



## Intersectional Identity and Representation of a Young Girl in *Elemental of Force of Nature (2023)*: A Contemporary Literary Analysis

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### Abstract

This study analyzes the representation of intersectional identity in the character Ember Lumen from Pixar's film *Elemental* (2023), which expresses the complexity of race, gender, and social class dimensions in the life of a minority girl within an immigrant family. The background of this research highlights the significance of children's films as a narrative arena capable of illustrating and reproducing the dynamics of social patriarchy and structural discrimination that restrict the freedom and self-identity construction of young women. The objective of this study is to describe how Ember's character embodies acts of resistance against social and cultural pressures through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. A qualitative descriptive approach is employed using the *critical film study* method to analyze symbols, characters, and narrative elements in the film, focusing on their interactions within socio-cultural contexts. The findings reveal that Ember Lumen successfully resists familial patriarchy and socio-economic constraints to create personal agency and achieve identity transformation. This transformative process signifies a struggle for liberation from traditional norms and socially constructed gender roles within both family and society. The conclusion emphasizes that children's films can function as a space for social critique and as a medium for gender emancipation among minority women. The implications of this research open new opportunities for developing studies on gender representation and intersectionality in popular media while enriching contemporary literary and children's film theory.

**Keywords:** Social patriarchy; Intersectional identity; Ember Lumen

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## INTRODUCTION

In Pixar's *Elemental* (2023), the character Ember Lumen, a young girl born from the element of fire, confronts not only water but also the rigid currents of social expectation: prescribed gender roles, racialized boundaries, and class-based constraints. Beneath its vibrant animation and seemingly light-hearted narrative, the film poses a pressing question: what does it mean to grow up as a girl in a world that continually asks her to shrink herself in the name of tradition, family, and survival? Ember's journey becomes a cinematic reflection of intersectional girlhood, illustrating how gender, race (figured through elemental difference), class, and migration shape the everyday struggles of young women navigating family authority and wider social structures.

*Elemental* is set in Element City, a futuristic metropolis where anthropomorphic fire, water, earth, and air attempt to coexist. Ember, a second-generation fire citizen, lives with her immigrant parents from Fireland, who run a small neighborhood shop called "The

Fireplace.” Her father’s dream is for Ember to inherit and sustain the family business, a narrative familiar to many migrant families. Yet Ember’s fiery temperament, creative potential, and desire for independence sit uneasily with these expectations. Her chance meeting with Wade Ripple, a sensitive water-element city inspector, after a burst pipe in the shop, catalyzes both a cross-element romance and an internal crisis. As she grapples with the impossibility of being “fire” in love with “water,” Ember also questions whether her life must be confined to the script written by her parents, community, and social position.

The world of Element City also functions as a metaphor for multicultural societies in the era of globalization. Diversity in the film emerges through everyday intercultural encounters—between elements, neighborhoods, and institutions. These interactions resonate with Abidin’s (2016) understanding of multiculturalism as the recognition and appreciation of cultural differences grounded in equality rather than hierarchical distinction. In such a framework, no element should be deemed superior; yet the film quietly exposes how structural inequalities persist, with fire residents pushed to the margins and forced into self-contained enclaves. In this context, Ember’s story exemplifies how a young woman’s identity is shaped at the intersection of multicultural ideals and the reality of unequal power relations.

As a mass medium, film shapes public imagination and everyday discourse, especially when much of the public’s knowledge about social issues is filtered through popular culture (William & Winduwati, 2021). Animated films marketed as family entertainment therefore carry ethical responsibilities and significant representational power. They rarely communicate social critique through explicit statements; instead, they rely on visual and narrative signs to communicate implicit and explicit meanings. This study responds to that representational power by examining young women in the context of intersectionality—specifically gender, race (refigured as elemental difference), class, migration, and patriarchal family structures—through the construction of Ember Lumen’s identity. By foregrounding a girl at the center of its narrative, *Elemental* opens a space to question which girls are allowed to dream, to disobey, and to redefine their futures.

In patriarchal cultures, women are positioned not as decision makers but as figures expected to obey and adapt to rules established by men (Yunita, 2025). Ember’s experiences are embedded in three overlapping axes of oppression: patriarchy, social class, and migration. Within her family, patriarchy appears in her father’s authority, intergenerational expectations of filial piety, and the assumption that a “good daughter” will prioritize caregiving, business continuity, and family honor over personal desire. Social class shapes the Lumens as working-class immigrants whose livelihood depends on a small shop in a city dominated by more privileged groups. Economic precarity narrows Ember’s space for exploration: her dreams are continually measured against the imperative to keep the shop—and thus the family—afloat. Migration adds another layer of complexity through cultural displacement, racialized prejudice, and identity conflict between Fireland roots and Element City belonging.

