



Psychological Cognitive Development of The Main Character in *Tangled* (2010) Movie

Felicia Huang¹, Suprayogi²

^{1,2}Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia, Bandar Lampung

E-mail: felicia1010huang@gmail.com¹, suprayogi@teknokrat.ac.id²

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Abstract

This research explores the cognitive development of Rapunzel, the main character in Disney's *Tangled* (2010), using Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development as a framework. Piaget's framework, based on stages—Sensori-motor, Preoperational, and Formal Operational are applied to analyze Rapunzel's growth from a sheltered upbringing to self-discovery. The research employs a descriptive qualitative method, focusing on scenes and dialogue to track how her thinking develops. The research shows how Rapunzel learns to think logically, solve problems, and understand more complex ideas. Her journey from being innocent and influenced by her environment to becoming an independent thinker follows the stages of Piaget's theory. By looking at her experiences, the reader can see how they challenge her understanding, help her become more independent, and lead her to a more mature way of thinking. Through this critical examination, the research highlights the relevance of Piaget's theory in understanding character growth within narrative storytelling.

Keywords: *Cognitive development, Jean Piaget, Movie, Tangled*

Introduction

Literature includes a broad variety of written or spoken works, such as plays, essays, novels, poems, movies and more. According to Wellek & Warren (1977), literature is the process of imagining human feelings and creativity. Many issues in literary works related to conscious and unconscious behavior can be deeper examined through the lens of psychological development, as literature often serves as a mirror reflecting complex aspects of human nature, including cognitive, emotional, and social growth.

Tangled is an animated movie interesting to observe from the points of view of psychological development. According to Abram (1981:20) in Nurgiyantoro (1995) character is the person that is shown in a narrative work or drama, which

will be deciphered by the reader or audience that has tendencies, a moral quality and certain that expressed in speech and action. The film highlights the main character's journey of self-discovery and maturation, emphasizing identity, repression, and the complex dynamics between daughter and mother. Her transition from isolation to independence underscores key developmental stages, including identity formation and autonomy, making it a rich subject for psychological analysis

In 2010, Walt Disney released a movie centered on the character Rapunzel, who is born into a kingdom with long, magical blonde hair. The film portrays her struggle against dependency on Mother Gothel, reflecting the challenge of breaking free from unhealthy attachments. Additionally, Rapunzel's experiences with Flynn Rider and other characters facilitate her emotional growth, emphasizing the importance of relationships in shaping one's identity

As the main character, the most important role in building the story, Rapunzel has dynamic and dramatic psychological development. As an infant, she is kidnapped and raised in a tower by Mother Gothel, whom Rapunzel mistakenly believes to be her biological mother. In truth, Gothel abducted her to exploit the properties of her hair for eternal youth. The narrative unfolds as Rapunzel encounters Flynn Rider, a thief, and together they escape the confines of the tower. Their journey is marked by thrilling adventures, the introduction of captivating characters, and the exploration of themes related to family and the quest for freedom.

This research explores Rapunzel's cognitive development using Piaget's theory of cognitive growth (1962). Piaget's work, despite debates and criticism, remains fundamental for understanding how individuals construct knowledge and develop reasoning abilities. The stages of cognitive development, especially the transition from concrete to abstract thinking are particularly relevant for analyzing Rapunzel's journey as she moves from naivety and dependence to independence and self-awareness.

According to Mosham (2011), Piaget's theory explains how people develop more advanced thinking, leading to the ability to understand abstract ideas and solve complex problems during adolescence. This idea is helpful for analyzing Rapunzel's growth because her journey shows how she moves from simple thinking to understanding deeper ideas and making thoughtful decisions. Bernstein, Clarke-Stewart, & Roy (2008) and Martin, Carlson, & Buskist (2010) also emphasize that these stages are important for explaining how people learn by interacting with their environment. By using Piaget's theory, this research shows how Rapunzel's experiences beyond the tower help her grow from being dependent to becoming more independent and aware of who she truly is.

This study seeks to answer the research question: How does Rapunzel's cognitive development in *Tangled* reflect Piaget's stages of cognitive growth, and in what ways do her interactions with other characters and her environment contribute to this development? Through descriptive qualitative methodology, this research analyzes scenes, dialogues, and interactions to trace key moments in Rapunzel's cognitive development.

