem (Hohlstein, 1998). Based on the (Tremblay et al., 2011) study, some 5-year-old girls fear getting fat. Indeed, young children often imitate their favorite movies, television stars, and sports (Gilbert, 2002). Although children may not understand the sexual implications of ideal beauty and body, several of them are aware that a thin body is desirable for women (Tremblay et al., 2011) and it is crucial for women to be pretty (Smolak & Murnen, 2011). The portrayal of ideal beauty and body in Disney Princesses is an early substance in which girls are taught that attractiveness is a need of female value and identity.

We need to criticize these portrayals that Disney gave, especially to younger audiences. Why do the majority of Disney Princesses have long, lustrous hair? Why is there only one African American and Asian Princess? Why do all the Disney Princesses have unrealistic thin bodies? As if a fat and short-haired woman is considered ugly.

## **Hypothesis**

The purpose of this study was to find out the descriptive also differences in beauty standards and body images between Disney Princesses and Female Villains. The first and second hypotheses declared that there are significant differences in beauty standards and body image indicators between Disney Princesses and Female Villains. Both ideas were rejected, yet there are two indicators in beauty standards found to be significant.

Due to differences in the level of measurement on several indicators and small samples, several indicators need to be analyzed with different tests. Nominal data were tested using Fischer’s Exact Test, and ordinal data used Mann Whitney. For the body size category, the data from each indicator was summed and tested using the T-test. The minimum acceptance value for Fisher’s Exact Test is  $p < 0.05$  (Sukmana & Rozi, 2017). According to (Ridayati, n.d.), if the *p-value*  $< 0.05$  in Mann-Whitney Test thus, H1 is accepted. In the T-Test,  $p \leq 0.05$  is considered statistically significant (Ling et al., 2014).

**Table 3.**  
**Indicators Test Result**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Level of Measurement</b>	<b>Test</b>	<b>Acceptance Value</b>
<b>Beauty Standards</b>	<b>Race</b>	Nominal	Fisher’s Exact Test	.022
	<b>Skin Tone</b>	Ordinal	Mann-Whitney Test	.168
	<b>Hair Color</b>	Nominal	Fisher’s Exact Test	.006**
	<b>Hair Length</b>	Ordinal	Mann-Whitney Test	.021
	<b>Hair Style</b>	Nominal	Fisher’s Exact Test	.027
	<b>Physical Appearance</b>	Ordinal	Mann-Whitney Test	.000**
<b>Body Image</b>	<b>Body Image</b>	Interval	T-Test	.119

\*\*  $\alpha = 0.01$

Based on Table 3, there are only two indicators declared significant, which are both contained in the beauty standards variable, scilicet hair color ( $p=0.006$ )

and physical appearance ( $p=0.000$ ). Furthermore, this study did not find significantly different for any indicators in the body image variable.

For hair color, the majority of Female Villains have gray hair because they are portrayed as old ugly, and jealous women. This finding aligned with Tania Sharmin & Sanyat Sattar (2018), who also mentioned that female villains are typically portrayed as old, ugly, and unattractive (Tania Sharmin & Sanyat Sattar, 2018). Whilst the protagonist roles, Disney Princesses were described as young, beautiful, and energetic ladies. The visualization from the Disney Princess movie gave an outcome question, “*Do all the old people considered to be mean and ugly?*”

Moreover, this study found that there is a significant difference in the physical appearance indicator because most Female Villains were portrayed as ugly or unattractive. This can form the wrong perceptions, such as women that don't fit the ideal beauty standard will be considered bad people or a villain. Another significant difference that we can see is the amount of makeup Disney Princess and Female Villains have. Disney Princesses were portrayed with natural makeup looks. At the same time, all Female Villains were portrayed with heavy makeup. The bold makeup is intended to show the solid or masculine characteristics of women. Wellman (2020) stated that Disney captured many of their female villains with non-normal gender masculine visualization. They use the male trait of women to indicate evil behavior.

The independent test analysis found that there are no significant differences in body image variables between Disney Princesses and Female Villains. Moreover, there are no significant differences in the body size, breast size, and waist size indicators from body image variables between subjects. Body image visual in the protagonist and antagonist is relatively the same, which indicates small unrealistic sizes. However, there is an exception for *Ursula* from *Little Mermaid*, who is depicted with a large body and breasts.

To conclude, there is no vast disparity between Disney Princesses and Female Villains in terms of beauty standards and body images. Although the analysis declared there is no significant difference in beauty standards and body images between Disney Princesses and Female Villains, there are two indicators of the beauty standards category reported significant and could create

misperceptions in audiences, especially children who do not have the capability to filter the media messages yet.

Disney Princess Movies became a broad phenomenon that has had a powerful influence on children's media, messages, and product consumption (Giroux, 1997) worldwide. Most parents think that Disney Princess is a safe movie for their children. However, according to Johnson (2015), many bloggers and journalists critique the princess characters' unrealistic body shapes and features.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study declared there is no significant difference in beauty standards and body images between Disney Princesses and Female Villains. However, there are two indicators of the beauty standards variable declared substantial; there are hair color and physical appearance. This study also found that there are some gaps in the distribution of the existing indicators, such as race, skin tone, and hair length. Some of the indicators gap also lead to race and skin tone racism issues. In addition, Disney also does not represent the inclusive of women's body types. The movies represent the unrealistic thin bodies for all roles and only use the plus size body for one of the female villains named Ursula.

“The impact of the media no longer just influences our way of life but has become a way of life” (Graber & Mendoza, 2012). The power of Disney Princess movie messages can spread to vast audiences and emerge false perceptions of beauty standards and body image. The perception of beauty and body image that Disney gave can also increase the bullying of children who don't fit in the beauty and body image concepts, further turning off one's confidence and identity. Therefore, parents or guardians need to be more aware and educated regarding the content or entertainment consumed by children.

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## **About the Author**

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