These intersecting dimensions create a dense, constraining space around Ember. She is limited not only as a girl, but also as the child of a racialized minority and a working-class family in a hierarchical multicultural environment. Family patriarchy demands obedience and self-sacrifice; the economic system demands loyalty to the business; the wider social environment pushes toward assimilation while still treating fire residents as “other.” Ember’s identity formation and agency therefore emerge through processes of negotiation, resistance, and self-transformation. Far from being a simple coming-of-age story, *Elemental* stages an intricate interweaving of structural forces and personal struggle, illustrating how a children’s film can function as a critical reflection on power relations shaping adolescent girls’ lives. Literature and narrative, as Faruk (2012) notes, often serve

as instruments of satire and critique, a point reinforced by Sulkhan (2021) who highlights how authors use stories to resist oppressive power structures and expose social problems. Ember's story can also be read against the notion of childism, which Adami (2025) defines as attitudes and practices that disregard children's rights and legitimize their marginalization within families, schools, and institutions.

Director Peter Sohn has acknowledged that *Elemental: Forces of Nature* draws heavily from his own experience as the child of Korean immigrants running a small shop in the Bronx. The Lumens' struggle to survive in a foreign city, hold onto their traditions, and secure a future for their child mirrors many real-world immigrant narratives. Ember's difficulties in balancing duty to the family business with her own aspirations echo the tension between gratitude and self-determination experienced by children in migrant families. As literature and film are often grounded in concrete realities (Faruk, 2012), *Elemental* can be read as both personal testimony and social commentary: it stages the emotional cost of expectations placed on daughters who are simultaneously seen as heirs, labor, and symbols of family continuity.

Within feminist analyses of children's literature, animated films like *Elemental* are vital sites for examining how gender identity is constructed and negotiated through narrative and character (Maybin & Watson, 2009). Ember Lumen is not merely an object within the story; she is portrayed as an active agent who questions and resists both familial patriarchy and broader social norms. Her arc embodies precisely the kind of autonomous identity formation and resistance to patriarchal constraints that Roberta Seelinger Trites foregrounds in *Waking Sleeping Beauty: Feminist Voices in Children's Novels* (Trites, 1997). At the same time, this film aligns with (Hooks, 1984) call for feminist theory to move "from margin to center," recognizing that women's experiences are shaped by race, class, and culture as much as by gender. Ember's positionality as a racialized, working-class, immigrant daughter situates her at multiple margins, making her an exemplary figure for intersectional feminist analysis.

Patriarchy, as Ferry (2024) and others note, is not a singular system but a dynamic structure that interacts with race and class to produce distinct experiences for women. This study follows Trites's (1997) insistence that girls in children's narratives be understood as agents who negotiate, rather than passively endure, patriarchal power. Ember's disobedience, emotional outbursts, and eventual act of self-assertion are not simply personal traits; they function as critiques of social structures that confine girls within narrow roles, particularly in migrant and working-class families. Through Ember, the film demonstrates the potential of children's media to foster progressive gender consciousness, prompting young audiences to question what is taken for granted about daughters' obligations, "good girl" behavior, and acceptable futures.

An intersectional perspective further sharpens this reading. Wulandari (2025) emphasizes that contemporary narratives increasingly portray young protagonists whose identities intersect across gender, race, and culture, allowing more inclusive and complex portrayals of agency. In *Elemental*, the Lumens' decision to build "Firetown" within Element City reflects a common practice among minorities of forming close-knit, culturally conservative enclaves. This collective identity helps preserve their heritage—symbolized by the blue fire as a sacred reminder of their origins—while they negotiate life in a new environment. Such enclaves offer protection and cultural continuity, but they can also become spaces where traditional gender roles and expectations are tightly policed, making Ember's resistance even more significant.

The persistence of discrimination across history, and its contemporary manifestations, underscores the urgency of these questions. Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, and other markers continues to generate bias, prejudice, and social division (Devyana & Nugroho, 2024; Kuncoro, 2023). Ember's refusal to fully conform to

her community's expectations reflects Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity: gender is not an innate essence but a repeated performance shaped by cultural norms. By disrupting the scripts assigned to her—as dutiful daughter, ideal fire woman, and unquestioning inheritor—Ember challenges heteronormative and patriarchal frameworks. This shift in representation must also be situated within a longer history of feminist movements that challenged discrimination, contested women's marginalization, and pressured cultural industries like Disney to transform how women and girls are depicted (Liu & Yang, 2021).

