

The Representation of Women Empowerment on The Little Mermaid Movie

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ABSTRACT

The Little Mermaid Movie tells the story of Ariel's journey to seek freedom and achieve her dream to be a part of the human world. This research explores the representation of women empowerment in the film using John Fiske's semiotic method, broken down into three levels, reality, representation, and ideology. The study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with the object being the representation of women empowerment and the subject being the film *The Little Mermaid*. The findings reveal that the women empowerment exhibited by Ariel, the protagonist of the film, is articulated through three categories: women empowerment in making life choices, achieving equality in society, and fostering social change. These categories align with the stages of women empowerment, personal level, interpersonal level, and social action & social change. Furthermore, it is evident that the depiction of a woman with a special status, such as a double minority, can empower individuals with similar statuses who view the film. Additionally, the ideologies of revisionism and feminism are identified in the process of women empowerment depicted in the film.

Keywords: *representation; women empowerment; women; movie; semiotic*

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment refers to a multidimensional process that allows women to make autonomous choices and control over their own lives. This concept was formally articulated at the International Women's Conference in Nairobi in 1985, where it was defined as the redistribution of social power and control over resources to benefit women (Chutia, 2022). Furthermore, (Rahman, 2007) explains that the systemic exploitation of women is a direct consequence of their disempowerment within patriarchal structures, which perpetuate gender inequality.

In the Indonesian context, various initiatives have been undertaken to enhance women's empowerment. Najwa Shihab, a prominent journalist and the founder of Narasi TV, frequently highlights women's issues through her media platform, revealing that despite a theoretical endorsement of gender equality, practical application of this principle remains insufficient

(Febriani, 2024; Aziza, 2023). This indicates the ongoing relevance of gender equality issues in Indonesia. Furthermore, Ida Fauziyah, the Minister of Manpower, has emphasized the persistent barriers faced by women in the workplace, including entrenched stereotypes and systemic sexism. Data from the National Commission on Violence Against Women (Komnas Perempuan) reveals that violence against women in professional settings continues to be a significant concern, highlighting the persistent challenges for women in the workforce (Itsaini & Alexander, 2024).

In the United States, the Pew Research Center reports that 42% of women experience workplace discrimination attributable to their gender (Parker & Funk, 2017). The #MeToo movement has highlighted the collective resistance of women against sexual violence and harassment. Public figures such as Michelle Obama and Kamala Harris serve as prominent symbols of women's empowerment in the United States. Michelle Obama, in her speech at The United State of Women Summit 2018, urged women to continue fighting against discrimination, emphasizing courage and perseverance (Chuck, 2018). On the other hand, Kamala Harris's historic rise as the first woman to be a Vice President, marks a significant milestone in the representation of women in political leadership (Lerer & Ember, 2020).

The role of media, including film, is crucial in propagating narratives of women empowerment through the portrayal of characters and stories that challenge traditional gender roles. This importance lies in the ability of the media to reach a wide audience and influence their perspectives through the message they represent. Representation, as articulated by Hall (1997), involves the communication of reality through various media forms, thereby influencing both the reflection and construction of societal perceptions. Through this lens, media not only mirrors societal values but also plays a part in shaping them. Semiotics, as a method of analysis, delves into the study of signs and symbols to decode the meanings embedded within media texts (Fiske, 2004). By analyzing these elements, people can gain deeper insights into the underlying messages conveyed by media content. Furthermore, John Fiske argues that the codes used in television have relationships with each other and form a meaning. Fiske reveals that every event broadcasted and displayed on television has social codes that are divided into three levels/stages of semiotics; reality, representation, and ideology, which collectively shape audience perceptions and societal ideologies (Vera, 2014).

Films such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Aquaman*, *Wonder Woman*, *Mulan*, and *Captain Marvel* offer salient examples of women characters who embody strength and bravery, thereby serving as vehicles for positive representations of women empowerment. For instance, *The Little Mermaid* portrays Ariel as a courageous and independent protagonist who undertakes significant risks to fulfil her aspirations (IMDb, 2023). These cinematic representations are instrumental in shaping public attitudes towards women empowerment and fostering a more nuanced understanding of gender equality.

