

Moral Values of the Main Character in Jennifer Lee's Wish (2023)

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Abstract: This study identifies the moral values embodied by the main character in the script of *Wish* (2023), a movie written by Jennifer Lee. The research applies the theoretical framework of Linda and Richard Eyre's *Teaching Your Children Values* (1993), supported by Carol K. Sigelman and David R. Shaffer's *Life Span Human Development* (1995). A qualitative descriptive method was employed, with the movie script serving as the primary data source. Data were collected through repeated readings and note-taking techniques to extract dialogues reflecting moral values. The analysis reveals that the main character exhibits 12 distinct moral values, categorized into two groups: values of being honesty, courage, peaceability, self-reliance and potential, self-discipline and moderation, fidelity and chastity and values of giving loyalty and dependability, respect, love, unselfishness and sensitivity, kindness and friendliness, and justice and mercy. These values collectively reflect the character's inner integrity and outward compassion, demonstrating the importance of both personal growth and social harmony. The study's novelty lies in its focused analysis of a contemporary animated film through the lens of established moral education theory. Practically, it emphasizes how animated narratives can serve as effective tools for moral development, especially in younger audiences. The study contributes to the field of literary and film analysis by highlighting the social impact of cinematic storytelling in promoting ethical behavior and community-mindedness.

Keywords: Character Analysis, Moral Values, Qualitative Research, Social Impact

A. Introduction

Literature has long served as a cultural mirror, reflecting human values, social norms, and ethical dilemmas through narrative and character development. As a form of modern literature, film extends this function by translating textual storytelling into visual and auditory experiences, allowing audiences to intuitively engage with moral content (Osborne, 1984) (Arkan, 2023). Animated films, in particular, blend entertainment with moral instruction, offering accessible narratives that model virtues such as empathy, honesty, courage, and responsibility. These moral messages are often conveyed through character behavior, dialogue, and plot progression elements that invite critical reflection among diverse audiences,

including students and educators.

Recent research has shown a growing interest in analyzing moral values in animated films. Studies have explored moral dimensions in *Encanto*, *Inside Out*, *Finding 'Ohana*, and *The Good Dinosaur*, highlighting themes such as resilience, respect, love, and environmental stewardship (Sjamsuddin & Said, 2024). These works affirm the educational potential of animation to promote character development and moral reasoning. However, this emerging body of scholarship still exhibits critical gaps.

One key gap lies in the lack of research on *Wish* (2023), a recent animated film written by Jennifer Lee. While Disney films like *Encanto*, *Luca*, and *Onward* have been subject to moral value analysis, *Wish* (2023) despite its rich narrative and character-driven themes has yet to be examined in scholarly literature. This omission is significant given Jennifer Lee's role as a prominent storyteller whose previous works (*Frozen*, *Zootopia*) have shaped contemporary animated ethics.

Second, most existing studies focus exclusively on identifying moral themes within film texts, with limited attention to their real-world social impacts. Specifically, little is known about how university students particularly those in Indonesia's English Departments interpret and internalize the moral values conveyed in these films. This is especially relevant for students at institutions such as Warmadewa grounding.

Third, there is a methodological gap in comparative studies. Few works have evaluated how the moral values in *Wish* (2023) align with or diverge from those in other recent Disney films. Moreover, the potential influence of Jennifer Lee's unique narrative voice and ethical framing remains underexplored in comparison to other Disney productions.

To address the identified gaps in current literature, this study is guided by three primary objectives. First, it aims to identify and categorize the moral values embedded in *Wish* (2023), an animated film written by Jennifer Lee. This analysis is grounded in the moral education framework proposed by (Ratna Sari Devi et al., 2023), which classifies values into key domains relevant to character development. Second, the study seeks to explore how English Department students at Warmadewa University perceive and respond to these moral values. By examining their cognitive interpretations and emotional reactions, the research offers insight into how young adult learners engage with moral narratives in contemporary media. Third, the study introduces a comparative dimension by analyzing how the moral themes presented in *Wish* (2023) align with or differ from those in other recent Disney animated films, including *Encanto*, *Inside Out*, *Luca*, and *Onward*. This comparison is intended to reveal broader trends in moral storytelling across recent Disney productions. In line with these objectives, the study is guided by four key research questions: What moral values are conveyed in the film *Wish* (2023)? How do these values compare with those found in similar animated films? How do students

interpret and respond to these values? And finally, what are the implications of these findings for moral education in higher education, particularly in English and social work-related contexts? These questions collectively aim to connect film-based moral content with its reception and educational relevance among university students.

This study is the first to analyze *Wish* (2023) through a moral-educational lens, offering an original contribution to film and literary studies. It introduces a comparative and student-centered approach that links media analysis to moral development outcomes. By connecting narrative content with audience reception, it contributes to curriculum design in moral and character education, particularly in Southeast Asian higher education contexts. Additionally, the research expands theoretical discussions on how contemporary animated films reflect and shape ethical consciousness in young adult learners.

B. Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to identify and analyze the moral values embedded in the animated film *Wish* (2023), written by Jennifer Lee. A qualitative approach was chosen due to its emphasis on meaning, interpretation, and the subjective experience of individuals—key to understanding how moral messages are conveyed through narrative and character behavior (Creswell, 2015). Consistent with (Stadtländer, 2009), this research sought to interpret how moral concepts are constructed in fictional narratives and how these values may relate to educational and social development contexts.

Research Site and Respondents

The research was conducted at the Faculty of Letters, English Department, Warmadewa University in Bali, Indonesia. Participants were purposively selected undergraduate students from the English Department, chosen for their familiarity with English-language films and narrative texts. These students contributed to the interpretive phase of the study by responding to selected moral themes from the film, allowing the researcher to evaluate both the educational relevance and the perceived social impact of those themes.

Data Source

The primary data source was the official script of *Wish* (2023), which was retrieved from a reliable online platform. The film script was selected for its literary depth and suitability for moral analysis. The focus of analysis was on the main character, Asha specifically her dialogues and actions as they relate to the expression of moral values. This selection aligns with (Zainal Abidin et al., 2024), who emphasize the importance of using credible sources to ensure research integrity.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection followed several systematic steps. First, the complete film script was obtained, archived, and subjected to close reading repeatedly examined to understand the narrative and identify expressions of moral value. Particular attention was given to moments where Asha's actions or language conveyed virtues such as honesty, courage, and peaceability (formerly referred to as "peace of ability").

Annotations and notes were taken throughout this reading, with key excerpts highlighted and categorized based on moral content. These excerpts were interpreted not only at the surface level but also through a philosophical lens, particularly drawing from Scheler's value theory (Zhong, 2022) (Boswell & Babchuk, 2022) which views moral values as reflections of deeper ethical ideals and inner human dignity.

The researcher then classified moral expressions into thematic categories such as honesty, empathy, and justice and documented their implied social effects, such as promoting ethical reflection or social responsibility among viewers. To enhance validity, interpretations were guided by established theoretical frameworks, ensuring a balance between researcher insight and scholarly consistency.

Instruments Used

The central instrument in this research was the script of *Wish* (2023), supported by a manually developed coding sheet. This sheet included fields for dialogue excerpts, moral values identified, associated character actions, and observed or implied social implications. In addition to textual analysis, the study integrated a student response component. English Department students completed reflection sheets containing open-ended questions designed to elicit their interpretations of the film's moral content. These responses enriched the study by providing insight into how young adult viewers cognitively and emotionally engage with moral narratives in animated films.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using an inductive qualitative approach, enabling the researcher to move from specific observations to broader thematic interpretations. The analysis began with open coding, labeling dialogue and actions with descriptors such as "selflessness," "justice," and "loyalty." These codes were then grouped into thematic categories based on existing frameworks in moral education (Laasch et al., 2023), (Schroeder et al., 2019), (McGhee & Grant, 2008), and (Mercader et al., 2021). Categories were divided into personal ethics (e.g., honesty, self-discipline), social values (e.g., kindness, cooperation), and spiritual or existential values (e.g., hope,

belief).

The next phase involved thematic analysis of student responses. Their reflections were coded and grouped according to recurring perceptions, emotional reactions, and moral insights. This method was chosen for its ability to uncover patterns of meaning across qualitative datasets, particularly in educational contexts.

Finally, the study engaged in interpretive synthesis, connecting the thematic findings from the film script with those from student responses. This triangulation allowed for a deeper understanding of how moral values are constructed in the narrative and internalized by viewers. By linking character-driven ethics with real-world moral perception, the study contributes to broader discussions on moral development, media literacy, and character education in higher education.

C. Results and Discussion

Overview of Findings

This study identified a spectrum of moral values portrayed by Asha, the main character in *Wish* (2023), which were categorized into two main domains, based on Linda and Richard Eyre's framework: Values of Being (e.g., honesty, courage, peaceability, self-reliance, self-discipline, and fidelity) and Values of Giving (e.g., loyalty, respect, love, unselfishness, kindness, and justice). These values emerged clearly in both dialogue and action and were interpreted using a qualitative-inductive approach. Table 1 is a summary table of the key values identified.

Table 1. The Key Values Identified

Moral Value	Domain	Dialogue/Scene Example
Honesty	Value of Being	"I think this isn't right at all..." (to her father)
Courage	Value of Being	Confronting King Magnifico despite danger
Peaceability	Value of Being	Remaining calm when friends betrayed her
Self-Reliance	Value of Being	Taking initiative without seeking approval
Loyalty	Value of Giving	Refusing to abandon her friends despite risks
Forgiveness	Value of Giving	"Simon, it's okay."
Justice	Value of Giving	Calling for equal voice and power among citizens

Each value was further analyzed through three dimensions of moral psychology: affective (emotion-driven response), cognitive (moral reasoning), and behavioral (ethical action). For example, Asha's honesty began with emotional discomfort about deception (affective), evolved into a conscious moral stance (cognitive), and resulted in her confronting power with integrity (behavioral). This process aligns with Scheler's value theory, which views moral values not as abstract traits but as deeply felt, prioritized expressions of inner essence and ethical intent.