To situate this study within existing scholarship on *Elemental*, it is important to note prior work such as Anzani et al. (2025), who analyze the film through Robert Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Theory of Love. Their research focuses on intimacy, passion, and commitment in Ember's relationships, exploring romantic love with Wade, familial love with her parents, and Ember's self-love and personal growth. Using qualitative textual analysis, they illuminate emotional connections and affective development in the film. However, their focus remains primarily on the typology of love rather than on the structural forces shaping Ember's identity. The novelty of the present study lies in its explicit integration of intersectional feminist theory, childism, and patriarchal critique to examine how Ember's girlhood is constructed at the crossroads of gender, race, class, and migration. By foregrounding power relations and structural constraints—not only emotional dynamics—this research offers a deeper understanding of how *Elemental* encodes resistance, agency, and identity formation for a young girl living within, and pushing against, intersecting systems of oppression.

The study also examines the intersectional feminist framework by Kimberle Crenshaw in depth, specifically in the realm of children's literature, an area that has not been widely studied using the material object of the film *Elemental* (2023). The novelty of this study lies in its focus on intersectionality within the immigrant family structure, which combines the dimensions of patriarchy, social class, and migration as an integrated analytical framework to understand the experiences of adolescent girls, an aspect that has not been widely explored in previous studies on *Elemental* (2023), which generally focus on surface-level themes of romance and multiculturalism.

Therefore, the researcher chose a film that utilizes the theory of intersectional feminism to broaden the analysis of gender, race, and ethnic differences in the film *Elemental*. Based on the theme raised, the researcher narrows the scope of discussion to address the following research questions: 1) How does *Elemental* represent the experiences of young women within the context of the intersectionality of gender, race (elements), and class?; 2) How is the role of the patriarchal family portrayed in shaping the identity of the female character, Ember.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a critical film study approach designed as a replicable protocol. The unit of analysis is not human participants, but selected scenes in the film *Elemental* (2023) that depict identity representations, family relationships, and the dynamics of interactions among elements. The research corpus includes the entire officially released version of the film with original audio and English subtitles, while decisions regarding the use of subtitles or original dialogue are recorded in an extraction sheet to anticipate potential shifts in meaning due to translation differences. Scene selection used purposive sampling, meaning scenes were selected based on the presence of key themes such as generational conflict, migration, racialization of elements, class relations, and gender performativity. From the total film duration, a number of scenes meeting these criteria were collected, and each scene was documented with start and end timecodes to ensure a transparent verification process.



All scenes were then transcribed using a consistent transcription convention, namely verbatim dialogue recording. Data recording was carried out using a structured extraction sheet, which includes columns for scene identity, denotative summary, dialogue transcription, description of visual elements, emerging code categories, notes on translation choices, and evidence in the form of representative dialogue or frames. To maintain interpretive consistency, this study employs an operational codebook containing definitions for each identity category and meaning (e.g., filial obligation, racialized exclusion, agency, and spatial representation), along with observation indicators and positive and negative examples to ensure each category has clearly defined operational boundaries. Data collection was conducted through systematic stages: first, the researcher collected the film corpus and watched the entire material to perform initial scene segmentation. Second, each relevant scene was recorded and transcribed into the extraction sheet. Third, the researcher conducted pilot coding on several scenes to test the clarity of the codebook and adjust definitions if ambiguities were found. In this study, the coding process was carried out by a single researcher, yet measures were taken to ensure traceability and credibility.

The data analysis technique was carried out by following Roland Barthes' semiotic procedure in stages. First, the denotation stage was used to identify what is seen and heard in the scenes including dialogue, gestures, expressions, spatial arrangement, and visual elements. Second, the connotation stage was used to interpret the cultural, emotional, and social meanings of these signs, such as power relations, family hierarchies, or racial symbolism. Third, the myth stage was used to draw connotative meanings into broader cultural narratives, for example, the myth of a cohesive immigrant family, the myth of meritocracy, or the myth of the 'fire' element as a racial minority. For each major theme, the researcher selected the most representative dialogue excerpts or visual frames to demonstrate how the data support the theoretical interpretation. The entire process was reported with comprehensive documentation, so that analytical claims can be transparently traced back to the original data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To provide an overview of the main analytical patterns, this section begins with a summary table that outlines the key scenes, thematic categories, and intersectional dimensions identified in the film. The table serves as a structural map that guides the subsequent discussion.

