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Disney characters as moral role models: a discourse analysis of *Coco* and *Encanto*

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Popular culture characters and narratives can influence people's understanding of moral actions, and thus guide their behaviors accordingly. Films have proven to be strong anchors in people's understanding of morality. We examine the perception of resilience as a moral characteristic in examining not just how people become resilient (thereby focusing on impact and action) but also to study "resilience" as a discourse and discussion in society as a moral message. We argue that popular culture narratives, particularly Disney films, help reinforce moral meanings of resilience. By conducting a discourse analysis of two films–*Encanto* and *Coco* and particularly focusing on resilience, we aim to contribute to a deepened understanding of Disney's role in producing morality through diverse narratives and characters who serve as role models.

KEYWORDS

Disney, morality, discourse, role models, films, resilience, *Coco*, *Encanto*

1 Introduction

The concept of using role models as moral educators has been applied throughout history via fictional and biographical narratives like Rosa Parks (Engelen et al., 2018). But recently, a theoretical and empirical interest has re-emerged in studying the impact role models have on moral development. Research has shown that emotions elicited when exposed to moral role models, such as admiration, elevation, and inspiration can trigger the motivation to reason and act morally (Algoe and Haidt, 2009; Schnall and Roper, 2012; Thrash et al., 2014). As with many moral theories, some factors need to be considered when using role models to ensure feelings of envy, hero-worship, and moral inertia are reduced. This leads to the question: what kind of role model narratives and characteristics could help encourage a sense of morality?

When using role models for moral development, our study focuses on resilience, and although there is limited research in this area, a relationship between morality and resilience is not far-fetched because resilience not only allows one to overcome hardship but can help an individual develop into a better person (Kim et al., 2018). Scholars have suggested particular virtues can allow one to develop resilience, such as gratitude (Emmons and Crumpler, 2000), or over-arching virtuosity such as wisdom (Kim et al., 2024). Narratives are powerful tools largely used by media and popular culture to facilitate an understanding of society's behaviors, conducts, values, morals, and norms, in addition to developing characteristics such as resilience (Reinecke and Kreling, 2022). Films, television shows, books, etc. are significantly responsible for creating and circulating such narratives. Stories and narratives in that sense are a mechanism to circulate moral education, and the intended ones created through films are tailored to lead audiences to particular moral conclusions, advocate certain behaviors, and discourage others (Bilandzic, 2011, p. 46).

Of the several media and film production companies, *The Walt Disney* plays a crucial role in shaping people's understanding of morality through its classic and popular films such as The *Sleeping Beauty, Finding Nemo, Lion King*, and *Brave*, to name a few. Disney films are also known to incorporate moral understandings and values such as friendship, sacrifice, love, trust, loyalty, etc., into their narratives. Disney promotes and represents people's understanding of the complexities of moral dilemmas between "good vs. evil", "weak vs. strong", or "right vs. wrong" (Boje, 1995). Films are one such representation of mass-produced morality that reinforces people's understanding of it. Disney's *Cinderella* and other fairy tale characters have been analyzed to indicate that individuals have an intrinsic capacity to resist external pressures, "the human capacity to overcome adversity" (Guillén, 2021). Other studies have examined the portrayal of Disney princesses who serve as powerful role models for young girls by showing resilience through narratives and characterization, thus challenging traditional gender stereotypes and promoting positive values (Singer, 2023). They showcase traits beyond beauty and love interests, displaying resilience, intelligence, bravery, and independence. However, there are several controversies surrounding the portrayal of princesses and their potential negative effects (Streiff and Dundes, 2017).

These studies are limited to studying resilience within the discourse of Disney princesses' films. Our analysis focuses on two non-princesses of Disney's animation films-*Coco* and *Encanto* to examine the ways in which moral values are understood and acted upon that enable the reinforcing of relevant moral messages, and more specifically, which are context-specific. On the one hand, Disney has been critiqued for reinforcing stereotypes and being Western-centric in its portrayal of characters (Robinson et al., 2007; Streiff and Dundes, 2017); recent films such as *Moana, Coco, Raya and The Last Dragon*, and *Encanto* have incorporated representations of different ethnic minorities and cultures, providing a sense of inclusivity among people, in general. Thus, bringing moral messages around such representations into prominence and blurring the dominant discourses around morality. Last year, 2023, marked 100 years of Disney's existence since the establishment of *The Walt Disney Company* in 1923. Thus, it makes for a significant study to examine the transition and navigation of moral narratives over a century. This adds to a heightened understanding of how Disney characters can be perceived as more inclusive, allowing them to circulate the moral message of resilience and act as possible impactful role models.