Literature Review

Piaget's Psychological Development Theory

According to Piaget, the developmental ideal is a balance between assimilation and accommodation, which is also known as equilibrium. And when the external world has been reached, children are in a comfortable state of equilibrium. According to Mosham (2011), Piaget is the construction of increasingly rigorous and encompassing forms of logic, culminating in the formal operational logic of the adolescent. Cognitive developmental stages for children, including sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and the formal operational stage (Bernstein, Clarke-stewart, & Roy, 2008; Martin, Carlson, & Buskist, 2010). Piaget's theory of cognitive development defines intelligence as a basic life function that helps the child to adapt to the environment. Cognitive structures, which are "basic, interconnected psychological systems that enable people to process information by connecting it with prior knowledge and experience, finding patterns and relationships, identifying rules, and generating abstract principles relevant in different applications," mattered to Piaget (Garner, 200: 32).

Piaget suggested that all children journey through the sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations, and formal operations stages of development (Moreno, 2010). Four phases of cognitive development were identified by Piaget: sensori-motor, pre-operational, concrete, and formal. During the sensori-motor period, often known as infancy, children are likely to learn through goal-directed behaviors, object permanence, and their five senses. Children and infants do not think in the same manner as adults do. Young children experience egocentrism because they fail to understand how someone else's point of view might be different from their own or they fail to coordinate their point of view with that other person's (Blake 2008). Piaget also believed that cognitive development is a continuous process and all children, even in different environmental contexts and culture diversity around the world, have the same sequence of cognitive development (Hockenbury & Hockenbury, 2011).

Table 1. Stage of Cognitive Development

Stage	Age	Characteristics
Sensori-motor	birth - 2 years	Often known as infancy, children begin to understand the object that children can hear, see, touch, and taste.
Pre-operational	2 - 7 years	Children understand language and symbols. Their imagination and intuition are stronger and more complex.
Concrete operational	7 - 11 years	Children begin to see things from the perspective of others. They develop their logical thinking and problem solving.
Formal	11 - up	Children can fully thinking systematically and abstract idea, rational and understand their complex situation, responsibility, cause and effect

Previous Studies

There are many studies that have investigated the *Tangled* movie. Safitri (2017) studied women’s language of Rapunzel from sociolinguistic perspectives. It identifies eight out of ten features from Lakoff's framework, including lexical hedges, tag questions, and super polite forms. The research also reveals that these features serve functions like expressing uncertainty and emphasizing feelings. Additionally, the film modifies the use of women’s language by omitting certain features, which helps create a more gender-neutral image. Damin, Fadhillah, and Ilham (2024) examined Rapunzel’s personality from psychoanalysis. Using Freud's theory of id, ego, and superego, it identifies 23 pieces of evidence reflecting these three aspects of her personality.

The research also explores various factors influencing Rapunzel's character, including heredity, family environment, cultural environment, and social environment. Utamie (2014) examined woman representation on Rapunzel’s physical appearance, personal traits, and her relationships with other characters. The findings suggest that *Tangled* presents a new representation of women as beautiful and skilled in language. Overall, this research contributes to understanding female representation in film from a unique perspective. Although many studies have examined *Tangled* from various perspectives, it seems to be less comprehensive research exploring Rapunzel's cognitive development using theories such as Piaget's theory. This leaves the opportunity for further research, especially from a cognitive developmental perspective, which could provide new insights into how the character of Rapunzel grows intellectually and how her

mental processes evolve throughout the film.

Furthermore, some studies investigating literary works from Piaget's psychological cognitive development perspectives have also been conducted. Dwi (2010) investigated the Juno Character in the Juno movie. Her research aims to explore the psychological aspects of Juno's character, specifically how she solves her problems. It is found that as Juno matures, she becomes better at understanding moral principles and her situation. Her relationships with her parents and friends also play a key role in guiding her decisions. Haris (2019) studied the main character's cognitive development in the Upin & Ipin Malaysian Animated TV Series.

This research explores how the show affects children's thinking and growth and which types of stories that are appealing to children and have a psychological impact on them. Novitasari and Kasprabowo (2022) studied Riley's cognitive development in Inside Out Movie. In this research deeply focus on finding four stages and factors that influence Riley's or main character cognitive development process through the theory Jean Piaget. Harris and Misdar (2019) studied the impact of Harry Potter Films on children's behavior. The research concludes that the movie is suitable for children in this age group, based on its analysis of the scenes using Piaget's theory. Although there have been many movies that have been analyzed using cognitive development by Piaget theory, none of the *Tangled* (2010) movies have been analyzed with this theory.