Table 1. Outlines of the Scenes, Thematic Categories, and Intersectional Dimensions in the Film

No	Time code	Scene Description	Key Theme
1	01:26	Ember's parents leave Fireland for Element City	Migration, social class, family patriarchy, father's hope for the future
2	03:27	Ember's parents' first arrival and encounter racist remarks	Racism, minority status, systemic xenophobia
3	04:52	Father welcomes young Ember and expresses hope for her to be a "good daughter"	Gender norms, patriarchy, formation of daughter's identity
4	05:57	Young Ember begins helping in the store	Filial piety, working-class work ethic, expectations of daughters
5	07:29	Teenage Ember working in the store	Limitation of life choices, social class pressure, gender roles
6	12:24	Ember increasingly directed to become the store successor	Burden of intergenerational labor, working-class immigrant family

No	Time code	Scene Description	Key Theme
7	13:15	Father retires and “appoints” Ember as successor	Patriarchy, responsibility, negotiation family identity
8	54:29	Ember begins to change after meeting Wade and questioning her future	Identity transformation, agency, resistance to patriarchy

The eight scenes listed in the table above were selected because they consistently contain meaningful structures relevant to the research objectives, namely how the film *Elemental* represents identity, family power relations, and minority group experiences through an intersectional lens. The initial scenes (Scenes 1–3) depict the formation of the fire immigrant family’s identity, ranging from migration journeys, experiences of discriminatory treatment, to the father’s expectations for his daughter. The subsequent scenes (Scenes 4–7) illustrate the internalization of cultural values and family pressures experienced by Ember. As she grows, she is shaped not only by the patriarchal structures embedded within the fire community but also by working-class demands that increasingly restrict her space for action. The analysis in this section examines how gender, class, and immigrant status intersect to create a double burden that determines Ember’s life choices, including the expectation to continue the family store as an expression of filial obedience. Meanwhile, the final scene (Scene 8) serves as a turning point in identity when Ember begins to question the life path set for her. Her encounter with Wade opens access to different emotional, social, and class experiences, thereby reactivating Ember’s agency as a subject capable of negotiating her identity.

The film *Elemental Force of Nature* (2023) is categorized as a film for all ages with a PG (Parental Guide) limit or parental supervision, so that it has an indirect influence and impact on the behavior and attitudes of children towards their families, their surroundings, and also on the development of attitudes and values that are owned by themselves. The narrative carried in this film tells how the struggle of a small family of immigrants in a new place tries to adapt to the existing social life by bringing cultural values from their place of origin and wanting to preserve and develop them in a new place. From this narrative, intrigue or a series of events begin to emerge that influence the course of character development which is presented sequentially so that each event has its own influence on character development.

*In the minute (01:26) Ember's father and mother when they left the fire nation for an elemental city. “Daddy Ember: Trust me, this will be better than our old place.” “Mother Ember: I trust you, my dear”*

Ember's father and mother in the scene above show how worried they are about their future, but here the father tries to convince his girlfriend to keep believing in her abilities. The vital role played by the head of the family is to provide peace and a sense of security to his family members. However, this sense of security can actually be the cause of certain regulations that can be restrictive for his family members from freedom of expression and deciding something independently even though they have structured thinking, sufficient age, and valuable experience. Finally, this makes family members feel obliged to fulfill the wishes of the family leader, to realize a sense of security, comfort, and have a good impact on the family which can then cause conflict and questions to oneself, finally triggering elements of rebellion against the policies that have been implemented.

*In the minute 03:27) Arrival of Ember's father and mother at Elemental City “Hey watch your step, Sparky,” said an air race man as he was hit by Ember’s fire elemental father.*

Ember's father and mother in the scene above experienced racist treatment when they first came to Elemental City, they were both insulted. This shows that from the

beginning they experienced rejection from society where Ember's family itself was an immigrant from the fire element which was a minority population in Elemental City which was previously built by the water element and the earth element which were the majority population. Ember's father is depicted as a racial minority man (fire element and lower class), because when he arrived he did not have a permanent job and started everything from the bottom. Elemental City also represents a system that is not friendly to migrant newcomers who are vulnerable groups because they are rejected by the majority community. The intersectionality in this scene is very clear.