Detailed Moral Value Analysis with Scene References

Honesty and Courage

Asha's moral backbone is built on honesty and the courage to act on it. Her decision to question King Magnifico despite the risk is encapsulated in the line: "I think this isn't right at all." This pivotal moment exemplifies what Scheler defines as "intentional value-realization" when a person acts on deeply held ethical convictions, even at personal cost.

Peaceability and Self-Reliance

Rather than retaliate in anger when betrayed, Asha remains composed and reflective, showcasing peaceability the ability to preserve inner harmony. For example, her measured tone and calm decision-making even after Simon's betrayal highlight this virtue. Simultaneously, she continues her quest independently, underscoring self-reliance. These traits resonate with Scheler's notion of spiritual values, which transcend utilitarian or social pressures.

Loyalty, Forgiveness, and Justice

Asha's loyalty is evident in her refusal to abandon her friends, even when they falter. Her forgiveness of Simon "Simon, it's okay" demonstrates her capacity to temper justice with empathy, a quality that Aguas describes as moral excellence through balanced accountability. Her demand for social fairness at the story's climax encapsulates a restorative view of justice, aligning with Scheler's hierarchy of values that places moral and spiritual fulfillment above material or pragmatic interests.

Social Impact: Student Responses

Student reflections revealed strong emotional and ethical engagement with Asha's character. Many participants from Warmadewa University reported identifying with her sense of justice, courage, and emotional self-regulation. One student wrote: "Asha made me think more deeply about when to speak up in unfair situations, even with people in authority." Another reflected on loyalty and forgiveness, noting, "I realized how important it is to not give up on others, even if they make mistakes."

These responses support (Anderson & Arsenault, 2021) assertion that emotional immersion and contextual storytelling can activate moral reflection more effectively than abstract instruction. (Rosalina, 2022) similarly argues that stories serve as moral simulations, allowing viewers to rehearse ethical decisions in safe, symbolic environments.

Comparative Analysis: Wish (2023) and Other Disney Films

While *Wish* (2023) shares Disney's tradition of embedding moral education in animation, it introduces unique moral dimensions not prominently featured in prior films. For instance:

1. *Encanto* focuses on family loyalty and self-acceptance (Putri et al., 2025), avoiding institutional critique.
2. *Inside Out* centers on emotional regulation and self-awareness (Sjamsuddin & Said, 2024).
3. *Luca* and *Onward* explore friendship and self-discovery, but largely within apolitical frameworks.

In contrast, *Wish* (2023) introduces institutional critique, with Asha directly opposing an unjust authority. This expands Disney's moral universe to include civic responsibility, ethical leadership, and systemic change values more closely aligned with adolescent and young adult moral development. This shift suggests a growing narrative sophistication in recent Disney films, positioning *Wish* (2023) as a bridge between personal ethics and social justice.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its insights, this study has limitations. First, the cultural background of the student participants primarily Indonesian university students may have influenced how they interpreted moral values, potentially emphasizing collectivist traits such as loyalty and harmony over individual autonomy. Second, the film's English-language context might affect interpretation among non-native speakers, introducing subtle comprehension gaps. Lastly, the study focused on a single character (Asha); future research might explore how supporting characters contribute to the film's broader moral framework.

Implications for Education and Social Work

The moral values portrayed in *Wish* (2023) offer valuable applications for both social work and education. In social work, virtues like honesty, self-discipline, and justice reflect core ethical principles (Marson, 2022). For educators, the film serves as a narrative tool for character education, especially within values-based learning environments. As suggested by (Fitria, 2020), film can be integrated into curriculum to stimulate ethical discussion and personal growth. Furthermore, the participatory method used in this study combining script analysis with student reflection can serve as a model for critical moral engagement across disciplines.

D. Conclusions

Rather than merely recounting the moral themes in *Wish* (2023), this study

contributes a nuanced framework for understanding how animated narratives can serve as vehicles for moral education. By analyzing the character of Asha through the lens of established moral philosophy, this research illustrates how moral values are not only depicted in media but are also internalized by audiences especially young learners in emotionally resonant and cognitively engaging ways. The study's key contribution lies in positioning animated film as both a site of character analysis and a pedagogical resource for cultivating ethical awareness. This research affirms the potential of narrative media—particularly Disney films as tools for fostering moral literacy. The integration of affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions in analyzing values provides educators with a model for using film to spark discussions on justice, empathy, responsibility, and social agency. The positive reception among students reinforces the idea that fictional narratives can act as bridges between personal reflection and social consciousness, making them powerful supplements in value-based education. Looking ahead, future studies should examine how such media are received across diverse cultural and educational contexts, and how different age groups interpret moral messaging in film. There is also fertile ground for interdisciplinary approaches that combine media studies, educational psychology, and digital pedagogy to deepen our understanding of how narrative structures influence ethical development. As digital storytelling continues to shape youth identity and moral reasoning, research at the intersection of moral education and media literacy will become increasingly vital.

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