



Globalizing Childhood: The Influence Of Global Media Across Borders On Children's Understanding Of Identity

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Abstract

This research explores the concept of gender globalization across cultures and its influence on children's psychology, particularly through exposure to gender representations in children's movies. As globalization increasingly permeates media, children's films have become powerful tools for transmitting cultural norms and gender roles across diverse societies. The paper examines the implementation of gender globalization in these children's films and its impact on shaping young audiences' psychological perspectives toward gender and culture, whereby it primarily focuses on the films *Mulan* (1998) and *Big Hero 6* (2014). This study investigates how globalized portrayals of gender and culture in these films help to shape young audiences' perceptions of gender identity, roles, expectations and the exposure to multifaceted cultures. The paper also highlights the dual impact of such exposure, meaning while it can promote inclusivity and challenge traditional stereotypes, it may also introduce conflicting messages that affect children's understanding of gender as well as culture. *Mulan*, which retells a Chinese legend, challenges gender norms by having its female lead adopt a male persona in order to gain respect from the society. However, *Mulan*'s reversion to a traditional female position in the film's ending has provoked controversies regarding its reinforcement of gender binary thinking, casting doubt on its progressive credentials. A more fluid approach to gender is presented in *Big Hero 6*, which is set in the fictional, multicultural city of San Fransokyo, a combination between Tokyo and San Francisco, establishes characters like Go Go Tomago and Hiro exhibiting attributes typically associated with both masculinity and femininity. Even so, the film's absence of overt discussion of gender identity leaves its messages up for interpretation, sparking controversy about how effective it is in addressing gender issues. By examining the intersection of gender, globalization, and children's media, this study provides important new understandings of the social and psychological effects of gender depiction in movies. In a world that is quickly globalizing, it underscores the significance of creating thoughtful material for children's movies, acknowledging their enormous influence on forming the next generation's perspective of gender as well as diverse cultures.

Key words: Gender globalization, Children's psychology, Gender representations, Cultural norms, Gender identity, Gender roles, Cultural expectations, Inclusivity, Gender binary, Gender fluidity, Multiculturalism, Psychological impact, Gender stereotypes

Introduction

What exactly is gender globalization? Gender globalization refers to the widespread distribution and transmission of the understanding of norms, roles and ideas related to the concept of gender. It is also a concept of the process by which the roles of gender and ideas are influenced by globalization influence the local gender roles and norms of the specific community in that particular area. The concept is also tied to the influence of cultural ideas and aspects of influence in cultural symbols, practices and ideologies across borders. As globalization occurs, it shapes and influences the local concept and distribution of beliefs and traditions of several cultural aspects and ideological beliefs that transcends the local culture and norms of various communities thereby making it into a more broader perspective in global level. This paper primarily focuses on the impact of globalization in the media, especially through children's media and psychology which is depicted in children's movies and its cultural influence towards this specific intersection of the impact witnessed by the globalization of gender and its influence towards the sprouting minds of children and their ideological belief system. The paper will primarily focus on the movies of *Mulan*, set against the backdrop of China, representing the traditional gender norms and roles implemented in the Chinese community as well as various other communities around the world, whereby the movie challenges the notion of such adversities highlighting the dilemma of the concept of being the lesser aspect amongst the existing gender and *Big Hero 6*, set against the backdrop of San Fransokyo, a fictional combination of San Francisco and Tokyo, combining both the cultural identity of America and Japan, highlighting the representation of both communities and acknowledgment towards the psychological representation of culture in children's understanding in early stages by implementing the Social Learning Theory by Albert Bandura.

Literature Review

The term "gender globalization" refers to the spread and evolution of gender norms, roles, and beliefs across cultural boundaries due to globalization. It highlights the shift towards more fluid and dynamic portrayals of gender, challenging established norms, particularly in children's media. Scholars like Mohanty (2003) emphasize the media's crucial role in shaping children's perceptions of gender by presenting hybridized, cross-cultural narratives that challenge local gender norms.

Animated films are pivotal in this context, influencing children's understanding of gender by either reinforcing or challenging stereotypes. McRobbie (2009) argues that these films often provide a child's first exposure to gender norms. In the case of *Mulan* (1998), the film blends traditional Chinese ideals with a Western feminist narrative, reflecting both local and global perspectives. Disney's adaptation exemplifies how globalization can transform and commercialize folktales for a worldwide audience, raising discussions about authenticity and cultural appropriation, especially in the context of the 1998 and 2020 versions of *Mulan*.

The Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) offers a framework for understanding how media exposure influences children's internalization of gender norms. According to Bandura, children model the gender roles they observe in media and receive validation from their social environment. *Mulan* presents a female warrior who challenges traditional gender roles, offering a new view of femininity that includes honor, independence, and strength—qualities often associated with masculinity in patriarchal societies.

Similarly, *Big Hero 6* features characters like GoGo Tomago and Honey Lemon, who defy conventional gender norms by embodying traits traditionally associated with males, such as bravery and scientific prowess. Hynes (2015) underscores the importance of such portrayals in promoting gender equality and providing diverse role models.

Big Hero 6 also reflects globalization's impact by merging American and Japanese cultural elements into the fictional city of San Fransokyo, creating a hybridized universe. Appadurai (1996) notes that globalization fosters hybrid identities that combine various cultural influences. Both films illustrate how globalization affects children's identity formation: *Mulan* navigates the tension between local traditions and global feminist ideals, while *Big Hero 6* depicts a more flexible, multicultural future where gender and cultural identities are fluid.

Materials

1. *Mulan* movie (1998 & 2020)
2. *Big Hero 6* movie (2014)

Methodology

To study the representation of gender roles and cultural globalization in children's films, concentrating on *Mulan* (1998) and *Big Hero 6* (2014). Examining particular conversation passages, character development, and visual representations of gender and culture in the two movies. We'll pay close attention to how the movies either subvert or uphold prevailing gender conventions and cultural stereotypes.

Identify and categorize key themes such as gender flexibility, cultural representation, defiance of societal expectations, and hybridity in identity. Particular attention will be paid to how each film integrates global cultural perspectives into the narrative.

The movies *Mulan* (1998) and *Big Hero 6* (2014), together with pertinent analyses, criticisms, and scholarly works that examine how gender and culture are portrayed in both productions.

To use SLT by Albert Bandura to comprehend how kids could absorb the gender roles and cultural norms portrayed in the movies.

To focus on how children are exposed to gender models and cultural norms and how this affects the formation of their own identities, using SLT as a framework.

To examine how media personalities—like *Mulan* and the *Big Hero 6* characters—act as role models for kids, encouraging them to copy and absorb particular gendered and culturally relevant actions and attitudes.

To examine psychological studies and the body of literature on children's media use, paying particular attention to studies on the early development of gender perception and identity formation.

Analysis

The concept of "gender globalization" encapsulates the spread and evolution of gender norms, roles, and ideologies beyond cultural boundaries due to globalization. This cross-border transmission merges local traditions with global perspectives, influencing how gender is perceived and represented. In children's media, such as the movies *Mulan* (1998) and *Big Hero 6* (2014), globalization shapes the portrayal of gender, impacting how young audiences understand gender roles and identity. This paper examines these films through

the lens of Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT), which explains how media exposure helps children internalize gender roles.

To understand the impact of gender as one of the most critical aspects of social identity, Eagly's (1987) social role theory proposed that gender beliefs and behaviors are shaped by diverse societal role expectations regarding sexuality, interaction, and observation from the environment. As long as individuals participate in societal settings, gender portrayal inevitably becomes a significant topic that represents social behaviors.(2)

Mulan serves as a prime example of gender globalization. Set against traditional Chinese culture, the film portrays a female protagonist who challenges societal expectations by taking on a masculine role to protect her family and country. While *Mulan* is rooted in Chinese cultural ideals, its adaptation for a global audience incorporates Western feminist values. Disney's adaptation emphasizes individualism and self-discovery, traits central to Western feminism, thereby altering the original narrative's cultural authenticity. This Westernization of a Chinese legend illustrates the broader tension in gender globalization: media products are often shaped by the cultural and ideological values of their creators, leading to representations that cater to global audiences but may compromise cultural authenticity.

*Mulan, as a representative story about women or female characters, has been popular since the 1980s, and its intertextuality has been formed from multiple film versions, providing bases for discussions on how women's stories, with *Mulan* as the template, are narrated in different stages of globalization, from which we can adopt the evolution of gender narrative.(3)*

Disney's *Mulan* challenges traditional gender roles by presenting a feminist narrative through a Western lens. The film highlights Mulan's personal bravery and triumph over societal norms, aligning with Western values of independence and self-empowerment. However, this portrayal overlooks the Confucian principles of collectivism and familial duty inherent in the original Chinese story. This adaptation reflects how globalization influences gender representation, where traditional narratives are often reshaped to fit Western ideologies, sometimes at the expense of cultural authenticity.

