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Character Development Of The Main Protagonist In The Movie “ZOOTOPIA” By Byron Howard And Rich Moore

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Abstract. This research investigates the character development of Judy Hopps, the main protagonist in the animated film "Zootopia" by Byron Howard and Rich Moore. It examines how her evolution, depicted through Syd Field's Three-Act Structure, contributes to the film's exploration of societal issues such as prejudice, diversity, and inclusivity. Furthermore, the study assesses the impact of Judy Hopps' development on the perception of animated characters as role models for both young and mature audiences. Utilizing a descriptive qualitative research method with library research, the study analyzes intrinsic character development based on Edgar V. Roberts' theory (1983:41) and the narrative structure through Syd Field's Three-Act Structure. The findings highlight Judy's transformation from an idealistic rookie to a mature and empathetic officer who challenges stereotypes and promotes inclusivity, underscoring the film's ability to convey meaningful messages and influence audiences across different age groups.

Keywords: Character Development, Main Protagonist, Zootopia, Syd Field's Three-Act Structure, Animated Film

Introduction

Background of the Study

Film serves as a communication medium designed to transmit messages via visual and audio components to a specific audience. As an audiovisual medium of mass communication, film proves instrumental in conveying messages to the public. It functions as an efficient communication tool by offering descriptive narrative ideas, thereby facilitating message reception by the audience (Pratidana & Setyawan, 2017). Furthermore, film, as a mass communication medium, operates as a conduit for information, entertainment, and education. It exerts a considerably significant influence on shaping public mindsets concerning media-

disseminated information. Beyond its communicative utility, film can be leveraged as a persuasive medium for cultural introduction

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and dissemination (Mangelep & Murwonugroho, 2019). Notably, film remains a highly prevalent medium for information conveyance (Ulhasanah, 2020).

Films serve as a powerful medium for illustrating the inherent character of individuals. Character, a pivotal element in any narrative, is meticulously constructed to differentiate entities—be they human, animal, spiritual, robotic, inanimate, or otherwise—based on their distinct mental, emotional, and social attributes. This intrinsic value of character conveys a compelling allure upon which the narrative's problems and events are contingent, thereby forming the very foundation of the story. Consequently, characters within a film hold an exceptionally significant role. Without characters there would be no story, without characters there would be no plot. In fact, differences in character will give rise to shifts, clashes of interests, conflicts which ultimately give birth to stories (Ardyanto, 2022)

Animated films have a unique power to engage audiences of all ages, offering narratives that entertain and provoke thought simultaneously. They create immersive worlds that mirror our own, allowing us to explore complex issues through the experiences of relatable characters. "Zootopia" does precisely this by constructing an allegorical city where animals reflect the diversity and challenges found in human societies. In a time when representation and diversity are increasingly emphasized in mainstream media, "Zootopia" plays a crucial role. With its lively characters and engaging plot, the movie prompts audiences to reconsider their views on others, confront the impact of stereotypes, and appreciate the value of empathy. While appealing to younger viewers, the film's deeper themes also resonate with adults, highlighting how animated films can effectively convey messages that resonate across different age groups.

In the contemporary landscape of cinema, animated films have evolved from being solely children's entertainment to becoming vehicles for intricate storytelling, socio-cultural commentary, and character exploration. These films, often crafted with advanced animation techniques, are capable of presenting narratives that resonate deeply with diverse audiences, addressing complex themes and human experiences through metaphor and engaging visual language. "Zootopia," produced by Walt Disney Animation Studios, stands as a prime example of this evolution. It not only delivers captivating visuals and a witty narrative but also subtly yet powerfully conveys profound moral and social messages. The film delves into themes such as the importance of inclusivity, acceptance of differences, the perils of stereotyping, and the challenges of overcoming societal prejudices. Its ability to weave these significant messages into an accessible and entertaining format makes it a compelling subject for academic inquiry.