Method

This research adopts a descriptive and qualitative approach to analyze the psychological development of the main character, Rapunzel, in the animated movie *Tangled* (2010). using descriptive qualitative approach to focus explores and investigate the main character in *Tangled* (2010). Krug and Schluter (2013) define that qualitative research usually focuses on one or several pieces of evidence and analyzes it in detail by looking at its various characteristics. Data in this research are dialogues of the main character taken from selected scenes in *Tangled* (2010) that represent Rapunzel's psychological (emotional and cognitive) development based on Jean Piaget's theory.

The scenes were chosen based on key moments showing cognitive changes, decision-making, problem-solving, and social interactions, including events where Rapunzel transitions from concrete to abstract thinking and gains autonomy. The classifying process involved identifying dialogues and scenes aligned with Piaget's stages, such as symbolic thought, logical reasoning, and abstract thinking. Scenes were assigned codes to capture instances of developmental milestones, helping to identify patterns and connections between Rapunzel's experiences and her cognitive growth. Grouping and other analysis approaches were used to highlight significant findings from the data. This strategy is frequently employed when the goal of the research is to construct a theory or gain a thorough understanding

rather than to measure or test ideas quantitatively (Tahir et al., 2023). By categorizing the data into relevant categories, grouping made it easier to understand the film on a deeper level. Through the application of these ideas, the research seeks to reveal significant insights about the character's growth and development in *Tangled*. The research offers insight on how the experiences of the character connect with Piaget's stages of cognitive development, offering a deeper understanding of the movie's depiction of personal development.

Results

Sensorimotor Stage:

In this early childhood stage, Rapunzel would have been exploring and understanding through their senses and actions. understanding of objects and people.

Preoperational Stage:

At this stage (2-7 years), Rapunzel shows curiosity and imagination, engaging in symbolic play, singing, painting, knitting, and storytelling. Her creative activities demonstrate early cognitive development.

Concrete Operational Stage:

Though older than Piaget's 7-11 years range, Rapunzel's isolation keeps her thinking in this stage. She shows logical thinking and problem-solving skills through daily tasks like puzzle-solving and creative activities with Pascal.

Formal Operational Stage:

Rapunzel transitions to abstract thinking and critical reasoning. She questions her identity, confronts Mother Gothel, and recognizes the truth about her past. Her decision-making and emotional understanding become more advanced, showing mature cognitive development.

Discussion

Before analyzing psychological development of main characters, several characters need to be introduced in this research to connect the context. The first character is Rapunzel as the main character born in Corona Kingdom. With her iconic magical, golden-colored hair which is so long that it almost reached the bottom of the grass outside the tower. The second character, the antagonist one, is Mother Gothel. She kidnapped Rapunzel as a baby because she wanted to get the magical power of Rapunzel's hair to make her stay young. She manipulated Rapunzel's thoughts into adulthood to never leave the tower on the grounds that the people in the tower there are scary and evil people. The third character is Flynn Rider, a thief of a crown in the kingdom and chased by kingdom soldiers. Flynn Rider was the one who helped Rapunzel get out of the tower and eventually make a friend and fall in love with her, playing a key role in accompanying Rapunzel's

journey of self-discovery. The fourth character is Pascal, Rapunzel's pet chameleon and loyal companion. Pascal is always by her side, offering emotional support and courage, especially when she feels uncertain or afraid. Pascal plays a crucial role as a companion throughout Rapunzel's adventure.

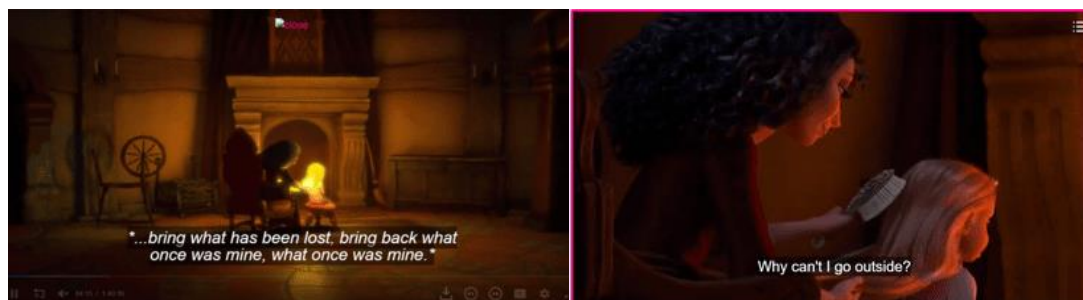
Rapunzel's Cognitive Development in Sensorimotor Stages



