

THE ASPECT OF LIBERAL FEMINISM IN MOANA 2

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Abstract. This study focuses on the depiction of the character of Moana 2 in the context of liberal feminism, particularly in relation to the issue of women's equality and autonomy in the public sphere. The purpose of this study is to identify the form of representation of liberal feminism shown through Moana's character and actions in the film. This study uses a qualitative approach with thematic analysis method. The research data consists of dialogues, images, words, phrases, and sentences contained in the film, which were collected through documentation techniques and repeated observations. Data analysis was carried out through initial coding stages, grouping themes, and thematic interpretation with reference to the framework of the seven main principles of liberal feminism, and supported by secondary sources in the form of relevant books and scientific articles. The results of the study indicate that of the seven main principles of liberal feminism, six principles are clearly represented in Moana's character and actions. These principles include individual autonomy, freedom of choice, moral and rational equality, participation in the public sphere and citizenship, achievement based on merit, and efforts to reform discriminatory practices. These findings confirm that Moana is depicted as an independent, rational female character with leadership capacity equal to that of men, thus this film represents the values of liberal feminism consistently and meaningfully.

Keywords: Feminism, Liberal Feminism, Gender Equality, Film Studies, Moana

Abstrak. Studi ini berfokus pada penggambaran karakter Moana 2 dalam konteks feminisme liberal, khususnya yang berkaitan dengan isu kesetaraan dan otonomi perempuan di ranah publik. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi bentuk representasi feminisme liberal yang ditampilkan melalui karakter dan tindakan Moana dalam film tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode analisis tematik. Data penelitian berupa dialog, gambar, kata, frasa, dan kalimat yang terdapat dalam film, yang dikumpulkan melalui teknik dokumentasi dan pengamatan berulang. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahap pengodean awal, pengelompokan tema, serta interpretasi tematik dengan mengacu pada kerangka tujuh prinsip utama feminisme liberal, dan didukung oleh sumber sekunder berupa buku dan artikel ilmiah yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dari tujuh prinsip utama feminisme liberal, enam prinsip secara jelas direpresentasikan dalam karakter dan tindakan Moana. Prinsip-prinsip tersebut meliputi otonomi individu, kebebasan dalam menentukan pilihan, kesetaraan moral dan rasional, partisipasi dalam ranah publik dan kewarganegaraan, pencapaian berdasarkan prestasi, serta upaya reformasi terhadap praktik-praktik diskriminatif. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa Moana digambarkan sebagai tokoh perempuan yang mandiri, rasional, dan memiliki kapasitas kepemimpinan yang setara dengan laki-laki, sehingga film ini merepresentasikan nilai-nilai feminisme liberal secara konsisten dan bermakna.

Kata Kunci: Feminisme, Feminisme Liberal, Kesetaraan Gender, Studi Film, Moana

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INTRODUCTION

Historically, women have often been positioned as inferior and unequal to men, particularly in social, political, and cultural domains (Fuadi et al., 2021). Although contemporary society has shown progress toward gender equality, patriarchal values continue to shape many aspects of life. Feminism emerges as a response to this inequality, aiming to eliminate discrimination against women and expand opportunities for their well-being (Darnell, 2018). Among its various strands, liberal feminism emphasizes equality in legal, political, and public spheres, asserting that women possess the same moral and rational capacities as men and therefore deserve equal rights and autonomy (Tong, 2009). One arena where patriarchal ideology persists is popular culture, particularly film. Movies do not merely entertain but also construct and reinforce social values, including gender roles, through narrative and visual representation. Disney films, in particular, have long been criticized for portraying women as passive, dependent, and subordinate to male figures (Streiff & Dundes, 2017; Crafton & Harriss, 2024). These portrayals contribute to the normalization of patriarchal stereotypes, especially for younger audiences.

In recent years, Disney has increasingly presented female characters who reflect principles associated with liberal feminism, particularly autonomy, agency, and participation in the public sphere. This representational shift is evident in the *Moana* franchise (2016; 2024), where the female protagonist is consistently constructed as an individual capable of independent decision-making and leadership. Rather than positioning femininity within domestic or supportive roles, the films portray *Moana* as a rational actor who negotiates responsibility, freedom of choice, and moral judgment within her community. These representations align with core liberal feminist values that emphasize individual rights, equality of capacity, and access to public leadership roles.