This research seeks to enhance our comprehension of character evolution in animated stories, with a particular focus on Judy Hopps from "Zootopia". Through an examination of the protagonist's journey, the study aims to reveal how the film utilizes character interactions, narrative framework, and visual storytelling to communicate themes of personal development and social awareness. Moreover,

it will investigate how these themes resonate across different age demographics, underscoring the film's ability to influence both youthful and adult audiences. Through a comprehensive analysis of character development within the context of "Zootopia," this study hopes to shed light on the artistic and thematic choices made by the creators. By dissecting the layers of narrative and character intricacies, we can gain insight into the mechanisms through which animated films become conduits for meaningful messages. In summary, the background of the study highlights the evolution of animated films as vehicles for storytelling complexity and societal commentary. "Zootopia" emerges as a prime example, inviting exploration into character development and thematic exploration through the lens of Judy Hopps' journey.

Reasons for Choosing the Topic

The decision to analyze "Zootopia" stems from several key motivations. Firstly, the film's significant critical and commercial success indicates its broad appeal and cultural impact. Secondly, its narrative complexity, particularly concerning its nuanced portrayal of social issues like discrimination and systemic bias, provides fertile ground for academic analysis. Thirdly, the character of Judy Hopps, a determined rabbit aspiring to become a police officer in a city built on the premise of harmony among diverse species, offers a rich case study for examining character development. Her journey is fraught with challenges that test her idealism and force her to confront uncomfortable truths about the world and herself. Understanding how such a character develops under pressure, and how her evolution contributes to the film's overarching themes, is central to this study. This research seeks to address the following key questions regarding the film "Zootopia":

1. How does the character of Judy Hopps undergo development throughout the narrative of "Zootopia"?
2. What are the primary internal and external factors that influence Judy Hopps' character transformation?
3. What are the implications of Judy Hopps' character development on the moral and social messages conveyed by the film?

Significance of the Study

This research holds significance for various stakeholders:

1. For Students: This study is expected to provide valuable insights into the intricate process of character development within cinematic narratives. It can serve as a comprehensive reference for students of film studies, literature, and animation, deepening their understanding of how fictional characters are crafted to convey meaning and evoke audience engagement.
2. For Teachers: The findings of this research can be a useful resource for educators. It offers a framework for discussing character education and moral values in an accessible and engaging manner, using "Zootopia" as a teaching tool to explore themes of empathy, perseverance, and social responsibility with students.
3. For Future Researchers: This research serves as a foundational study for subsequent investigations into character development in animated films and broader cinematic works. It lays the groundwork for further inquiry into the mechanisms by which films influence the moral and psychological development of their audiences, and how narrative structures contribute to such impacts.

Definitions of Key Terms

To ensure clarity and consistency, the following key terms are defined within the context of this study:

1. **Character Development:** Refers to the changes a character undergoes over the course of a story, including changes in personality, beliefs, values, and motivations, often in response to plot events, conflicts, or relationships (Sanders, 2016, p. 186). Researcher using Syd Field's Three-Act Structure, as outlined in his book "Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting" (Lazarus, 2019) which provides a framework for understanding the evolution of characters throughout a narrative. The three-act structure gives the most basic story organization for your screenplay. It's a virtual compass that guides your process, characters, stories, and plots.
2. **Protagonist:** The main character of a story, around whom the plot revolves and whose journey is central to the narrative (Subarkah, 2020). In this study, the protagonist is Judy Hopps.
3. **Zootopia (Film):** The animated feature film released in 2016 by Walt Disney Animation Studios, directed by Byron Howard and Rich Moore, which serves as the primary data source for this research.
4. **Narrative Analysis:** A qualitative research method used to interpret the stories or accounts presented in various forms, focusing on the structure, themes, and meaning-making processes within the narrative.

Method

This research employs a qualitative approach using narrative analysis and semiotics. According to Taylor et al. (2016), qualitative research generates descriptive information, including individuals' written or spoken words and their observable behaviors. The primary data is derived from the film "Zootopia" itself, including character dialogues, key scenes, expressions, and actions of Judy Hopps. Secondary data includes a literature review on character development theories in film narratives, semiotic theory for analyzing visual symbols and dialogues, and animated film theory. The data collection process involves several stages: (1) watching the film repeatedly to gain a comprehensive understanding of the plot and characters, (2) identifying important scenes that show interactions and conflicts shaping Judy Hopps, (3) transcribing relevant dialogues and visual descriptions, and (4) organizing the data based on character development stages. Data analysis is performed by identifying changes in Judy's traits, beliefs, and motivations, as well as the external and internal factors driving these changes. A theoretical framework of character development is used to categorize and explain Judy's evolution from a naive idealist to a more wise and realistic individual.