Scene 1. (00:03:12-00:03:24)

In scene 1, when Rapunzel was a baby, she could see the sun symbol of her toys, and could express her feeling happy and comfortable with her family. But the baby will not be able to remember all the things clearly as she grows up. This *Tangled* (2010) movie only shows the scene of Rapunzel as a baby so shortly (00:03:01-00:04:00). Because the *Tangled* movie focuses on the problem of kidnapping and isolation of Rapunzel by Mother Gothel.

Rapunzel's Cognitive Development in Preoperational Stages



Scene 2. (00:04:14 - (00:04:30)

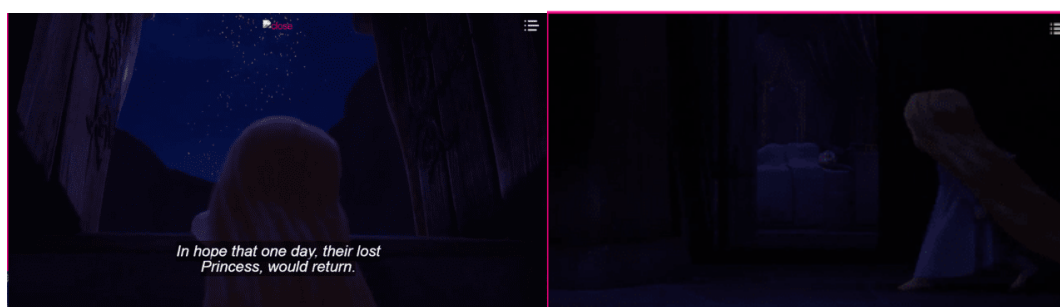
This is reflected in scene 2, when Mother Gothel combs Rapunzel's magic hair, Rapunzel sings "Healing Incantation" to make her magic hair shine, which Mother Gothel utilizes to keep her young. Then Mother Gothel manipulated Rapunzel's mind.

Rapunzel: *"Why can't I go outside?"*

Mother Gothel: *"The outside world is a dangerous place. Filled with horrible, selfish people. You must stay here, where you're safe. Do you understand?"*

Rapunzel: *"Yes, mommy"*

Rapunzel simply believes and obeys the words of mother Gothel to stay in the tower to spend her entire life isolated. She trusts mother Gothel completely, thinking of her as a loving mother who guards her from the bad guys outside her tower. Another scene reflecting this phase is when Rapunzel secretly looks at the lantern on the window of her tower while Mother Gothel was sleeping.



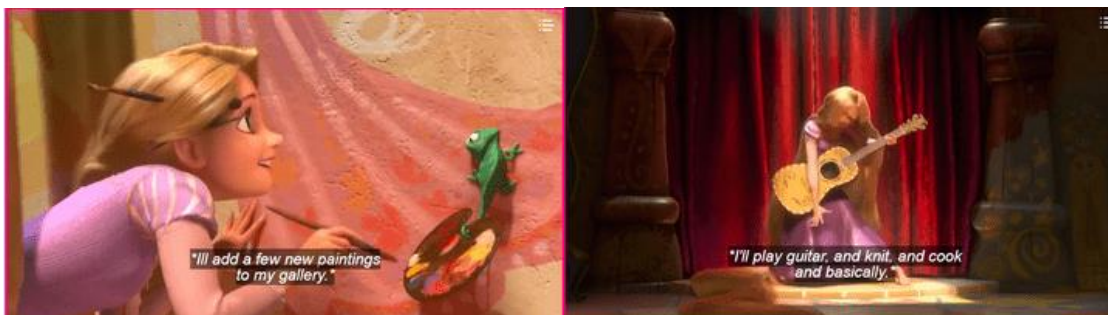
Scene 3. (00:04:55 - 00:05:05)

Scene 3 depicts the moment when Rapunzel sneaks past Mother Gothel's room who has fallen asleep to look at the lanterns from her tower window. This is also a scene reflecting characteristic of the preoperational stage is that she is full of fantasy about the world as she sees the lanterns where stars are popping out. She is very creative, and singing, which fits Piaget's idea of symbolic play. The lantern displayed here is a replica of the lantern that was lit every year on her birthday, as a way of remembering the princess who passed away. And her belief that they are linked to her destiny reflect this stage, where children's thoughts are still magical and not yet based on reality.