Moral learning begins right from the early years primarily within the family structure, and then as children grow, they learn and internalize morals through other social institutions such as education, religion, and the government (Potts, 2020). For a deeper level of moral development, three vital and interconnected aspects of moral development are required: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, which could also be termed cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Lickona, 2004). According to the moral psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, the cognitive aspect relates to using one's moral reasoning to make decisions in certain situations, which can be developed in stages from childhood to adulthood based on one's education and maturity (Kohlberg, 1975). While the affective element focuses on emotions that can encourage the motivation to act morally, such as empathy or gratitude (Hoffman, 1990; Emmons and McCullough, 2003). Lastly, moral behavior involves the resulting action such as altruistic practices. However, to encounter authentic moral development, there needs to be continuity for it to be part of one's moral identity (Colby and Damon, 2010). However, as shown in the discussions below, an individual's understanding of morality and how they act based on this, is multi-layered and complex due to its sociological influences.

Within moral theories, the use of moral exemplars for moral development has been a topic of interest (Zagzebski, 2015; Croce, 2019; Croce, 2020; Henderson, 2022). Zagzebski (2015) has tried to develop a moral theory based on the emotion "admiration" when witnessing an exemplar, which she believes is a positive emotion that motivates one towards emulation. Neo-Aristotelian concepts emphasize the significance of having moral exemplars in education, as they enable learners to reflect on their shortcomings and inspire them to progress through the emulation process (Kristjánsson, 2017). Henderson (2022) even argues that, based on Aristotle, emulation is a virtue in its own right, as it requires cognitive reasoning, moral emotions, and moral action to imitate the virtue. From an empirical perspective, studies by Algoe and Haidt (2009) and Immordino-Yang and Sylvan (2010) found physical and emotional changes in the body occur when witnessing moral excellence which then motivates one to imitate an exemplar's moral values. Overall research has shown that increased resilience could improve overall well-being (Cohn et al., 2009), but character education has been criticized for possibly encouraging an individualistic and neo-liberalist mindset, placing the responsibility on the individual rather than society (Fenton, 2020; Jerome and Kisby, 2022). In fact, this has been found through teacher's discourse as well (Spohrer, 2024). Therefore, the following study aims to follow a similar approach by exploring how the two films present the concept of resilience through their stories.

Some issues can arise when using role models for moral development, for instance, the emotion-envy. Aristotle claims this emotion can hinder moral development as it causes one to show interest in "equality" with the exemplar rather than acquiring a moral value, therefore, the exemplar losing the value would bring as much satisfaction as the learner developing it (Kristjánsson, 2017). Therefore, an essential aspect when using role models for moral development to reduce these issues is to focus on the exemplars' relatability and attainability. "Relatability" being defined as finding a similar attribute between self and other, such as culture, age, a shared interest or some kind of "belongingness", while "attainability" refers to how achievable the skills or qualities the model possesses are (Lockwood and Kunda, 2000; Han et al., 2017). Han and Dawson (2023) found there is an increased sense of elevation and pleasantness when individuals witnessed exemplarity through relatable models, and this then becomes stronger if the virtues are more attainable. This then reduces "moral inertia" (Monin, 2007) where the learner feels as though the value is too superior, and due to its lack of feasibility, they see little use in trying to emulate the moral value.

How moral role models are presented to children and adolescents could help reduce the impact of these problems. The focus should not be on imitating the models but on using them as a medium for self-discovery because "there is a significant difference between becoming like the exemplar and becoming what the exemplar exemplifies" (Vos, 2018: p. 22). A method of doing this is using relatable and attainable models as discussed earlier, but also understanding the exemplar's imperfections to reduce their superiority so they are not perceived as perfect individuals placed on a pedestal (Croce and Silvia Vaccarezza, 2017; Osman, 2019; Croce, 2020; Kotsonis and Dunne, 2023). This can

lead to the emotion *adoration* (Schindler, 2014) or *hero-worship* (Kristjánsson, 2017), which involves learners mindlessly obsessing over the role model and possibly emulating their flaws. Furthermore, using "ordinary" exemplars conveys the complexities of exemplars' personalities and provides a more authentic and realistic representation of morality. Using "social anthropology" with role models is understanding the details of a model's life to help a learner gain a deeper understanding of the exemplar as well as know how to incorporate the values into their own everyday lives (Banner, 2014). Understanding models' moral personalities and characteristics that create their moral identities fills in the gaps between moral judgment and action (Damon and Colby, 2015). Disney becomes an effective medium as the audience sees the ins and outs of how the protagonist develops and the reasons why they think and act the way they do.