The Little Mermaid (2023) is an American romantic fantasy musical film directed by Rob Marshall, with a screenplay by David Magee. This film is a live-action adaptation of Disney's 1989 animated feature of the same name, produced by Walt Disney Pictures, DeLuca Marshall, and Marc Platt Productions. The announcement by Disney in 2019 that Halle Bailey would portray Ariel elicited a wave of racist backlash and insults, including the emergence of

the hashtag #notmyariel. The official trailer received over 1.5 million dislikes on YouTube, leading the platform to conceal the dislike count (Klecko, 2023). In Indonesia, the casting of Halle Bailey as Ariel also received mixed responses and reactions, with both criticism and support. The film also gained significant attention in Indonesia through TikTok posts by a prominent Indonesian singer, Raisa, and through collaborations with other prominent local artists.

The *Little Mermaid* narrates the story of Ariel, the youngest daughter of King Triton, who is eager to explore the human world. Ariel falls in love with Prince Eric and makes a deal with the sea witch Ursula to acquire human legs. Notably, in the live-action adaptation, Ariel herself defeats Ursula, emphasising themes of women empowerment. The film achieved a rating of 7.2/10 on IMDb and won several awards, including Next Big Thing at The Queerties and the Feature Award from the ReFrame Stamp. It also received numerous nominations from various organizations, including the Hollywood Music in Media Awards and the Black Reel Awards.

The theme of women empowerment is prominently featured in the film, illustrating how Ariel, as the protagonist, asserts control over her life and makes consequential decisions. Women empowerment involves the elevation of women's status through education, awareness, and active participation in decision-making processes. This aligns with the principles of the fourth wave of feminism, which emphasises gender equality and seeks to address the marginalization of women within society.

Previous studies have extensively examined the topic of women's empowerment. Jongkit Wongpinit's dissertation, "An Analysis of the Empowerment of Women as Reflected in Selected Works by African American Feminist Writer" (2006), explores women protagonists in the works of Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, and Maya Angelou. Wongpinit's research categorizes the protagonists' struggles into ignorance, patriarchy, stereotypes, and racism, and identifies five empowerment strategies they use: making assumptions, experimenting, becoming aware, rejecting, and educating. These strategies enable the protagonists to overcome their challenges and achieve inner happiness. Another study by Feronica Ambarwati, titled "The Representation of Women's Empowerment Depicted in the Movie *Raya and The Last Dragon* (2021)" (2022), employs a qualitative descriptive method and Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis alongside a feminist approach. Ambarwati finds that women's empowerment in the film leads to greater control, a stronger voice, the ability to influence key social decisions, recognition as equal citizens, and meaningful contributions, highlighting the significant impact of empowerment on the main character.

Building on existing literature, this study aims to analyze the representation of women's empowerment in *The Little Mermaid*, focusing on both narrative techniques and visual strategies used in the film. Featuring Halle Bailey, an African American actress, as Ariel, the film has sparked controversy, making it a compelling subject for analysis. Unlike previous studies, this research will employ John Fiske's semiotic method and his television codes to examine how women's empowerment is depicted through Ariel's character. This analysis will elucidate how symbols, signs, and narratives in the film contribute to conveying messages about women's empowerment to the audience.

Based on the background research that has been outlined above, the objective of this study is to analyze the representation of women's empowerment in *The Little Mermaid*, examining both the narrative techniques and visual strategies employed in the film.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Film as a Mass Communication Media

Mass communication, as defined by Jay Black and Frederick C. Whitney (as cited in Nurudin, 2019), is a process where large-scale messages are transmitted to extensive, anonymous, and diverse audiences via mass media. This includes media such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, films, and books, which allow messages to reach broad, impersonal audiences simultaneously. Joseph A. Devito adds that mass communication targets a vast and indistinct audience through audio and visual channels. In communication studies, film is seen as a form of mass communication due to its ability to reach large and remote audiences, using moving images and sound to convey ideas. Over time, film has become a powerful audio-visual medium influencing perception of reality, truth, and preferences among diverse demographic groups (Maisuwong, 2012)