Rapunzel's Cognitive Development in Concrete Operational Stages

This stage is characterized by the age of 7-11 years. The children develop more logical thinking, problem-solving skills, categorize things, start to understand cause and effect and see things from other people's points of view. Although of this Rapunzel's scenes appears to be older than the 7-11 year old, her isolation in the tower keeps her cognitive development in a state resembling the Concrete Operational stage in terms of her playful and creative engagement with her

environment, before moving on to more logical thinking as seen at the end of the movie. She develops her imagination into an active activity even though she only stays in the tower. The followings are the scenes when Rapunzel spends her life in the tower with painting, singing, knitting, cook, read book, playing guitar, puzzle, and accompanied by her pet, Paskal. (00:06:28-00:07:15)



Scene 4. (00:06:34 - 00:06:37)



Scene 4. (00:06:39 - 00:06:42)

Scene 4 depicts the moment when Rapunzel shows her growth by spending time in the tower learning basic skills such as singing, knitting, cooking, and playing around. until she got bored doing these things over and over again until Rapunzel's curiosity on the world outside the tower increased. Previously she never broke her promise to mother Gothel, but one time, she started trying to lie and break her promise to leave the tower with Flynn Rider. The following is the scene when Rapunzel goes outside from the tower for the first time, even though she is still overthinking, hesitate, and guilty about her promise to mother Gothel.

Rapunzel: *"Mother would be so furious. That's okay, what she doesn't know won't kill her, right? Oh my gosh, this would kill her.... This is so fun..... I am a horrible daughter.... I'm going back.... I am never going back!"*

In the middle of the story, tangled set the scene of Rapunzel who starts exploring the outside world with Fynn Rider and comes to the Snuggly Duckling.



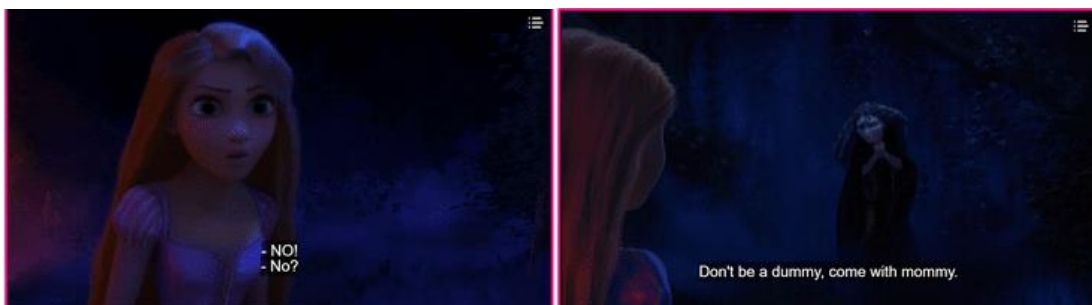
Scene 5. (00:37:10 - 00:42:25)

Scene 5 depicts Rapunzel’s action of leaving from her tower, the first place she is invited by Flynn Rider to visit is The Snuggly Duckling, filled with a group of scary, chunky thugs. However, it turns out that these characters are much gentler and more interesting than they appear, each harboring unique and often bizarre dreams, such as being a concert pianist or a florist. Scene 4 when Rapunzel and The Snuggly Duckling gang are so well adapted and interacted with that, they encourage Rapunzel to follow her dreams to see the floating lantern. When Rapunzel and Flynn Rider work together and trust each other, then they survive the pursuit of soldiers and also share their secrets as reflected in the following dialogue (00:49:20 - 00:49:28).

Flynn Rider: *“My real name is Eugene Fitzherbert”*

Rapunzel: *“I have magic hair that glows when I sing”*

She also showed problem solving skills, she also survived escaping from danger while being chased by palace soldiers because they wanted to arrest Flynn Rider as a wanted for stealing the royal princess's crown. until she was trapped under a pile of rocks and water to drown with Flynn Rider. But she realized and used the power of her glowing hair to see the darkness inside so she and him could find a way out and they survived.