In addition to traditional social institutions such as family, religion, and education, popular culture plays a huge role in shaping people's understanding of morality through its mediated representations. In that sense, morality can be regarded as mass-produced strategies of actions by popular culture, which provides guidelines and discourses towards people's ethical behaviors in society. DiMaggio (2000) argues that "when individuals account for their actions, they tend to instead "draw from a "grab-bag of odds and ends: a pastiche of mediated representations, a repertoire of techniques, or a toolkit of strategies (p. 267)". By repeated representations, popular culture reiterates and reinforces moral messages in a variety of ways. Hollywood films are consumed regularly all over the world. There is a deep connection between morality and films. This is depicted and consumed in the form of portraying relationships, particularly personal relationships that are imbued as moral messages from childhood (Gillett, 2012). We argue that such mass-produced moral tools are re-created and re-circulated by popular culture posited within an understanding of institutionally acquired practices that people consume in great amounts in their everyday lives. Our arguments are supported by Laugier's (2021) assessment of morality "to seeing it not in rules and principles of decision making, but rather in attention to ordinary behavior, to everyday micro-choices, to individuals' styles of expressing themselves and making claims" (p. 275).

While films continue to produce and disseminate moral meanings, they are informed and developed by and within organizational structures and practices, particularly media. One such media organization that enables the production and circulation of moral messages is Disney-the company, conglomeration, and, more importantly, the Disney brand, as it is known to be in recent years. Disney, known for producing and developing large amounts of media content and films each year, can be seen as a moral educator. Disney corporation depicts and circulates moral meanings through its various transmedia and conglomerations (Hesmondhalgh, 2007). Of the various genres and types of films Disney creates and produces, its animation films that cater to children are a useful discourse in understanding the connection between morality and children's internalization of moral messages upon viewing and consuming Disney films. Disney animated films continue to influence and shape children's development of beliefs and their understanding of the world surrounding them (Zurcher et al., 2018). Some films have the power to engage children, emotionally and cognitively, presenting them with moral and ethical problems that stimulate critical thinking and thoughtful reflection. In a way, films can be considered as useful tools

for moral educators and education in general (Wonderly, 2009). The commonly known formats of myth and fairy tale are adopted in almost every Disney film, making it a societal template to consume moral meanings (Wasko, 2013; Menise, 2019). The application of the myth and fairy tale is commonly seen across Disney's films and can be argued is Disney's style of cultural production through the circulation of morality embedded in myth and fairy tales. Disney Corporation has strategically reached families and has a huge impact on children worldwide (Lueke, 2014). This supports our argument that moral messages are adopted, learned, and internalized since childhood, and popular cultural formats are largely responsible for reinforcing morality in society.

In addition to the style or the format, the characters are also strong elements adopted for producing morality to enable effective circulation of meanings. Disney characters have been one of its strong suits in the dissemination of moral messages. *Snow White, Elsa (Frozen), Alice (Alice in Wonderland), Belle (Beauty and the Beast)* symbolize some of the "good morals" such as honesty, strength, confidence, purity, loyalty, trust, friendship, selflessness; whereas *Ursula (The Little Mermaid), Captain Hook (Peter Pan), Maleficent (Sleeping Beauty), Scar (The Lion King), Queen of Hearts (Alice in Wonderland)* depict mortality associated with "evil" (Iseminger et al., 2019). This "good" vs. "evil" binary is prominent through Disney films, particularly animated films that are targeted towards children. In line with our earlier arguments on moral reasoning, we resonate with Wonderly's (2009) approach to moral instruction through popular culture that enables a sense of empathy and encourages moral reasoning among children over value indoctrination that is induced through primary and secondary socialization.

In the last two decades, The Walt Disney Company has been largely critiqued for the portrayal of its female characters, especially princesses (Menise, 2019; Guillén, 2021) with overpowering sexist, classist, and racist values (Best and Lowney, 2009). And not just the female characters, but Disney as a whole has been critiqued for imbuing morals related to consumerism and traditional nuclear family (Giroux, 2010). In that, positive portrayals of diverse ethnicities and races to produce and circulate values and morality seem to be lacking. Though Disney continues to promote Americanness and American values, there is a change witnessed in recent years wherein Disney produces and develops values that not only enable children's understanding of hegemonic values of racism, sexism, and capitalism (Best and Lowney in Lueke, 2014), but also promotes morality through themes of ethnicity, inclusivity, and cultural diversity. Recent films such as *Moana, Raya the Last Dragon, Coco*, and *Encanto* are some of the Disney films that portray inclusivity and cultural diversity with a specific representation of diverse ethnicities through their narratives, story structure, and characters. These films enable a moral understanding of not only the dominant Western ideologies and values but also enable the production of "relatability" through character portrayals. We argue that such narrative practices that highlight diverse representations through character portrayals enable wider consumption of morality. Such characters depicting an understanding of morality and the recent representations of moral messages through ethnically and culturally diverse characters further serve as positive anchors. Additionally, we argue that such characters, and more specifically "relatable" characters from the films *Coco, Moana*, and *Encanto*, serve as role models to disseminate moral messages in society, particularly resilience.