Women's Empowerment Movement

Women empowerment refers to the process by which women gain the ability to make autonomous choices and decisions about their lives. This empowerment enhances women's status through education, awareness, literacy, and training, facilitating their active participation in social, organizational, and community life, thereby gaining control over their circumstances (Stein, 1997). Empowerment enables women to redefine gender roles, granting them greater freedom to achieve their aspirations (Mahbub, 2021). The *Rencana Pembangunan Jangka Panjang Nasional* (RPJPN) 2005-2025 integrates gender equality, emphasising fair and equitable development and human resource advancement (Siscawati et al., 2020)). Diversity and inclusion are essential for achieving equality, ensuring representation and valuing individual contributions (Thomas & Ely, 1996). Empowerment also involves redistributing power within society, defined as control over resources and ideologies, encompassing physical, intellectual, financial, and self-resources, such as self-esteem and confidence (Batliwala, 1993).

In patriarchal societies, women often face exploitation due to their lack of empowerment (Rahman, 2007). Empowerment allows women to take control of their lives, set agendas, organize support, and demand societal changes (Young, 1993). This process is linked to the fourth wave of feminism, which addresses gender norms and marginalization (Mahbub, 2021). The stages of empowerment include personal level (gaining personal power and independence), interpersonal level (collaborative decision-making), and social action & social change (Mahbub, 2021). (Chutia, 2022) identifies six dimensions of women empowerment: economic, social, political, psychological, physical, and legal. Economic empowerment allows control over economic resources, social empowerment changes patriarchal perceptions,

political empowerment ensures fair representation, psychological empowerment improves self-perception, physical empowerment emphasises health, and legal empowerment involves supportive legal frameworks. Mahbub (2021) outlines five approaches to empowerment: welfare, efficiency, equity, empowerment, and gender and development, each highlighting different aspects of women's roles and participation in development.

Representation

According to Stuart Hall (1997) representation is a mechanism for generating meaning by linking concepts with language, thereby imbuing objects with significance based on the observer's interpretation. Hall delineates two forms of representation: mental and linguistic. Mental representation refers to the abstract concepts within our minds that enable us to interpret the world. Hall posits that meaning depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our minds that represent the world. Linguistic representation involves the translation of abstract concepts into comprehensible language, thereby connecting ideas with specific signs or symbols. The theory of representation underscores the importance of shared knowledge and language backgrounds within groups, as these commonalities facilitate the effective reception and comprehension of communicated messages.

Semiotics

According to Fiske (2004), semiotics involves examining signs and how meaning is constructed within sign systems. It scientifically analyzes how meaning is produced in media texts and how signs are understood within the societal context that engages with them. This discipline explores the processes through which meaning is encoded and decoded in different forms of communication and cultural artifacts.

METHODOLOGY

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach, a methodological approach that aims at comprehending phenomena related to the holistic experiences of research subjects. It employs descriptive techniques, utilizing words and language, within specific natural contexts and relies on naturalistic methodologies (Moleong, 2009). The specific methodology applied in this study is John Fiske's television semiotics method. According to Vera (2014), this method categorizes social codes into three levels: the level of reality, the level of representation, and the level of ideology. This methodological approach is used by the researcher to study the representation of women's empowerment as depicted by Ariel, the main character in *The Little Mermaid* movie.

The subject of this research is the representation of women empowerment and the object is *The Little Mermaid* movie. The researcher will analyze the data collected through the documentation technique, which involves capturing screenshots of scenes from the film. The researcher will focus on scenes that are relevant to the topic of women's empowerment, using

John Fiske's television codes as a methodological framework for gathering and interpreting the meanings of the signs in the selected scenes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected from the research indicates that *The Little Mermaid* movie encapsulates various aspects of women's empowerment, as evidenced through multiple scenes within the film.

Women Empowerment in Decision-Making Process

This research point analyses women's empowerment as depicted through the decision-making processes of the woman protagonist in *The Little Mermaid*. According to Santoso (2015), individuals possess an intrinsic desire for success, necessitating a series of deliberate efforts and decisions throughout their lives. Women empowerment equips and enables women to make decisions that significantly impact their lives (Mahbub, 2021). As Kabeer (2005) elucidates, empowerment requires a transformative process wherein women demonstrate their capacity to make autonomous choices and act against patriarchal constraints. This study examines how Ariel's life choices, specifically her defiance of social norms to pursue her aspiration of joining the human world, embody the principles of women's empowerment.