*In the minute (04:52) The little bucket is welcomed by its father's presence in the world. "Look at this little princess, I hope she can be a good princess in the future"*

Father and Ember in the scene above show how the father's hopes have been conveyed to little Ember to be able to live as a good daughter. A good daughter here is interpreted as a little daughter who obeys her father's wishes, inherits the family's ideals, and bears the responsibility as a working class to be able to live a good social life while living in Elemental City. The intersectionality that occurs in the main character, Ember, of course starts from the most basic level of patriarchy, namely the father's orders, gender responsibilities in the form of being a good daughter, and also the working class to be able to live decently in Elemental City in the future.

*In the minute (05:57), (minute 07:29), (minute 12:24), and (minute 13:15), Ember was invited to sell in the shop since she was little and when she was an adult she was asked to be the successor to her father's business.*

Ember in the scene above began to be invited by her father to help sell in the shop since she was little until she was asked by her father to be able to continue the shop sales because her father was about to retire and was no longer able to continue his business. Ember helped her father's shop and was expected to continue the family business, where Ember was not asked about her own wishes and was only asked to carry out the duties and responsibilities of continuing her father's shop business. In addition, the shop they own is also damaged because the water channel system built by the water element race almost covers the entire city order. So that women like Ember experience multi-level oppression, racially including the minority race, namely the fire race. Ember as a woman who is expected to submit to family decisions, continue the family business, and not choose to live alone. Ember as a working class whose choices are limited, namely not having wide access like other residents. In this case, patriarchy limits the rights that women can fulfill.

*In the minute (54:29) Ember begins to understand the wider world after interacting with Wade, and begins to transform.*

The scene above shows Ember opening up to outsiders after being educated by her father to hate other races such as water elements. As the story progresses, Ember begins to learn about things outside her world. Especially since meeting Wade, she began to open her mind and feelings. Ember began to question her destiny as a good daughter that her father had expected since she was little. Since meeting Wade, Ember had doubted herself and questioned society's views on her relationship. After meeting Wade's family, Ember began to realize what she wanted. She didn't want to run a shop forever. She was attracted to the world of design that looked so beautiful before her eyes. When she returned home, even though she had doubts about the path she had chosen, Wade came to convey his courage in front of Ember's family, right at the appointment of Ember as the successor to her father's business. Ember was still in doubt when Wade approached her.

## Discussion

The analysis of *Elemental: Force of Nature* (2023) reveals that Ember Lumen's character embodies a multidimensional intersectional identity shaped by gender, race, class, and migrant status. The findings demonstrate that Ember's experience is not defined by a single axis of identity but emerges through the convergence of familial patriarchy, socioeconomic pressures, and systemic racialization. This aligns directly with Kimberlé Crenshaw's argument that oppression must be understood through intersecting systems rather than isolated categories. As Crenshaw notes, women who occupy multiple marginalized positions often experience forms of discrimination that cannot be captured by frameworks focusing solely on gender or race. Ember's narrative reinforces this claim: as a fire-element girl from a working-class immigrant family, her struggles are inseparable from overlapping social structures that limit her autonomy. This multi-layered representation shows that *Elemental* does more than construct a typical coming-of-age storyline; it illustrates how identity is negotiated under structural pressure and personal desire.

The findings correspond with previous research indicating that animated media often encode social hierarchies and power relations through metaphorical world-building. Barus (2024), for example, found that *Elemental* uses elemental differences to symbolize multicultural tensions and societal inequalities. This is evident in the scenes depicting Ember's family's arrival in Element City, where immediate racist treatment establishes their outsider status. These visuals function as semiotic cues that reinforce racialization narratives within children's films, resonating with Devyana and Nugroho's (2024) discussion of how discrimination in *Elemental* mirrors real-world prejudice experienced by minority groups. In this context, the film's spatial arrangement—placing the fire community in segregated, structurally vulnerable districts—reflects patterns of urban marginalization discussed in migration studies, further grounding Ember's identity struggle within a broader socio-political framework.

Another important finding is how patriarchy shapes Ember's internal conflict and identity development. The father-daughter dynamic in the film illustrates Lerner's (1986) conception of patriarchy as a historically constructed system in which male authority is naturalized within the family. Ember's father's insistence that she become a "good daughter" and inherit the family business reflects an intergenerational transmission of patriarchal expectations that bind daughters to obligations of loyalty, caregiving, and sacrifice. These findings resonate with Yunita's (2025) argument that patriarchal cultures often position women as subordinate members expected to obey male decision-makers. Ember's early involvement in store work demonstrates how gender norms and economic necessity converge to shape her perceived role within the family. This layered expectation underscores Crenshaw's claim that minority women experience gender oppression differently due to the added pressures of class and cultural identity.