Resilience can be seen as a moral process or value that allows an individual to prevent or reduce the negative effects of adversity or even develop strength or transform because of it (Gilligan, 2006). Several factors can impact how one grows resiliency. One of them involves a person's self-esteem and how they are perceived and valued by others reflecting on their ability to overcome adversity (Legault et al., 2006). In addition to self-esteem, self-efficacy could be related to resiliency (Gilligan, 2006), and according to Bandura (1982) this involves one's belief in their ability to achieve a certain goal. Thus, when adolescents are provided opportunities to reach these goals, it gives them a feeling of competence that helps enhance resiliency (Woodier, 2011). Although personal characteristics of resilience can include social competence, autonomy, and a sense of purpose, it is not seen as an innate trait as much as it is the capacity to grow. External aspects, such as the relationships surrounding an individual, could also help with the resilience process, as resiliency increases when there are strong family and communal relationships (Legault et al., 2006; Lietz, 2011). Another element found to have a possible impact on resilience is self-compassion, as treating oneself with care and understanding, as well as accepting imperfections, could increase resiliency in adolescents (Neff and McGehee, 2010).

We intend to add to a heightened understanding of the dissemination of such specific moral meanings of resilience through character portrayals and narratives as some of the key tools in producing and circulating moral messages. We further analyze how Disney, over the recent years, has produced diverse characters and narratives to reiterate and reinforce morality by developing a sense of "relatability." This is made prominent through characters that serve as role models. We acknowledge that there is no dearth of studies related to the dissemination of moral meanings via popular culture. In addition, Disney's role as a moral educator is also widely discussed and deliberated within academia (Boje, 1995; Ward, 2002). We attempt to fill a gap by focusing on "resilience" as a moral message in society through Disney films. The following research combines the disciplines of cultural studies, media, and education to examine Disney's circulation of resilience through narratives, characters, and related discourses that shape children's understanding of morality. We highlight the importance of imperfections in role models that make "relatability" better and easier.

2 Methodology: discourse analysis

Our units of analysis are the two Disney films *Coco* and *Encanto*, and the surrounding texts and media, which will help constitute an understanding of narratives that represent reality related to meanings of resilience. Films have a strong potential for being a carrier of the discourse (Starzyńska and Budziszewska, 2018). Discourses are conversations or talks with an agenda. They are orientated towards action, aimed at establishing a particular prevailing view or social reality. Discourses produce knowledge that functions to influence how individuals make sense of experience (Singer and Hunter, 1999). By using a thematic discourse analysis, we considered common threads and topics embedded in the narratives surrounding the two films which assist in the selective analysis of resilience. For this study, the construction of "resilience-related" narratives and discourses were examined. The interest was primarily in examining how Disney characters can serve as moral role models for children with an emphasis

on resilience. The aim is not to study the effects of these films on children but rather to understand how particular discourses are created that enable the meaning-making of moral ideas through narratives. The aim is not to highlight the differences in the ways resilience is portrayed but rather the moral meanings around the theme that both films have created and circulated. We aim to examine various discourses from, within, and around films related to practices and processes that involve examining certain moments, scenes, and narratives from *Coco* and *Encanto* related to characters' actions and behaviors that demonstrate overcoming adversities and engaging in concepts such as self-efficacy, imperfections, and admiration (as discussed in the literature review). The other related media texts (in addition to the films) are the producers' accounts in the form of published video interviews with CineMagna for *Encanto* and ScreenRant for *Coco* (see Table 1).[1]

Fairclough (1993) offered three overlapping and useful perspectives of looking at discourse: "(1) discourse as text, that draws attention to the meanings of written or spoken words, symbols and any form of communication; (2) discourse as practice, focusing on how the text is distributed and consumed; (3) and discourse as social practice, explicating how the text is part of a broader societal structure" (McCloskey, 2008, pp. 26–28). All three approaches of understanding discourse are useful in their methodological application because our research contextualizes Disney's circulation of morality within a wider societal context. Discourse analysis is a useful methodology for studying meanings, and is a useful way of investigating any form of communication that constitute social action and culture (Wetherell et al., 2001). Film, similar to language, could be considered an entire discourse through its creation of apparent meanings (Prince, 1993). A deeper and wider interpretation of discourse is central to the "social construction of reality" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), more specifically it extends to studying the social processes and practices that shape a culture and the way meanings are derived from it (Fairclough, 1993; El-Nashar and Nayef, 2016).