*In contrast, she uses her strength and will as a "person" and her talent and potential to reach the top, realizing that she can remove the shackles and learn about herself. *Mulan*, like the protagonists in other superhero movies, is inherently different and works very hard and is thus destined to succeed (3)*

In contrast, *Big Hero 6* presents a more fluid approach to gender roles. Set in the fictional city of San Fransokyo—a blend of American and Japanese cultures—the film reflects globalization's impact on cultural identity. It features diverse characters who defy traditional gender stereotypes, such as GoGo Tomago and Honey Lemon, who embody traits traditionally associated with masculinity, like bravery and scientific intelligence. This multicultural setting and character representation offer children exposure to various cultural norms, fostering a more inclusive understanding of gender roles.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory provides a framework for understanding how media influences children's internalization of gender norms. According to SLT, children learn about gender by observing behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes associated with different gender roles in their environment. Media, including films like *Mulan* and *Big Hero 6*, plays a significant role in this learning process by providing models of gender behavior for children to emulate. Reinforcement from parents, peers, and media figures helps children internalize these gender norms, shaping their gender identity.

The social learning theory explains how environmental and cognitive factors interact to influence human learning and behavior. This indicates that learning occurs as a result of people realizing the consequences of other people's actions. According to Bandura, people can learn about their own progress both slowly and quickly through social interactions with other people as well as quickly and easily through media exposure (2)

Children's films are crucial in gender socialization, often serving as a child's first encounter with societal norms regarding masculinity and femininity. Characters in these films, whether adhering to or defying traditional gender roles, offer models for children to imitate. Films that reinforce gender stereotypes can perpetuate societal norms that restrict both boys and girls, while those that challenge these stereotypes promote gender equality by presenting diverse and inclusive representations.

For instance, *Mulan* provides a model of gender flexibility and empowerment through its female protagonist, encouraging children to question societal expectations and envision themselves beyond traditional roles. Conversely, *Big Hero 6* offers a range of characters who challenge traditional gender roles, presenting a more inclusive portrayal of gender and cultural identity. By exposing children to diverse gender representations, these films contribute to the development of more egalitarian attitudes.

In summary, gender globalization in children's media, as exemplified by *Mulan* and *Big Hero 6*, plays a vital role in shaping children's perceptions of gender roles and cultural identity. Through the lens of Social Learning Theory, these films provide models for children to learn from, reflecting the complex interplay between cultural authenticity and global commercialization. The blending of gender and cultural norms in these films highlights the broader impact of globalization on media, influencing how children understand their place in an increasingly interconnected world.

Findings

- In *Mulan*, gender roles are presented in direct opposition to traditional Chinese values, particularly around the expectations of women in a patriarchal society. The film challenges traditional gender norms by showing Mulan as a woman who defies cultural expectations and assumes a masculine role to protect her family and country.
- *Big Hero 6* presents more fluid gender roles, especially in the characterization of Hiro and his friends. The female characters, GoGo and Honey Lemon, possess attributes that traditionally align with male traits, such as bravery and scientific intelligence, blurring the lines of rigid gender stereotypes.
- The global nature of both films allows for a hybridization of gender roles. While *Mulan* remains grounded in traditional Chinese culture, it simultaneously incorporates Western feminist ideals. *Big Hero 6*, on the other hand, blends Eastern and Western cultures, creating a more flexible and universally relatable portrayal of gender.
- *Mulan* teaches children that gender roles are not fixed and that individuals can challenge societal expectations. Mulan's character empowers young viewers, especially girls, to see themselves as capable of achieving the same things as boys, fostering an egalitarian view of gender.
- *Big Hero 6* introduces children to diverse cultural settings and a group of characters who collectively model cooperation across genders, race, and cultural backgrounds. The setting of the fictional city San Fransokyo itself reflects a merging of Eastern and Western cultural elements, allowing children to visualize a world where multiple cultures coexist, encouraging a global understanding of identity.
- Children exposed to both films are likely to internalize flexible gender roles and may view cultural hybridity positively, as seen through characters who defy traditional boundaries while embracing diverse identities.
- According to Bandura's Social Learning Theory, children learn by observing and imitating the behaviors of role models. In *Mulan*, young viewers, especially girls, may learn to challenge gender-based limitations, seeing Mulan as a role model for strength and courage in a world dominated by men.
- In *Big Hero 6*, children are presented with a more nuanced view of gender and culture, where the boundaries of gender are less rigid. Female characters engage in scientific innovation and action-packed heroism, while male characters, like Hiro, exhibit emotional vulnerability and intelligence, offering boys an alternative to traditional male stereotypes.