The film also exposes class as an influential component of Ember's intersectional identity. Her family's working-class status limits her mobility and opportunities, as seen when Ember is tasked with running the shop from a young age. This reflects what Collins (2019) describes as the structural dimension of intersectionality, where institutions and economic conditions reinforce inequality. Ember's lack of choice is not simply a result of familial expectation but stems from a socioeconomic structure that restricts upward mobility for migrant families. Compared to majority groups in Element City, who have access to better-maintained infrastructure and economic stability, the fire community's precarious position reinforces the significance of class in shaping identity and agency.

The emergence of transformation and agency in Ember, especially through her interactions with Wade, highlights another key dimension of the findings. Wade's contrasting background—emotionally expressive, economically stable, and socially



accepted—offers Ember an alternative perspective on life that challenges the constraints imposed by her family and society. This aligns with Trites's (1997) assertion that contemporary children's narratives often depict young women negotiating their autonomy by resisting patriarchal norms. Ember's process of questioning her future, redefining what she wants, and ultimately refusing to inherit the store represents a feminist articulation of agency grounded in emotional growth and self-determination. This finding contributes to the scholarship by positioning Ember not as a passive recipient of structural oppression but as an evolving subject capable of transformation.

Several studies have focused on *Elemental*, but few have examined the film through an intersectional feminist lens. For instance, Anzani et al. (2025) analyzed the film using Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love, focusing largely on relational dynamics rather than on structural oppression. Similarly, Barus (2024) explored multicultural representation but did not foreground gender or class as intersecting factors. The novelty of the current study lies in its integration of intersectionality theory with semiotic film analysis to uncover how visual and narrative signs convey layered identities. By examining race (elemental difference), gender, class, and migratory background as interconnected rather than separate issues, this study expands the interpretive frame of *Elemental* and contributes to contemporary debates on representation in children's media.

The theoretical implications of the findings emphasize the importance of intersectionality as both an analytical lens and a critical social theory. Ember's narrative demonstrates Crenshaw's point that identities formed at social margins reveal power dynamics overlooked in mainstream analysis. Moreover, the use of Barthes' semiotics in this study shows how meaning is constructed not only through dialogue but also through visual cues, spatial organization, and symbolic mythologies. These semiotic layers enable the film to critique structural inequality while remaining accessible to younger audiences.

Practically, the findings underscore the educational potential of animated films for introducing complex social topics such as discrimination, patriarchy, and class inequality to young audiences. Scholars such as Maybin and Watson (2009) have long argued that children's literature and film shape early understandings of gender and social norms. *Elemental* offers opportunities for educators and parents to encourage discussions about inclusivity, cultural identity, and the rights of children to pursue their own aspirations. The film's portrayal of Ember's resistance suggests that children's media can model empowered girlhood and challenge restrictive gender expectations.

## CONCLUSION

This study affirms that the representation of Ember Lumen demonstrates how gender, race/ethnicity racialized through the elemental system, working-class position, migrant status, and age as a child intersect simultaneously to shape a field of constraints and possibilities for agency, so that the subject's experience cannot be understood through a single, isolated identity category. Referring to Crenshaw's intersectionality, the cross-scene findings show that family patriarchy, the economic pressures of an immigrant family shop, and institutionalized xenophobia operate not additively but in mutually reinforcing ways, while moments of negotiation emotional encounters, career choices, and the refusal of a succession mandate, reveal the emergence of agency that moves Ember from normative compliance toward identity transformation.

Empirically, this study contributes an in-depth explanation of power relations between father and daughter, intergenerational work expectations, and the negotiation of agency under layered oppression. These findings offer a vantage point not yet addressed in prior *Elemental* studies, which tend to emphasize romance or multicultural themes in general. Methodologically, this article demonstrates the value of integrating Barthes' semiotics with an operational scene-based coding protocol to uncover how visual,

narrative, and ideological signs both naturalize and challenge domination in animated media. The study's implications extend to media literacy and children's film pedagogy, indicating that *Elemental* can function as an entry space for cultivating intersectional awareness, empathy across identity boundaries, and critical reflection on tradition, migration, and gendered responsibility.

## RECOMMENDATION

For literary scholars, this study recommends deepening the theoretical braid of intersectionality, gender performativity, affect theory, and critical race studies; conducting cross-corpus comparisons with migrant-family narratives across literature and film; tracing the genealogy of filial/legacy tropes; deconstructing the affective patriarch as a narrative-visual text; and incorporating paratextual/industrial discourse to historicize representation.

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