We applied thematic discourse analysis by carefully identifying discourses related to resilience in and surrounding narratives from the two films. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting repeated patterns of meaning across a dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In our case, we examined the ways in which resilience as an idea and social construct was used through the films, thereby enabling us to systematically identify the themes presented. Themes were reviewed to ensure that the data within them was coherent and distinct from data used in other themes and, importantly, to ensure that the themes reflected an overview of the data associated with meanings related to resilience through tropes of characters that serve as moral role models (Botelle and Willott, 2020). The films were purposefully chosen for their commonalities, including the inter-generational family concept and the representation of non-hegemonic cultures, such as those portraying Mexican and Columbian traditions, rituals, and practices. Very limited studies have focused on factors related to multilingualism, cultural affirmations, and politics of representation of Latinx characters and cultures, which are crucial for children's understanding of the people from those cultures, and the depictions that were reflective and co-constructive of the respective Mexican-American and Colombian-American interculturalities by

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1   https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AzS0FBm73dQ

TABLE 1 Presentation of data findings.

Themes	Resilience			
	Encanto		*Coco*	
	Film	Production	Film	Production
Self-efficacy (Through their characters and stories, both films stress the significance of having confidence in one's ability to be able to be resilient in the face of adversity, but also to be able to successfully achieve their goals)	In *Encanto*, Mirabel shows resilience throughout the film by not letting the notion of having no gift stand in her way	Mirabel's voice-over artist, Stephanie Beatriz acknowledges Mirabel as a role model in displaying self-efficacy and resilience	The protagonist Miguel presents high self-efficacy by having confidence in his ability to achieve his dream/goal of being a musician and breaking barriers against the family. By being rebellious and finding all ways and means to find his great-great grandfather he demonstrates resilience in adapting to the adversities and anger that he will face	Miguel's voice-over artist, Anthony Gonzalez, acknowledges Miguel as a role model in displaying self-efficacy and resilience
	Quote: "*Gift or not gift, I am just as special as the rest of my family*"—Mirabel			
	Represented in song: "Waiting on a miracle". Even though Mirabel is disappointed in her family members for not seeing her the same way she sees herself, she has high self-efficacy and in fact meets her own expectations by the end of the film, for instance by moving mountains and healing what is broken:	Quote: "*It's telling an audience, a lot of them impressionable young people, that by daring yourself you could possibly become the hero of your own story*"—Stephanie Beatriz	Quote: "*No more hiding Dante, I've got to seize my moment*"—Miguel	Quote: "*He's a big role model for children because if they have a passion they want to do, they should share it with the world*"—Anthony Gonzalez
	Quote: "*I would heal what's broken, I would show this family something new, who I am inside*" "*I am ready, come on, I'm ready, I've been patient and steadfast and steady*"—Mirabel	The animators of the film emphasize this further, saying that although Mirabel was meant to convey vulnerability when she was alone, she was also meant to show "*perseverance*"		
Transparency & Imperfections (Both films emphasize the importance of accepting and showing one's imperfections in yourself and in those around you to send more relatable moral messages. The films demonstrate that to be resilient, imperfections need to be balanced with forgiveness and compassion to allow for growth)	Self-efficacy is portrayed in parts of the film when Mirabel refuses to surrender in the face of adversity, for instance, finding her uncle Bruno's vision for answers or looking deeper into the vision when it was unclear	Producers of *Encanto* discussed how imperfection allows the characters and their stories to be more relatable, as the characters were based on family archetypes that people can connect to and understand	Miguel put Ernesto de La Cruz up on a pedestal and refused to see his flaws, creating a sense of hero worship. While Hector was the imperfect underdog who was looked down on even by the protagonist. Only when the whole truth about their stories were revealed did Miguel see Hector as a role model	Resilience develops once there is transparency and forgiveness. The producers of *Coco* highlight this by explaining how the film focuses on "*uncovering the truth about family*", as the matriarch, Imelda, is able to forgive Hector when discovering the truth about his disappearance
	Terms "perfection" and "open your eyes" are used repeatedly, the former representing the antihero of the story and the latter highlighting the notion of being vulnerable and transparent			