In *The Little Mermaid* (1989), the scene depicted in Figure 1 represents Ariel when she makes her way to the surface, symbolizing her decision to defy her father's edicts in pursuit of her dreams. From a realist perspective, Ariel's upward arm gesture as she swims signifies her quest to transcend existing boundaries and reach beyond her current circumstances. At the level of representation, the illumination from the surface of the sea functions as a visual spotlight, underscoring the significance of Ariel's pivotal moment of transformation.

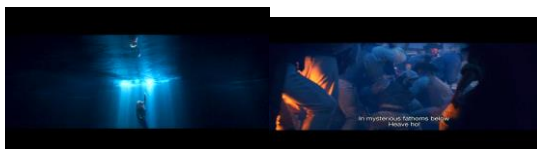


Figure 1. Ariel Makes Her Way to The Surface

Source: *The Little Mermaid* (Movie, 2023)

In this dolly-in shot (Figure 1), the camera dynamically tracks Ariel's ascent, positioning her centrally within the frame while the background shifts to visually articulate her journey from the ocean's depths to the sea's surface (Brown, 2022). This cinematographic technique not only underscores the gravity of Ariel's choice to embark on her personal quest but also serves as a metaphor for her emergence into a new phase of self-determination and empowerment.

This scene exemplifies the concept of women's empowerment at a personal level, which involves the cultivation of individual agency, autonomy, and decision-making capabilities in the face of societal constraints (Mahbub, 2021). It embodies an empowerment approach wherein women endeavour to effectuate self-transformation and assert their rights to independent life choices (Mahbub, 2021). Additionally, Ariel's covertly observing human

activities from a small boat, as captured through a point-of-view shot, shows the cold, oppressive environment of the sea with the warmer, inviting realm of the human world. These two opposite visuals reflect Ariel's deep-seated curiosity and fascination with a world fundamentally different from her own (Brown, 2022)

The deployment of an extreme long shot that gradually zooms in on Ariel as she ascends from the seabed to the surface intensifies the dramatic impact of the scene, offering a more profound and emotionally charged representation than that found in the animated version.

Women Empowerment in the Pursuit of Equality

Equality originates from the concept of being *equal* or *equivalent*. This means that equality denotes a state of being on the same level, with no one being higher or lower than another; it signifies a state of equivalence. This notion of equality starts from the belief that all human beings are created with equal standing, viewed as noble beings with a higher status compared to other creatures. Human status within society is intrinsically linked to the concept of equality. Equality encompasses equal rights under the law, the right to safety, the right to have a voice, freedom of speech, access to healthcare, access to education, and many other aspects (Pratiwi & Annisa, 2023).

After experiencing various events in the human world, Ariel, who lost her voice and was cursed by Ursula, faces numerous challenges. Failing to achieve the "kiss of true love" within the specified time, Ariel is brought back to the ocean by Ursula (Figure 2). This event provides Ursula with the opportunity to seize King Triton's life. Rather than resigning, Ariel engages in an act of empowerment to confront Ursula. The equity approach is evident in how Ariel once again saves Prince Eric by pushing Ursula away. From the body language code, we can also see how Ariel assists in pulling Prince Eric to the surface to prevent him from drowning.



Figure 2. Ariel Defeats Ursula

Source: The Little Mermaid (Movie, 2023)

Despite the difficulties Ariel faces in battling Ursula, she does not give up easily. She crawls onto the ship to take control of the ship's wheel. This instance of women empowerment is supported by the level of representation using dark and blue colours and lighting that illustrate the chaos of the situation. Eventually, Ariel succeeds in defeating Ursula and winning the battle. This outcome demonstrates that achieving the "kiss of true love" is not the only way for Ariel to save herself, but she is also able to rescue her father. These codes represent a woman's struggle in advocating for herself.

In contrast to the animated film, in the live-action version of The Little Mermaid (2023), it is Ariel who struggles and delivers the final blow to defeat Ursula. In the animated film, Prince Eric is the one who kills Ursula. Although the actions are like those performed by Ariel

in the 2023 live-action film, the clear difference lies in Prince Eric's ability to run on the ship while Ariel, who lacks legs, must crawl to accomplish the same task. This change challenges the stereotype that men are inherently stronger than women (Mahbub, 2021). It also exemplifies physical empowerment, as Ariel not only strategizes to combat the enlarged Ursula but also takes control of the ship's wheel despite her physical limitations. Based on both the reality and representation levels in this scene, Ariel's struggle against Ursula illustrates that women possess physical and mental capabilities equivalent to those of men. This reinforces the message of gender equality, showcasing that women are not merely supportive characters but also possess strength, courage, and resilience.