In *Moana 2*, this liberal feminist representation is further developed through *Moana*'s expanded role in collective decision-making and inter-communal leadership. Her position as a central actor in uniting multiple tribes reflects an explicit engagement with the public sphere and civic responsibility, reinforcing the portrayal of women as legitimate political and social agents. While previous studies have examined liberal feminism in *Moana* and other cinematic texts, much of the existing scholarship focuses on static representations or limits analysis to the first film. Research that systematically explores the evolving representation of liberal feminist principles across the sequel narrative remains scarce. This gap underscores the need for a focused analysis of how liberal feminism is not only represented but also negotiated and strengthened through *Moana*'s character development in *Moana 2*.

The novelty of this study lies in its examination of *Moana 2* as a narrative space where liberal feminism is represented as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a static set of traits attached to a female character. Instead of merely identifying the presence of liberal feminist values, this research highlights how Moana's autonomy, rational agency, and participation in the public sphere develop across the sequel narrative. By applying Rosemarie Tong's liberal feminist framework, the analysis moves beyond listing theoretical principles and focuses on how these values are negotiated through Moana's decisions, interactions, and leadership practices. This approach distinguishes the study from earlier research that tends to treat feminist representation as fixed or symbolic, offering a more process-oriented understanding of liberal feminism in contemporary animated cinema.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the representation of liberal feminism in *Moana 2* and to investigate the development of Moana's dynamic character as a reflection of liberal feminist ideology. Through this analysis, the research seeks to contribute to feminist film studies by offering a more nuanced understanding of gender representation in contemporary animation, while also providing a critical framework for discussing women's empowerment, leadership, and ethical responsibility within popular media.

METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the representation of liberal feminism in the film *Moana 2*. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate because it enables an in-depth interpretation of meanings embedded in verbal and visual elements, including dialogue, character actions, and symbolic representations. The analysis focuses on key principles of liberal feminism, such as individual autonomy, equality of opportunity, and merit-based achievement independent of gender. The primary data source of this study is the film *Moana 2*, accessed through the official Disney+ Hotstar platform to ensure data authenticity. The film was selected because it prominently features a female protagonist whose character development reflects issues of leadership, agency, and gender equality. Data were derived from spoken dialogues, character interactions, and significant visual elements that contribute to the construction of feminist meanings. To ensure a thorough understanding of the narrative and thematic content, the film was viewed repeatedly.

Data collection was conducted through systematic observation and transcription. Relevant dialogues were transcribed verbatim, while screenshots were used to document important scenes and visual symbols that support the analysis. This procedure was intended to maintain accuracy and consistency between verbal and visual data.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis began with data familiarization through repeated examination of transcripts and visual materials. The next stage involved coding, in which relevant scenes, dialogues, and actions were identified based on core principles of liberal feminism. These codes were then grouped into broader themes related to female agency, gender power relations, leadership, and public participation. Finally, the identified themes were interpreted to explain how liberal feminist ideology is represented and developed through Moana's character and narrative progression in *Moana 2*.

RESULTS

The movie *Moana 2* was identified as having a liberal feminist principal, although not all principals are present in this movie (Table 1). Among the seven liberal feminist principals, only six appear, namely individual autonomy, freedom of choice, moral and rational equality, public participation and citizenship, merit-based achievement, and reform of discriminatory practices.

Table 1. Liberal Feminism In Moana 2

Liberal Feminism Principle	Status	Representative Dialogue
Individual Autonomy	Met	"So I will sail into this new sky to reconnect the people of the entire ocean."
Freedom of Choice	Met	"So I will sail into this new sky to reconnect the people of the entire ocean."
Moral and Rational Equality	Met	"Guys, the ancestors wouldn't have called if we couldn't do this."
Public Participation and Citizenship	Met	"We need to convene a council of people."
Merit-based Achievement	Met	"I learned to sail by listening, failing, and trying again."
Reform of Discriminatory Practices	Met	"If Nalo thinks he's stronger by keeping people apart, then maybe the way to break his curse is by coming together."
Equal Access to Opportunities	None	-

Table 1 summarizes the principles of liberal feminism identified in *Moana 2* (2024) along with representative dialogues. A more detailed interpretive analysis will be described in the discussion section.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that *Moana 2* represents liberal feminist ideology through Moana's verbal expressions, particularly as reflected in her leadership practices. The thematic analysis identifies six core principles of liberal feminism expressed in Moana's dialogues: individual

autonomy, freedom of choice, moral and rational equality, public participation and citizenship, achievement based on merit, and the reform of discriminatory practices. Through these verbal representations, Moana is consistently portrayed as an independent decision-maker, a rational leader, and an equal participant in the public sphere.