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Themes	Resilience			
	Encanto		*Coco*	
	Film	Production	Film	Production
	Quote: *What else could I do if I knew it did not need to be perfect?*—Isabella Julieta, Mirabel's mother, represents this as she accepts her husband Augustin and Mirabel's imperfections. One example of this is shown through their eyeglasses because even though Julieta has the power to heal their eyesight, she leaves them be	The animators also tried to make Mirabel more relatable by creating her in a way that allows her to look "*capable but imperfect*"		Ernesto's voice-over artist Benjamin Bratt discusses the importance of seeing imperfections in characters to increase relatability
				Quote: '*It shows the connected tissue, at the end of the day, we are all human beings..it's all relatable*'—Benjamin Bratt
	Although there is no villain in *Encanto*, Abuela's concept of resilience is seen as the opposing side. Abuela's drive for hard work and perfection is unforgiving to those who do not meet her expectations consequently, vulnerabilities and flaws are perceived as signs of weakness, as Abuela shames mistakes in general, particularly Mirabel for not having a gift	Jessica Darrow from *Encanto* (Luisa's voice over artist) summarizes this succinctly by explaining how the film portrays the complexity of human beings, with daily experiences that make it challenging to be perfect		
	Although there is no villain in *Encanto*, Abuela's concept of resilience is seen as the opposing side. Abuela's drive for hard work and perfection is unforgiving to those who do not meet her expectations consequently, vulnerabilities and flaws are perceived as signs of weakness, as Abuela shames mistakes in general, particularly Mirabel for not having a gift			
	Quote: '*But work and dedication will keep the miracle burning, and each new generation must keep the miracle burning*'—Abuela			
	Abuela's self-growth journey evolves into realizing the importance of forgiving herself and her family members in order to rebuild a strong foundation that was broken both literally through their home and psychologically through the relationships in it. Mirabel forgives Abuela for how she was treated, but this was only through understanding Abuela's trauma and feeling deep compassion for it			

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Themes	Resilience			
	Encanto		*Coco*	
	Film	Production	Film	Production
	Abuela's self-growth journey evolves into realizing the importance of forgiving herself and her family members in order to rebuild a strong foundation that was broken both literally through their home and psychologically through the relationships in it. Mirabel forgives Abuela for how she was treated, but this was only through understanding Abuela's trauma and feeling deep compassion for it			
	The song "*All of you*" at the end of the film brings this theme full circle, because not only does Abuela accept each person fully, but each member accepts themselves. When the family transparently sees each other's imperfections, Mirabel is then able to receive the gift to bring the miracle back			
	Quote: "*I see me, all of me*"—Mirabel			
	Accepting imperfections is seen as a step towards growth, and this theme is presented continuously through the butterfly symbol, as it is placed in the characters' clothing, the house, the candle, and in one of the final scenes between Mirabel and Abuela			
	The song "Two Oroguitas (caterpillars)" ties the theme neatly towards the end as it conveys the value of growth which can be painful but eventually leads to resilience			
Family relations (Family relationships is a common theme in both films, showing resilience can only be developed through strong bonds, as well keeping values passed on through generations)	Quote: "*Do not you hold on too tight, both of you know, it's your time to grow, to fall apart, to reunite*"	The actors and producers also emphasize the importance of family in the film, as Lin-Manuel, the song producer explains how *Encanto* brings the "*complexity of our family dynamics on screen*" not only displaying family connections but relating it to the audience. It is meant to convey how a family evolves by seeing each other more fully	Strong family bonds transcend time and go beyond the living, which is common in many non-Western cultures, and represented mainly through Mexico's *Dios Muertos*	The actors and producers of *Coco* mentioned that one of the main themes of the film focuses on the importance of family

(Continued)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Themes	Resilience			
	Encanto		*Coco*	
	Film	Production	Film	Production
	Through the final song "*All of you*" the family members and community unite to rebuild the house, and only then does the miracle return, further proving adversity is overcome together			Quote: "*This is something that can touch the world because we all come from families*"—Adrian Molina
	Quote: "*Lay down your load..we are only down the road..we have no gifts, but we are many, and we'll do anything for you*"—Community members	Bruno's voice-over artist, John Leguizamo, further supports this theme by describing how the film shows a family is stronger together than separate, once again conveying the significance of shared resilience	Strong family bonds transcend time and go beyond the living, which is common in many non-Western cultures, and represented mainly through Mexico's *Dios Muertos*	
	Failing to nurture these familial relationships could cause hardship, as the family's resilience is mirrored through the miracle, and the house, "*casita*". For instance, when Mirabel hugs her sister Isabela, the candle burns brighter while the cracks in the house disappear. On the other hand, when Abuela shames Mirabel, the miracle dies, causing the house to fall apart in ruins		Although in *Encanto*, Mirabel acknowledges the importance of family from the beginning, Miguel in *Coco* reaches this realization towards the end. Initially, Miguel was willing to sacrifice his family to pursue his dream in music, but his self-growth journey helped him reach an epiphany	
			Quote: '*We may have our differences, but nothing's more important than family.*'—Miguel	

using *Coco* and *Encanto* as examples (Kinasih, 2022; Dosch, 2023; Mikkonen, 2023). By using these two films, we aim to address factors surrounding discourses around the commonalities mentioned by highlighting resilience as a moral value portrayed through characters that stand out as examples of role models (see Table 1).[2]