Women Empowerment to Make Social Transformation

Social action and social change represent the third and final stage of the women empowerment process. This stage focuses on achieving social action and change, which can lead to both individual and interpersonal empowerment (Mahbub, 2021). Society is dynamic, continually evolving and changing due to internal factors or external environmental influences. Social transformation generally refers to the process of shifting or transforming societal structures, including thought patterns, attitudes, and social life. It should not be viewed from a single perspective as it affects multiple sectors within society. Social change impacts all aspects of society, indicated by shifts in prevailing values and norms (Goa, 2017)



Figure 3. Mermaid and human in the same frame

Source: The Little Mermaid (Movie, 2023)

In the representation level, the final scene of the film utilizes long shot and extreme long shot techniques (Figure 3) to depict the unity between mermaids and humans. The use of *epic sound* at the film's conclusion underscores Ariel's success in achieving social action and social change, marking a significant accomplishment. Originally denoting heroic poetry, the term *epic* has evolved in the modern era to signify something extraordinary and impressive, beyond its traditional associations with conflict and grandeur (Muliani, 2020). The concept of *epic* has come to represent greatness, nobility, and historical significance.

Furthermore, the visual codes in this scene illustrate a diverse society, showcasing varied skin tones and hair types among both mermaids and humans. This diversity represents Ariel's success in bridging her world with that of humans, reflecting her achievement of all three stages of empowerment, including social action and social change. The scene, set at the beach as a symbolic boundary between the mermaid and human worlds, illustrates the transition from initial discrimination to a harmonious coexistence (Mahbub, 2021).

Data Interpretation

In the preceding subsection, the researcher conducted an analysis of *The Little Mermaid* movie employing John Fiske's three semiotic levels: reality, representation, and ideology. The reality level revealed elements such as appearance, costumes, and dialogue that reflect women's empowerment. The representation level explored how cinematographic techniques, lighting, and music enhance the depiction of women empowerment. Furthermore, the ideological level provided insight into the film's conveyed messages.

Disney has established a legacy of creating strong, independent women characters, exemplified by figures such as Mulan and Moana, as well as protagonists like *Brave* and *Raya* who shape their own destinies. Through its empowering and inclusive narratives, Disney has demonstrated a commitment to transforming perceptions and providing positive role models for children and adolescents.

In the 2023 adaptation of *The Little Mermaid*, Disney cast Halle Bailey, a Black actress, as Ariel, marking a significant departure from the original animated film. This 135-minute film serves as a medium for exploring women's empowerment through Ariel's quest for freedom and independence. The film's dual role of providing both entertainment and inspiration underscores its effectiveness as a tool for social messaging, encouraging viewers to recognize the importance of women's rights and to pursue their aspirations (Fiske, 2004; Mahbub, 2021)

Representation of Women Empowerment Process

In *The Little Mermaid* Movie, the concept of women empowerment is vividly portrayed through the protagonist, Ariel. It is known that the process of women empowerment is implemented in accordance with defined stages. According to Mahbub (2021)), women empowerment can be delineated into three stages: the personal level, the interpersonal level, and social action & social change. The personal level involves a woman developing a sense of personal power, control, and independence over her material and inherent choices. The interpersonal level is characterized by a woman's influence in decision-making processes through collaboration with others. Lastly, social action and social change emphasize the objective of achieving societal transformation. These stages are represented through John Fiske's three levels of semiotics in the film, with the most prominent being the level of reality.

In the initial stage of the empowerment process, Ariel is depicted as a resolute and inquisitive woman with a strong desire to make autonomous life choices. This is evident in various scenes where she strives for the freedom to choose her desired life path. The narrative demonstrates how a woman's determination and strong will can facilitate the pursuit of personal autonomy. Every woman possesses the right to exhibit bravery and make significant decisions to achieve their aspirations. Through courage, independence, curiosity, and strong determination, women are shown to possess the power and right to chart their own lives and pursue their dreams without considering limitations. However, women often encounter challenges and obstacles in the empowerment process, such as authoritarian attitudes from family members that can hinder their ability to make independent choices.