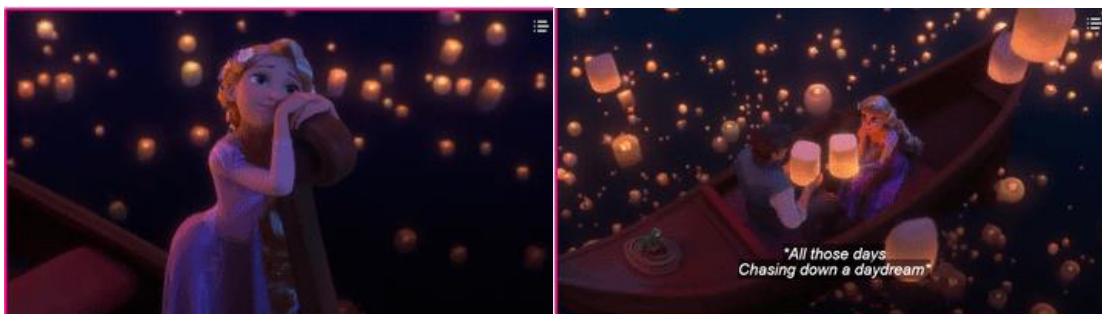
Scenes 6. When mother Gothel want to take Rapunzel back home (00:57:21 - 00:57:28)

Mother Gothel: "Don't be a dummy, come with mommy."

Rapunzel: "NO!"

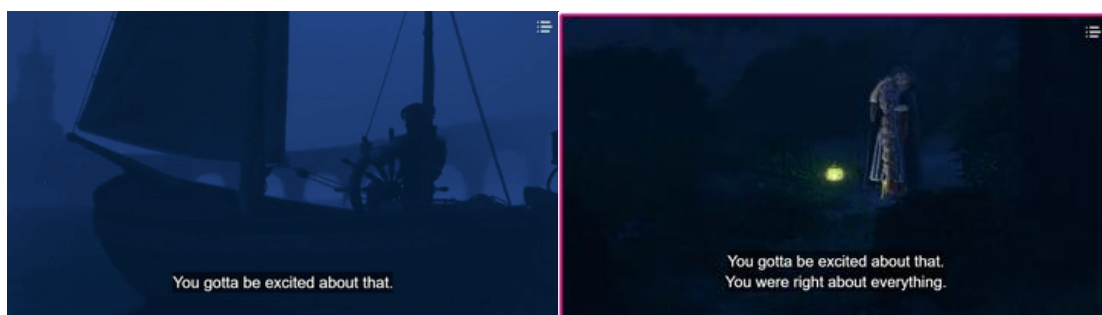
Mother Gothel: "NO?!"

At this stage, Rapunzel begins to be able to think logically, which aligns with Piaget's Concrete Operational Stages, as she starts to question her situation and piece together the truth about her life. This newfound cognitive clarity gives her the confidence to refuse Gothel's invitation to return to the tower, marking a significant moment in her journey toward independence and self-realization.



Scene 7. (01:08:18 - 01:08:54)

Scene 7 Rapunzel felt very happy, she could achieve her dream of seeing lanterns. Rapunzel and Flynn Rider also celebrate the moment by releasing two lanterns together. At this stage, Rapunzel realizes that the lanterns are more than just pretty lights but she starts to categorize them as part of a tradition of society and able to see the lantern from other people's perspectives, meaning she might start to understand how the lanterns are meaningful not just to her, but to the kingdom as a whole.



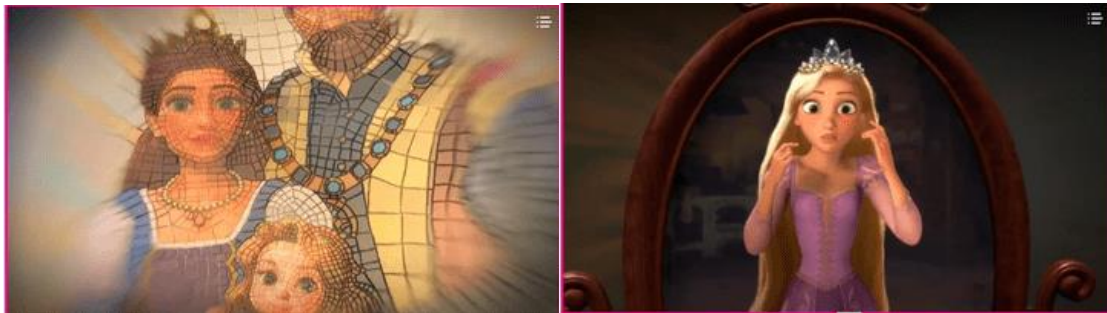
Scenes 8. (01:12:41 - 01:14:01)