2.1 Methods and data collection

Our data sources are publicly available documents with no direct involvement from participants. Our primary source for analysis is films which are also considered as discourse. Within films, while the entire narrative structure of *Coco and Encanto* is largely based on morality with storytelling tools of "depiction of other cultures, and the focus on familial ties", we will focus on a few narratives that depict the morals of resilience. The selection of these narratives emerges from a commonality of morals within both the films that center around themes of "resilience and self-efficacy," "family relations and resilience", and "transparency and imperfections," through which resilience is brought into prominence as a moral epicenter. Discourse is crucial for the production of knowledge from everyday conversations to experts engaging in the process of meaning-making, in that discourse has implications for how individuals construct norms and expectations based on communications and interactions (Gibson et al., 2023). And thus, in addition to the films as a discourse, we also examine one of the key paratexts, such as the producers' and filmmakers' accounts in the form of stories and interviews. Some qualitative forms of discourse analysis tend to analyze texts in more depth (Pickering, 2008, p. 57). Thus, the intention to selectively analyze texts would be to provide a more in-depth understanding of the data than to the breadth of it. Based on the importance of storytelling within Disney and the role models they portray, we aim to examine how the value of resilience is shown and developed through the characters and stories in *Encanto* and *Coco*. Themes of resilience, as highlighted earlier, will be studied to understand how this is circulated in society to increase children's and adolescents' connection with role models and their moral understanding of the values.

2.2 Background of the films

2.2.1 *Encanto*

Encanto tells the story of the Madrigals who are a magical family living in the mountains of Colombia. The family is run by the matriarch Abuela, who found the miracle "*Encanto*" after fleeing a conflict with her three children. As the family grew, each member received an extraordinary gift and role to help their community, such as the ability to heal, change the weather, or speak to animals. The only member who did not receive a gift was Mirabel, yet she is the one to discover the *Encanto* miracle is in danger and takes on the role to save it.

2.2.2 *Coco*

Similarly, *Coco* is about a multi-generational family in Mexico, where the main character, Miguel dreams to play music against his

family's wishes. While insisting on pursuing his dreams, he finds himself in the Land of the Dead, where he meets Héctor. The two go on a journey together that starts with Miguel trying to find his musical role model Ernesto de la Cruz but ends in a special family discovery.

3 Results

Referring to Bandura's definition of self-efficacy as one believing in their ability to achieve a task successfully, both films present the main characters with high self-efficacy. This then provides them with the resilience to overcome the obstacles they face. Through their characters and stories, both films stress the significance of having confidence in one's ability to be able to be resilient in the face of adversity, but also to be able to successfully achieve their goals.

Furthermore, in both *Encanto* and *Coco* emphasize the importance of accepting and showing one's imperfections in yourself and in those around you to send more relatable moral messages. The films demonstrate that to be resilient, imperfections need to be balanced with forgiveness and compassion to allow for growth.

For instance, in *Encanto*, any of the characters in the film other than Mirabel, such as Isabela and Luisa, have their own self-growth journey that causes them to reveal their imperfections and accept them through compassion; both are presented through their songs.

In the film *Coco*, transparency and imperfection are shown through a different lens as it explores the issues of viewing role models as perfect. Lastly, family relationships are a common theme in both films, showing resilience can only be developed through strong bonds, as well as the importance of keeping values passed on through generations.

In *Encanto*, one of the foundational themes embedded within the film is the dynamic and strength of family relationships.

"*…strengthen our community, strengthen our home, make your family proud.*"—Abuela.

In *Coco*, the film's villain may have been an obstacle, but the main struggle is internal, as Miguel tries to find himself and his resilience through love and connection with his family. A Both films represent collectivist cultures showing resilience develops through unity and relations. Moral values are developed through family and community connections and understandings, which allows for a different perspective from Western-centric and neoliberalist notions of resilience.

Table 1 shows the "resilience" reflected in *Encanto* and *Coco* through three main themes: Self-efficacy, Transparency and imperfections and Family relations.