The second stage of women empowerment is represented through Ariel's efforts to achieve equality in society. Equality entails having the same level, position, and status as

others. In *The Little Mermaid* movie, empowerment in the pursuit of equality is depicted in several key scenes highlighting Ariel's strength, independence, and bravery. Unlike in the animated film, where Prince Eric kills Ursula, the live-action adaptation portrays Ariel as the one who fights and defeats Ursula, saves her father, and repeatedly rescues Prince Eric. Women empowerment encompasses more than gender equality; it also involves broader concepts such as diversity and inclusion.

The casting of Halle Bailey, a Black actress and singer, as Ariel represents Disney's commitment to diversity and inclusion. Diversity ensures the representation of various groups, while inclusion ensures that all individuals are valued and empowered to contribute fully. Bailey's portrayal of Ariel challenges stereotypes regarding who can be a protagonist in major stories, inspiring the Black community to believe they can achieve their aspirations. Despite receiving mixed reactions from the public, Bailey views her role as part of a larger movement towards greater diversity and inclusion in media. She emphasizes staying true to her identity, incorporating her natural locs into Ariel's look, which adds depth to the character and empowers young women to see themselves reflected in her role. Bailey's performance has garnered significant recognition, including nominations for various awards, demonstrating her success in promoting women empowerment both on-screen and in real life.

The third stage of women empowerment involves achieving social change, leading to both individual and interpersonal empowerment. Women empowerment not only transforms individual lives but also precipitates broader social change. With strong leadership and the courage to challenge injustices, women can influence policies and improve societal quality of life. Women can emerge as leaders who unify diverse communities, demonstrating that empowerment can foster a more just and balanced society. Despite ongoing challenges such as gender discrimination and negative stereotypes, women have the potential to be leaders who bring about positive societal changes. This is exemplified by the impact Bailey has had on young Black girls, like eleven-year-old Leah Murphy, who feels empowered by Bailey's role and believes she can overcome barriers historically placed against young Black women (Ellis, 2024)

Through the depiction of the three stages of women empowerment, it is evident that women, particularly Black women, can face significant obstacles yet successfully achieve empowerment. As a double minority, Black women face more substantial challenges in achieving equality. Disney's representation of a Black woman's struggle, through Halle Bailey's portrayal of Ariel, highlights the journey through all stages of women empowerment. Ariel's success in the film and Bailey's recognition and influence in real life illustrate that women empowerment can lead to significant societal impact and inspire others. The film not only narrates a story of individual empowerment but also advocates for broader social change by illustrating the transformative power of women, particularly those from marginalized communities.

Revisionism and Feminism as Pillars of Women Empowerment

The analysis of the film *The Little Mermaid* reveals that it employs a revisionist approach which supports the ideals of women empowerment. Revisionism, as articulated by

(Bergan, 2011) refers to a cinematic approach that does not seek revolutionary changes within a genre but instead questions long-standing assumptions and introduces modifications. Such revisionist films challenge prevailing norms and offer new, critical interpretations of cultural, social, and political issues. *The Little Mermaid* (2023), as a remake of the 1989 animated film, exemplifies this revisionist approach by revising and updating the narrative to reflect contemporary values, particularly those related to racial diversity and gender equality. This reimagining aligns with the principles of revisionism by reevaluating and expanding upon the original story's representation of gender and racial identities.

In the original animated adaptation, Ariel is depicted as a white character with red hair, a portrayal reflective of the racial norms of the late 20th century. The 2023 remake, featuring Halle Bailey, a Black actress, signifies a deliberate and strategic move towards racial diversification and normalization of racial diversity in mainstream media. This casting decision embodies the revisionist ideology as described by Bergan (2011), which seeks to correct historical exclusions and offer a more inclusive representation of women. By casting a Black actress in the role of Ariel, the film reconfigures traditional racial boundaries and redefines the parameters of who can be a leading character in popular narratives. This approach not only supports the feminist agenda of expanding opportunities for women from marginalized backgrounds but also challenges the historical underrepresentation of Black women in significant cinematic roles (Mahbub, 2021).