Mother Gothel wasn't happy and wanted Rapunzel back because she wanted to utilize her magical hair, understanding that Rapunzel had begun to rebel and refused to return with her until she began to think of a plan for cooperation with two robbers from Flynn Rider's friends (Stabington Brothers). Mother Gothel manipulates the situation by making it seem as if Flynn Rider cares more about money and material things than he does about Rapunzel. When Rapunzel sees

Flynn, Rider leave on a boat with the robbers, she feels hurt and believes that Flynn left her, until Rapunzel believes that mother Gothel is a savior, caring and believable. The following scene is when Mother Gothel manipulates the situation by making it seem as if Flynn Rider left her alone.

Rapunzel's Cognitive Development in Formal Operational Stages

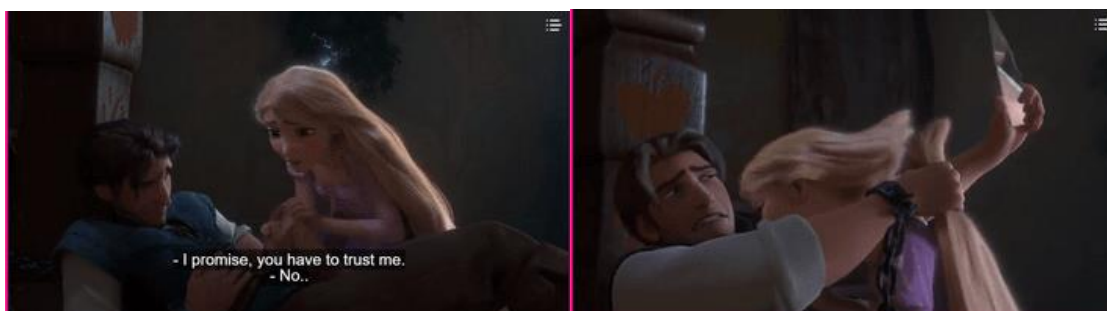
At this stage, starting from age 11-up. Piaget's Formal Operational Stage. The development of adult patterns of thought involving logical, rational and abstract thinking characterizes this stage (Piaget, 1952). Here, people can think abstractly and consider multiple possibilities. Rapunzel was able to fully understand, learn, be emotional, able to make decisions, and progress from simple thinking to more complex reasoning. She realized and understood her identity more deeply. She is now able to think critically and make her own decisions, especially when confronting Mother Gothel. The following scenes show that Rapunzel fully understands who she is. In this scene, Rapunzel returns to her tower, she feels sad because she feels disappointed in Flynn Rider leaving her for wealth and material, she then stays in her room holding a flag with the sun symbol.



Scene 9. (01:17:00 - 01:17:05)

Scene 9 Rapunzel suddenly sees the glimpses in her memory that she remembers everything. Rapunzel has realized that she is the princess who has been missing for 18 years.

In this Formal Operational Stage, there is a moment when Rapunzel begins to dare to decide to save the injured Flynn Rider, rather than herself. She is willing to sacrifice herself to promise to stay forever with mother Gothel but it turns out that Flynn Rider cuts Rapunzel's magical hair with a piece of glass



Scene 10. (01:23:54 - 01:24:29)

Rapunzel: "I'm so sorry, everything is going okay, though"

Flynn Rider: "No, Rapunzel..."

Rapunzel: "I'm promise, you have trust me"

Flynn Rider: "No..."

Rapunzel: "Come on"

Flynn Rider: "I can't let you do this"

Rapunzel: "And I can't let you die"



Scene 11. (01:24:37 - 01:24:33)

Rapunzel: "Eugene, what?" (she was shocked)

Mother Gothel: "What have you done? WHAT HAVE YOU DONE!?! NO...."