Findings and Discussion

The analysis reveals that Judy Hopps' character development in "Zootopia" is a dynamic and complex process, marked by several key phases. Initially, Judy is depicted as a highly idealistic and optimistic character, believing in Zootopia's potential as a city where anyone can be anything they want, regardless of species. This idealism is severely tested when she faces the realities of discrimination and stereotypes within the police force and broader society. Her main conflict is overcoming prejudice, both from others and her own internal biases against

predators. Significant moments in her character development include her struggles at the police academy, her challenges in handling cases, and especially her mistake in inadvertently spreading fear towards predators, which worsens social tensions.

Judy's development culminates when she acknowledges her mistakes, apologizes, and collaborates with Nick Wilde, who was initially an antagonistic character. This transformation demonstrates a shift from a black-and-white worldview to a more nuanced understanding of societal complexities. Judy learns that social change not only requires individual courage but also empathy, acknowledging mistakes, and the ability to adapt. Her friendship with Nick Wilde serves as a primary catalyst, teaching her about the dangers of generalization and the power of collaboration. The film effectively uses animal metaphors to convey these messages, making complex issues like discrimination and stereotypes accessible to a wide audience. Judy's character development reflects the film's core message: that personal growth and social progress are intertwined, and even small acts of courage and understanding can have a significant impact.

Character Development of Judy Hopps in the “Zootopia” Movie Using Syd Field's Three-Act Structure

Judy Hopps' character development can be broken down into several key stages, each marked by significant events and interactions that challenge and reshape her worldview:

· Naive Idealism and Determination (Early Life and Police Academy)

In Bunnyburrow, Judy's idealism is untempered. She believes that simply trying hard is enough to overcome any obstacle, including ingrained prejudice. This phase is characterized by her relentless pursuit of her dream, even when facing a rigorous and biased training regime at the Police Academy. Despite initial struggles and being underestimated by instructors and peers, her sheer determination allows her to graduate at the top of her class. This stage highlights her unwavering spirit but also her lack of exposure to the complexities of realworld prejudice. She believes that once she is a police officer, all will be fair.

· Confrontation with Reality and Initial Disillusionment (First Days in ZPD)

Upon arriving in Zootopia, Judy quickly faces the harsh realities of discrimination. Instead of being assigned to major cases, she is relegated to parking duty, a role that undermines her aspirations and capabilities. Her initial interactions with Chief Bogo and the larger, more imposing police officers reveal the deep-seated biases within the ZPD. This period is marked by frustration and a growing sense of disillusionment as her idealistic view of Zootopia clashes with the prejudiced reality. Her encounter with Nick Wilde further challenges her beliefs, as he embodies the cynical and street-smart perspective she lacks.

· Partnership, Growing Empathy, and Emerging Pragmatism (Working with Nick Wilde)

The investigation into the missing mammals forces Judy to partner with Nick Wilde. Initially, their relationship is adversarial, defined by Judy's preconceived notions about foxes and Nick's cynical view of the world. However, as they work together, Judy begins to see beyond Nick's stereotypes and understand his past experiences that shaped his skepticism. This stage is crucial for Judy's development of empathy and a more pragmatic understanding of justice. She learns that not all problems can be solved by simply following rules and that sometimes, bending

them or using cunning is necessary. This collaboration softens her idealism, replacing it with a more balanced and effective approach to her duties.

- **Making Mistakes and Learning from Them (The Press Conference and Its Aftermath)**

A pivotal moment in Judy's development occurs during the press conference where, in an attempt to explain the "savage" behavior of some predators, she inadvertently perpetuates harmful stereotypes by implying that the behavior is biological. This mistake has severe consequences, leading to widespread fear, division, and a breakdown in her relationship with Nick. This is a moment of profound introspection for Judy, as she realizes the negative impact of her own unconscious biases and the power of her words. She experiences deep regret and temporarily abandons her dream, returning to Bunnyburrow. This low point is essential for her growth, forcing her to confront her own flaws and the complexities of prejudice.