- The psychological impact of these portrayals is significant. Children who see these films are likely to adopt more flexible attitudes toward gender roles, allowing them to break free from the constraints of stereotypical masculinity and femininity, promoting gender equity from a young age.
- *Mulan* serves as a direct gender role model for breaking societal norms and expectations. Her transition from a traditional female role to a warrior serves as a strong example for young viewers to resist conformity and pursue what they believe is right, regardless of societal constraints.
- In *Big Hero 6*, the characters, both male and female, provide diverse role models. The combination of physical strength, intelligence, creativity, and empathy allows children to see that gender is not a determinant of what they can achieve. Hiro's emotional journey, from dealing with loss to finding purpose, provides boys with a more emotional and multifaceted role model.
- *Mulan* carefully balances its portrayal of traditional Chinese culture with global feminist ideals. While the film respects Chinese customs, such as the emphasis on family honor and obedience, it simultaneously critiques the rigidity of gender roles in a way that resonates with global audiences.
- *Big Hero 6* leans heavily into cultural hybridity, portraying a world where Eastern and Western elements seamlessly blend. This fusion makes the film's portrayal of gender and culture more accessible to a global audience, helping children appreciate the value of diversity and cultural exchange.

Results

The results of this study show that, in the context of globalization, children's conceptions of gender roles and cultural identity are greatly influenced by both *Mulan* and *Big Hero 6*. *Mulan* presents a female protagonist who rejects patriarchal rules, so presenting an egalitarian view of gender and directly challenging traditional gender roles. The film presents gender as fluid rather than fixed, allowing youngsters to see both Western feminist ideals and traditional Chinese norms. This gives young viewers—especially girls—the confidence to question conventional norms and support gender equality. *Big Hero 6*, on the other hand, offers a more flexible and hybridized representation of gender norms, with female characters like Honey Lemon and GoGo exhibiting qualities like bravery and brilliance that are usually associated with men. San Francisco, the multicultural backdrop of the movie. The results show that when it comes to tackling gender and cultural globalization in children's media, *Mulan* and *Big Hero 6* provide different strategies. *Mulan* challenges patriarchal standards and demonstrates how gender and cultural norms are flexible and adaptive by basing its feminist story on traditional Chinese culture. The success of the movie all around the world emphasizes how relevant *Mulan's* fight for gender equality is to everyone, showing kids that standards can change over time and throughout countries. On the other hand, *Big Hero 6* represents a worldwide society where technological innovation and multiculturalism thrive by embodying a more overt kind of cultural blending through its fictitious setting of San Fransokyo. Instead than concentrating on questioning certain gender norms, the movie offers a contemporary, flexible portrayal of identity that cuts across cultural boundaries.

Conclusion

In conclusion, gender globalization and its effects on children's psychological growth and identity formation are insightfully discussed in *Mulan* and *Big Hero 6*. Both movies show how globalization affects how gender roles and cultural identity are portrayed in children's media, despite being based in very different cultural settings.

Mulan defies conventional Chinese gender standards with her gripping story. The movie emphasizes how gender roles are malleable by showing a female protagonist who rejects patriarchal expectations to take on a masculine role. *Mulan's* adaption, which combines Western feminist values with its deeply ingrained Chinese

culture, highlights the wider conflict in globalization that arises when regional narratives are modified for a worldwide audience. In addition to questioning conventional norms, this adaptation gives young viewers—especially girls—more confidence to see themselves. However, Big Hero 6's multicultural San Fransokyo setting provides a more complex and adaptable depiction of gender roles. protagonists in the movie defy gender stereotypes by portraying male protagonists who exhibit emotional vulnerability and female heroines who possess traits typically associated with masculinity. This representation, which reflects the blending of Eastern and Western cultural components, encourages a more inclusive concept of gender. Big Hero 6 fosters an international viewpoint on cooperation and identity by presenting kids to a world where a variety of gender and ethnic identities coexist. Both films support the emergence of more accommodating views toward gender and cultural hybridity through their creative depictions of gender roles.

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