4 Discussion

Based on the literature and the analysis of the two films, Disney characters can be effective role models in learning the moral value of resilience. One of the issues associated with role-modelling is hero-worship and indoctrination because the admirer is blindly idolizing the exemplar rather than using their critical thinking skills (Kristjánsson, 2017), therefore preventing learners from internalizing their own moral identity (Bucher, 1998). In *Coco*, Miguel himself worships Ernesto only to find out he was obsessing over a role model with inauthentic values. Within these two films, Disney has shown

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morality is not black or white, and in fact, criticality is required when the characters are faced with moral dilemmas. For instance, in *Encanto* Abuela is not a villain and is loved yet is faced with difficult moral decisions. The Disney characters presented the various aspects of virtue development (Kristjánsson, 2017; Henderson, 2022), as Miguel and Mirabal showed moral reasoning and moral emotion through the dilemmas they faced, as well as moral behavior based on their actions as the protagonists of the films. The first step of the role-modelling process involves the feelings that arise when exposed to the exemplar, such as admiration, elevation, or inspiration (Algoe and Haidt, 2009; Zagzebski, 2015; Kristjánsson, 2017), which could possibly lead to the audience feeling motivated by the characters' value of resilience through self-efficacy, transparency, and family relations. This can be increased through more relatable models (Lockwood and Kunda, 2000; Han et al., 2017; Han and Dawson, 2023). The analysis shows that Disney is using more diverse characters to increase relatability, and the producers have intentionally chosen common characteristics the audience can connect to.

In relation to the producer's "intentionality," to elicit admiration, elevation, and inspiration, filmmakers usually focus on characters whose personalities, behaviors, and actions satisfy those criteria that invoke associated emotions or feelings. Plantinga (2023) outlines that the criteria for admiration are worthiness, excellence, and approbativeness (p. 184). So, in order to elicit admiration through characters, filmmakers should focus on these character traits.

Moreover, the characters' struggles and journeys are shown in detail, making the values seem more attainable; as Stephanie Beatriz (Mirabel's voice-over) says, "what Disney does so well is let you into the inner lives of their superheroes." This helps reduce moral inertia (Monin, 2007) because the moral value seems more feasible to emulate, and it is heavily shown in both films through the theme "Transparency and Imperfection" because the characters or "heroes" are portrayed as human and flawed. Imperfection is embraced to empower the characters to thrive, allowing the audience to see the extraordinary as ordinary so they can then connect the values with their own lives (Vos, 2018).

Similar to the research, within these two films, resilience is seen as a value that requires self-efficacy (Gilligan, 2006), strong relationships (Legault et al., 2006; Lietz, 2011), and compassion (Neff and McGehee, 2010). Although compassion was not placed as a theme, both films have shown that it is required to balance transparency and imperfection. Displaying and embracing flaws needs to be accompanied by kindness to oneself and others for resilience to develop. This is shown when Abuela accepts and appreciates her family members at the end of *Encanto*, as well as when Miguel accepts Hector as his real great-great-grandfather in *Coco*. Moreover, the films' notion of communal and familial resilience deviates from the traditional Western concepts such as neo-liberalism that places accountability on the individual.

The idea of resilience as a moral virtue has been studied within the healthcare and nursing profession (Monteverde, 2016; Young and Rushton, 2017), but it is quite limited within moral education or media. Our study aimed to add to the discussion on how resilience is perceived within these fields. There are limitations in that we only explored two films within one conglomerate (Disney), and although the discourse shows a connection between resilience and morality, it is still unclear whether moral values lead to resilience or vice versa. Therefore, future research could look at a larger sample within

various contexts as well as delve deeper into the connection between resilience and morality. Our analysis explores how resilience as a moral value is produced and circulated by Disney through its portrayal and representation of racially and ethnically diverse characters. Linked to the characters is the storytelling format or the narrative that focuses on the non-hegemonic representations of morality that Disney is largely critiqued for. We have shown through a discourse analysis of two films–*Coco* and *Encanto* how Disney could be seen as more inclusive by emphasizing factors of "relatability" that enable a dissemination of moral meanings in society. Moreover, we have also examined the role of Disney in creating characters that serve as impactful role models for an understanding of resilience. This research could be extended to examine the "impact" of similar Disney films on children and their moral development. Further research areas could also explore the role of films in children's moral development as pedagogical approaches used within schools.

Moral anchoring can be studied through multiple approaches that not only analyzes films and production aspects but takes into account the diverse representations and fan practices related to the symbolic systems that make morality culturally significant (Vaidya, 2019). The variety and diversity of fan practices could further help explain why myths and fairy tales are adopted by media companies as storytelling tools to circulate moral meanings. Additionally, while we explored role models based on diverse race and ethnic backgrounds to heighten "relatability", there is potential to examine and focus on such diverse characters that several media companies have recently adopted into their storytelling practices to further examine discourses on identity and gender politics.

Data availability statement

The original contributions presented in the study are included in the article/supplementary material, further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Author contributions

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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