- **Redemption, Self-Correction, and Mature Leadership (Return to Zootopia and Resolution)**

Driven by her guilt and a new understanding, Judy returns to Zootopia to uncover the real cause behind the predators' behavior. This stage is marked by her humility, as she sincerely apologizes to Nick and seeks his help. Her actions demonstrate a shift from naive idealism to a mature understanding of leadership, which includes admitting mistakes and seeking reconciliation. She uses her newfound knowledge and experience to expose the true antagonist, Dawn Bellwether. By working alongside Nick and embracing their differences, Judy not only solves the case but also helps heal the social divisions she inadvertently contributed to. She becomes a police officer who understands the nuances of justice, empathy, and the ongoing effort required to build a truly inclusive society.

Factors Influencing Character Development

Several factors contribute to Judy Hopps' character development:

- **Societal Prejudice and Stereotypes:**

The pervasive species-based prejudice in Zootopia is the primary external force shaping Judy. She faces stereotypes as a small rabbit trying to enter a profession dominated by larger animals, and later, as a police officer, she confronts the prejudice against predators. These challenges force her to question her initial beliefs and adapt her approach.

- **Mentor/Partner Relationship with Nick Wilde:**

Nick serves as both a foil and a catalyst for Judy's growth. His cynicism, born from his own experiences with prejudice, initially clashes with her idealism but ultimately provides her with a more realistic perspective. Their evolving friendship teaches Judy about trust, empathy, and the dangers of generalizing.

Failure and Mistakes:

Judy's failures, particularly her initial struggles at the academy and her disastrous press conference, are crucial for her development. These setbacks force her to introspect, acknowledge her limitations, and learn from her errors, leading to significant personal growth.

- **Personal Idealism and Determination:**

While sometimes naive, Judy's inherent idealism and unwavering determination are internal drivers that push her to persevere despite obstacles. Her desire to make Zootopia a better place fuels her actions and allows her to ultimately overcome her challenges.

- **The Case Itself (Missing Mammals):**

The complex and dangerous investigation forces Judy to step outside her comfort zone, utilize new skills, and rely on others. The high stakes of the case accelerate her learning and expose her to the darker underbelly of Zootopia.

Implications for the Film's Moral Messages

Judy Hopps' character development directly reinforces the film's core moral and social messages:

- **Challenging Stereotypes:** Judy's journey from holding subtle biases (e.g., her initial wariness of Nick's "fox nature") to overcoming them, and her struggle against the stereotypes imposed on her, highlights the film's central message about the destructiveness of prejudice. Her ultimate success demonstrates that individuals can break free from predetermined roles.
- **Importance of Empathy and Understanding:** Her evolving relationship with Nick Wilde emphasizes the necessity of looking beyond superficial differences and understanding individual experiences. This partnership becomes a powerful symbol of successful coexistence achieved through empathy and mutual respect.
- **Consequences of Unconscious Bias:** Judy's mistake at the press conference demonstrates that even well-intentioned individuals can perpetuate harm through unconscious biases. Her subsequent regret and efforts to correct her error underscore the importance of self-awareness and accountability in addressing prejudice.
- **Perseverance and Resilience:** Judy's unwavering determination despite numerous setbacks illustrates the film's message about the importance of perseverance in achieving one's goals and contributing to social change.
- **True Equality is an Ongoing Effort:** By the end of the film, Judy realizes that achieving true equality is not a one-time event but an ongoing process requiring continuous effort, self-correction, and collaboration. Her transformation reflects the idea that society's progress relies on individuals willing to challenge norms and advocate for a more inclusive world.

Conclusion

This research confirms that "Zootopia" is a powerful example of how animated films can effectively portray deep and socially relevant character development. Through Judy Hopps' journey, the film not only entertains but also educates about the importance of empathy, understanding, and respect for differences. Judy's character development, from a naive idealist to a wiser individual capable of admitting mistakes, highlights the potential of individuals to drive positive change and contribute to a more inclusive society. Judy's story serves as a reminder that despite facing challenges and failures, the ability to learn from mistakes and build bridges between individuals is key to personal growth and collective progress. This research is expected to provide insights for students on character development in films, a reference for teachers to teach character values, and a foundation for future researchers to further explore how films influence the moral development of their audiences.

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