Individual autonomy and freedom of choice are clearly illustrated in Moana's declaration, "So I will sail to this new sky to reconnect all the inhabitants of the ocean," which is reinforced by her statement, "I will not back down just because it is dangerous." These dialogues demonstrate Moana's determination to act independently despite potential risks. At a deeper level, her words reflect a conscious assertion of agency, emphasizing her ability to make decisions without relying on approval from others. From a liberal feminist perspective, individual autonomy and freedom of choice are fundamental principles. Tong (2009) argues that women should possess the same freedom as men to determine their own life paths. Moana's actions exemplify this principle, as she trusts her own judgment and assumes responsibility for her decisions. In doing so, she challenges traditional gender norms that often associate leadership and risk-taking exclusively with masculine traits.

The principle of moral and rational equality is evident in Moana's reasoning during moments of collective action. Her statement, "Friends, our ancestors would not call on us if we couldn't do this," reflects a rational and deliberative approach rather than an emotional appeal. This is further reinforced by her assertion, "Because if we never act, our people's story will end," which highlights her sense of moral responsibility toward the community. Liberal feminism emphasizes that women possess intellectual and moral capacities equal to those of men and therefore deserve equal recognition and authority (Tong, 2009). Moana's reasoning is acknowledged and accepted by her community, indicating that her ideas carry intellectual legitimacy. Her ability to organize problems systematically and ethically supports the liberal feminist claim that women are equally capable of occupying leadership roles.

In terms of public participation and citizenship, Moana's leadership represents a clear departure from the traditional leadership model often portrayed in earlier Disney animated films. Rather than positioning the leader as a solitary hero whose authority is rooted in destiny, lineage, or personal exceptionalism, Moana consistently frames leadership as a shared responsibility. Her statements, such as "We need to form a council of the people" and "This isn't about me. It's about all of us," demonstrate a participatory and inclusive approach to decision-making. This model contrasts with the hierarchical and individual-centered leadership commonly found in classic Disney narratives, where resolution depends largely on the actions of a single protagonist. Moana's leadership emphasizes deliberation, inclusion, and shared

accountability, aligning closely with liberal feminist perspectives that stress women's equal participation in public and civic life. As Tong (2009) notes, liberal feminism rejects the confinement of women to the private sphere and advocates for their active involvement in political and social decision-making. Moana embodies this principle not only by occupying a public leadership role, but also by redefining leadership as democratic and collaborative.

This collective orientation is further reinforced through Moana's merit-based legitimacy as a leader. Her reflection, "I learned to sail by listening, failing, and trying again," along with her statement, "I am honoured to serve our people," frames leadership as something earned through competence, experience, and continuous learning rather than inherited authority. This portrayal contrasts with earlier Disney representations in which leadership is often tied to royal lineage or predetermined destiny. Moana's assertion that "The ocean chose us because we are capable" reinforces the liberal feminist principle that social roles and opportunities should be based on ability and effort rather than gender or status. Her leadership is validated through skill development, resilience, and dedication, highlighting a feminist reconfiguration of merit that places women's achievements on equal footing with men's.

The reform of discriminatory practices is also evident in Moana's collective leadership approach. When she states, "If Nalo thinks he's stronger by keeping people apart, then maybe the way to break his curse is by coming together," she directly challenges systems built on separation and exclusion. Rather than seeking dominance or change through force, Moana advocates rational cooperation and institutional reform. This approach reflects liberal feminism's emphasis on transforming unjust structures through dialogue, inclusivity, and collective governance rather than radical disruption (Tong, 2009). In this sense, Moana's leadership diverges sharply from traditional heroic narratives by presenting social change as the result of shared reasoning and unity. Through this portrayal, *Moana 2* offers a distinctive liberal feminist vision of leadership that not only places a woman at the center of power, but also reimagines how power is exercised within the Disney animated tradition.

CONCLUSION

Based on the finding and discussion, *Moana 2* represent liberal feminism because it was depicting Moana as a self-reliant, logical, and socially conscious female leader. Six principles of liberal feminism—individual autonomy, freedom of choice, moral and rational equality, public participation and citizenship, merit-based achievement, and the reform of discriminatory practices are clearly stated through Moana dialogue, actions, and decisions. Moana is shown as a figure who defies conventional gender convention that link leadership to masculinity by

making dangerous decision on her own, using reason in group setting, and actively engaging in public space. The liberal feminist emphasizes on merit-based equality in reinforced by the portrayal of her accomplishment as the product of hard work, education, and skill rather inherited or gender privilege. Moreover, Moana's promotion of unity and inclusivity embodies liberal feminism's dedication to reforming discriminatory practices through collaboration rather than radical upheaval. However, the lack of the principle of equal access to opportunities suggest that Moana 2 advocates for individual empowerment and leadership. Overall, these findings indicate that Moana 2 serves as a cultural text that predominantly aligns with liberal feminist ideology by depicting women as competent leaders

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