Rapunzel's hair turned brown and lost its magic which aimed to prevent Rapunzel from being utilized by mother Gothel. Scene 11, mother Gothel was angry when she saw her hair cut by Flynn Rider. Until mother Gothel turned into an old grandmother and disappeared into ashes. and in the scene where Flynn Rider faints and Rapunzel cries over him, her emotional response illustrates key characteristics of Piaget's Formal Operational Stage



Scene 12. (01:26:50 - 01:27:30)

In the scene 12, Flynn Rider faints and Rapunzel cries over him, her emotional response illustrates key characteristics of Piaget's Formal Operational Stage. She feels guilty for failing to save Flynn Rider indicates her growing capacity for empathy and moral reasoning. So that her tears dripped heavily until it touched Flynn Rider's cheeks. It turns out that the power in her hair is lost, but her tears also have the power to heal Flynn Rider.

The previous studies on *Tangled* have focused on various aspects of the film, such as sociolinguistics, psychoanalysis, and representation of women. However, these researches do not address the progression of Rapunzel's intellectual and cognitive growth in the film. In contrast, using Piaget's cognitive development theory, my research fills this gap by analyzing Rapunzel's journey from the Sensorimotor Stage to the Formal Operational Stage. This perspective reveals how her experiences foster logical reasoning, problem-solving, and abstract thinking, offering a comprehensive understanding of her cognitive maturity. Where this aspect has not been explored in detail by previous studies. This approach adds a new layer of analysis to *Tangled*, focusing on Rapunzel's intellectual evolution alongside her emotional and social growth

Compared with similar characters from Disney movies, Rapunzel from *Tangled* and Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* share similar journeys of self-discovery. Both start as curious and imaginative characters, Rapunzel confined to her tower and Ariel dreaming of life on land. They grow by challenging authority and making independent decisions, showing their shift to mature thinking as described in Piaget's formal operational stage.

In *Tangled*, the roles of people and environment are significantly influenced in shaping Rapunzel's cognitive development as explained by Piaget's theory. Rapunzel's environment plays a big role in her cognitive development. Living in isolation limits her experiences and learning opportunities. She doesn't get to interact with others or face real-world challenges. But once she leaves the tower, everything changes. Meeting Flynn Rider, exploring the kingdom, and facing new challenges help her think critically and understand complex situations, marking

Piaget's Concrete Operational Stage This shows that learning and growth depend not just on age but also on new experiences and interactions. This situation illustrates how a negative environment can hinder cognitive progress, as she lacks the necessary social interactions to develop more advanced thinking skills (Piaget, 1952). Mother Gothel's manipulation reinforces Rapunzel's naive thinking and dependence, restricts her curiosity and ability to engage in abstract reasoning. This situation shows how a restrictive environment can hinder cognitive development, as Rapunzel does not have the social interactions and experiences needed to progress to higher cognitive stages.

These new relationships give her chances to practice problem-solving and decision-making, highlighting the importance of social interactions for cognitive growth (Vygotsky, 1978). Her ability to make plans and face challenges demonstrates her developing logical reasoning skills, which is a significant step in her intellectual growth

Ultimately, Rapunzel's journey from isolation to independence emphasizes how important people and the environment are in her cognitive and psychological development. By the end of the film, she displays traits typical of Piaget's Formal Operational Stage, such as abstract thinking, able to fully understand, learn, be emotional, able to make decisions, and progress from simple thinking to more complex reasoning. and the ability to see different perspectives. This growth shows that cognitive development is not just about individual maturation but is also greatly influenced by external factors like social relationships and environmental contexts (Erikson, 1963). In *Tangled*, Rapunzel's development highlights that supportive interactions and varied experiences are crucial for cognitive advancement, reinforcing the connection between social and cognitive growth in developmental psychology.

Conclusion

This research explored Rapunzel's cognitive development in Disney's *Tangled* (2010) using Jean Piaget's theory. Through descriptive qualitative analysis of scenes and dialogue, we observed how Rapunzel moves through Piaget's stages, starting from limited, naive thinking in the Preoperational stage to more logical, independent thinking in the Formal Operational stage. Her journey from a sheltered life to self-discovery shows how her experiences help her grow mentally, learning to solve problems and understand complex ideas.

This research shows how Piaget's theory explains Rapunzel's growth and can help us understand character development in stories. Future research could compare cognitive development in different animated characters across films using Piaget's stages. This would help identify patterns in how characters grow intellectually and emotionally. Additionally, combining Piaget's theory with others, like Erikson's, could offer deeper insights into psychosocial with eight stages that individuals go through from infancy to adulthood.

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