Furthermore, the film's narrative demonstrates a more independent and self-determined Ariel compared to her animated predecessor that aligns with the principles of revisionist Westerns, which often present unglamorous anti-heroes and offer stronger roles for women. The 2023 adaptation portrays Ariel not merely as a romantic figure but as an active agent of change who challenges patriarchal structures, as demonstrated by her actions against Ursula and her efforts to achieve personal freedom. This revisionist framework is exemplified through Ariel's proactive role in combating Ursula and rescuing her father, contrasting with the original film's portrayal of Ariel primarily through a romantic lens. The film's Caribbean-inspired setting, with its vibrant market scenes and diverse cultural influences, further reinforces this revisionist narrative by embracing a richer, more inclusive depiction of cultural diversity, thus aligning with feminist principles of equality and representation (Bergan, 2011).

Additionally, *The Little Mermaid* integrates elements of feminist theory, particularly reflecting the fourth wave of feminism which emerged in the early 21st century. This wave is marked by a focus on gender equality and addresses the marginalization of women (Mahbub, 2021). The film's feminist dimension is evident in Ariel's quest for personal freedom, her resistance against patriarchal authority, and the adaptation's broader commitment to diversity and inclusion. By reimagining Ariel as a Black woman, the film challenges conventional racial and gender stereotypes, offering a modern interpretation of women empowerment that extends beyond mere gender equality to address intersections of race, identity, and representation. This approach aligns with feminist objectives of achieving a more equitable and inclusive society and critiques existing norms that have historically marginalized women of color (Asnani, 2020).

In sum, *The Little Mermaid* (2023) movie embodies a revisionist and feminist

perspective that supports women empowerment through its updated representation of Ariel and its broader narrative themes. The film's innovative approach to racial and gender representation serves as a contemporary critique of traditional cinematic tropes and offers a renewed vision for female empowerment in both the narrative and the real world. By situating Ariel's character within a framework of racial and gender inclusivity, the film not only challenges historical stereotypes but also provides a platform for a more diverse and equitable portrayal of women in cinema (Bergan, 2011; Mahbub, 2021).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research, data analysis, and interpretation conducted by the researcher, several findings have been made regarding the research problem: how the concept of women empowerment is represented in *The Little Mermaid* movie. The researcher draws conclusions from these findings by applying John Fiske's semiotic method, which integrates the levels of reality, representation, and ideology. This study specifically focuses on the main character in the film, Ariel, portrayed by Halle Bailey. From the interpretation and analysis of the data regarding women empowerment in *The Little Mermaid*, it is concluded that the film portrays women empowerment through the process of a woman choosing her own path in life despite facing societal norms to achieve her goals, seeking gender equality, and promoting diversity and inclusion within society, as well as instigating social change. These elements reflect the three stages of the women empowerment process; personal level, interpersonal level, and social action & social change.

At the personal level of empowerment, Ariel's character in the live-action of *The Little Mermaid* movie is depicted as a determined and curious figure who actively seeks to assert her autonomy in making life choices despite the restrictive societal and authoritative norms imposed upon her. At the interpersonal level, the film advances Ariel's role as a central heroic agent who defies traditional gender stereotypes by undertaking independent and significant heroic endeavours, thereby challenging and redefining conventional narratives that restrict women agency. Finally, at the level of social action and social change, the film exemplifies how women, particularly those who are double minorities, can emerge as transformative leaders and make societal progress through their bravery and dedication. This representation underscores the capacity of women to enact substantial social reforms and inspire broader societal transformations.

Additionally, the study identifies the influence of revisionism and feminism ideologies within the film as pillars of women empowerment. The revisionism ideology is demonstrated through the film's reimagining of classic narratives to create a more inclusive character and setting, while the feminism ideology is evidenced by Ariel's pursuit of gender equality and social reform. The film serves as a medium to inspire viewers to recognize and actualize their own potential for empowerment, particularly for Black women who find representation in Ariel's role, as well as those who embody a double minority status. Individuals holding such double minority status encounter exacerbated challenges in their pursuit of empowerment. *The Little Mermaid* not only depicts a journey of individual empowerment but also promotes broader societal change by showcasing the significant impact of women, especially those from

marginalized communities.

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